

# American Climate Metrics Survey 2018

## *Guidance for the Climate Movement*

### **A Look Inside**

- **Expanded climate advocacy must center on People of Color and Millennials**
- **Support for climate solutions is vast, but personal benefits must be made known**
- **Americans need to know they're not alone in their concern for climate change**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ecoAmerica builds institutional leadership, public support, and political will for climate solutions in the United States. We help national mainstream organizations elevate their climate leadership, providing them strategy, tools, and resources.

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### Methodology

ecoAmerica and Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey, which was conducted online September 14-18<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The survey yielded a total of 800 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 region, age, race, and education. 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 802 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%.

### Suggested Citation

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*Note: Survey data can be found by [Political Party](#) and [Timeseries](#) at [ecoAmerica.org/research](http://ecoAmerica.org/research)*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ecoAmerica’s American Climate Metrics Survey (ACMS) goes beyond tracking American climate awareness, attitudes, and behaviors to provide quantitative **insights to guide the climate movement on how to connect with a broader diversity of Americans and stimulate or support public engagement and political will for climate action.**

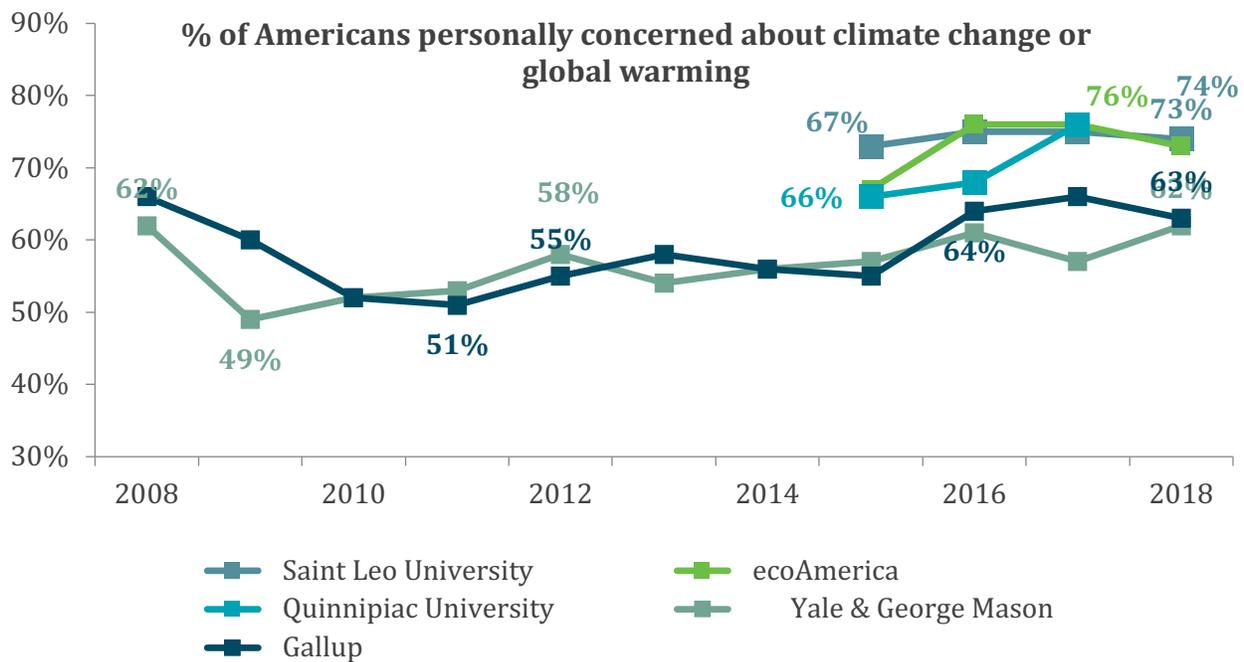
There are **many points of consensus** (see page 6) on climate. Today, **80% of Americans say that climate change is happening** (page 7) and just 9% say climate change is not happening (down from 13% in 2015). **77% say humans have a role in causing climate change.** Further, a majority of Americans (**73%**) are **personally concerned about climate change, including 40% who are very concerned,** however **only 57% believe others around them are concerned** (page 11).

