



Climate Impacts: Take Care and Prepare

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Executive Summary	4
Awareness and Attitudes on Climate Impacts	
Finding #1: 70% of Americans think volatile weather & seasonal weather patterns are changing.	5
Finding #2: 67% of Americans think human actions contribute to changing weather patterns.	6
Finding #3: Americans are relatively unconcerned about the impacts of climate change.	6
Finding #4: Most Americans are willing to take action to prepare for climate change impacts.	7
Finding #5: People are more likely to act if they believe changes in climate are human-caused.	8
Message Frames	
Finding #6: Preparedness is the most compelling frame to motivate action on climate impacts.	8
Finding #7: Prepare for and protect from the impacts of climate change, don't adapt.	9
Methodology and Contributors	10

Climate Impacts: Take Care and Prepare is a research project conducted to learn more effective ways to speak with Americans about the impacts of climate and preparedness. It is an ecoAmerica project conducted with Lake Research Partners with support from MacArthur Foundation. For further information on this report please contact Meighen Speiser, meighen@ecoAmerica.org.

ecoAmerica is grateful to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for its generous support.



Climate Impacts: Take Care and Prepare

Executive Summary

The following are the major findings of “Climate Impacts: Take Care and Prepare” on American sentiment regarding the impacts of climate change and what we should do about them.

Finding #1: 70% of Americans think volatile weather and seasonal weather patterns are changing.

Nearly 7 in 10 voters think that the impacts of climate change are happening. Half of all Americans surveyed say we are experiencing the effects of climate change now, and only 19 percent say the effects now are small. Political affiliation plays a dominant role in denial.

Finding #2: 67% of Americans think human actions contribute to changing weather patterns.

12 percent of Americans believe changes in volatile weather and seasonal weather patterns are due more to human actions. 31 percent believe they are due more to natural fluctuations. A slight majority of Americans, 55 percent, believe the changes are due to a “combination of both.”

Finding #3: Americans are relatively unconcerned about the impacts of climate change.

Americans continue to prioritize action on climate change well below other national issues. Even with the increase of volatile weather, floods, droughts and fires, Americans only prioritize the issue as a 4.6 out of 10, with only 5 percent of Americans rating it a top priority.

Finding #4: Most Americans are willing to take action to prepare for climate change impacts.

71 percent of voters say they are very or somewhat willing to take personal actions such as preparing their home and planning ahead, and 57 percent are very or somewhat willing to take political action, such as signing a petition or asking a legislator to help the community prepare. Some groups are more willing to take action, including people of color, Democrats, and Americans who live in rural areas.

Finding #5: People are more likely to act if they believe changes in climate are human-caused.

92 percent of those who say climate changes are caused by humans (and 79 percent of those who say changes are caused by both human and natural fluctuations) are willing to take action compared to only 54 percent of those who say change are just natural fluctuations.

Finding #6: Preparedness is the most compelling frame to motivate action on climate impacts.

“Preparedness” is the only message that beats the opposition message, with 79 percent of voters finding it very or somewhat convincing. “Prevention” is a powerful message for women, Democrats, and young voters. “Adaptation” is much less effective, falling 15 points below “preparedness”.

Finding #7: Prepare for and protect from climate change impacts, don’t adapt.

85% of voters seek “preparedness” as the preferred approach to address climate impacts. “Protection and safety” is also a favored approach – even by more than three quarters of Republicans.

This research shows **new potential message frames** that may be effective to increase action and urgency on climate. We need to remove “adaptation” from messages, allow ambivalence, and focus on:

- **Preparing for changes in climate and weather that seem to be already happening.**
- **Taking steps to prevent changes from causing further damage.**
- **Trying to prevent changes and prepare for those that we can’t to help protect our safety.**

Preparedness offers concrete and sensible steps that people can do themselves. Prevention and protection (read: mitigation) are values-driven and help buttress preparedness by tying concrete steps to outcomes and impacts. They are practical values that are easily adoptable for Americans who are not yet completely sure on the changes, causes, and scope of the climate problem.



**AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES ON THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE:
 VOLATILE WEATHER AND SEASONAL WEATHER PATTERNS**

Finding #1: 70% of Americans think volatile weather and seasonal weather patterns are changing.

Nearly 7 in 10 voters think that the impacts of climate are happening. Half of all Americans surveyed say we are experiencing the effects of climate change now, and only 19 percent say the effects now are small. However, 31 percent say volatile weather and our seasonal weather patterns are not changing, and any changes that we see are just natural fluctuations.

