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How Americans Really Feel About 'Climate Change' – The America In One Room Survey

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NASA-NOAA satellite image of the Atlantic Ocean captured on September 11, 2018 at 11:45 AM EDT ... [+]

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We live in a divisive time, in a country that is being portrayed as the most disconnected that it's been in a century. So it's important to understand what Americans actually think about the critical issues that are dividing us.

One of those issues is [Climate Change](#). And one of the most recent national polls on it is a special type of survey known as a [highly dynamic deliberative polling experience](#). Announced this week, *The America In One Room Survey*, or A1R, is a Stanford University and Helena project that includes a consortium of institutions including California Forward, the Greater Houston Partnership, the Center for Houston's Future and the In This Together.

NORC at the University of Chicago identified participants and conducted the initial and exit surveys which were part of the deliberative poll.

The big questions put to the participants was - Where do we really fall on climate change? And more importantly - what are we willing to do about it?

Including 962 people in the treatment group and 671 in the control group, this deliberative poll gathered a sampling meant to represent America, from a diverse grouping of political parties, socioeconomic status, gender, race, geographic location and more, and put them in a room together to discuss and debate key issues on climate change.

The goal was to demonstrate that Americans *can* come together on key issues, especially when politicians get out of the way. And it looks like they succeeded.

The A1R virtual event, was based on a model known as Deliberative Polling that measures public opinion on core issues before and after the event. The A1R event structure offers both an in-depth and representative look at American political opinion and demonstrates how public opinion can shift after structured and substantive dialogue.

The project is the largest controlled experiment with in-depth deliberation ever held in the United States. It used an innovative AI moderation platform designed to increase engagement in an unbiased way and improve attendee

participation. addressing the question: What would the American public really think about our climate and energy challenges if it had the chance to deliberate about them in depth, with good and balanced information?

The A1R project employs an experimental design involving treatment and control groups. The treatment in the project involves being invited to and then participating in A1R as a “delegate.” The control group is not invited to participate in A1R. There were two A1R sessions 1) on weekday evenings on September 14, 16, 21, and 23, from 5-7:30 PM Central Time, and 2) during the weekend of September 25 and 26 from 11 AM to 5 PM Central Time.

Both treatment and control groups were administered a pre-event and post-event survey. The two surveys are designed to measure opinion and knowledge shifts that could occur in the time period elapsing between the administrations of the two surveys. The surveys were designed to measure shifts in opinion and knowledge that might occur between their fielding. The result was an unprecedented, scientific look at what Americans really believe when given a chance to think deeply and engage with different opinions.

Participants received comprehensive, balanced briefing materials containing arguments for and against specific policy proposals on climate and energy. Over the course of six days, they engaged in respectful discussions with diverse others and had the opportunity to ask questions of a bipartisan panel of experts. An in-depth questionnaire was administered before and after the deliberative experience.

Participation was voluntary. Participants could withdraw their consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they were otherwise entitled.

The overall poll results were as follows:

Despite a summer of floods, tropical storms, severe drought and other weather events, the control group changed hardly at all in its opinions on climate and energy. By contrast, the representative sample of deliberators changed significantly on 68 out of 72 substantive questions. 66 of the 68 significant changes were in the direction of doing more about climate change or accepting the key presuppositions about why more needed to be done.

On the basic issue of whether or not “rising temperatures are caused by human activities that emit [greenhouse gases](#), like carbon dioxide and methane, which trap heat in the atmosphere and warm the earth’s climate,” the participants moved from 67% agreeing before deliberation to 76% after. Democrats started high but still rose slightly to 94%. Independents rose 14 points from 62% to 76%, and Republicans rose from a minority of 35% to a majority of 54% support.

Similarly, following deliberation, 75% of the participants (an increase of 12 points) endorsed the need to get to Net Zero by agreeing with this statement: “In order to stop the increase in global temperatures, humans must stop adding to the total amount of climate-heating gases in the atmosphere.” Support among Democrats rose slightly to 91%, while Independents and Republicans each increased their agreement by about 20 points - from 57% to 78% among Independents and from 35% to 55% among Republicans.

Another general question probed the risk of inaction: “We should take serious action to reduce greenhouse gases in our atmosphere because waiting to do so is taking an irresponsible risk with our kid’s future.” Agreement with this went up 15 points, from 63% to 78%. Democrats rose 9 points (to 95%),

Independents 18 points (to 78%) and Republicans 21 points (to 57%, once again moving, as they often did, from minority to majority agreement.)

The same pattern applied to many specific energy sources. For example, overall agreement with “eliminating greenhouse gases from coal, ideally by 2035” rose 14 points (to 72%). Democrats remained highly supportive (rising slightly from 86% to 88%). Support among Independents rose 20 points to 69%, while Republican support more than doubled, from 24% to 53%.

Support for eliminating [fossil fuels](#) in the generation of electricity rose 9 points from 59% to 68%. Democrats ended at 88% (up 5 points), Independents at 69% (up 12 points) and Republicans at 44% (up 13 points). Results were similar for eliminating fossil fuels in cement and steel production as soon as new technologies permit. Support was 71% for the sample overall (up 12 points), 85% for Democrats (6 points), 85% for Independents (up 25 points) and 53% for Republicans (up 18 points, going from minority to majority support). The deliberators also dramatically increased their support—to 75% (up 15 points)—for the United States enacting “standards for utilities that limit the amount of greenhouse gases emitted during the production of electricity.” Democrats finished at 90% (up 8 points), Independents at 75% (up 14 points), and Republicans at 56% (up 23 points).