### Concerned About Climate

**90%** of Democrats, **66%** of Independents, **54%** of Republicans

**85%** of Latinos, **80%** of African Americans, **67%** of white Americans

**81%** of Millennials, **72%** of over 65

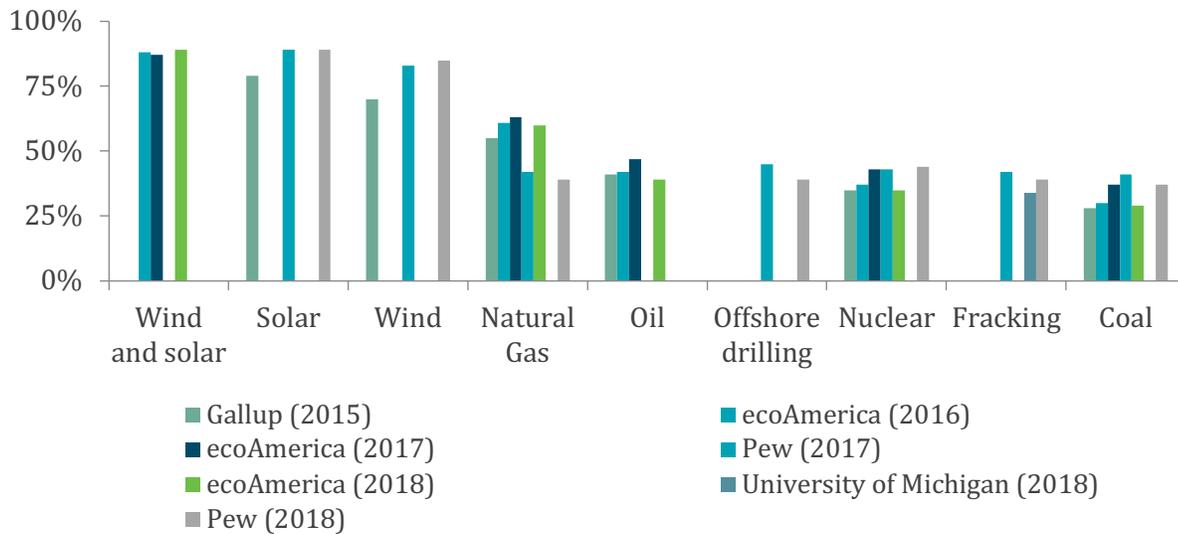


This survey uncovers what lies underneath basic climate attitudes, including how **Americans feel agency (83%), urgency (80%) and a moral responsibility (88%) to create a safe and healthy climate** for their families and future generations (page 7). It highlights that Americans have **strong support for a wide variety of solutions** (page 8) from local preparedness to modernizing the grid, laws for efficient buildings and cars, charging corporate polluters a fee, tax incentives for clean energy and vehicles, and more.



Americans are becoming comfortable with moving away from oil and coal, with 61% of Americans would like the U.S. to produce *less coal*, up from 54% in 2017. A 48% plurality say we should produce *less oil* (39% say more), a reversal from last year when 47% said produce more, 42% said less. 60% of Americans want the U.S. to produce more natural gas, compared to 28% who say less. 52% of Americans want *less nuclear* production, with 33% saying ‘much less’. American are in consensus **(89%) that the U.S. should produce more clean energy. 87% believe everyone has the right to clean energy** (page 8).

**% of Americans that support or believe we should produce more...**



Enclosed in this report are recommendations for the climate movement – our best opportunities for moving climate action and solutions forward.