Political affiliation remains the strongest determinant on whether or not a voter agrees with the realities and impacts of climate change. Independents, who used to side with Democrats on climate and environmental issues, now more closely mirror Republicans views. Twice as many Democrats (67 percent) versus Republicans or Independents say we are experiencing impacts now. Only 14 percent of Democrats think that changes are due to natural fluctuations, compared to nearly half of Republicans and Independents who hold this belief.

Between Men and Women, the findings show a majority of women believe that change is happening “now,” whereas men are mixed across all three choices, with 1/3 solidly agreeing with “not.”

Volatile Weather and our Seasonal Weather Patterns			
<i>Which do you agree with?</i>	Changing, experiencing effects now	Changing, but effects are small	Not Changing, just natural fluctuations
Total	50%	19%	31%
Democrats	66%	20%	14%
Independents	33%	24%	43%
Republicans	37%	17%	46%

Q10. <i>With which of these statements do you agree with most?</i>	TOTAL N 803	MEN 367	WOMEN 436
_Volatile weather and our seasonal weather patterns are changing and we are experiencing the effects now...	47%	40%	53%
_ Volatile weather and our seasonal weather patterns are changing, but the effects now are small ...	25%	26%	24%
_Volatile weather and our seasonal weather patterns are not changing, and any changes we see are just natural fluctuations...	28%	34%	23%



Climate Impacts: Take Care and Prepare

Finding #2: 67% of Americans think human actions contribute to changing weather patterns.

In a follow up question, we asked whether changes in volatile weather and seasonal weather patterns were caused by human actions, natural fluctuations, or a combination of both.

Overall, only 12 percent of Americans believe changes are due more to human actions while 31 percent believe they are due more to natural fluctuations. These percentages align with the percentage of Americans who are willing to be activists on the issue (12 percent) and those who are either doubters or deniers (31 percent).

Another 55 percent of Americans believe our volatile weather and changing seasonal weather are caused by a “combination of both” human actions and natural fluctuations. This ambivalence presents an entry point to conversations about climate. Combined with the 12 percent who believe that changing weather is more due to human causes, it yields 67 percent of Americans who believe that human actions contribute primarily or partially to the impacts of climate change.

Q12. Do you believe that changes in volatile weather and seasonal weather patterns are caused:

	TOTAL N 803
More by human actions	12%
More by natural fluctuations	31%
Combination of both	55%
Do not believe changes taking place	3%

Finding #3: Americans are relatively unconcerned about the impacts of climate change.

Americans prioritize many other issues above climate change impacts. Even with the increase of volatile weather, floods, droughts and fires, Americans only rate the issue as a 4.6/10, with just 5 percent rating it a 10. Jobs and economic growth continue to sit at the top of the priority list.

Climate advocates have previously tied the priorities at the top of the list (namely jobs) as social benefits of addressing climate, to attempt to build salience on the issue. Indications are that this was unsuccessful, however the concept should be re-evaluated. There may also be better ways of making connections, such as tying action on climate solutions to preserving lower costs and availability of food.

Issue Priorities		
On a scale of 0-10, how important a priority is this?	Mean Score	% rating 10
Creating jobs and economic growth	9.0	57
Addressing the cost of food and gas	8.3	42
Strengthening Social Security and Medicare	7.8	34
Ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan	7.8	33
Improving Education	7.8	31
Volatile weather and increasing floods and droughts	4.6	5



Climate Impacts: Awareness, Attitudes, Action

Finding #4: Most Americans are willing to take action to prepare for climate change impacts.

Voters are more willing to take **personal action** than **political action** to prepare for changes in volatile weather and seasonal weather patterns. Overall, 71 percent of voters say they are very or somewhat willing to take actions such as preparing their homes, and 33 percent say they are very willing. In terms of **political action**, such as signing a petition or asking a legislator to help the community prepare, 57 percent are very or somewhat willing to take action, but only 24 percent are very willing to take action.

Democrats are more willing to take **personal action** – 80 percent say they are very or somewhat willing to take personal action compared to 71 percent of Independents and 62 percent of Republicans. Willingness on political action shows a greater gap - 71 percent of Democrats are very or somewhat willing, compared to only 47 percent of Independents and 44 percent of Republicans.

Black and Hispanic voters are most likely to say they are willing to take personal action. 83 percent of Hispanic and 79 percent of black voters are very or somewhat willing to take personal action, versus 68 percent of white voters. On political action, 75 percent of Hispanic and 73 percent of black voters are very or somewhat willing to take political action, versus 52 percent of white voters.

