

American Climate Attitudes Now at Majority Levels, And Most Want Local Communities and National Government To Do More to Prepare

In September 2017, ecoAmerica and Lake Research Partners asked a nationally representative sample of 802 adults in the United States (U.S.) a series of questions to understand what Americans think about climate change, action, and solutions.

The results show that American concern about climate change is pervasive and strengthening, and strong majorities support a variety of solutions with clean energy at the top of the list. Many Americans feel the urgency to take action and are confident we can address climate change together. Many more Americans trust local community leaders as climate messengers and are taking action personally and collectively within their communities to engage on climate. Americans also have high expectations that their communities and leaders pursue solutions that prepare and protect us from the impacts of climate change. The increase in intensity of these findings since 2015 suggests broad support for action. ecoAmerica and Lake Research will continue to conduct this survey every year in September, and issue reports on the findings. Our 2017 National SlideShare details more trends and shifts in American attitudes and opinions towards climate, which we welcome you to share. Full findings and data are available on request.

Key Findings from the American Climate Metrics Study 2017

1. **American climate concern has risen to the majority in the past two years.** Nationally, 80% believe climate change is happening (up from 77% in 2015). 78% have noticed more severe weather and changing seasonal weather patterns where they live over the last several years (up from 71% in 2015). And, **76% are concerned** about climate change (up from 67% in 2015).
2. **Powerful feelings of moral responsibility underscore Americans' support for climate solutions.** 83% of the surveyed adults agree (63% **strongly**) that we have a moral responsibility to create a safe and healthy climate for ourselves and our children.
3. **Americans express strong support for a variety of climate solutions.** A majority (83%) favor (53% **strongly**) modernizing America's electric grid. 81% favor (53% **strongly**) a proposal to reduce climate change pollution by charging corporate polluters a fee for the pollution they create (up from 73% in 2015). 77% of Americans favor passing laws for more efficient buildings and cars and 76% favor expanding public transit.
4. **Majorities of Americans now see the personal benefits of climate solutions.** In fact, 67% of Americans believe if the U.S. took steps to prevent future climate change, it would improve their health (up from 58% in 2015), 64% believe it would help the economy (up from 53% in 2015), and 61% believe it would increase jobs (up from 53% in 2015).
5. **Nearly 9 in 10 Americans say the U.S. should be producing more wind and solar.** 87% of Americans say the U.S. should be producing more wind and solar (**64% much more**). 63% say the U.S. should be producing less coal (**32% much less**).

6. **Americans are hopeful and believe we can work together on solutions, and feel the urgency to do so.** Americans are optimistic for the future with 76% reporting they are hopeful we can reduce the pollution that is causing climate change. 77% say we need to take action on this now.
7. **Trust in climate messengers has shifted over the past two years, with some gains, and notable losses.** Americans place the highest levels of trust in scientists (70%) and health professionals (62%). The largest gain was in local community leaders—40% of Americans say they trust local community leaders as a source for information about climate change (+15-points from 25% in 2015). The largest loss was in trust in the President on climate information—only 31% trust the President, a decrease of 10-points from 2016 (down from 41%). Other noteworthy shifts in trust include trust in companies and corporations (28%, up from 15% in 2015) and celebrities (25%, up from 12% in 2015) both which have increased 13-points over the last two years.
8. **Climate action is on the rise among Americans, individually and within their communities.** 69% of Americans say they have discussed climate change with family or friends. One in five Americans (21%) say their cities or towns are already acting on climate by talking to the public about climate change (up from 11% in 2015). Nearly a third (30%) say the city or town where they live is taking action to prepare for climate impacts (up from 15% in 2015).
9. **But, a majority of Americans also believe their government and communities can do more.** 83% believe communities need to prepare for floods and droughts and minimize impacts, with 60% strongly agreeing. **72% say they want their city or town to prepare** for climate change. 70% believe the government needs to protect all people from the impacts of extreme weather, with half strongly agreeing. More than 4 in 10 (41%) say they want their city or town to conserve energy (up from 29% in 2015). Over a third (37%) want their city or town to purchase clean energy, like wind and solar (up from 27% in 2015). A growing number of Americans want their cities and towns to talk to the public about climate change (29%, up from 16% in 2015), and educate others about climate change (33%, up from 20% in 2015).

Methodology

ecoAmerica and Lake Research Partners (LRP) designed and LRP administered this survey, which was conducted online September 25–27, 2017. The survey yielded a total of 802 adult responses. The sample was drawn from an online panel and the respondents were screened to ensure that they were over the age of 18. The national sample was weighted slightly by gender, region, age, and race.

The margin of error for the sample is +/-3.5%. In interpreting the survey results, it is important to note that all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error. Thus, the results of a survey may differ from the results that would be obtained if the entire population was interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends upon both the total number of respondents in the survey and the percentage distribution of the responses to a particular question. For example, if 50% of the respondents in a sample of 900 respondents answered, “Yes” to a particular question, we can be 95% confident that the true percentage would fall within 3.5 points, or range from 46.5% to 53.5%.

Special Thanks

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

Suggested Citation

Fery, P., Speiser, M., Lake, C., and Voss, J. (2017). American Climate Metrics Survey: National 2017. *ecoAmerica and Lake Research Partners*. Washington, DC.