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Why Some Americans Do Not See Urgency on Climate Change

In-depth interviews find some Americans consider crisis language overblown, leading to added skepticism of claims

BY Giancarlo Pasquini, Alison Spencer, Alec Tyson, and Cary Funk

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

Cary Funk, Director, Science and Society Research

Alec Tyson, Associate Director, Science and Society Research

Haley Nolan, Communications Manager

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

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How we did this

Pew Research Center conducted this study to better understand the perspectives of Americans who put lower priority on taking action to address climate change and who see a limited role for human activity as a reason for the Earth warming.

The Center completed in-depth interviews with 32 U.S. adults to discuss their views about climate change, extreme weather and environmental problems. The interviews were conducted online by Sago, a market research firm, between May 15 and 26, 2023.

Interviews were conducted with people who said that addressing climate change is not a top priority for the country and who did *not* see human activity as the primary reason the Earth is getting warmer, including some who said there was no evidence that the Earth is warming. Interviews included adults living in five geographic regions in the United States: the Midwest, Mountain West, Southwest, South and Coastal Florida.

Here is the [interviewer guide](#) used for the in-depth interviews, and more on its [methodology](#). Quotations featured in this report have been lightly edited for grammar and clarity.

A companion report, “[Majorities of Americans Prioritize Renewable Energy, Back Steps to Address Climate Change](#),” analyzed public opinion on climate, energy and environmental issues based on a survey of 10,329 U.S. adults from May 30 to June 4, 2023.

Why Some Americans Do Not See Urgency on Climate Change

In-depth interviews find some Americans consider crisis language overblown, leading to added skepticism of claims

As the Earth's temperature [continues to rise, fueling more intense storms](#) and extreme weather, scientists are [calling for immediate action to address climate change](#). However, climate change remains a lower priority for some Americans, and a subset of the public rejects that it's happening at all.

To better understand the perspectives of those who see less urgency to address climate change, Pew Research Center conducted in-depth interviews with 32 U.S. adults who hold this view, including some who do not believe there's evidence that the Earth is warming. Unlike much of our work on climate change, these interviews are not representative of all U.S. adults; rather, they are designed to provide deeper insight into the motivations and views of those most skeptical about climate change.

The interviews revealed that language describing climate change as a crisis and an urgent threat was met with suspicion by many participants. The disconnect between crisis rhetoric and the participants' own beliefs and experiences drove doubt about the motivations of the people making these claims, sowing suspicion and deeper mistrust.

Interviewees widely rejected the national news media as a credible source for climate information. They see these outlets as presenting information that suits their own agendas. Interviewees generally expressed greater openness toward hearing from scientists on climate change because of their subject matter expertise. Still, participants stressed the importance of hearing factual statements from scientists rather than beliefs that may be shaped by their own political leanings or their research funders.

On policy, interviewees were open to government efforts to improve environmental quality, including air and water quality – especially when these efforts were at the local level. The conversations underscore areas of common ground around environmental protection, regardless of Americans' level of concern about climate change.

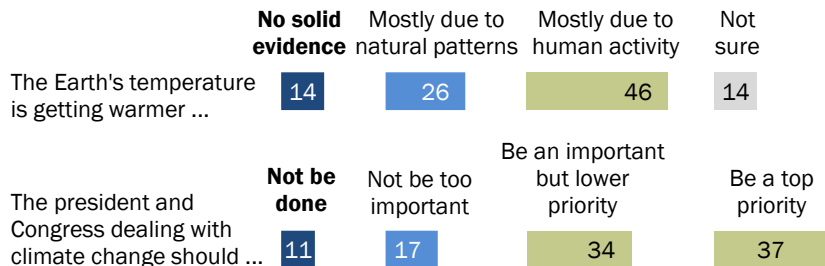
When it comes to measures aimed at transitioning the country toward renewable energy, interviewees stressed the importance of respecting individual freedoms – and individual choice –

in any energy transition. This theme was underscored by criticism of policies like ending the production of new gas-powered vehicles.

Nationally representative Pew Research Center surveys show that fewer than half of all Americans reject that humans are major contributors to climate change or say addressing the issue is not too important for the country. Even smaller shares take the most skeptical views and say the Earth is not warming at all and that no action should be taken.

14% of Americans say there is no solid evidence that climate change is happening

% of U.S. adults who say the following



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted May 30-June 4, 2023 and Jan. 18-24, 2023. "Why Some Americans Do Not See Urgency on Climate Change"

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Overall, 46% of Americans say human activity is the primary reason why the Earth is warming. By contrast, 26% say warming is mostly caused by natural patterns in the environment and another 14% do not believe there's evidence the Earth is warming at all.

When it comes to policy action, 37% of Americans think addressing climate change should be a [top priority for the president and Congress](#), and another 34% say it is an important but lower priority. By contrast, about three-in-ten say action on climate change is not too important (17%) or should not be done (11%). Republicans are much less likely than Democrats to prioritize climate action, though individuals who are skeptical about addressing climate change are seen within both party coalitions and across demographic groups. ([Read this post](#) for a roundup of survey data on how Americans feel about climate change.)

In-depth interviews with adults who view climate change as a lower priority and do not think the Earth is getting warmer primarily due to human activity were conducted virtually in May 2023 across five geographic areas: the Midwest, Mountain West, South, Southwest and Coastal Florida. Participants were selected based on their views on climate change and to ensure a broad mix of interviewees across characteristics including party, ideology, gender and education.

The analysis of these 32 interviews is designed to highlight common themes that emerged across conversations. The analysis and quotations are meant to offer a deeper exploration of the “why” behind the views and beliefs of those who see climate action as a lower priority.

