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AUGUST 31, 2021

Climate Change

Oregonians answer some thought-provoking questions about their values and beliefs related to climate change.

COMMUNITY PLANNING, ECONOMY AND JOBS, ENERGY, ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY, NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, POLITICS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

From August 9-17, 2021, the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center conducted a statewide survey of Oregonians' perceptions of climate change. The questions were intended to gather preliminary data to inform more in-depth research in the months ahead.

The online survey consisted of 1,154 Oregon residents ages 18+ and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. This survey's margin of error, for the full sample, ranges from ±1.7% to ±2.9% depending on how the response category percentages split for any given question. Due to rounding, numbers may not add up to 100%.

Respondents were contacted by using professionally maintained online panels. In gathering responses, a variety of quality control measures were employed, including questionnaire pre-testing, validation, and real-time monitoring of responses. To ensure a representative sample, demographic quotas were set, and data weighted by area of the state, gender, age, and education.

This survey uses aggregated data to analyze the opinions of BIPOC residents in comparison to the opinions of residents who identify as white and not another race. BIPOC residents are not a monolith; the grouping represents a wide diversity of races and ethnicities. The findings included in this memo should not be construed such that all people of color are believed to share the same opinions. Disaggregated race data will be provided when sample sizes permit reliability. The question numbers in this document correspond with the survey questionnaire, available for download at the bottom of the page (Q35-41, 44-45, 47-74, 85).

Can We Solve Major Issues Before It's Too Late?

Two-thirds of Oregonians think there is a small or no chance that humans can solve climate change soon enough (66%) (Q35-41).

- Oregonians also express pessimism about forest fires; two-thirds say that humans have no or only a small chance of addressing this issue before it's too late (67%).
- People are more pessimistic about forest fires and the climate crisis than about solving communicable diseases like Covid (33%), voting rights and secure elections (40%), racial discrimination (58%), or population growth (62%).
- Oregonians are most pessimistic about our ability to solve the worsening homelessness crisis (72%) (Q37).
 - Homeowners and renters are equally likely to say humans have a small or no chance of solving this crisis before it's too late (71%, 73%).

Which Impacts Do Oregonians Attribute to Climate Change?

Oregonians ascribe longer, hotter summers and droughts to climate change—at least in part (81%, 80%) (Q52).

- College graduates are 10 percentage points more likely than high school graduates to say that climate change is to blame for hotter, longer summers (87% to 77%).

About six in ten or more Oregonians say weather events, like hurricanes and flooding, and environmental events, like forest fires, crop failures, and timber die off, are attributable to climate change (62-76%) (47-55).

- Just over half say climate change plays a role in the rising cost of food (54%), and a plurality says it influences human migration (40%).

On a similar note, Oregonians are much more likely to blame hotter, drier weather than forest practices for increased wildfires (54% to 23%) (Q44).

- Respondents working in agriculture or forestry were nearly split in their opinions. While 40% of these workers said climate change was the bigger culprit; 35% said forestry practices that allow excess fuel to build up were more to blame.

Oregonians and Physical or Emotional Impacts of Climate Change

More than one-third of Oregonians say the impacts of climate change have resulted in significant or dramatic physical or emotional impacts (38%). Another 40% have experienced slight impacts (Q85).

- People under 45 are more likely to report significant or dramatic impacts of climate change on their personal well-being (42%). Specifically, about one in six Oregonians under the age of 45 say that climate change has resulted in dramatic impacts (16-17%).
- Women are more likely than men to report impacts (43% to 32%).

Taking Action

Six in ten Oregonians say governments and residents need to work together to mitigate the impacts of climate change (60%) (Q56).

- One in four residents under the age of 30 say mostly government regulations are needed to address climate change (25%), more so than other age groups (5-18%).

Oregonians mostly favor government regulations that promote tree planting and prioritize renewable energy (81%, 80%). A strong majority also support increased restrictions on industrial emissions and tougher fuel efficiency standards (73%, 69%) (Q66-73).

- Nearly half of Oregonians say they aren't sure about geo-engineering strategies, like reflective artificial clouds (47%). Strategies like this will need more media attention before people have strong opinions.
- People also struggle to balance the benefits and risks of nuclear energy in place of fossil fuels. About one-third of Oregonians support this strategy (38%), about one-third oppose it (30%), and about one-third don't know (32%).

When it comes to individual actions, three-quarters of Oregonians say we should significantly reduce fossil fuel use, driving, water use, consumption of goods, and air travel by 25% or more as a matter of personal responsibility (75-83%) (Q57-65).

- For red meat, 64% say that people should reduce their consumption by at least one-quarter. Although representing a strong majority, this was the least popular individual action suggested.
- Most Oregonians in all age groups agree reducing home size would be a good action for the climate (66-78%). Oregonians under 45 are more likely to say people should reduce their home sizes by half or more (48-50%).

Although most Oregonians say we should take individual actions to reduce our fossil fuel use, far fewer support a tax on fossil fuels of more than 25 cents per gallon. A scant majority (51%) say that they would be willing to pay between 25 and 50 cents more per gallon at the pump (Q74).

Protecting the Environment or Economic Growth?

More than seven in ten Oregonians now say protection of the environment should be given priority over economic growth (77%) (Q45).

- This figure has climbed precipitously since the 2013 Oregon Values and Beliefs Study, when 57% said environment should be a higher priority and 8% weren't sure. In the meantime, wildfires like Beachie Creek and Bootleg have ravaged Oregon towns, and Portlanders experienced their first-ever 116-degree day.

Demographic Trends

Identifying What Unites Us and Understanding What Divides Us

Reported below are statistically significant subgroup differences between BIPOC and white Oregonians, and urban and rural Oregonians. Many of these differences are not major and are presented to inform public education and communications initiatives.

There are few differences in opinion about humans' ability to solve increasing rates of homelessness. However, urban dwellers are slightly more optimistic than people living in suburban or rural areas (64-75%) (Q40).

In rural areas, one in five residents say that hotter, longer summers are either not occurring or are not a product of climate change (21%). For urban areas, this figure stands at 12% (Q52).

- Although ideological differences play a role, a majority of Oregonians who identify as socially liberal (95%), moderate (75%), and conservative (57%) believe that climate change is responsible—at least in part—for hot, long summers in Oregon.

People of color are more likely to report significant or dramatic emotional or physical impacts because of climate change, as compared to white residents (47% to 37%).

- Differences by area are of similar intensity. While 47% of urbanites say they have felt significant or dramatic impacts, for ruralites that figure is 31%.

For many individual actions to reduce climate change, like flying and driving less, there are significant differences between urban and rural residents (Q57-65).

- For example, nearly half of rural residents say people don't really need to reduce their consumption of red meat (46%), compared to 30% of urban dwellers.
- However, when it comes to the consumption of personal goods, between 20% and 25% of residents in all parts of the state say it isn't really needed.
 - White people are more likely than BIPOC residents to say we don't need to significantly reduce our consumption of goods (24% to 17%).

Rural residents and urban dwellers agree: the environment is now more important, even if slows economic growth (73-82%).

Yet a strong urban-rural divide still exists when it comes to taxing fossil fuels. While 26% of urban residents say they oppose increasing the price of fuel at all to combat climate change, that figure rises to 46% in rural areas (Q74).

This research was completed as a community service by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, an independent and non-partisan organization. OVBC is an Oregon charitable nonprofit corporation (www.oregonvbc.org).

For More Information:

[OVBC August 2021 Survey: Annotated Questionnaire](#) [Download](#)

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