



HR71

Climate Change Survey

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for the Climate Action Zoom Group

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Outline

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Respondents' Background Information

- Climate change survey: 243 responses out of 1136 sent (21%)
- Class survey: 470 out of 1136 (41%)
- From class survey:
 - 45% retired, 20% semi-retired, 21% not retired
 - \$5 million median household net worth
 - 84% Democrat, 10% Republican, 6% independent
 - 89% voted for Biden, 6% for Trump
 - 98% vaccinated and boosted
 - Well-off but strongly Democratic

Politics and Activism

Do political candidates' records or platforms regarding climate change influence your vote?

A great deal	60%
Somewhat	36%
Not at all	4%

Do you support a carbon tax?

Yes	81%
No	12%
Don't know/understand	7%

How do you think carbon tax revenues should be used (multiple responses)?

Support climate change programs	91%
Return to taxpayers	20%
Reduce the deficit	9%

Comments on Voting and Carbon Tax

“I prefer candidates who are sensitive to climate change but there are other issues such as workers’ rights and reproductive rights.”

“I’m active politically but climate change is one of several big issues. Call me foolish, but I’m prioritizing saving democracy.”

“Right now, the worst war and humanitarian crisis in years is underway and dealing with it effectively probably requires at least temporary growth in US-based production of oil and gas.”

“I would tend to disfavor politicians who advocate radical green.”

“No chance of passing [carbon tax] if no refund.”

“I also think carbon tax revenue should be used to reduce the deficit, to try and knock some of the wind out of Republican sails.”

“Return it to citizens on a per capita basis. Not to taxpayers based on tax paid.”

“Revenue is revenue. If we need climate change programs, we should be establishing them, regardless of what is taxed.”

“Canada, where I live, has a carbon tax that I strongly support.”

Politics and Activism

Have you contributed money to an environmental organization?

No	25%
Yes	75%

Have you volunteered for an environmental organization?

No	69%
Yes	31%

Comments on Volunteering and Organizations

“Most of our contributions are to environmental organizations, about \$15,000 per year. I volunteer for environmentally ‘correct’ candidates to get to the heart of the problem.”

“I am part of a study group conducting an engineering feasibility study to build a ground-source heat pump to heat the 400 homes in our English village.”

“My partner and I RUN an environmental organization and take a nominal salary as a way of supporting it.”

“I have helped to plant over 10,000 trees, contoured a farm, rotated crops, and cleaned up rivers. And you?”

“I used to support environmental organizations, but they have become so tone-deaf to political context and anti-growth as not to deserve much support.”

Lifestyle Choices

Power source for cars (first and second cars combined)

Gasoline or diesel	75%
Hybrid	18%
Electric	7%

Use of air travel (multiple responses)

I am flying or planning to fly less often	44%
I have resumed air travel at pre-pandemic levels	25%
I fly less than once a year on average	25%
When possible I am substituting ground travel	24%

Lifestyle Choices

Food consumption (multiple responses)

Trying to eat less animal protein	47%
Omnivore	43%
Pescatarian	11%
Vegetarian	7%
Vegan	2%

Do you make it a priority to buy local?

Yes	73%
No	27%

How do you grill?

Propane	44%
Don't grill	39%
Charcoal	16%

Comments about Lifestyle Choices

“All these answers are skewed by Covid, which has dramatically reduced travel.”

“I’m still in virtual quarantine. I don’t fly except in good dreams and even then I don’t consume fossil fuel.”

“The manufacture of a car is a significant part of its carbon footprint. We minimize our footprint by holding on to cars until they are worn out. Ours are 11 and 15 years old, both Priuses.”

“I think it is foolish to switch to hybrid or electric cars, and further that to do so amounts to pointless, self-righteous virtue signaling of a particularly unintelligent variety.”

“I don’t just buy local, I raise local.”

“Don’t any Harvard grads hunt, fish, and raise livestock the way we do?”

“Grilling is a waste of carbon footprint and a terrible source of air pollution, particulates, and gas.”

“Buying local is booming. Local produce is higher quality because it’s fresher and requires less freight.”

“I subscribe to Pollan’s ‘eat food, mostly plants,’ but I like meat.”

“Vegan or vegetarian most days, fish two days a week, poultry some days.”

Communal Choices

Individuals are constrained by government policy in terms of available options

Use of public transit

Sometimes	51%
Never	39%
Always	10%

Recycling available (multiple responses)

Plastics, glass, metal, paper	96%
Yard waste	65%
Heavy or bulky items	61%
Food waste	28%

Communal Choices

Home heating source (multiple responses)

Natural gas	64%
Electric	28%
Oil	21%
Solar	13%
Wood or other biomass	11%

Communal Choices

Power generation by your utility (multiple responses)

Natural gas	44%
Solar	36%
Wind	31%
Hydro	30%
Nuclear	19%
Oil	17%
Coal	12%
Don't know	34%

Purchase of “greener” power

No	71%
Yes, at increased cost	16%
Yes, at same cost	10%
Yes, at lower cost	2%

Comments about Communal Choices

“We compost everything compostable – food and yard waste and a lot of paper and cardboard.”

