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Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab Poll: Iowans Worried About Climate Change

According to a recent Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab Poll, a majority of Iowans, 65.8%, are worried about the effects of global climate change. The online poll, designed by University of Iowa faculty and students as a research project, surveyed 883 voting-age Iowans between Feb. 10 and Feb. 25, 2022. Overall results showed 31.6% of respondents were very worried and 34.2% somewhat worried. In contrast, 17.9% were not worried much and 15.1% were not at all worried.

Concern about climate change split strongly along partisan lines with 54.2% of respondents identifying as Democrats reporting that they were very worried about climate change and another 35.2% reporting that they were somewhat worried. Most who self-identified Independents also expressed worries about global climate change: 31.3% of Independent respondents reported feeling very worried about climate change, with another 32.8% feeling somewhat worried. This contrasts strongly with results among Republican respondents: only 10.3% of respondents identifying as Republicans reported feeling very worried about climate change, with 34.4% being somewhat worried. This leaves a majority of Republicans not worried, with 23.7% not worried much, and 31.7% not worried at all.

As for who bears responsibility for environmental issues, respondents were again relatively split along party lines. For example, a majority of Democrats think several of the groups listed in the survey bear some responsibility for acting on issues pertaining to environmental sustainability. These groups include individuals (70.3%), corporations (76.8%), and federal, state, and local governments (78.1%, 76.5%, and 67.8%, respectively). A majority of independent respondents also think that these same groups bear some responsibility, but the majority is not as overwhelming, with no group reaching more than 70%. A majority of Republicans thinks only individuals and corporations hold responsibility for acting on such issues, with a smaller majority compared to Democrats (66.7% and 56.7%, respectively). The federal government received the largest majority for both Democrats (78.1%) and Independents (67.0%); however, Republicans ranked it one of the lowest of the five groups (40.5%). Across all parties, there is little support for the idea that non-profits bear responsibility for acting on sustainability, an intriguing finding given the support and media attention many non-profits receive for their actions to preserve the environment.

Further, most Iowans are at least moderately concerned about the localized impact of climate change on their community, with 17.1% of respondents indicating a great deal of concern and 36.1% some concern. Similar to the results of the global climate change and environmental responsibility questions, responses regarding localized climate change and its effect on Iowa communities were also largely split along party lines. Fewer than half of respondents identifying as Democrats (48.6%) indicated they think that climate change is impacting their local community

some, and another 29.7% of Democratic respondents think climate change is affecting their local community a great deal. Contrarily, 29.3% of Republican respondents think that climate change is affecting their community some, while only 8.5% responded that they think climate change is affecting their community a great deal. Generally, the respondents that were somewhat or very worried about global climate change tended to overlap with those who also think climate change is having a localized impact on their own community.

The results revealed some generational differences in the level of concern for climate change: 8.1% of respondents aged 18-29 identified their level of concern over climate change to be not at all worried, whereas 18.2% of respondents aged 30-49 identified that same level of worry. Conversely, 33.9% of respondents aged 18-29 identified their level of concern for climate change as very worried. These results revealed similarities with respondents aged 65 and older, 34.2% of whom identified their level of concern as very worried. The most common selection by respondents aged 50-64 was somewhat worried (37.6%). Overall, younger respondents aged 18-29 showed only slightly more concern for climate change than older respondents aged 50 and older.

When looking at the level of concern about the impact of climate change on their local community, the highest concentration of concern across all age groups fell in the category of “some affect” in terms of how much climate change is affecting them on a localized level. These numbers are 40.2% for the 18-29 age group, 36.8% for the 30-49 age group, 40.5% for the 50-64 age group, and 35.3% for the 65 and older age group. The remaining responses are spread in smaller proportions on both sides of the some effect category, but in total, the majority of respondents in all age groups said they think that climate change is affecting their local community either some or a great deal, displaying a general consensus among Iowans of all ages that the effects of climate change have reached them on a localized level and have begun impacting their individual communities.

Respondent identification: The Iowa Social Science Research Center (ISRC) contracted with a respected web panel vendor to field the survey to a demographically representative sample of up to 900 respondents. Respondents invited to complete the web survey were Iowa adults, aged 18-120 years, recruited for participation via web panel. To obtain a census-representative sample, quotas were set on the following demographics: sex, age, and urbanicity.

Sample: 883 voting-age resident in Iowa, margin of error +/-3.4%.

Weighting: Reported results are weighted by age, sex, and party identification.

About the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab

The poll was designed by the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab, comprised of University of Iowa faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab is co-directed by Frederick J. Boehmke, professor of political science and Kajsa Dalrymple, professor of journalism and mass communication. The poll is a teaching, research, and service project, and was implemented in collaboration with the Iowa Social Science Research Center directed by Frederick J. Boehmke. The University of Iowa Public Policy Center provided support for this poll as part of its student success mission, intended to expand experiential policy-relevant research for UI students.

Thomas Dainty, Makenna Gregurek, Oskar Kaut, Sam Johnson, and Natalie Leathers, research fellows for the Iowa Policy and Opinion Lab assisted with the preparation of this release.

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