The major themes across these interviews include:

Perceptions of climate change as part of the Earth’s natural cycles and strong skepticism toward claims of crisis

A common explanation across interviews was that any changes to Earth’s climate are a natural part of the planet’s cycles that humans cannot control. Extreme weather was explained in a similar way, with many saying these events are natural occurrences that have not become more frequent and severe because of climate change.

Most of the 32 interviewees perceived claims of a climate crisis as exaggerated, and they connected this sense of overblown rhetoric with a need for increased scrutiny toward such claims.

- **Climate change is seen as part of Earth’s natural cycles and humans play a small role.** Most of the 32 interviewees were in agreement that the Earth’s climate is changing, but they typically explained these changes as part of natural patterns over time, with humans described as having little control over these changes. Two interviewees expressed extreme skepticism, calling climate change a “hoax.”
- **Extreme weather is seen as a part of life and not happening more often.** Many interviewees said that extreme weather events are natural occurrences and did not draw a connection between their intensity or frequency and climate change. Some participants added that people are just hearing more about these events than in the past because of the availability of information, but they are not becoming more common.

Explanations for climate change and extreme weather as natural patterns over time

“I do believe [the climate] is changing, but I believe it is changing in a natural cycle that happens all the time. What I don’t believe is that humans are 100% responsible for climate change.” –Man, 50s, Mountain West

“I think that [extreme weather events] are not happening more. I think people know about them more. We know about a tsunami that happened across the world, whereas 50 years ago we never even heard of it. It may seem like things are happening more and more, but I think that just that’s the cycle of life, the cycle of Earth. And if they are happening a little more, then that is just the cyclical part of what’s going on with the planet.” –Man, 50s, Coastal Florida

Suspicion around claims that action on climate change is urgent

One of the most common frustrations participants raised is the way that people talk about climate change as a crisis that requires immediate action. Many said that when they hear these arguments, they react with disbelief and increased scrutiny of the motives behind such statements.

As one participant put it: *“People who are alarmist tend to want really drastic policies that seem to not make sense, so it kind of makes me disbelieve the other things they’re saying.”*

–Man, 20s, Midwest

Another said: *“From a personal standpoint, whether it’s the climate or anything else, when the statements are too large ... like when the statements are, ‘The world is getting warmer and Earth is going to be ended in five years because we’re all terrible humans and we throw trash on the ground.’ Those things cause me to be, instead of causing me to be concerned, it causes me to be more skeptical about where the information is coming from and why it’s being presented in such a grandiose term, for lack of a better word.”*

–Woman, 30s, Midwest

Climate scientists are valued for their expertise, but also seen as potentially having an agenda; media outlets are not trusted sources of climate information

Participants expressed trust in climate scientists while also considering that some might have personal biases. The openness to hearing from scientists on this issue was in contrast to their views of media outlets. Most interviewees said that the news media cannot be trusted for information about climate change.

- **Open to information from climate scientists.** Many participants wanted to hear more from climate scientists because of their expertise. Yet some of the same participants also said they don’t have full trust in scientists because of uncertainty about their financial motivations and personal biases.

“I think that scientists, if they worked hard for their degree, it’s good to listen to them. I do always wonder, with anybody – anybody – if they have an agenda. It’s looking into maybe where their education is, what groups or environmental groups are they a part of. What is their main focus? And then, is there an agenda behind what they’re saying?” –Woman, 40s, Mountain West

- **Widespread distrust in traditional media outlets.** Most of the 32 interviewees were reluctant to put full faith in information from national media outlets. Many said that media sources each have their own agenda and thus cannot be trusted.

“Networks and radio and newspapers and television, they’re all getting paid to tell me something. And if they don’t have my attention then they’re not getting paid. So they’ll do whatever they need to get my attention. So they will stretch things. I’m sure that in the past, they’ve made up stories or, or, you know, make you try to feel something that’s not necessarily important or whatnot. It’s all about ratings and, you know, getting people to watch.” –Man, 40s, South

Views of renewable energy sources and electric vehicles

Interviewees expressed some support for using more renewable energy, alongside concerns about the pace and practicality of this transition.

As one participant explained: *“I think we’re so reliant on carbon-based fuels for our economy and the way we live. We have to cripple ourselves to switch over. It would have to take 40, 50 years reasonably to do that, so if we’re going to ban gas cars by 2035, I think it [is] too excessive.”* – Man, 20s, Midwest

Participants shared hesitations about increased use of electric vehicles (EVs) as part of a renewable energy transition. Some questioned whether EVs harmed the environment: *“I think that with everything that’s in place over the last five years – and there’s good and bad, so all these people again, no one’s addressing the electric car in the energy and the minerals it depletes from the Earth. That’s an environmental issue.”* –Man, 50s, Southwest

And some saw logistical challenges with EVs, such as many people lacking space at home to charge: *“It’s not practical for everyone to purchase a Tesla or be able to have the ability to plug in a car at their home or to, quite frankly, pay to charge up a car and have an additional expense or additional changes to their lifestyle that is always productive or applicable.”* –Woman, 30s, Midwest

Support for governmental policies as long as they don’t infringe on individual rights; personal efforts to protect the environment through recycling, reuse

While interviewees saw less urgency on climate change action, they expressed an openness to government efforts to help the environment and preserve natural lands and waterways, especially

when these actions were at the state and local level. They also supported individual action in areas such as recycling and limiting waste.

- **Government’s role is to help protect the environment without restricting individual freedoms.** While there was little support among participants for government action connected explicitly with climate change, some were open to efforts in related areas, such as encouraging renewable energy use and environmental protection. But participants stressed that any government action should not limit individuals’ freedoms and people should not be forced to change. More broadly, interviewees stated that a transition away from fossil fuels must be gradual, citing concerns about economic problems if such a transition happened too quickly.

