

The Rural-Urban Divide on Climate Change Where’s the Polarization?

In the past year, the United States has battled record wildfires, heat waves, droughts, and hurricanes. While impacts may look different for Americans depending on where they live, “There is no small town, big city or rural community that is unaffected by the climate crisis,” says EPA Administrator, [Michael S. Regan](#). As this American Climate Perspectives Survey from ecoAmerica shows, to ignite climate action across the country, Americans need to be engaged locally, whether they hail from rural, semi-rural, suburban, or urban communities.

Majorities of Americans are concerned about climate change, and a vast majority agree we have a right to live in a healthy environment with clean air and water. Health and nature are motivators for climate solution support and most Americans feel it is their personal and their local community’s responsibility to address it. However, meaningful differences exist depending on where Americans live — and should inform efforts to engage them in climate — as shown below.

Americans Are in Consensus: We Have a Right to Clean Air and Water

ecoAmerica’s research shows that a vast majority of Americans (96%) believe we have a right to live in a healthy environment with clean air and water. These findings remain in consensus across the major demographic groups studied — including 96% of rural Americans who say they agree with this statement as do 97% of urban Americans.

A vast majority of rural and urban Americans agree we have a right to live in a healthy environment with clean air and water. Survey question: “Please indicate if you agree or disagree: Americans have a right to live in a healthy environment with clean air and water.” 1,084 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error.



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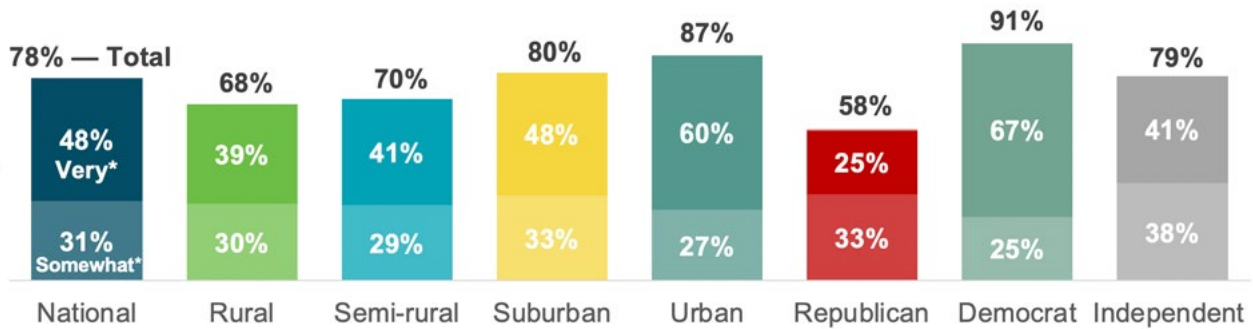
Climate Concern on the Rise, But Differs by Area and Political Affiliation

Climate change concern has grown from 74% in [2019](#) to 78% in April, 2021, with the number of Americans reporting they are very concerned rising. ecoAmerica findings show a 19 point spread in concern between rural (68%), semi-rural (70%), suburban (80%), and urban Americans (87%). The spread between political party affiliation is greater at 33% with Republicans at 58%, Independents at 79%, and Democrats at 91%. This may be partially explained by the demographics of urban communities.

47% of survey respondents living in urban areas identified themselves as Democrats, 22% identified as Independents, 19% identified as Republicans, and 11% identified as something else. 42% of survey respondents living in rural areas identified themselves as Republicans, 24% identified as Independents, 23% identified as Democrats, and 11% identified as something else.

The majority of Americans are concerned about climate change, Democrats and Urban Americans most concerned.

Survey question: How concerned are you about climate change? 1,084 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error



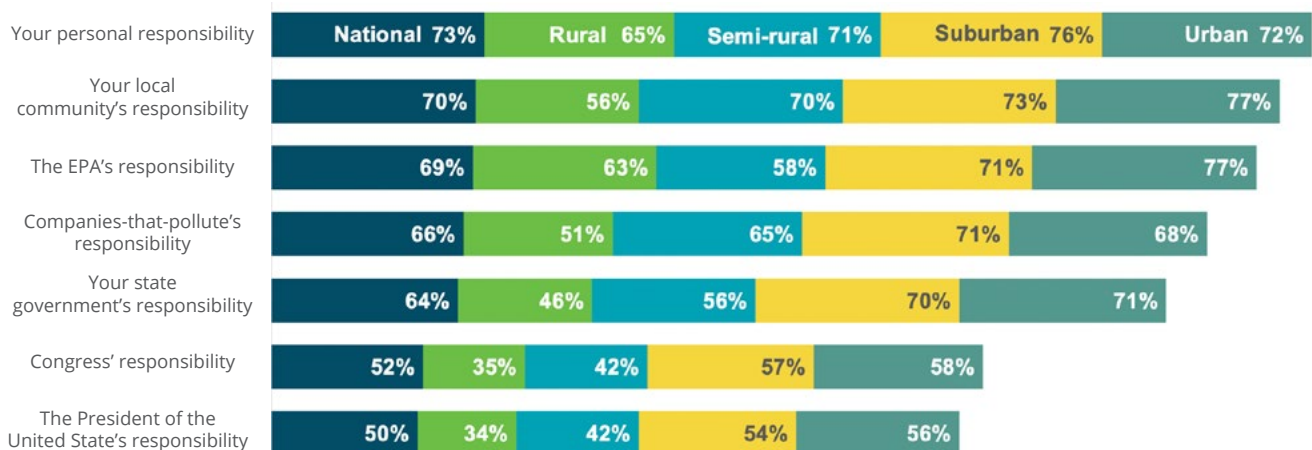
*concerned about climate change

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Climate Responsibility Leans Local and Personal

So, whose responsibility is it to address climate change? ecoAmerica finds that 73% of Americans feel it is their personal responsibility, 70% believe it is their community's responsibility, and 69% believe it is the EPA's responsibility. Looking at these findings by different community types reveals variations, most notably between urban and rural communities. Majorities of urban and suburban Americans place responsibility also with state government and companies-that-pollute, however these numbers are much lower for rural and semi-rural Americans. Only half of Americans believe that climate change is Congress' or The President of the United States' responsibility, including only one in three rural Americans.

