

# Attitudes about climate change are shifting, even in Texas

December 15 2020, by Jeannie Kever

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New research from UH Energy and the Hobby School of Public Affairs found most Americans, including most Texans, believe climate change is real and are willing to pay more for low-carbon products. Credit: Pexels

Longstanding skepticism among Texans toward the climate movement has shifted, and attitudes in the nation's leading energy-producing state now mirror those in the rest of the United States.

About 80% of Americans—almost 81% of Texans—say they believe [climate change](#) is happening, according to new research by UH Energy and the University of Houston Hobby School of Public Affairs. Slightly lower percentages said they believe the change is driven by human activities.

Most said they are willing to pay more for electricity derived from [natural gas](#) produced without venting and flaring, electricity derived from renewable generation that factors in the cost of the grid, and [low-carbon](#) or carbon-neutral transportation fuels and other energy products.

"People are aware of [climate](#) change and believe it is real," said Ramanan Krishnamoorti, chief energy officer at UH. "That is true even in Texas, where people have been less likely to say they believe in climate change and, especially, change caused by human activities."

But Krishnamoorti said researchers also found that while most people understand the link between climate change and [fossil fuels](#), they are less sophisticated in their knowledge about potential solutions, from carbon taxes to emissions trading systems. Only 58% believe individual consumer choices are responsible for climate change.

The report, Carbon Management: Changing Attitudes and an Opportunity for Action, was released less than a month before the Texas Legislature convenes a session expected to address curbing methane flaring and other emissions. The Biden administration also is likely to consider more stringent environmental regulations, and a number of energy companies have committed to reducing their carbon footprints.

"With so much potential for change ahead, we wanted to assess public attitudes about climate change and support for specific policies aimed at curbing emissions," said Pablo Pinto, director of the Center for Public Policy at the Hobby School. "We found people are worried about climate change and want it to be addressed, but many people, especially older residents, don't understand the strategies being considered."

The researchers will present a webinar discussing the results at noon Friday, Dec. 8.

### **Among the findings:**

- Two out of three nationally are worried about climate change. More than 60% of Texans agree
- 55% agree "the oil and gas industries have deliberately misled people on climate change." 49% of Texans agree
- About two-thirds say oil and gas companies should adopt [carbon management](#) technologies
- 56% say government should promote, incentivize and subsidize carbon management technologies; 53% of Texans agreed
- 64% of people nationally, and 61% of Texans, say hydraulic fracturing has a negative effect on the environment
- Mitigation strategies aren't well understood. 61% have heard of [carbon taxes](#), while less than half are familiar with carbon management and just one-third have heard of carbon pricing. Younger people and those with more education had higher levels of awareness

The full report is available on the UH Energy and Hobby School websites.

While large majorities said government, the fossil fuel industry and the transportation sector bear responsibility for climate change, fewer said

individual consumer choices were responsible, said Gail Buttorff, co-director of the Survey Research Institute at the Hobby School. Still, among people who were better informed on the topic, about 76% said individual choices were partly to blame.

"We also found that more than 93% are willing to pay more for carbon-neutral energy, and 75% said they would pay between \$1 and \$5 more per gallon," Buttorff said.

The researchers found generational differences in support for paying higher prices in exchange for [carbon](#)-neutral energy, with [younger people](#) generally more willing to pay a higher premium.

Francisco Cantú, co-director of the Survey Research Institute at the Hobby School, said demographic changes are likely one reason the study found few differences in attitudes between Texans and people elsewhere in the U.S.

"Texas has a growing population of young people, along with increased migration both from other states and other countries," Cantú said. "That, along with major changes that are already underway in the industry, from the growing use of renewables to industry pledges to decarbonize, suggests regulators could take advantage of the timing to lock in long-term climate strategies."

The survey was conducted online in October, surveying 1,000 people age 18 and older living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. An additional 500 residents in Texas were surveyed.

**More information:** [uh.edu/hobby/carbonmanagement/ ...ment\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://uh.edu/hobby/carbonmanagement/...ment_report_2020.pdf)

Provided by University of Houston

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