

Americans Increasingly Concerned About the Planet They're Leaving Behind for Future Generations

Over half of Americans don't think our society is sufficiently focused on the environment, though they are becoming less inclined to see environmental and economic goals as aligned

NEW YORK, N.Y. – April 16, 2014 – With Earth Day nearing once again, a new Harris Poll finds that 44% of Americans – up from 38% last year – say that the statement “I am concerned about the planet we are leaving behind for future generations” describes them completely or very well; an additional 26% say it describes them fairly well. In the meantime, a majority of Americans (56%) say the current focus on the environment in our society is not going far enough.

These are some of the results of **The Harris Poll®** of 2,244 adults surveyed online between March 11 and 16, 2015.

Changing attitudes towards climate change

While the overall belief that global climate change exists is all but unchanged since last year (with roughly three-fourths of Americans believing it exists), attitudes are shifting when it comes to causality: the percentage of Americans believing humans to be the main cause of global climate change has increased from 45% to 51% year over year, while the percentage who believe it exists but that its causes aren't related to humans dropped from 30% to 25%. It's worth noting, though, that over half (55%) of Americans feel the severity of the past winter calls global climate change into question.

Is it easy being green?

Many Americans are making an effort to be more environmentally conscious, with one third of U.S. adults (33%) agreeing that they're making more of an effort to do so than a year ago. However, Americans remain divided on whether it's easy (45%) or difficult (49%) to live a green or environmentally conscious lifestyle.

Organic attitudes

Americans show little consensus in how they feel towards organic products. On one hand, a 57% majority believes labeling food or other products as “organic” is just an excuse to charge more and an identical majority disagrees with the characterization of organic as tasting better or fresher than non-organic. On the other hand, a similar majority of 56% believes organic foods are healthier in comparison to non-organic, but otherwise similar, products.

Playing politics

The environment continues to be a point of widespread dissent at the political level, starting with the question of global climate change. One-fourth of Republicans (25%) don't believe it exists, compared to just 4% of Democrats and one-in-ten independents (10%). Republicans (36%) are also more likely than Democrats (17%) – with Independents (26%) falling between the two – to say that it exists but that its causes are mainly not related to humans, while Democrats (68%) and Independents (53%) are both far more likely than Republicans (28%) to say that it exists and humans are the main cause.

Democrats and Independents (41% and 40%, respectively) are also more likely than Republicans (30%) to see environmental and economic goals as often aligned, while Republicans (38%) are more likely to believe a choice needs to be made between the two (vs. 29% each Democrats and Independents).

As to the question of whether our society's current focus on the environment is going too far or not far enough, a strong majority of Democrats (73%) and a slim majority of Independents (54%) say "not far enough," with 35% of Republicans indicating the same. Four in ten Republicans (39%), one-fourth of Independents (24%) and fewer than one-in-ten Democrats (7%) say "too far."

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TABLE 1a
ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENTS & LABELS
Summary Table

“To what extent, if any, does each of the following statements describe you?”

Base: U.S. adults

	Very well/ Completely (NET)	Completely	Very well	Fairly well	Somewhat well/Not at all (NET)	Somewhat well	Does not describe me at all
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I am concerned about the planet we are leaving behind for future generations.	44	19	25	26	30	20	10
I personally care a great deal about the current state, and future, of the environment.	38	16	22	30	31	23	9
I am environmentally-conscious.	33	11	23	30	36	26	10
I feel a personal responsibility for taking care of the environment.	30	11	19	30	40	26	13
I encourage others to be more environmentally-friendly.	30	11	19	27	43	23	19
I am a conservationist.	22	8	14	29	49	27	22
I am “green.”	20	7	14	27	53	31	21
I am an environmentalist.	17	7	10	25	58	27	31

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 1b
ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENTS & LABELS
Trend

“To what extent, if any, does each of the following statements describe you?”

Summary of those saying “Very well” or “Completely”

Base: U.S. adults

	2009 Total	2010 Total	2012 Total	2013 Total	2014 Total	2015 Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I am concerned about the planet we are leaving behind for future generations.	43	36	34	37	38	44
I personally care a great deal about the current state, and future, of the environment.	36	34	31	38	36	38
I am environmentally-conscious.	30	29	27	31	31	33
I feel a personal responsibility for taking care of the environment.	29	29	27	30	28	30
I encourage others to be more environmentally-friendly.	26	25	24	28	27	30
I am a conservationist.	17	20	20	23	19	22
I am “green.”	13	18	17	22	19	20
I am an environmentalist.	13	16	16	18	15	17

Note: Multiple responses.

