

US public views on climate and energy

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Majorities of Americans say the federal government is doing too little for key aspects of the environment. And most believe the U.S. should focus on development of alternative sources of energy over expansion of fossil fuels, according to a new Pew Research Center survey.

The survey, conducted Oct. 1-13 among 3,627 U.S. adults using the Center's American Trends Panel, finds that 67% of U.S. adults say the federal government is not doing enough to reduce the effects of climate change, and similar shares say the same about government efforts to protect air or water quality. While there is strong consensus among Democrats on the need for more government efforts to reduce the effects of climate change, Republican views are divided along ideological, generational and gender lines.

A majority of moderate or liberal Republicans (65%, including GOP-leaning independents) say the [federal government](#) is doing too little to reduce the effects of climate change. In contrast, 24% of conservative Republicans say the same. A divide can also be seen by age; 52% of Millennial and Gen Z Republicans, ages 18 to 38 in 2019, say the government is taking too little action on climate, a higher share than of either Gen X (41%) or Baby Boomer and older Republicans (31%). Republican women (46%) also are more inclined than GOP men (34%) to think the government is doing too little to reduce the effects of climate change.

Other key findings include:

Most Americans say they are taking at least some action in their daily lives to protect the [environment](#).

- 80% of Americans report that they reduce their food waste for environmental reasons. Large shares of the public say they use fewer plastics that cannot be reused such as plastic bags, straws or cups (72%) or reduce their [water use](#) (68%) to help the environment.
- 51% of Americans say they drive less or use carpools, while 41% say they eat less meat for environmental reasons.
- Asked about how much individual actions matter, 67% of

Americans say using fewer single-use plastics makes a big difference for the environment. About half say the same about cutting back on personal vehicle use (52%), limiting food waste (52%) or limiting water consumption (50%). A quarter of Americans (24%) say people eating less meat makes a big difference for the environment, 38% say it makes a small difference and another 38% think this makes almost no difference for the environment.

Most Americans favor expanding [renewable energy sources](#), but divides remain over expanding offshore drilling and nuclear power.

- 92% of U.S. adults favor expanding solar power and 85% favor more wind power. The public is evenly divided over whether to expand nuclear power (49% on each side). Fewer than half of Americans support more offshore oil and gas drilling (42%), hydraulic fracturing for oil and natural gas (38%) or coal mining (35%).
- Support for more nuclear power plants is up 6 percentage points from 2016, and support for coal mining is down 6 points. Democrats' support for [offshore drilling](#) and hydraulic fracturing has gone down over that period; support for both energy sources has stayed about the same among Republicans.
- On balance, 77% of Americans think the more important energy priority for the country should be developing alternative energy sources rather than increasing U.S. production of fossil fuels.
- 90% of Democrats believe the U.S. should prioritize alternative energy development over expanded oil, coal and natural gas exploration and production. While a majority of Republicans also prioritize alternative energy sources, Republican views of this issue differ by ideology, generation and gender.

How Americans view the impact of climate change depends on where

they live.

A majority of Americans (62%) say that climate change is affecting their local community either a great deal or some. That figure remains fairly steady from last year, when 59% reported at least some local effects of climate change.

- Americans in Pacific states are most likely to see at least some local impacts of climate change (72%). By comparison, 54% of those living in Mountain states say climate change is affecting their local area at least some.
- Those living in Western states stand out as particularly likely to report increasing frequency of wildfires or droughts/water shortages as local effects of climate change. Large shares in each region nationwide who report at least some local impact of climate change cite long periods of unusually hot weather as a major impact of climate change where they live.
- Respondents living within 25 miles of a coastline anywhere in the U.S. are modestly more inclined to say that climate change is having at least some effect in their community; 67% of this group says this compared with 59% of those living at least 300 miles inland who say the same.

Political groups remain divided over climate change causes and policies.

Overall, 49% of Americans say human activity contributes a great deal to climate change and another 30% say human actions have some role in climate change. Two-in-ten (20%) believe human activity plays not too much or no role at all in climate change. At the same time, a majority of Americans say that natural patterns in the Earth's environment contribute to climate change a great deal (35%) or some (44%). Just 4% of Americans say that neither human activity nor natural patterns in the Earth's environment contribute to global climate change at least some.

- 84% of liberal Democrats say human activity contributes a great deal to climate change, with near consensus among this group that human activity contributes at least some amount to climate change (96%).
- 53% of conservative Republicans say [human activity](#) contributes a great deal (14%) or some (39%) to climate change. Another 45% of this group says human actions play not too much or no role in [climate change](#).
- 81% of liberal Democrats say climate policies result in net benefits for the environment. Also, most (90%) think they either help or have no effect on the economy.
- Conservative Republicans stand out as particularly skeptical about the benefits of [climate](#) policies for the environment. A minority of this group (25%) says such policies do more good than harm for the environment, and a majority (62%) says these policies hurt the economy.

The margin of sampling error for the full sample is plus or minus 2.1 percentage points.

More information: [www.pewresearch.org/science/20 ... n-climate-and-energy](http://www.pewresearch.org/science/20...n-climate-and-energy)

Provided by Pew Research Center

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