“I’m skeptical that mixed recycling is recycled.”

“Plastics that are ‘recycled’ are now making floating islands in the Pacific, thanks to China.”

“We have solar panels that provide almost all our electricity. We have heat pumps, even in Maine. They work. They will be the home heaters of the near future.”

“Our electric utility, Southern California Edison, is rapidly adding solar, wind, and batteries to meet California’s aggressive renewable portfolio standard goals.”

“Our home is all electric and all of our electricity is generated from renewable sources. We pay a premium for that willingly.”

“I have rooftop solar panels, which generate about 130% of the electricity used in my home and cars.”

“As a renter, I have little choice.”

Self-Education

Taken a course about climate change

No	88%
Yes	12%

Watched movies about climate change (multiple responses)

An Inconvenient Truth	60%
Don't Look Up	36%
Other	4%

Read any of listed books about climate change

No / N.A.	90%
Yes	10%

Calculated their carbon footprint **10%**

Per-person carbon footprint (tons/yr.): mean 24, median 21

Comments about Self-Education

“I think that the key to success is changing the people we elect to important offices. If we don’t do that, reading all the climate books in the world won’t save us.”

“I’m a retired university professor biologist. It’s been obvious to most life sciences and adjacent fields that climate change was heading toward civilization-altering consequences since the 1980s.”

“An Inconvenient Truth consists of amazingly brazen half-truths and falsehoods.”

“For the most part it is one-sided – claiming that the world will end if we don’t follow the author’s prescriptions today, and avoiding any serious discussion of tradeoffs with other worthy goals.”

“So many books, so little time ...”

“Frankly, I find it all so depressing. I avoid the topic in recreational reading.”

“Over the past 50 years significant positive changes have been made to the environment. The Charles River and Boston harbour have been cleaned up. You can no longer see the air in Los Angeles. Every area has similar significant positive stories that aren’t being told.”

“I feel remiss in not having calculated my footprint, but this survey is a good prod.”

“Living in a rural area there are a few obvious options for minimizing our net CO2 contribution: minimizing travel, producing our own food (and gradually our own renewable energy), and reducing the use of materials that have high energy inputs.”

Urban-Rural Differences

Climate survey respondents: 70% urban (living in towns or cities of 25,000+) and 30% rural (living in towns of under 25,000 or unincorporated or rural areas)

Most variables showed little urban-rural difference except:

- Influence of candidates' climate records on your vote, a great deal (rural 64%, urban 58%)
- Contributed money to environmental organization (rural 80%, urban 73%)
- Volunteered for an environmental organization (rural 50%, urban 22%)
- Food consumption (rural more vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian; urban more omnivore)
- Rural buy local more than urban (80% to 72%)
- Rural grill with charcoal more (25%/15%), urban don't grill more (40%/30%)
- Urban use natural gas for heating more; rural use oil, electric, and wood or biomass more
- Urban utilities use natural gas, nuclear, wind more; rural use oil, hydro more

Conclusions

- Respondents strongly supportive of political action on climate change (candidate choice, carbon tax), but recognize that it is one of several existential crises confronting the US
- Comments indicate some respondents disagree strongly with this consensus
- Survey should have asked respondents' political preferences and vote in 2020 to see if they are completely polarized on climate change or if there is some common ground among Dems, Reps, and independents
- Most respondents donate to environmental organizations, fewer volunteer but some classmates are playing major roles, rural respondents more active than urban respondents
- Respondents are early adopters of hybrid and electric cars compared to general population
- Respondents are reducing air travel, though because of Covid and aging as well as concern about carbon emissions
- Respondents are choosing lower-carbon diets and buying local, rural respondents more than urban

Conclusions

- Survey suggests recycling of plastics, metal, glass, paper, yard waste, bulky items are all widespread, food waste not so much
- Survey shows natural gas the most popular home heating choice and energy supply for utilities, but wind and solar are growing in popularity
- Respondents are early adopters of solar home heating (13%) and greener power (30%)
- Respondents not undertaking a great deal of self-education about climate change, they have studied it and appear to have made up their minds
- Urban-rural differences often show rural respondents leading urban – counter-intuitive?

Overall, if climate change is an issue that matters to you, your classmates' political preferences, organizational engagement, and lifestyle choices should be cause for optimism!