The results show that **African Americans, Latinx, Millennials, and women under 50** are ready for greater influence and support in the climate movement (page 9). These groups possess the strongest climate values, are motivated to engage, and need movement capacity and inclusion to center them in climate discussion, action, and solutions.

Rather than educate or convince Americans about climate change, **the climate movement now needs to fuel catalytic climate advocacy**, expanding not only who they engage on the issue, but also the methods they employ to do so. *With 63% of Americans willing to contact or vote for a climate candidate*, and a majority **(70%) saying candidates running for office in 2018 were not focusing enough on climate change**, it is clear that climate will be a defining issue of upcoming elections, and that more Americans are ready to engage (page 10). They need to be invited and supported in personally relevant ways.

To broaden climate constituency, the movement needs to **empower trusted messengers** (page 11) to bring personalized messages to their communities, **such as health professionals (62%) and professors and educators (55%)**. They **need to give permission to Americans to feel concerned** about climate (page 11), focus their message on solutions, and always tie solutions to personal health, wealth and wellbeing benefits.



## CLIMATE CONSENSUS

- 91% Believe **clean air and water are critical rights** for all people
- 89% The United States should **produce more wind and solar energy** than it is today
- 88% We have a **moral responsibility to create a safe and healthy climate** for ourselves and our children
- 87% Everyone has a **right to clean energy** that does not pollute the air or water
- 87% Favor a proposal to reduce climate change pollution by **modernizing America's electric grid**
- 85% **Communities need to prepare** for floods and droughts to minimize their impact
- 83% **We can reduce the pollution** that is causing climate change
- 83% Favor a proposal to reduce climate change pollution by **charging corporate polluters a fee for the pollution** they create
- 81% Favor a proposal to reduce climate change pollution by passing **laws for more efficient buildings and cars**
- 81% Have **noticed more severe weather** and changing seasonal weather patterns where they live over the last several years
- 80% **We need to take action now** to reduce the pollution that is causing climate change
- 80% Favor a proposal to reduce climate change pollution by expanding **public transit** like buses and trains
- 80% **Climate change is happening**
- 79% Favor a proposal to reduce climate change pollution by providing **corporate tax credits to expand clean energy**
- 78% I am **hopeful we can reduce the pollution** that is causing climate change
- 78% Climate change **will harm future generations** of people
- 77% Climate change **will harm plant and animal** species
- 77% **Trust scientists** as a source of information about climate change
- 77% Climate change is caused partially or primarily **by humans**
- 76% Want their **city or town to prepare** for the impacts of climate change
- 76% Favor a proposal to reduce climate change pollution by providing **personal tax credits for electric or hybrid cars**



## CLIMATE CONSENSUS: Common Ground to Broaden Climate Action

While the general assumption is to the contrary, ecoAmerica found over twenty climate perspectives on which a strong majority of Americans (over 75%) agree. Focusing on these themes offer promising starting points for climate communications, movement building, and program or policy design.

