

THE GREEN WAVE IS COMING

Something remarkable happened in the recent Danish general elections in June. The main issue of the election campaign was not the economy or job creation, but climate change. Fuelled by public demands for answers to the existential threat posed by climate change, the political parties that addressed the climate change issue head-on gained seats, while those parties who did not lost out. As such, this was termed the first "Climate Elections" in Denmark. This seems to be a part of a wider trend, a so-called "Green Wave", that has swept across much of Europe in the recent European Parliament elections in May where the green parties increased their representation by 33%. There are also signs that the green wave is a global phenomenon, which goes hand-in-hand with increasing awareness of the threat posed by climate change.



By

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BEGINNINGS OF A PARADIGM SHIFT

The tiny country of Denmark is often lauded as a frontrunner with respect to embarking on the green transition away from fossil fuels and towards sustainable development. And with good reason. Over the past 35 years, Denmark's economy (GDP) has increased by more than 70%, yet, the energy consumption has remained unchanged thanks in part to a strong push for energy efficiency. Moreover, by shifting to cleaner fuels (switching from coal to gas) and ramping up the use of renewable energy (wind and biomass), Denmark has managed to lower its CO2 emissions by 40%. Looking ahead, Denmark has set the ambitious target of becoming completely fossil-fuel free by 2050.

Despite already having successfully embarked on the green transition for decades, climate change and environmental policy issues had never before taken centre stage in the Danish general elections. So, why was it different this year? Two key factors were attributed to this development. The first factor was the publication of the 2018 climate change report by IPCC (the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change), which delivered an unusually stern warning of the catastrophic consequences of climate change, which the UN Secretary-General calls "an existential threat to humanity". The second factor is the climate school strike protest started by the Swedish student, Gretha Thunberg, which struck a chord around the World and has become a global climate change movement. Gretha's call for immediate action to combat climate change has received widespread recognition - also among political leaders.

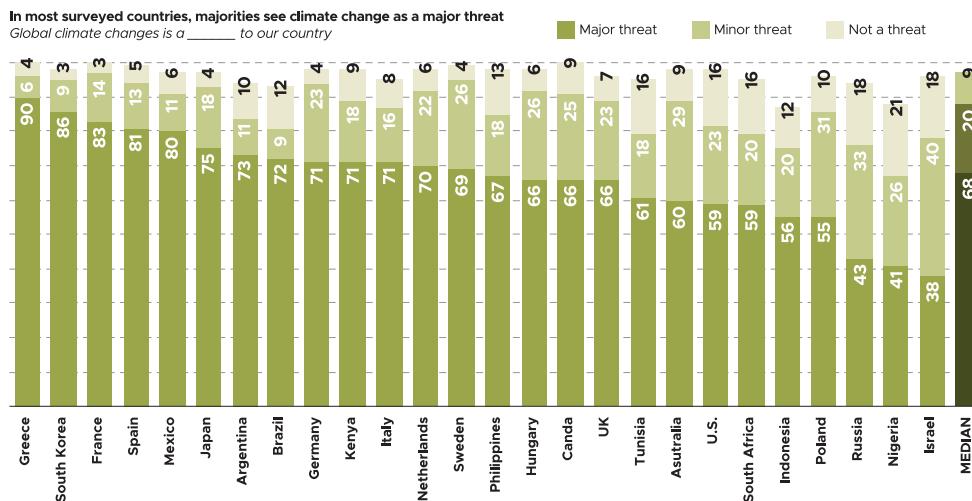
In the final televised debate, the Danish prime minister and the opposition candidate, were asked whether they were willing halt or even decrease the economic growth, if the threat from climate change and the survival of the Earth demanded it. The prime minister rejected the idea and made a case for continued economic growth, so-called, green growth. The opposition candidate, however, disagreed and stated that "we cannot continue to follow the current economic growth paradigm". She also stated that we are consuming too much and need to change the way we consume and our lifestyles. And she won the election.

A paradigm shift is indeed on the way, when it is possible to win the general election by questioning the economic growth paradigm by citing the threat from climate change.

CLIMATE THREAT AWARENESS

A paradigm shift can only occur, once there is a fundamental change in the basic perception, for example, in the important role of climate change. The science behind climate change is well founded. Moreover, people across the World experience climate change first hand with 25 million people already having fled their homes due to climate change. The number of "climate change refugees" is predicted to balloon to an alarming number over the next 40 years, namely to somewhere between 200 million and 1 billion people.

Last year, a big PEW poll¹ with 27,612 respondents from 26 different countries across the World were asked whether they perceived global climate change to be a "major threat", a "minor threat" or "not a threat".

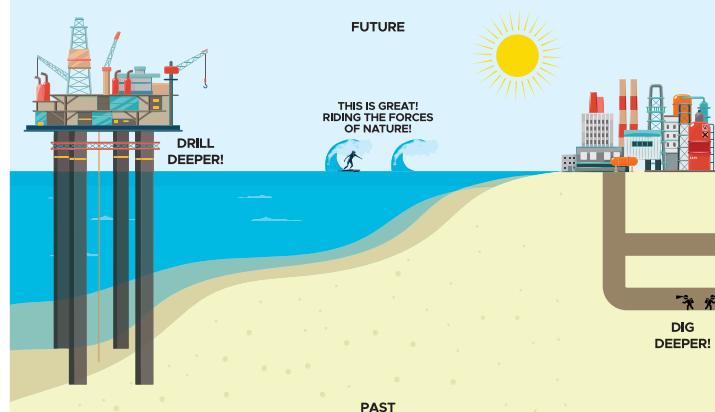


The results showed a high level of concern for the threat posed by climate change with 68% labelling it as a "major threat", up from 56% in a poll conducted five years earlier. Only 9% believe that climate change is "not a threat". Malaysia was not among the polled countries, but in neighbouring Indonesia more than half of the population (55%) saw climate change as a "major threat".

Even though the United States is the only country in the World to have pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, the majority of the people in the United States also perceive climate change as a "major threat" (59%). Interestingly, the same PEW poll found a stark bipartisan divide on climate change in the United States, with only 27% of the Republicans perceiving that climate change is a "major threat" as opposed to 83% of the Democrats. In other words, the climate change position of the Republicans and president Donald Trump is not representative of the American people, which is also evident by the fact that 23 out 50 of the states have pledged to comply with the Paris Agreement.

TIME FOR ACTION

The link between the public opinion and public policy is fundamental to political representation. The global PEW polls have shown that a significant majority of the global population perceives climate change as a major threat. And that the public concern for threat of climate change is on the increase. Moreover, economic studies² on climate change emphasize the benefits of strong, early action on climate change far outweigh the costs of not acting. It is time for the politicians across the world to seize the day and decisively act on combatting climate change. The time is ripe for riding the green wave.



The energy of tomorrow is no longer found below the ground. Time to utilise renewable energy like wind and sun - and to ride the Green Wave!

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/18/a-look-at-how-people-around-the-world-view-climate-change/>

² The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change (2006) and Prosperity Without Growth (2009)