Americans say addressing climate change is their personal responsibility most. Survey question: In your view, whose responsibility is it to protect our environment and address climate change? (check all that apply) 1,083 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error

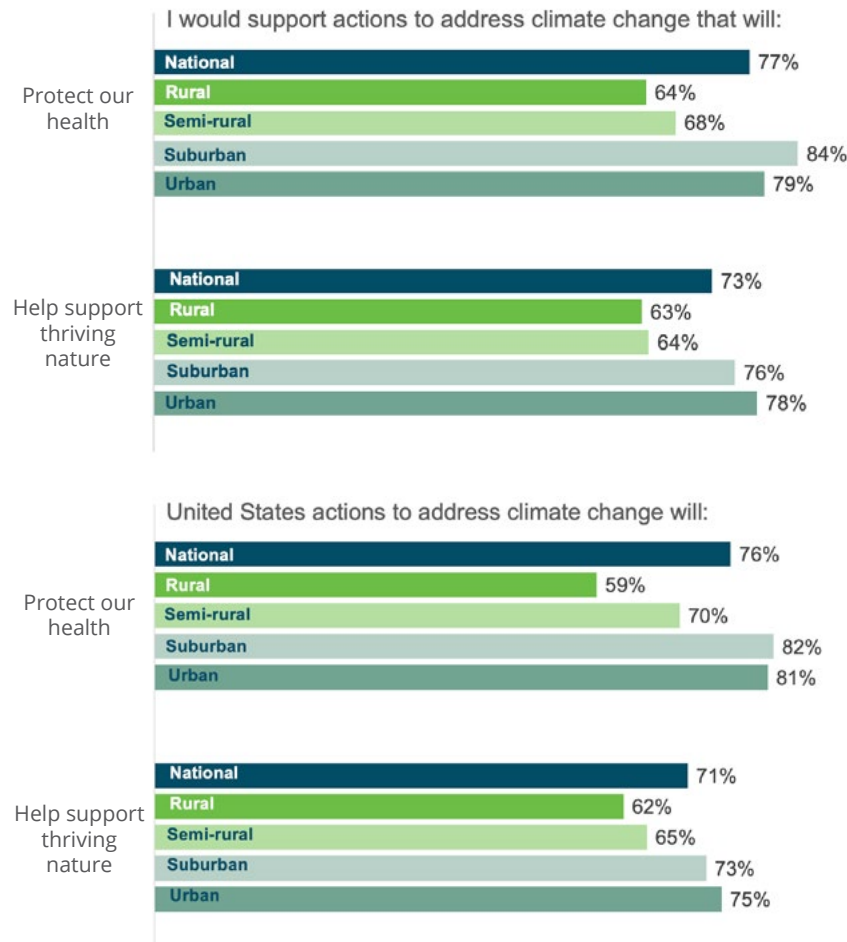


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Divides Aside, Americans Support Climate Solutions to Protect Our Health and Nature

The majority of Americans support actions to address climate change that will protect our health and help nature, believe US actions to address climate change will.

1,058 and 1,036 respondents. +/- 3% margin of error



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This latest survey finds that health is a driver for climate solution support with 77% of Americans indicating they would support actions to address climate change that protect our health. 76% of Americans also believe that US actions to address climate will do just that. While majorities of Americans support climate action for health and nature and believe US actions will do both, gaps exist between urban, suburban, semi-rural and rural Americans.

On health, a 20 point difference unfolds between suburban Americans (84%) who support climate change action that protects health and rural Americans (64%) who support that action. On nature, a 15 point difference unfolds between urban (78%) and rural Americans (63%). The greatest gap, however, is between urban (81%) and suburban (82%) Americans who believe that US actions on climate will protect our health vs. only 59% of rural Americans.

New Opportunities to Activate Communities

These findings show that the vast majority of Americans are concerned about climate change, and feel a personal responsibility to take action. Protecting health and nature drive support for action, as does the widely-held belief that it's our right to live in a healthy environment with clean air and water. The timely opportunity exists to build support for local solutions across rural, semi-rural, suburban, and urban communities. Efforts to broaden support for climate action on the state and national levels — particularly amongst rural and semi-rural communities — are urgently needed. For actions to take right now, read ecoAmerica's new Climate Action Fact Sheet, [Climate Solutions in Your Community](#).

Full data is available in the accompanying [toplines](#).

Methodology

ecoAmerica designed and administered this survey, which was conducted online on April 12-13, 2021 using Survey Monkey. The survey yielded a total of 1,084 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 margin of error for the sample is +/-3%. 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 1,029 respondents answered, "Yes" to a particular question, we can be 95% confident that the true percentage would fall within 3 points, or range from 47% to 53%.

Suggested Citation

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