“I think the best way to protect the environment is just educating people on what steps we can take that aren’t extreme, meaning don’t ban gas combustion vehicles. Don’t ban gas stoves. Give people the information. Let them decide what they want to do. But when you start to force things upon people, that’s when people become skeptical. It’s like, why are they forcing something on to us? Why are they changing laws?” – Man, 40s, Southwest

- **The role of ordinary citizens is to recycle and not be wasteful.** With doubts about the urgency of climate change, few participants saw a need for direct personal action on the issue. However, many saw value in individual efforts to help protect the environment.

“And it is so very important that we take care of our planet. Let’s not litter. Let’s have good clean water. Let’s not do anything that’s going to hurt our planet that we live in. And so that’s what I feel about everybody’s duty, to take care of – everybody takes care of their own little piece, and I think it’s going to be fine.” – Man, 50s, Coastal Florida

How do people who feel less urgency on climate change explain the Earth's climate?

When we talked with people about their views of climate change, most of the 32 interviewees explained that the Earth is warming mostly because of natural cycles of the environment, not human activity. Participants often supported their view by pointing to the planet's history of warming and cooling as evidence of these natural cycles happening now.

The emphasis on natural cycles was cited as a reason why humans have a limited role in affecting climate change. A few interviewees were skeptical of whether climate change is happening at all, with the two most skeptical interviewees saying that climate change is a hoax used only for political gains.

Interviewees offered similar explanations for extreme weather as they did for climate change. These events were often seen as a natural part of the Earth's climate system and not something that has become more frequent or more severe because of climate change.

Belief that climate change is due to Earth's natural cycles, with limited effects from human activity and development

A common view among interviewees was that changes in the Earth's climate are due to natural patterns that the Earth has always experienced. Those with this view often said that the climate is changing but pointed to evidence of planetary cycles as proof that any current climate change is natural.

"It's my opinion, based on the science that I've seen generated, if you go through and look at the studies of Earth, we go through these peaks and valleys of climate. We have since the Earth was created. Why are we not going through one of those peaks as we speak now? I haven't seen enough proof to deter me otherwise." –Man, 50s, Mountain West

"I believe it's cyclical. And the reason why I believe this is because there were record high temperatures more than 100 years ago that are higher than what we are having now. And this is going to come and go as time goes on – a.k.a. cyclical." –Woman, 50s, Coastal Florida

A few interviewees pointed to their own experiences with weather as evidence of the Earth's natural cycles. As one woman put it:

"I just don't think that there's any evidence. I mean I don't see where anything has changed throughout my life. The summers aren't hotter. It's just not any different. ... Show me where the

changes are. I think that the planet goes through a continual cycle anyways. I don't think it's more drastic than any other change the planet's gone through." –Woman, 40s, Mountain West

A common theme in these responses was that humans have played a small role, if any, in contributing to climate change. And because these changes are seen as natural, humans cannot prevent climate change. These explanations downplayed the role humans have on the climate and emphasized the patterns of warming and cooling that have happened throughout the planet's history.

"What I'm skeptical on is what the source of the change is. I do believe it is changing, but I believe it is changing in a natural cycle that happens all the time. What I don't believe is that humans are 100% responsible for climate change and thus, humans are 100% able to fix the problem." –Man, 50s, Mountain West

"I think that there's climate change but I think this planet is, I don't know, how many millions if not billions of years old and that's just probably a cycle that it goes through. I think humans probably have a very, very minor part of it but it is also just things out of our control." –Man, 40s, Southwest

When asked whether society should take steps to address climate change, one interviewee emphasized that this issue is out of humans' control, saying:

"Take steps? No, because I don't really know what step they could take. I don't see anything that people, society can do to change the weather and change how the climate is going to react. I feel like that's all earthly and there's nothing that us, humans and society, can do to change that." –Woman, 30s, Coastal Florida

Extreme weather seen as part of natural patterns

The frequency and intensity of extreme weather events are [linked to climate change](#). Our past research has found that large majorities of Americans who have experienced extreme weather say that [climate change contributed at least a little](#).

In contrast to national opinion, most interviewees in these discussions did not see extreme weather as connected to climate change. Instead, participants explained extreme weather events in a similar way as climate change: These are natural events the Earth has always experienced. One man pointed to the history of extreme weather events happening as proof that they are not happening more frequently now.

“I think we do have spikes where we have just a ridiculous number of hurricanes or drought or snowstorms. But I think if you look back through history, we’ve had significant weather events since the dawn of time. So do they happen? Yes. Are we causing [them] to happen more frequently? No.” –Man, 50s, Mountain West

Another man expressed a similar idea, explaining that because these events have always happened, he doesn’t believe they are becoming more intense.

“I think there’s been extreme weather events since the beginning of time. ... There’s been hurricanes, tornados, all that. I just don’t buy into the fact that they’re getting worse” –Man, 50s, Coastal Florida

Interviewees tended to say that extreme weather events have not become more common due to climate change. Some said these events might seem like they are happening more frequently because of the availability of information, but that they are not actually more common.

“I think it’s about the same. I think people are a little bit more aware of things happening. If there’s a freeze in Dallas, Texas, as an example, I can know about it within seconds. I just log into my anything and I can see breaking news. I just think it’s been happening for so long that people now think that if it happens it’s something rare.” –Man, 40s, Southwest

One man said that extreme weather is not becoming more frequent, pointing to the consistency of some events, like hurricanes, happening during certain seasons each year.

