

Commitment to democratic values predict climate change concern

September 21 2018



Gregory Lewis, professor and chair of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies' Department of Public Management and Policy at Georgia State University Credit: Georgia State University

Commitment to democratic values is the strongest predictor of climate change concern globally, Georgia State University faculty have found in a new study comparing climate change attitudes across 36 countries, including the U.S.

The article, published this month in *Environmental Politics*, was based on

an analysis of the Pew Research Center's 2015 Global Attitudes Survey by professor Gregory Lewis, chair of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies' Department of Public Management and Policy; Risa Palm, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at Georgia State; and Bo Feng with IMPAQ International.

"The biggest surprise in this study is the strength of the Pew measure of commitment to democratic values as a predictor of climate change concern," Lewis said. "A belief in free elections, freedom of religion, equal rights for women, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and lack of Internet censorship is nearly universal in predicting this attitude. In fact, it is the strongest predictor of climate change concern everywhere except in English-speaking Western democracies, where party identification matters more."

Earlier research in the U.S. points to political ideology and party identification as driving opinions on climate change. The new study shows fairly similar patterns across English-speaking western democracies and, to a lesser extent, western Europe. However, these factors matter much less in most countries. Gender, age, education and religiosity also have very different impacts in the developed West than in most of the world.

"U.S. patterns differ widely from those in most countries," Lewis said. "We found that members of the left and liberal parties worry more about the effects of climate change than members of conservative parties in Western democracies, but that's not so in the rest of the world. Women, young people and those who are less religious express greater concern about climate change in the English-speaking Western democracies. In most of the world, however, gender differences are small, and older and more religious people express more concern."

These disparities suggest the need for more research in other countries

and stronger explanations for the patterns observed there and in the U.S.

"Climate impacts follow no national boundaries, so solutions must be global," Lewis said. "However, most of the survey research has focused on the U.S., where political ideology and party identification drive opinion. We need to gain a clearer understanding of those who take [climate](#) change seriously versus those who doubt it exists in other countries, as well as in the U.S. This knowledge will help all policymakers address the populations most likely to support [climate change](#) mitigation efforts and develop the messaging most effective in reaching them."

More information: Gregory B. Lewis et al, Cross-national variation in determinants of climate change concern, *Environmental Politics* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2018.1512261](https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2018.1512261)

Provided by Georgia State University

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