

Research reveals 'climate-change complacency' across Europe

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Most European citizens do not particularly care about climate change. That's the striking finding from new research on the views of 70,000 randomly sampled European men and women.

Only 5% described themselves as "extremely worried" about [climate change](#). The [climate](#) and the environment ranked only fifth in people's overall views about priorities. There was also skepticism that coordinated action, for example to cut personal energy use, would make much difference.

"It seems there is a chance the current generation will be content to sell their great grandchildren down the river," said Andrew Oswald, Professor of Economics and Behavioral Science at the University of Warwick, and senior author of the study "Do Europeans Care about Climate Change? An Illustration of the Importance of Data on Human Feelings."

He also pointed out that so-called desirability bias, which is the tendency for interviewees to feel compelled to shade their answers towards "politically correct" ones, might mean the true level of worry about climate change is lower than indicated in the statistical surveys.

The study has implications for economists and policymakers, Oswald explains. "There is little point in designing sophisticated [economic policies](#) for combating climate change until voters feel that climate change is a deeply disturbing problem. Currently, those voters do not feel that."

Professor Oswald and Mr Adam Nowakowski of Bocconi University in Italy analyzed data from two large-scale sources, the 2016 European Social Survey and the 2019 Eurobarometer survey. They found:

- Europeans do not exhibit high levels of worry about climate change, with 1 in 20 describing themselves as "extremely worried"
- Europe's citizens are more concerned with inward-looking issues seen as closer to home, such as inflation, the general economic

situation, health and social security, and unemployment.

- Europeans do not have a strong belief that joint action by energy users will make a real difference to climate change.
- Women, [young people](#), university graduates and city-dwellers show higher levels of concern about climate change.
- People living in warmer European countries had higher levels of concern than those in the cooler North of the continent.

On the way to move forward, Oswald and Nowakowski suggest parallels with the original government campaigns to cut smoking. They argue that it will be necessary to change people's feelings about the problem of rising global temperatures. Just as education about the risks of smoking went hand-in-hand with graphic warnings and tax increases, governments should consider doing more to educate and alter people's perceived level of worry about climate change.

Adam Nowakowski commented: "We should not conclude that Europe does not care at all about climate change. However, our analysis of the data does suggest that European citizens are not ready for policies which would have strongly negative consequences on their day-to-day lives—not least because we have found a low level of confidence in the usefulness of joint action."

More information: IZA DP No. 13660: Do Europeans Care about Climate Change? An Illustration of the Importance of Data on Human Feelings. [www.iza.org/publications/dp/13 ... ta-on-human-feelings](http://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13...ta-on-human-feelings)

Provided by University of Warwick

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