“I’m thinking with hurricanes, they always happen in the same kind of interval. I don’t think it’s gotten any quicker, and I haven’t read any articles or information that convinces me that they’re more common or it’s linked to human-caused climate change.” –Man, 20s, Midwest

A handful see no evidence the Earth is warming and consider climate change a hoax

The most skeptical interviewees (two out of 32) dismissed climate change as entirely false and explained the discussion of climate change as rooted in political motivations.

“Climate change is a hoax. It’s what politicians want people to believe. And if they want to do anything about it, in educating people, then truly put statistical, actual data together, and show how climate change and environmental changes have affected us as human beings.” –Woman, 50s, Coastal Florida

“I think it’s a hoax. I think it’s a joke. I mean, I just think like I said, it’s been politicized through the roof. I don’t know. It’s kind of funny when you think about it, that people are so ignorant and so gullible.” –Woman, 40s, Mountain West

How do people who see less urgency on climate change interpret calls to action?

Many interviewees explained that hearing other people state the potentially catastrophic impacts of climate change caused them to be skeptical of whether climate change is actually something to be concerned about. For example, claims that climate change threatens human lives were often labeled as alarmist and seen as pushing an agenda. Participants were especially skeptical of the ways politicians could benefit if they frame climate change as a topic that must be addressed.

One approach aimed at motivating people to take action on climate change – describing it as a crisis and emphasizing its potentially catastrophic impacts – appears to be having the opposite effect on at least some parts of the population. Several interviewees said messages emphasizing the dire outcomes of climate change make them feel even more skeptical about the issue. Instead of motivating action, it sowed deeper distrust.

The interviewees who expressed frustration with the way those urging action on climate change discuss the issue felt there are people who talk about climate change with a level of concern unsupported by evidence. One woman emphasized the uncertainty around future impacts of climate change.

“We don’t know that there’s going to be major climate change in the next few years or the next few months. It’s kind of more of a guess, a hypothetical thing, so I feel like people are making a big deal out of it when really in all actuality no one knows what’s going to happen long term. It’s kind of just guessing and theories, but no one knows.” –Woman, 30s, Coastal Florida

Others said their perception of hyperbole or exaggeration around climate claims lead them to take a more skeptical view.

“People who are alarmist tend to want really drastic policies that seem to not make sense, so it kind of makes me disbelieve the other things they’re saying.” –Man, 20s, Midwest

“From a personal standpoint, whether it’s the climate or anything else, when the statements are too large ... like when the statements are, ‘The world is getting warmer and Earth is going to be ended in five years because we’re all terrible humans and we throw trash on the ground.’ Those things cause me to be, instead of causing me to be concerned, it causes me to be more skeptical about where the information is coming from and why it’s being presented in such a grandiose term, for lack of a better word.” –Woman, 30s, Midwest

Some acknowledged the Earth is warming, but still viewed the urgency and severity of some climate change messages as extreme.

“Are we gradually getting warmer? Yes, but I don’t think we’re all going to die in 30 years. And also, some of the policies that we’re trying to change within the next 10-15 years, it’s not that drastic, I don’t believe.” –Man, 30s, South

One man saw politicians pushing alarmist views and described a specific example of what he saw as an extreme view being untrue.

“I just was watching old footage from 2009 of John Kerry and other senators. They stated by 2014, which is 10 years ago – [by] 2013, 2014 that there would not be one polar icecap left in the world. Well, that’s a lie and so I think that that’s been forced down our throat. ... I mean, the American people over time have been lied to.” –Man, 50s, Southwest

Some suspect elected officials’ advocacy on climate change is motivated by political or financial gain

Some interviewees said elected officials push climate change as an important topic for their own political and financial benefits.

“I think for political reasons it’s probably made into a bigger reason than it isn’t. ... And then I also know that there’s billions, if not more, of money to be made in that industry in those sectors when it comes to solar and energy efficiency and emissions and all of these different control factors. It makes sense to fight for something if you have the possibility to have your pocket in something that’s a billion dollar industry, if not more.” –Man, 40s, Southwest

Another man expressed a similar idea and gave an example of climate change being used as a talking point to help candidates get elected.

“I think that [politicians] have said that they have those extreme views to get popularity or financial gain from such things. ... Next year we have a presidential election. I think that is going to be one key speaking point. Now, do I agree that it should be top two or three? No, but it is going to be pushed and that next selection is going to have a major role in what we do as a country to limit our contributions to global warming.” –Man, 30s, South

How do people less concerned about climate change view information from climate scientists and news media?

Climate scientists have been at the center of discussions over evidence that the Earth is warming and projections about the future effects climate change could cause.

Interviewees expressed respect for the expertise of climate scientists while also raising the need to scrutinize their motivations. Overall, participants were more open to hearing from climate scientists than news media – who they see as largely biased and untrustworthy.

Those who saw climate scientists as trustworthy sources for climate change information mentioned their expertise and subject knowledge as reasons to trust them as a source. When asked how she would feel about scientists presenting information about climate change, one woman said:

“I would feel positive because I know they’re specialists in it. They specialize in that, so, I would listen to them over just a normal person telling me something.” –Woman, 40s, South

However, for many, trust in scientists was not absolute. One man said that he would listen to scientists about climate change as long as they were unbiased, emphasizing their value as experts.

“I’d like to see reputable scientists or a group of scientists that are nonpolitical come out and be the sole voice of whatever it is. I’ll take the good. I’ll take the bad. I just don’t want to hear people talk about it that are not experts in the field.” –Man, 50s, Mountain West

Others also expressed limits to their trust in climate scientists raising questions about their motivations. These questions focused on scientists’ financial or political biases as reasons they do not fully trust them for information on climate change.