### Our Climate Is Changing, Causing More Severe Weather

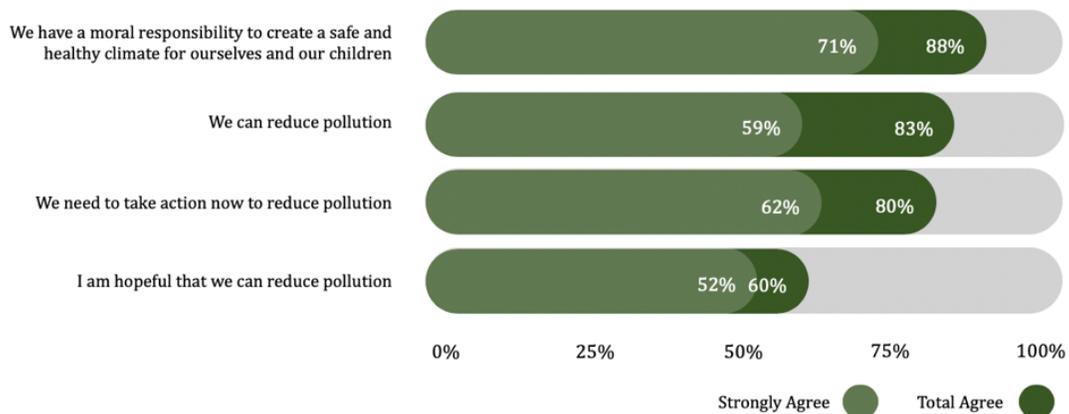
Three in five Americans (60%) believe **the effects of climate change have *already begun*** to happen, and another 16% believe the effects will happen in their lifetime. Now a strong majority, **81% of Americans say they have *noticed more severe weather*** patterns where they live over the last several years, up from 71% in 2015. 90% of those who have noticed more severe weather also believe climate change is happening. **Over three quarters (77%) of the public agree that *humans are at least partially to blame*** for climate change, with a majority (53%) saying it is due to a combination of both human activities and natural causes and 23% understanding it is mainly due to humans. On where Americans believe the harm will be distributed, they say future generations (78%), plant and animal species (77%), people in the U.S. (71%), the world’s poor (71%), their community (61%), family (56%), and they personally (53%) will bear the brunt of it, respectively.

### Clean Air, Water and Energy are Personal Rights for All

Vast majorities of Americans believe that **clean air and water (91%), and energy (87%) that does not pollute the air or water are critical personal rights for us all**. When Americans view issues as personal rights, it is in our cultural DNA to be more likely to protect against threats that may infringe on or impinge these rights.

### We Can Reduce Pollution, Need to Begin Now, and Feel Moral Responsibility to do so

Today, 78% of Americans are *hopeful* that we can reduce the pollution that is causing climate change, including 52% who strongly agree. **A vast majority (83%) believe we have agency, that *we can reduce the pollution that is causing our climate to change***. Four in five (80%) Americans agree that we need to ***take action now to reduce the pollution that is causing climate change***, including **62% who strongly agree** (up from 55% strongly agree in 2015). They also view climate action through an ethical lens – **88% believe we have a *moral responsibility*** to create a safe and healthy climate for ourselves and our children, including **71% who strongly agree**.





These results show **it is time for the climate movement to transition beyond proving climate change exists, and focus resources on creating a broader and more inclusive advocacy movement that compels policymakers and business leaders to bring forth just, equitable and effective solutions, now.** Americans are ready to get going and “get ‘er done” as long as the solutions and benefits are equitable. The good news is that they support a wide variety of solutions.

### Americans Want Their Communities to Prepare

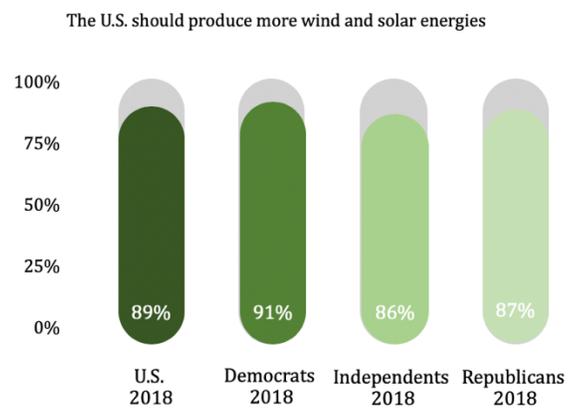
Protecting cities and towns from climate impacts has strong bipartisan support. **Fully 85% of Americans believe communities need to prepare** for floods and droughts to minimize their impact, including 60% who strongly agree. Few Americans (20%) say their town or city is currently doing something to prepare for impacts, while more than **three-quarters (76%) want their cities or towns to prepare**, including a majority across party lines (90% of Democrats, 76% of Independents, and 60% of Republicans).

