Poll finds vast gaps in US climate views

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The American public is sharply divided on the issue of climate change, with liberals far more likely than conservatives to trust scientists on the science of global warming, a poll said Tuesday.

The survey by the Pew Research Center, based on a nationwide sample of more than 1,500 adults, also found a vast divide on acceptable solutions for climate change.

Only 36 percent of Americans said they are "deeply concerned about climate issues," said the survey, which was taken from May to June, some five months before the US presidential election.

"Liberal Democrats are especially likely to see scientists and their research in a positive light, while conservative Republicans are considerably more skeptical of climate scientists' information, understanding and research findings on climate issues," said the findings.

For instance, 70 percent of liberal Democrats said they "trust climate scientists a lot to give full and accurate information about the causes of climate change," compared to just 15 percent of conservative Republicans.

More than half of liberal Democrats (54 percent) said climate scientists understand the causes of climate change very well, and 55 percent believe there is "widespread consensus among climate scientists" about the causes of global warming.

Among conservative Republicans, just 11 percent and 16 percent respectively said the same.

Meanwhile, conservative Republicans were far more likely to say "climate research findings are influenced by scientists' desire to advance their careers (57 percent) or their own political leanings (54 percent) most of the time," said the Pew report.

Among liberal Democrats, just 16 percent believed in such influences.

Divided on solutions

Views on solutions were also quite different among political groups.

More than three quarters of liberal Democrats said restricting emissions from power plants could make a big difference, compared to 29 percent of conservative Republicans.

A similar divide was seen on the question of the usefulness of an international agreement to limit carbon emissions—with 71 percent of liberal Democrats in favor compared to 27 percent of conservative Republicans.

Two thirds of liberal Democrats back tougher fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks and corporate tax incentives to encourage greener business practices, compared to just about one quarter of conservative Republicans.

Even the worthiness of individual efforts to reduce one's "carbon footprint" were seen quite differently, with 52 percent of liberal Democrats saying this can make a big difference compared to 21 percent of conservative Republicans.

Having a base of science knowledge did not make a sweeping difference in people's beliefs.

"To the extent that science knowledge influences people's judgments related to climate change and trust in climate scientists, it does so among Democrats, but not Republicans," said Cary Funk, lead author and associate director of research at the Pew Research Center.

"For example, Democrats with high science knowledge are especially likely to believe the Earth is warming due to human activity, to see scientists as having a firm understanding of climate change, and to trust climate scientists' information about the causes of climate change," said Funk.

"But Republicans with higher science knowledge are no more or less likely to hold these beliefs."

The poll did find "strong bipartisan support for expanding solar and wind energy production," with 89 percent of Americans favoring more solar farms and 83 percent more wind turbine farms.

More information: www.pewinternet.org/2016/10/04 … -politics-of-climate

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