“I have a lot of confidence in a lot of scientists. My concern is when science is met with ideology. If you’ve got somebody who is ideological one way or the other. Statistics can be changed. Science can be written to have the results you want because of your ideology. I have great confidence in science. I have less confidence in people who are driven by ideology. ... It’s just when people are trying to push an agenda. That’s when I’m skeptical.” –Man, 50s, Coastal Florida

When asked how much confidence he has in scientists, one man said:

“A fair amount of confidence. Absolute confidence? Probably not. A fair amount of confidence? Yes, because they are studying it. They are in the field. They know the data. But at the same point, they are human ... they’re going to be biased to whoever [is] funding their research. They don’t want to bite the hand that feeds them and provide data that is going to contradict what the agency’s trying to push out. I would say they have a fair amount of confidence, but you have to be, still, skeptical.” –Man, 30s, Coastal Florida

Analyses of scientific publications show [widespread agreement among climate scientists that human activity is the primary cause of climate change](#). Yet some interviewees said they wanted to hear from a variety of scientists to be able to get a balanced view of multiple opinions within the scientific community.

“I also like to hear what the other [scientists] say as well because scientists have different approaches at things. They have different ways of thinking.” –Man, 50s, Coastal Florida

For another man, multiple voices in the scientific community caused him confusion about the truth.

“There’s scientists that are so far apart from each other – there’s a group that are like, ‘Oh the world’s going to burn up. The core temperature is rising,’ and then there’s another side that says, ‘We’ve already started being on the downside of cooling off.’ It couldn’t be more polar opposite, so who do you believe?” –Man, 50s, Southwest

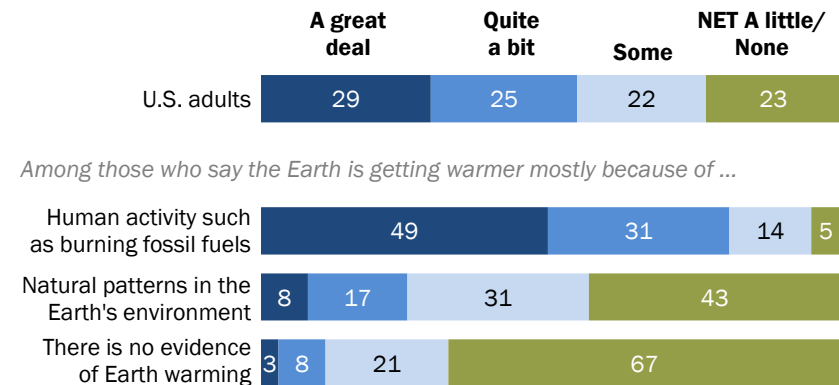
Trust in climate scientists among all U.S adults

A 2022 Pew Research Center survey found that 23% of Americans say they have little or no trust in climate scientists to provide full and accurate information on climate change. Another 22% say they have some trust in climate scientists. At the other end of the spectrum, 54% of Americans say they have either a great deal or quite a bit of trust in information from climate scientists.

Distrust in information from climate scientists is most widespread among those who do not see a strong link between human activity and climate change. For example, 43% of those who say the Earth is getting warmer mostly because of natural patterns in the environment say they have a little or no trust in climate scientists to give full and accurate information. And 67% of those who say there is *no evidence* that the Earth is warming hold the lowest level of trust in climate scientists.

67% of Americans who see no evidence of climate change have little or no trust in climate scientists

% of U.S. adults who trust climate scientists ___ to give full and accurate information about global climate change



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
 Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 11-17, 2022.
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Participants express deep misgivings about the accuracy of information from traditional news media

The openness to hearing from scientists was in stark contrast to how interviewees talked about the news media. Participants were much more dismissive of information from media organizations. Most of the 32 participants described climate information from the media as biased and untrustworthy. Some said the media outlets are motivated more by profit than a goal to accurately report information. As one man put it:

“Networks and radio and newspapers and television, they’re all getting paid to tell me something. And if they don’t have my attention then they’re not getting paid. So they’ll do whatever they need to get my attention. So they will stretch things. I’m sure that in the past, they’ve made up stories or, you know, make you try to feel something that’s not necessarily important or whatnot. It’s all about ratings and getting people to watch.” –Man, 40s, South

Another felt that the information news media publish is selected to appeal to their audience and is therefore untrustworthy.

“Any mainstream news organization, they’re going to have their bias ... they all have their narrative that they’re pushing for their own, quote unquote, customer base where they can market to. I don’t necessarily trust anything that they post.” –Man, 30s, Coastal Florida

Interviewees pointed out that they don’t trust news sources regardless of the outlet’s political leaning. For them, news sources are not trusted authorities on the topic of climate change. One man drew on his own work experience of analyzing data as a reason to be skeptical of these sources.

“When it comes from media sources, it’s just hard to believe when they post things because a lot of times they post it as factual when it’s opinion pieces. ... It’s just journalists who [are] not experts in that field of work, and they’re just kind of giving their ‘this is what we think.’ And we all know that, at least in my line of business that we can look at statistics. We can look at data. We can kind of give a story around particular data points even if they’re not the right ones. So I definitely don’t trust media sources from either side.” –Man, 40s, Southwest

Another man said media outlets have a bias one way or the other and feature viewpoints he considers extreme, which causes him to be disengaged.

“There aren’t very many media [outlets] that [are] really truly in the middle anymore. So you have to listen, and the turnoff is, you get the extreme people, and that turns you off from wanting to really listen to the whole story.” –Man, 50s, Coastal Florida

Views of government efforts to promote renewable energy and electric vehicles

The interviews explored views of government policies meant to limit the effects of climate change by encouraging a renewable energy transition and the widespread adoption of electric vehicles.

