

Generation X is surprisingly unconcerned about climate change

July 18 2012, by Diane Swanbrow

(Phys.org) -- As the nation suffers through a summer of record-shattering heat, a University of Michigan report finds that Generation X is lukewarm about climate change—uninformed about the causes and unconcerned about the potential dangers.

"Most Generation Xers are surprisingly disengaged, dismissive or doubtful about whether global climate change is happening and they don't spend much time worrying about it," said Jon D. Miller, author of "The [Generation X](#) Report."

The new report, the fourth in a continuing series, compares Gen X attitudes about climate change in 2009 and 2011, and describes the levels of concern Gen Xers have about different aspects of climate change, as well as their sources of information on the subject.

"We found a small but statistically significant decline between 2009 and 2011 in the level of attention and concern Generation X [adults](#) expressed about climate change," Miller said. "In 2009, about 22 percent said they followed the issue of climate change very or moderately closely. In 2011, only 16 percent said they did so."

Miller directs the Longitudinal Study of American Youth at the U-M Institute for Social Research. The study, funded by the National Science Foundation since 1986, now includes responses from approximately 4,000 Gen Xers—those born between 1961 and 1981, and now between 32 and 52 years of age.

Only about 5 percent of those surveyed in 2011 were alarmed about climate change, and another 18 percent said they were concerned about it. But 66 percent said they aren't sure that global warming is happening, and about 10 percent said they don't believe global warming is actually happening.

"This is an interesting and unexpected profile," Miller said. "Few issues engage a solid majority of adults in our busy and pluralistic society, but the climate issue appears to attract fewer committed activists—on either side—than I would have expected."

Because climate change is such a complex issue, education and scientific knowledge are important factors in explaining levels of concern, Miller said. Adults with more education are more likely to be alarmed and concerned about climate change, he found. And those who scored 90 or above on a 100-point Index of Civic Scientific Literacy also were significantly more likely to be alarmed or concerned than less knowledgeable adults. Still, 12 percent of those who were highly literate scientifically were either dismissive or doubtful about climate change, Miller found. He also found that partisan affiliations predicted attitudes, with nearly half of liberal Democrats alarmed or concerned compared with zero percent of conservative Republicans.

"There are clearly overlapping levels of concern among partisans of both political parties," Miller said. "But for some individuals, partisan loyalties may be helpful in making sense of an otherwise complicated issue."

Given the greater anticipated impact of climate change on future generations, Miller expected that the parents of minor children would be more concerned about the issue than young adults without minor children.

"Not so," he said. "Generation X adults without minor children were slightly more alarmed about climate change than were parents. The difference is small, but it is in the opposite direction than we expected."

Miller found that Gen X adults used a combination of information sources to obtain information on the complex issue of climate change, with talking to friends, co-workers and family members among the most common sources of information.

"[Climate change](#) is an extremely complex issue, and many Generation X adults do not see it as an immediate problem that they need to address," Miller said.

"The results of this report suggest that better educated young adults are more likely to recognize the importance of the problem, but that there is a broad awareness of the issue even though many adults prefer to focus on more immediate issues—jobs and schools for their children—than the needs of the next generation. These results will not give great comfort to either those deeply concerned about climate issues or those who are dismissive of the issue."

More information: The full report is online at:
bit.ly/GenXReport0712

Provided by University of Michigan

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