### There is Majority Support for a Vast Array of Climate Solutions

As the most recent IPCC report reinforced, there is little time to act on climate. The good news is that Americans are ready. The federal government’s abdication of responsibility for climate solutions directly contradicts the will of the American people, who support a wide array of public policy solutions to climate change. Today, an **87% majority favors a proposal to reduce climate change by modernizing America’s electric power grid** (up from 83% last year), including 54% who strongly favor. Additionally, **83% favor charging large companies a fee for the pollution they create**, including 57% who strongly favor it. **81% of Americans favor laws for more efficient buildings and cars** and **80% favor expanding public transit**. High majorities also favor **corporate tax credits (79%) to expand clean energy** and **personal tax credits (76%) for hybrid and electric cars**.

### Renewable Energy is a Win-Win-Win

High majorities of Americans want the United States to produce more renewable energy – **89% want more wind and solar energy production**, including 69% who want much more. **Strong support for wind and solar exists across all demographic and party lines** (91% of Democrats, 86% of Independents, and 87% of Republicans agree). Conversely, Americans **want the U.S. to produce less energy from coal** (61%, up from 54% last year) and **less oil** (48% want less, 39% want more). Republicans over 50 and those who don’t believe climate change is happening are the only subgroups who are more likely to say we should produce more coal compared to last year (48% and 55% agree, respectively), however these groups represent a small minority compared to the total American population.



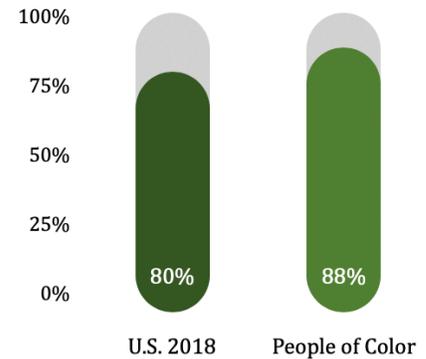


## OUR BEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOVING CLIMATE ACTION FORWARD

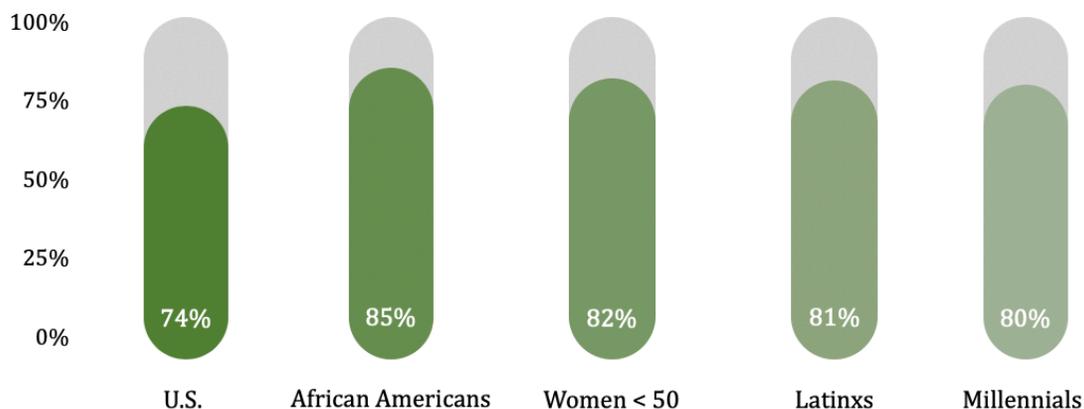
**Expand the Climate Movement to be More Inclusive, Just and Equitable. Support and Affirm Climate Leadership from Diverse Climate Leaders, Locally and Nationally.**