The Biden administration has invested in [developing more renewable energy sources](#) such as wind and solar power as a path to address climate change. The Inflation Reduction Act passed last August also included [incentives for Americans](#) to make their homes more energy efficient and to purchase electric vehicles.

Some interviewees were open to the idea of a renewable energy transition but called for a slower pace of change. Others expressed outright opposition to a move away from fossil fuels, saying that renewable energy is not reliable.

Concerns with electric vehicles (EVs) were front of mind for many interviewees when discussing renewable energy. Interviewees saw potential problems ranging from environmental damage due to EV manufacturing to practical challenges involved in owning an EV. A recent Center survey found that the share of the public interested in an EV purchase has fallen slightly over the past year, and many Americans lack confidence that the U.S. will build the charging infrastructure needed to support large numbers of EVs. For more on these findings, see our recent post [“How Americans view electric vehicles.”](#)

Concerns over an energy transition toward renewable energy sources

Many interviewees emphasized that a transition toward a greater reliance on renewable energy sources must unfold gradually. Economic decline was a common concern with a fast-paced transition.

“I’m fine with the change. What I’m not fine with are the demands and the urgency to change, which then has a major impact on the economy.” –Man, 50s, Mountain West

“I think we’re so reliant on carbon-based fuels for our economy and the way we live. We have to cripple ourselves to switch over. It would have to take 40, 50 years reasonably to do that, so if we’re going to ban gas cars by 2035, I think it [is] too excessive.” –Man, 20s, Midwest

“I have nothing whatsoever against renewable energies. I’m just, I would be, my concern is the pace. The pace at which we’re going.” –Man, 30s, Southwest

Other interviewees were more strongly opposed to renewable energy sources, raising concerns about the functionality of renewables. These interviewees commonly expressed strong support for the continued – or expanded – use of fossil fuels.

“We don’t have all the batteries to make the electric cars. Things like that. I don’t see where that’s an improvement. I think that fossil fuels have gotten us this far, and I think that they’re fine.” – Woman, 40s, Mountain West

One man living in Florida expressed his skepticism about relying too heavily on electricity, particularly in the aftermath of natural disasters.

“I think to try to switch from one to the next is way too much of a burden, too unfeasible, and would be too costly for the average-day person that it’s just not realistic to say, in 10 years, let’s just have all electric everything. That’s a terrible idea, especially here in Florida with hurricanes. The power goes out. If everything’s electricity, then what are you going to do?” – Man, 30s, Coastal Florida

Concerns about electric vehicles range from environmental downsides to practicalities of charging

Interviewees often used electric vehicles as an example to express their concerns with or opposition to renewable energy. Interviewees with concerns about electric vehicles mentioned environmental harm from EV batteries and the practical challenges of owning an EV.

“I think that with everything that’s in place over the last five years – and there’s good and bad, so all these people again, no one’s addressing the electric car in the energy and the minerals it depletes from the Earth. That’s an environmental issue.” – Man, 50s, Southwest

Relatedly, many said EVs are no better for the environment than gas-powered vehicles or were unsure whether EVs are an improvement.

“If you talk to people about switching to electric cars versus diesel- or gas-powered cars, you’re going to hear a lot of talking about how electric powered vehicles still produce a lot of waste, that they’re not as reliable, that they’re more expensive. Those are the questions that we’ve got and I think they’re valid questions because sometimes alternatives are not always better, and we know that producing electricity is probably going to produce waste no matter what unless we switch to a wind-powered society or something.” – Woman, 20s, Southwest

Many pointed to the lack of infrastructure and challenges with home charging as barriers to owning EVs.

“It’s not practical for everyone to purchase a Tesla or be able to have the ability to plug in a car at their home or to, quite frankly, pay to charge up a car and have an additional expense or additional changes to their lifestyle that is always productive or applicable.” –Woman, 30s, Midwest

“The infrastructure isn’t there quite yet, just because I’ve also heard that there’s not a lot of places to recharge your car or the amount of time that it takes to recharge your car takes longer than expected – of course, much longer than just going to a local gas station and filling up your gas. I think having – creating that infrastructure, not just saying we need more vehicles, but OK, what does that mean, how do we get there so that also we want to have an electric vehicle?” –Woman, 30s, Midwest

Views of electric vehicles among all U.S. adults

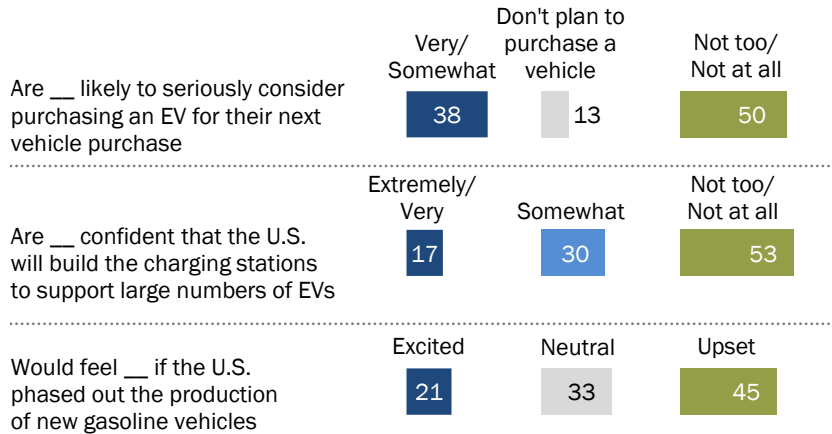
Overall, 38% of Americans say they would be very or somewhat likely to consider an electric vehicle the next time they purchase a car or truck; 50% say they would be unlikely to consider an EV. On balance, Americans have doubts that the country is likely to build the infrastructure needed to support large numbers of electric vehicles – though adults who are most optimistic about the infrastructure are among the most likely to say they’d consider buying an EV.