TABLE 1c
ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENTS & LABELS
By Gender, Parental Status & Political Party

“To what extent, if any, does each of the following statements describe you?”
Summary of those saying “Very well” or “Completely”

Base: U.S. adults

	Total	Gender		Children under 18 in household		Political Party		
		Male	Female	Yes	No	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I am concerned about the planet we are leaving behind for future generations.	44	44	43	44	44	34	54	43
I personally care a great deal about the current state, and future, of the environment.	38	39	38	35	40	29	49	37
I am environmentally-conscious.	33	33	34	31	34	27	40	33
I feel a personal responsibility for taking care of the environment.	30	30	31	31	30	24	40	29
I encourage others to be more environmentally-friendly.	30	29	32	29	31	24	37	30
I am a conservationist.	22	22	21	17	23	18	24	22
I am “green.”	20	20	21	19	21	14	23	23
I am an environmentalist.	17	16	18	16	18	10	22	19

Note: Multiple responses.

TABLE 2
EFFORT TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS
By Trend, Gender & Political Party

“Would you say that you are making more effort, less effort or about the same amount of effort to be environmentally conscious than you were a year ago?”

Base: U.S. adults

	2009	2013	2014	2015	Gender		Children under 18 in household		Political Party		
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Male	Female	Yes	No	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
More effort	45	32	34	33	30	36	39	31	31	38	31
Same amount of effort	51	63	64	65	67	63	59	67	67	60	68
Less effort	3	5	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	1

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 3
EASY OR DIFFICULT TO LIVE A GREEN LIFESTYLE
By Trend, Gender, Political Party

“How easy or difficult do you think it is to live a green or environmentally conscious lifestyle?”

Base: U.S. adults

	2013	2014	2015	Gender		Children under 18 in Household		Political Party		
	Total	Total		Total	Male	Female	Yes	No	Rep.	Dem.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Easy (NET)	47	45	45	43	47	44	46	42	50	45
Very easy	10	10	35	33	36	34	35	34	37	34
Somewhat easy	36	35	11	10	11	10	11	8	13	11
Difficult (NET)	49	50	49	50	48	52	48	50	46	51
Somewhat difficult	39	41	9	10	7	8	9	10	7	9
Very difficult	9	9	40	40	41	44	39	40	40	42
Not at all sure	5	5	6	7	4	4	6	7	4	4

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 4a
AGREEMENT WITH “GREEN” STATEMENTS
Summary Table

“Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.”

Base: U.S. adults

	Agree (NET)	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree (NET)	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I prefer to use environmentally friendly cleaning supplies because of the chemicals contained in traditional cleaning products.	58	15	43	42	27	15
I think labeling food or other products as “organic” is just an excuse to charge more.	57	17	40	43	27	16
I think organic foods are healthier in comparison to non-organic, but otherwise similar, products.	56	14	42	44	27	17
I worry about the freshness of my produce due to the distance it travels to my grocery store.	55	14	42	45	27	18
I think washing dishes by hand is more environmentally friendly than using the dishwasher.	48	16	32	52	32	19
I think organic food tastes better/fresher than non-organic.	43	11	32	57	33	24
I am concerned about the “carbon footprint” caused by transporting fresh produce to my grocery store.	40	8	32	60	35	24
I often don’t buy organic food because I think it goes bad faster.	25	5	20	75	38	37
I feel guilty if I buy non-organic fruits and vegetables.	17	3	15	83	29	54
I judge people who only buy organic food.	15	4	11	85	21	64
I judge people who do not buy organic food.	9	2	7	91	18	73

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

TABLE 4b
AGREEMENT WITH “GREEN” STATEMENTS
By Gender, Region & Political Affiliation

“Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.”
Summary of those saying “Strongly agree” or “Somewhat agree”

