

Climate Change in the American Mind: November 2019

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1 Executive Summary

- About seven in ten Americans (72%) think global warming is happening. Only about one in eight Americans (12%) think global warming is not happening. Americans who think global warming is happening outnumber those who think it isn't by a 6 to 1 ratio.
- About half of Americans are certain that global warming is happening; 52% are “extremely” or “very” sure it is happening. By contrast, far fewer (7%) are “extremely” or “very” sure global warming is not happening.
- About six in ten Americans (59%) understand that global warming is mostly human-caused. By contrast, three in ten (30%) think it is due mostly to natural changes in the environment.
- More than half of Americans (55%) understand that most scientists think global warming is happening. However, only about one in five (22%) understand how strong the level of consensus among scientists is (i.e., that more than 90% of climate scientists think human-caused global warming is happening).
- Two in three Americans (66%) say they are at least “somewhat worried” about global warming. Three in ten (30%) are “very worried” about it.
- More than six in ten Americans (64%) say they feel at least “moderately interested” in global warming. About half say they feel “helpless” (53%) or “disgusted” (50%).
- Nearly half of Americans (46%) say they have personally experienced the effects of global warming.
- More than four in ten Americans (45%) think people in the United States are being harmed by global warming “right now.”
- More than four in ten Americans (43%) think they will be harmed by global warming, while more think their family (49%) will be harmed. Half or more Americans think global warming will harm people in their community (51%), people in the U.S. (65%), the world's poor (66%), people in developing countries (68%), future generations of people (72%), and/or plant and animal species (73%).
- Two in three Americans (67%) say the issue of global warming is either “extremely,” “very,” or “somewhat” important to them personally, while one in three (33%) say it is either “not too” or “not at all” personally important.
- About six in ten Americans (59%) say they “rarely” or “never” discuss global warming with family and friends, while 41% say they do so “occasionally” or “often.”
- More than half of Americans (56%) say they hear about global warming in the media at least once a month and more than four in ten (44%) say they have seen more media coverage of global warming over the past year. Fewer (24%) say they hear people they know talking about global warming at least once a month.
- Fewer than half of Americans perceive a social norm in which their friends and family expect them to take action on global warming. Forty-three percent think it is at least moderately important to their family and friends that they take action (an injunctive norm), and four in ten (40%) say their family and friends make at least a moderate amount of effort to reduce global warming (a descriptive norm).
- Few Americans (12%) think it is too late to do anything about global warming, while two in three (66%) disagree that it is too late. About half of Americans (48%) think new technologies can solve global warming without individuals having to make big changes in their lives.
- More than six in ten Americans (64%) think global warming is affecting weather in the United States, and about three in ten think weather is being affected “a lot” (31%).
- Half or more Americans think global warming made several extreme weather-related events worse in 2019 including melting of the Greenland ice sheets (64%), European heat waves (55%), and California wildfires (50%).
- A majority of Americans are worried about harm from extreme events in their local area including extreme heat (64%), droughts (60%), flooding (58%), and/or water shortages (54%).
- A majority of Americans (56%) think extreme weather poses a risk to their community.