Americans are cool to the idea of ending the production of gas-powered vehicles. About six-in-ten say they oppose phasing out the production of new gasoline cars and trucks by 2035. In addition, more say they would feel upset (45%) than excited (21%) if new gas-powered vehicles were phased out.

For more on Americans’ views of electric vehicles, [read this post](#).

45% of Americans would feel upset if production of new gas-powered vehicles is phased out

% of U.S. adults who say they ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. “EV” stands for electric vehicle.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 30-June 4, 2023. “Why Some Americans Do Not See Urgency on Climate Change”

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What role should government play in environmental protection?

While the participants in this study all placed lower importance on taking action to address climate change, they shared an openness to some types of government action on the environment, particularly at the local level. Specifically, support for efforts to protect natural lands and waterways came up in multiple conversations.

However, interviewees commonly raised caution that government regulations should not limit people's freedoms, restrict individual choice or burden people financially.

(For views on these issues among all U.S. adults, read our companion report: [“Majorities of Americans Prioritize Renewable Energy, Back Steps to Address Climate Change.”](#))

Enthusiasm for local government efforts to help citizens live in ways that support the environment

One interviewee said government programs should provide a way for individuals to help the environment on their own.

“I think they should provide the ability to help. Recycle, reuse. We’re fortunate here. Our government does – multiple times a year, they give out trees. So you can plant a new tree in your yard, and help with the CO₂ in the air ... that does help our environment as we plant trees.” – Woman, 50s, Coastal Florida

Another expressed a similar sentiment about the government providing individuals with incentives to protect the environment.

“I feel like maybe government, if they put an incentive on recycling, like say you recycle this much a month or something, if they give an incentive to things, like maybe get a discount on your electricity bill or something like that, I think that would give people more motive and give them an enticement to do better in regards to protecting their environment.” – Woman, 30s, Coastal Florida

A common call across interviews was for actions to protect natural lands and waterways. Some of these pertained to specific regional issues such as preserving water in Arizona and protecting waterways around Florida.

“No, I don’t think enough is being done when it comes to [water scarcity]. I think there’s a bigger focus on trying to control other things. I’m not sure if you’re familiar with the Phoenix area but

there's a lot of [foreign] companies that are buying out farmlands and drilling for water to take and growing alfalfa to take to other countries. We allow other countries to come into this country and use up a really important resource here in the desert. The government's doing absolutely nothing about that but they're trying to tell us what type of cars to drive. It just makes no sense. You can't survive without water.” –Man, 40s, Southwest

“Off the top of my head, I know that there [are environmental challenges], at Biscayne Bay here in Miami, it's one of the bigger bays. It is having a lot of environmental issues ... I do know that it is a concern for the community because that's a whole ecosystem where fish and wildlife, they live there. We live there as well, but it's a big ecosystem. It seems to be being very impacted by pollution and what humans are doing to the area. ... Also making sure that the Everglades stays clean. It's an important aspect to being a Floridian, because the Everglades is a big part of Florida. A local aquifer system where the water pumps down, and we want to make sure that that stays clean, because if we have polluted water, that's not good for anybody.” –Man, 30s, Coastal Florida

More general concerns were over preserving natural lands. Interviewees mentioned limiting development to ensure that natural habitats could survive.

“I believe in the theory of habitat where your land can only sustain with X amount of people or animals. You can apply it anywhere. If you have too many people in one area, then the habitat cannot sustain it, thus the environment starts to suffer. You can see that in any of the major cities.” –Man, 50s, Mountain West

“I think it's very important to not overdevelop so there's still space for natural habitats so animals like foxes and predators don't start going onto people's homes and businesses. To have more plants and trees, more biodiversity is very important.” –Man, 20s, Midwest

In interviews, the most widespread support for environmental regulation came on the topic of ensuring that individuals and corporations were not harming the environment. Still, openness to government action was tempered by the preference that it not go too far.

“I think the government likes to get their hands on everything. But obviously if there are things that are illegal, like dumping oil in the ocean or throwing your trash in the rivers, there should be consequences for stuff like that. It's affecting all of us.” –Woman, 40s, Mountain West

“I think we should conserve where we can. I think we should protect endangered species, do some of the things we are doing, but I don't think that includes eliminating fossil fuels or anything like

that. I don't think it means regulating people's homes or anything like that. I do think what big industry puts into the air should be at least monitored and somewhat controlled, but I don't think it should be completely restricted." –Woman, 40s, Mountain West

Support for government action that avoids financial burden, respects personal freedoms and stays local

Interviewees wanted to make sure government policies for addressing climate change and protecting the environment are effective and cost taxpayers little.

"I think that [government] should set up guidelines and try and help steer people in the right direction, but as far as what they do ... I don't know about writing a blank check. If there's going to be a financial burden on people, I would really need to see what the benefit is going to be at the end of that, whether the people are going to, essentially be taxed for it, or how much they're going to get taxed for it, and what's the impact going to happen to the environment." –Man, 30s, Coastal Florida

Interviewees also prioritized ensuring that policies do not limit individuals' freedoms.

"I don't think they need to be so heavy-handed. I do like the idea of incentives for sure, I don't know if people take advantage of them. I'd like to see some incentives, more incentives, less heavy-handed. I'm trying to think of ways they could do it without pissing off people, like business owners like ourselves." –Woman, 50s, Mountain West

“I think the best way to protect the environment is just educating people on what steps we can take that aren’t extreme, meaning don’t ban gas combustion vehicles. Don’t ban gas stoves. Give people the information. Let them decide what they want to do. But when you start to force things upon people, that’s when people become skeptical, as well. It’s like, why are they forcing something on to us? Why are they changing laws?” –Man, 40s, Southwest

Interviewees generally expressed the view that government policies to address climate change and protect the environment are better suited for local and state governments than the federal government. Many viewed these levels of government as being closer to the issues and therefore better equipped to create policy.