**Millennials, women under 50, African Americans, and Latinxs** possess climate values that align with climate advocacy, however their presence is greatly underrepresented in the movement. Efforts to affirm and support their leadership must be prioritized, including centering them in the development of and outreach on solutions and action. People of color in particular, including African Americans, Latinx, and Asian Americans **understand that climate change is happening** (88% vs. the four in five nationally who agree), and are concerned (page 4). These Americans **understand that their families will be harmed** (68% Millennials, 69% women under 50, 65% African Americans, and 65% Latinxs, vs. 56% nationally). They are also the most likely groups to **agree that the government has a role to play** in protecting us against climate impacts (80%, 82%, 85%, and 81% agree, respectively, vs. 74% nationally). While most Americans support climate solutions, these groups do so at a much higher rate. For instance, high majorities favor a proposal to **charge corporate polluters a fee for the pollution** they create, including 87% of Latinx, 86% of women under 50, and 84% of African Americans vs. 83% of national. Millennials stand out for their shifts in believing the **U.S. should produce less oil** (57%, up from 40% in 2017) **and coal** (63%, up from 50% in 2017), as do **Independents**.

Climate change is happening



Government needs to protect all people from the impacts



### Shifts in wanting the U.S. to produce *less oil*:

- 66% of adults under 30, up from 40% in 2017
- 57% of Millennials, up from 40% in 2017
- 54% of Independents, up from 36% in 2017

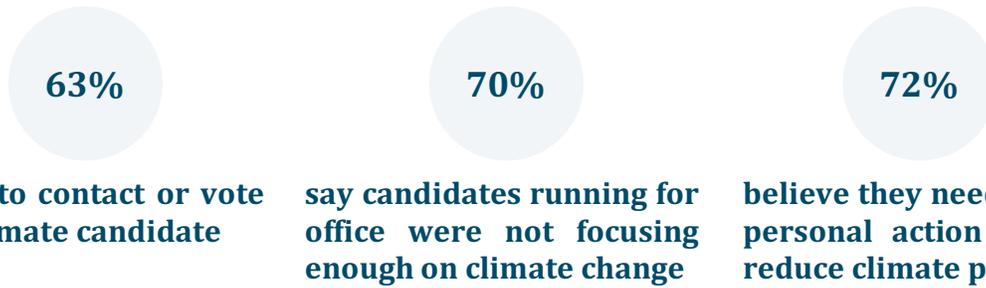
### Shifts in wanting the U.S. to produce *less coal*:

- 70% of Independents, up from 47% in 2017
- 63% of Millennials, up from 50% in 2017
- 61% of rural adults, up from 53% in 2017
- 60% of white women, up from 49% in 2017



## Fuel Catalytic Climate Advocacy

A majority of Americans are ready to act on climate, and it is time to help them do so. Not only do they support a breadth of solutions (see page 8), and feel the urgency to act now to reduce pollution (72%), but also **63% are willing to contact or vote for a climate candidate**. A majority **70% say candidates running for office in 2018 were not focusing enough on climate change**. Nearly three quarters of Americans (72%) believe that they need to take personal action now to reduce pollution that is causing climate change, including 43% who strongly agree.



Many Americans believe it is important to **personally speak out to their family (59%), elected officials (55%), and their friends (54%)** on climate issues. Others said they had not yet taken these actions, but would be willing to do so, including 42% who would contact or vote for an elected official based on his or her support for taking action on climate, and 26% who would be willing to discuss climate change with family or friends.

Yet, so many Americans still need to be invited to engage on climate, and supported with a path to advocacy. Although **half of Americans feel empowered to advance climate solutions among family and friends (52%)** and **a third (34%) feel empowered nationally**, **53% do not feel empowered** to do so in their community, at a national level (58% not empowered), nor with their employer (57% not empowered). Republicans (63%) nor Independents (68%) feel empowered to advocate nationally.

While some of these results seem lackluster, one must imagine how fast climate solutions would progress if over half of America were advocating. The climate movement needs to invite a broader swath of Americans to engage, and **offer training with ways to advocate that are accessible to newcomers uncomfortable with activism**.