Support for carbon pricing rose 15 points, to 57% of the overall sample (and 79% of Democrats). Independents held steady at 39 %, and Republicans increased 19 points to 38% (still a minority, but greater than the share of Republicans opposing the policy). This comes with strong overall support for carbon border adjustment on imports (72%) and for using the carbon dividend to compensate low- and middle-income earners to ease the transition to Net Zero (74%).

71% of the overall sample (a 9% increase, with majorities of each party) came to support a “mixed technology” transition to renewables (solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal and biomass from waste) as well as “new generation [nuclear](#),” [carbon capture](#), use and sequestration, and [hydrogen as an alternative](#) source of fuel and electricity. 65% (a 17% increase) were willing to allow continued post-transition use of some hydrocarbons for selected purposes.

Support for government incentives to encourage adoption of technologies to capture and reuse or store emitted carbon increased dramatically from 49 to 64% of the overall sample, and from 29 to 53% of Republicans.

Americans of all partisan orientations strongly favored action to discourage deforestation and plant more trees, with support for this rising to 91% of the overall sample and 87% of both Republicans and Independents. There was also strong agreement across party lines that how we pursue the transition matters.

- 70% agree that the President and the Congress should develop a long-term budget that shows how much the transition will cost, how the funding will be provided, and who will pay. Americans want a durable, bipartisan approach.
- 76% agree the federal government should set goals and broad policy but allow states flexibility on how to achieve goals.
- 84% agree that a transition plan should minimize impacts on U.S. economic competitiveness, in particular job impacts for American workers during and after the transition.

- 84% agree that a transition plan should specify how the cost of transition will be reduced for low and middle-income Americans.
 - o 89% agree that a transition plan should ensure a reliable supply of energy for all communities.
- 87% agree that a transition plan should specify how the transition will ensure that energy is affordable for low-and-middle-income Americans.
- 78% agree that a transition plan should specify how states that currently depend on tax revenues from the fossil fuel industry can transition to other sources of revenue. 70% agree that a transition plan should help remedy conditions in communities that have been harmed by past environmental practices.

Californians and Texans were oversampled to enable evaluation of differences between the biggest blue and red states in the nation. The poll found a surprising congruence of views between residents of the two states on most issues. For example, Texans showed a 23 percentage point increase in support for achieving Net Zero, moving toward agreement with Californians, while Californians moved toward agreement with Texans with a 15-point increase in support for new generation nuclear power.

The biggest political differences involved references to specific dates. Large differences remained on a 2050 target for reaching Net Zero (with Democrats finishing at 85%, Independents at 70%, and Republicans at 39%); eliminating sale of new gas and diesel-powered cars and passenger trucks by 2035 (Democrats at 71%, Independents at 44%, Republicans at 23%); and requiring all new buildings and major appliances to use only electricity (no gas) by 2035 (Democrats at 76%, Independents at 53% and Republicans at 32%).

Finally, participants were asked to evaluate the process itself and their experience with it.

- 91% said the event as a whole was valuable (96% Democrats, 84% Independents, 89% Republicans).
- 83% said the small group discussions were valuable in helping to clarify their positions on the issues (87% Democrats, 73% Independents, 81% Republicans)
- 83% said the briefing materials were valuable in helping to clarify their positions on the issues (88% Democrats, 75% Independents, 80% Republicans)
- 77% said the plenary sessions were valuable in helping to clarify their positions on the issues (87% Democrats, 73% Independents, 67% Republicans)
- 73% agreed that the members of their group participated relatively equally in the discussions (73% Democrats, 74% Independents, 73% Republicans).

The Stanford Online Deliberation Platform was also evaluated highly:

- 93% agreed that the discussion platform provided the opportunity for everyone to participate in the discussions (96% Democrats, 85% Independents, 93% Republicans).
- 70% agreed that the discussion platform tried to make sure that opposing arguments were considered (75% Democrats, 67% Independents, 66% Republicans)

Overall, 75% of the participants concluded, “I learned a lot about people very different from me, about what they and their lives are like” (77% Democrats, 68% Independents, 76% Republicans).

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Says Roger Aines, Chief Scientist for Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory’s Energy Program and one of the Expert Panelists evaluating the Project, “We have found at LLNL that people have a huge diversity of initial thoughts about how to get to a safe climate future. I’m excited to see that the A1R process was able to bring out so much agreement from a group that also started with very diverse thoughts. This is the kind of personal decision making that we need to solve the climate crisis.”

And a lot of other crises as well.

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I have been a scientist in the field of the earth and environmental sciences for 33 years, specializing in geologic disposal of nuclear waste, energy-related research, planetary surface processes, radiobiology and shielding for space colonies, subsurface transport and environmental clean-up of heavy metals. I am a Trustee of the Herbert M. Parker Foundation, Adjunct at WSU, an Affiliate Scientist at LANL and consult on strategic planning for the DOE, EPA/State environmental agencies, and industry including

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