Voters in rural areas are most likely to say they are willing to take action. 84 percent are very or somewhat willing to take personal action versus 71 percent of voters in suburban areas and small towns, and 66 percent of voters who live in urban areas. Voters who live in rural areas also lead in willingness to take political action at 62 percent very or somewhat willing, with urban voters following at 60 percent, and suburban voters trailing at 54 percent.

Willingness to Take Action				
	Personal		Political	
	Very Willing	Very + Somewhat	Very Willing	Very + Somewhat
Total	33%	71%	24%	57%
Democrats	39%	80%	36%	71%
Independents	31%	71%	15%	47%
Republicans	27%	62%	13%	44%
Men	28%	65%	22%	56%
Women	37%	76%	27%	59%
Under 50	35%	74%	26%	60%
Over 50	30%	69%	21%	53%
White	30%	68%	20%	52%
Black	42%	79%	35%	73%
Hispanic	43%	83%	39%	75%
Urban	35%	66%	27%	60%
Suburban	29%	71%	21%	54%
Rural	43%	84%	31%	62%



Climate Impacts: Awareness, Attitudes, Action

Message Frames – Convincing		
How convincing is this statement?	Very	Very + Somewhat
Counter Frame	38%	72%
[SSB] Preparedness	37%	79%
[SSF] Prevention	31%	70%
[SSA] Adaptation	28%	64%
[SSD] Stability	26%	51%
[SSC] Health	22%	62%
[SSE] Cost	19%	60%

Examining the messages by demographics indicates that the “preparedness” message and counter frame worked more effectively with all audiences. Preparing and planning ahead resonates more so than the apathy and diminishing tone of the counter frame, particularly among younger voters, women, Democrats and Independents. The counter frame, encapsulating the uncertainty around these issues claimed by opponents of action, resonates with voters who think that any changes are a result of nature causes. This includes blue-collar men, older men, and Republicans.

The counter frame resonates with male voters who call themselves independent - not hardline deniers, but rather people who are uncertain about the severity of climate changes and distrustful of claims that immediate action is required. One participant summed up what has likely happened for many voters:

“For me, at one time I was really concerned about it, but over time with no consensus ever reached and the continuing controversy and you don’t know who to believe, it’s no longer an issue...I will adapt to what happens in the future. You know there are more immediate needs. ... I am sort of burned out on the climate change stuff.” – VA Man

Finding #7: Prepare for and protect from climate change impacts, don’t adapt.

Voters seek “preparedness” as the preferred approach to address climate impacts. “Protection,” and “safety” are also favored approaches – even for more than three quarters of Republicans. “Adaptation” falls well below “preparedness,” indicating the need to remove this frame from our messaging.

Approach to Dealing with Changes				
(6-10) Would take this approach	Total	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Preparedness	85%	91%	69%	81%
Protect Health and Safety	82%	90%	70%	77%
Protect Safety	82%	92%	57%	77%
Adaptation	69%	71%	59%	68%
Predictability	68%	71%	55%	66%
Prevention	66%	83%	52%	53%
Reduced Cost	65%	69%	60%	63%
Predictability and Control	62%	74%	41%	54%



Climate Impacts: Take Care and Prepare

Methodology

The research consisted of focus groups, and a nationwide phone survey during March to April 2012:

Phase 1: Focus Groups We conducted two focus groups in Richmond, VA on March 17, 2012, to test initial frames and elicit directional ideas on concepts and frames to motivate Americans on addressing the impacts of climate. The groups were separated by gender, and participants were screened to be swing voters, and undecided or toward the middle of attitudes on climate change. The groups included a mix of ages (between 25 and 65), levels of education, occupations, and marital and parental status, as well as a mix of political orientations, with strong partisans excluded.

Phase 2: Quantitative Survey. Questions and frames developed and tested in the initial focus groups phase were further refined and tested in an online survey, available on request. During the message testing, messages were rotated so that half of the respondents heard “our side” messaging first, and “half heard “their side” first. The survey was conducted March 25th through March 27th, 2012 and reached a total of 803 registered likely 2012 voters nationwide selected randomly from a national online voter panel. Data were weighted slightly by gender, region, age and race to reflect the attributes of the population. The margin of error for the survey is +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence interval. It is higher among subgroups.

ecoAmerica
start with people

1900 L Street NW Suite 607 • Washington DC 20036
202.457.1900 ecoAmerica.org