### Americans feel empowered to advocate on climate:

**52%** among friends and family  
**34%** nationally

### Do not feel empowered to advocate on climate:

**58%** nationally  
**57%** with their employer  
**53%** in their communities

**68%** of Independents nationally  
**63%** of Republicans nationally

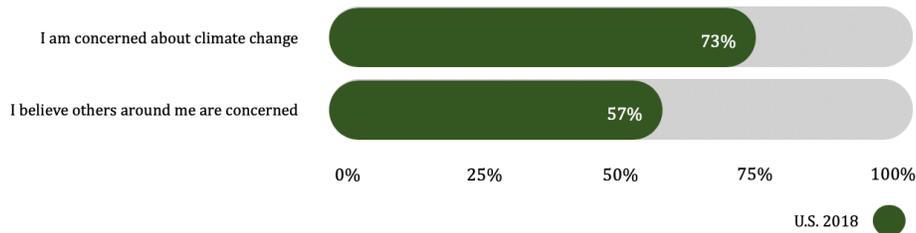
## Empower Trusted Messengers, Give Permission for Concern, and Focus on Benefits

Americans seek guidance on climate change from a variety of people. They trust scientists (74%), environmental organizations (63%), health professionals (62%), clean energy companies (57%), and colleges and universities (55%) most. **Out of these “messengers,” health professionals and professors and educators seem ripe to bolster**. Americans report hearing about climate change from the news and media (60%) and family and friends (27%), but only 23% from



professors and educators, only 19% from health professionals. The climate movement needs to build capacity to educate and train health professionals and educators on how to harness their influence on climate. Located in nearly every community nationwide, they can reach people and families, across socio-economic status, and help make the issue personal. Hearing from someone with local ties, who understands the local impacts, solutions and culture, is vital for increasing public engagement on climate solutions.

**Americans need to know they are not alone in their climate concern.** Although 73% of Americans are concerned about climate change, **only 57% believe that others around them feel concerned.** In order to truly open doors for engagement on climate change, the climate movement needs to let Americans know that concern is widespread, give permission to have concern, and make it more socially acceptable show it.



**Climate impacts are happening in Americans’ backyards, impacting them and those they care about.** They are beginning to see this with their own eyes. **Majorities believe climate change will harm them locally,** including people in the United States (71%), those in their community (61%), their family (56%), and themselves personally (53%). A solid majority of Americans believe climate change will harm future generations of people (78%, 54% a great deal), plant and animal species (77%, 52% a great deal), and the world’s poor (71%, 48% a great deal). Awareness is strong, which is why **the climate movement should spend less time bearing the bad news, and more time sharing the good news.**

**It is the right of everyone American to live in a nation free from climate pollution, change and impacts.** Majorities believe clean air and water, and clean energy are personal rights – and it is imperative that the climate movement tie climate action to these factors.

**It is time to get past cost and sacrifice, toward promoting solutions, investment and personal benefits.** As established, Americans support a wide array of climate solutions. And while **they are beginning to see the benefits of climate solutions for health (66%), the economy (61%) and jobs (56%),** some are still influenced by oppositional messaging on cost and tradeoff. Currently, 39% of Americans agree that “we could address climate change, but the *costs and sacrifices are too high,*” while only 52% disagrees. This is a positive shift from 2017, when 43% of Americans agreed that the “costs and sacrifices are too high” and only 47% disagreed. A decreasing number of Republicans perceive the cost and sacrifice framing, now 43% believe this, down from 53% in 2017. However, 41% of Independents and 34% of Democrats still believe the cost and sacrifice frame. And, while the following statement promotes a false choice (and should be removed from surveys going forward accordingly), Americans are split on whether “it is more important that we *prioritize economic growth over taking action on climate change*”, with 44% agreeing and 46% disagreeing. **The climate movement must focus messaging on solutions, and whenever doing so tie solutions to personal health, wealth and wellbeing.** And, “cost” must be reframed as **investment.** After all, didn’t it *cost* to build the national highway system, and, wouldn’t every American agree it was a needed investment?



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