Base: U.S. adults

	2013 Total	2015 Total	Generation				Political Affiliation		
			Millennials (18-37)	Gen X (38-49)	Baby Boomers (50-68)	Matures (69+)	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I prefer to use environmentally friendly cleaning supplies because of the chemicals contained in traditional cleaning products.	60	58	60	56	58	61	50	63	60
I think labeling food or other products as “organic” is just an excuse to charge more.	59	57	55	55	60	61	67	50	58
I think organic foods are healthier in comparison to non-organic, but otherwise similar, products.	55	56	68	53	52	42	49	58	59
I worry about the freshness of my produce due to the distance it travels to my grocery store.	56	55	60	52	55	51	50	59	56
I think washing dishes by hand is more environmentally friendly than using the dishwasher.	48	48	56	46	47	38	40	53	50
I think organic food tastes better/fresher than non-organic.	41	43	54	42	40	28	36	46	46
I am concerned about the “carbon footprint” caused by transporting fresh produce to my grocery store.	39	40	44	43	38	31	28	48	41
I often don’t buy organic food because I think it goes bad faster.	23	25	29	20	24	26	28	22	24
I feel guilty if I buy non-organic fruits and vegetables.	18	17	26	17	13	6	12	20	17
I judge people who only buy organic food.	16	15	26	10	10	10	12	16	17
I judge people who do not buy organic food.	9	9	17	6	7	3	5	11	10

Note: Multiple responses.

TABLE 5
GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE CAUSED BY HUMANS OR NOT

"Which of these best describes your feelings towards global climate change?"

Base: All adults

	2014 Total	2015 Total	Generation				Gender		Political Party		
			Millennials (18-37)	Gen X (38-49)	Baby Boomers (50-68)	Matures (69+)	Men	Women	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
			%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I believe it exists and humans are the main cause	45	51	55	53	48	48	53	49	28	68	53
I believe it exists but that its causes are mainly not related to humans	30	25	25	22	25	32	25	26	36	17	26
I do not believe it exists	13	11	8	12	14	11	13	9	25	4	10
Unsure	12	13	13	13	13	9	9	16	12	11	12

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 6
SEVERITY OF PAST WINTER CALLS GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE INTO QUESTION
By Gender & Political Party

"How strongly do you agree or disagree that the severity of this past winter calls global climate change into question?"

Base: U.S. adults

	Total	Gender		Political Party		
		Male	Female	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
		%	%	%	%	%
Agree (NET)	55	50	59	52	60	50
Strongly agree	17	19	15	15	22	16
Somewhat agree	38	31	44	37	39	34
Disagree (NET)	45	50	41	48	40	50
Somewhat disagree	22	22	22	27	15	25
Strongly disagree	23	28	19	21	25	25

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 7
SOCIETY'S CURRENT FOCUS ON THE ENVIRONMENT GOING TOO FAR OR NOT FAR ENOUGH
By Generation, Gender & Political Party

"Would you say that the current focus on the environment in our society is going too far or not far enough?"

Base: All adults

	Total	Generation				Gender		Political Party		
		Millennials (18-37)	Gen X (38-49)	Baby Boomers (50-68)	Matures (69+)	Men	Women	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Not far enough	56	67	52	53	44	55	57	35	73	54
Too far	21	15	23	22	29	26	17	39	7	24
Not at all sure	23	18	24	25	27	19	26	26	20	22

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 8
SOCIETY'S CURRENT FOCUS ON THE ENVIRONMENT GOING TOO FAR OR NOT FAR ENOUGH
By Education, HH Income & Political Party

"Some people say that environmental goals and economic goals are in conflict and that we have to choose between them in the decisions we make. Other people say that environmental goals are often aligned, and that you do not have to choose between them. Which is closer to your opinion?"

Base: All adults

	2009 Total	2015 Total	Education				Annual HH Income					Political Party		
			HS or less	Some college	College grad	Post grad	<\$35k	\$35k- <\$50k	\$50k- <\$75k	\$75k- <\$100k	\$100k+	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Environmental and economic goals are often aligned	51	37	30	38	38	57	32	29	36	44	45	30	41	40
Have to choose between environmental and economic goals	31	31	30	30	37	23	30	34	32	29	28	38	29	29
Not at all sure	18	33	40	32	26	19	38	37	32	27	27	32	30	31

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding

Methodology

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States between March 11 and 16, 2015 among 2,244 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Poll surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in our panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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