

New survey shows opinions differ on causes, effects of extreme weather

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A new Texas Trends survey shows about half of Texans are likely to agree there is a link between climate change and extreme weather events. Survey respondents who have suffered through a crisis caused by weather affirmed the connection in even larger numbers. Credit: Pexels

Ask a cross section of Texans, and about half are likely to say there is a link between climate change and severe weather events, suggests the newest report in the Texas Trends 2023 survey series.

"But among Texans who have experienced hardship due to an [extreme weather](#) event, there is likely to be more certainty in the belief that a direct link does exist," said Sunny Wong, associate dean for graduate studies at the University of Houston's Hobby School of Public Affairs and an author of the survey.

The [Climate Change: Beliefs and Actions](#) report was released today by the UH Hobby School and the Texas Southern University Barbara Jordan–Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs. In addition to examining perceptions of a link between [climate change](#) and [weather](#), it also asked Texans who or what they believe is at the root of the increase in weather-induced crises—including hurricanes, wildfires, drought, severe freezes and heat waves—and what actions they take at home to prepare for emergencies and cope with widening fluctuations in seasonal weather.

"When we looked closely at the numbers, we found opinions dividing along generational and political lines," said research associate Maria P. Perez Argüelles, also an author of the study. For example, 58.7% of the survey's Generation Z respondents, born in or after 1997 (but at least 18 to participate in the survey) show greater concern about the state of the environment, versus 32.4% of the Silent Generation respondents, born in or before 1945. Among Democrats, 73.4% said they were very concerned about [climate issues](#), versus 30.6% of Republicans.

When asked which industries are most responsible for [climate](#) shifts, about a fifth (20.9%) of all respondents considered the [coal industry](#) highly responsible, contrasting with the even third (33%) who said they did not hold coal responsible at all.

"In a surprise finding, most respondents said the oil and [gas industry](#) has only low-level responsibility for climate change," said Perez Argüelles. Just over two-fifths (41.6%) found it not responsible at all, compared to almost a fifth (19.8%) finding oil and gas very responsible.

Considered by age, slightly more than half (51.9%) of Gen Z attributed more responsibility to the oil and gas sector, compared to just a fifth (21.1%) of Silent Generation respondents who agreed.

"When we focus on [survey respondents](#) who attribute extreme weather to climate change, we find 65% of them hold the oil and gas industry very responsible for climate change," said Michael O. Adams, director of the executive master of public affairs graduate program at TSU's Jordan-Leland School.

In discussing the potential of individual behavior, a little more than half of all respondents (55.5%) said individual behavior does contribute climate problems; just over a quarter (26.7%) said it does not.

When it came to households' responsibility, a clear majority (60.2%) of all respondents believe a household's action can make a noticeable difference in reducing extreme weather, but more than a quarter (29.5%) disagreed. Suggested at-home changes ranged from simple adjustments to considerable investments: Among respondents who acknowledge climate change, 80% said they turned off lights not in use, while only 5.3% had installed solar panels.

"While only 16.9% of respondents said individuals' consumption and behavior were very responsible for climate change, 38.6% said they are somewhat responsible. These comparisons might indicate a growing awareness of people's role and commitment surrounding the environmental crisis," Adams said.

Among the findings:

- 51% of respondents view climate change as a significant impact on [extreme weather events](#)
- 58% of respondents who had experienced extreme weather believe climate change is a reality; only 44% of unaffected respondents agree
- More than 35% of respondents consider the meat and dairy industries to be highly responsible for climate changes

The survey was conducted between Oct. 6 and 18 in English and Spanish with 1,914 YouGov respondents 18 years of age and older, resulting in a weighted confidence interval of +/-2.9 for this report. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race/ethnicity and education, and are representative of Texas adults.

The Climate Change: Beliefs and Actions report is the latest in the 2023 edition of the Texas Trends survey project, a five-year look that started in 2021 as a record of shifting viewpoints within the state. Past subjects include issues surrounding elections, inflation, school vouchers, gun laws, and abortion and transgender policies.

More information: Report: [Climate Change: Beliefs and Actions](#)

Provided by University of Houston

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