“I think the local government would have more effect on the citizens here in Idaho than the federal level. I feel like a lot of people don’t trust the federal level as much here. ... We need to be responsible for where we live. So it would be all hands on deck for this region. If it’s national, it’s less personal.” –Woman, 40s, Mountain West

“I think the state government officials, they’re going to be more in tune with the issues of the area. Going federal, I think that’s too far out. I think they just may be too far removed from any possible issues from the community itself to understand the difficulties that that community might face and the issues.” –Man, 30s, Coastal Florida

Views of what individuals can do to help the environment

When asked what individuals themselves should do to address climate change and environmental problems, interviewees pointed to recycling and reducing waste as a way to take personal responsibility.

“Best ways to protect the environment I think is to reduce, reuse, recycle.”

–Man, 30s, Mountain West

“Whether it be less pollution, more recycling ... landfills are full with stuff it shouldn’t be full with. We should learn how to reuse the resources we already have instead of trying to make more harmful resources.” –Woman, 30s, Midwest

“And it is so very important that we take care of our planet. Let’s not litter. Let’s have good clean water. Let’s not do anything that’s going to hurt our planet that we live in.” –Man, 50s, Coastal Florida

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pewresearch.org/science.

Primary research team

Cary Funk, *Director, Science and Society Research*

Alec Tyson, *Associate Director, Science and Society Research*

Brian Kennedy, *Senior Researcher*

Giancarlo Pasquini, *Research Associate*

Alison Spencer, *Research Analyst*

Emma Kikuchi, *Research Assistant*

Stephanie Ross, *Research Intern*

Editorial and graphic design

David Kent, *Senior Copy Editor*

Kaitlyn Radde, *Associate Information Graphics Designer*

Communications and web publishing

Haley Nolan, *Communications Manager*

Kelsey Beveridge, *Communications Associate*

Reem Nadeem, *Digital Producer*

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Methodology

Pew Research Center completed a series of individual in-depth interviews from May 15 to May 26, 2023. A total of 32 interviews were held to explore the views of adults who see addressing climate change as a lower priority for the United States and do not believe the Earth is getting warmer mainly because of human activity. Each interview was held online for approximately 30 minutes. Additional survey findings were included in this report; the [survey methodology can be found here](#).

Interview recruitment

Center researchers developed recruitment guidelines in consultation with Sago, a market research firm. Sago recruited adults to participate in the interviews through their national database. To be included, potential interviewees had to be adults ages 18 to 59 living in one of five designated regions of the U.S.

People were eligible for inclusion in the study based on their responses to questions that asked about views of climate change. Potential interviewees were asked, “Thinking about all the issues and problems the federal government could address, how much of a priority do you think dealing with global climate change should be?” Those who gave a response of less than “A top priority” continued in the screener process.

Potential interviewees were also asked, “From what you’ve read or heard, is there solid evidence that the average temperature on Earth has been getting warmer over the past few decades, or not?” Those who responded “No” moved forward.

Those who responded “Yes” were asked which of these three statements about the Earth’s temperature came closest to their view: The Earth is getting warmer mostly because of human activity such as burning fossil fuels, the Earth is getting warmer mostly because of natural patterns in the Earth’s environment, the Earth is getting warmer because of an equal mix of human activity and natural patterns in the Earth’s environment, or if they were not sure. Those who responded that the Earth is getting warmer mostly due to natural patterns, or due to an equal mix of human activity and natural patterns, moved forward in the screener process.

Potential interviewees were then asked how much they had heard or read about issues related to climate and the environment. Those who responded “a lot” or “a little” and met previous criteria were eligible for the study.

Five geographic regions were targeted during recruitment: the Midwest, Mountain West, South, Southwest and Coastal Florida. Recruits were considered as interviewees for each region if they lived in the following states:

- **Midwest:** Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Ohio
- **Mountain West:** Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado
- **South:** Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas
- **Southwest:** Nevada, Arizona and New Mexico
- **Coastal Florida:** Florida, with an emphasis on areas near the coast

Number of interviews completed in each region

Region	Number of interviews
Midwest	7
Mountain West	6
South	6
Southwest	6
Coastal Florida	6
New York*	1

* One interviewee listed his residence as New Mexico during recruitment but mentioned during the interview that he lives in New York.

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Recruitment was monitored across each region to ensure a variety of adults were recruited based on party, ideology, gender and education.

Interviews and analysis

A professional moderator conducted the virtual interviews on behalf of Sago and Pew Research Center. The 32 interviews were conducted by either Fred Anderson or Linda Anderson. Each moderator followed the same interview guide and covered the following topics:

- Beliefs about climate change
- Sources of information about climate change
- Views of environmental protections and problems in their local area
- Views of extreme weather

The [full interviewer guide can be found here](#).

Interviews were conducted online. Prior to each interview, Sago team members confirmed that the interviewee had the necessary devices to complete the interview. Each interview lasted for

approximately 30 minutes. Sago provided a transcript of each interview. Interviewees were compensated for their participation.

Center researchers reviewed video recordings and analyzed transcripts of each interview. Researchers then created a coding scheme based on themes identified across interviews and coded each transcript using the scheme.

Quotations featured in the report have been lightly edited for grammar and clarity. Quotations are not representative of a larger demographic or geographic group; instead, they are intended to describe themes identified during the interviews.

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