



455 Science Drive, Suite 200
Madison, Wisconsin 53711
608.238.8276

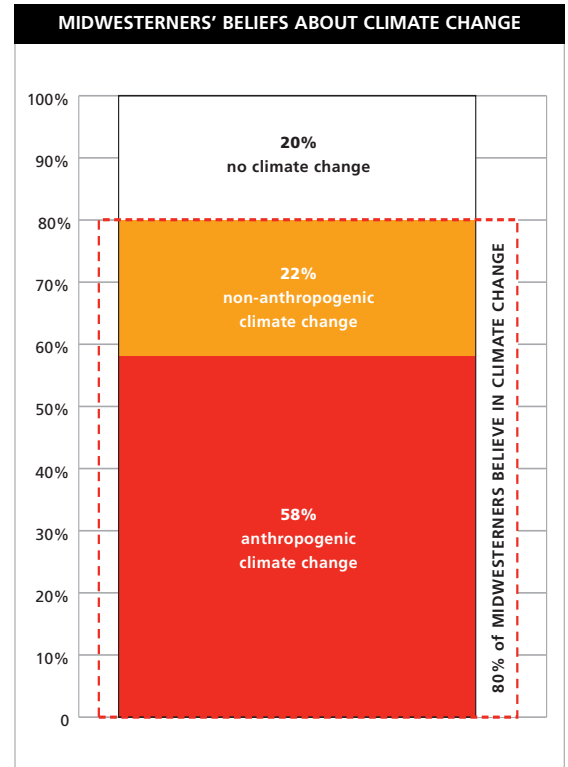
Public Opinion

WE BELIEVE THAT CLIMATE CHANGE IS HAPPENING AND WE ARE A CAUSE

An Energy Center of Wisconsin study of public perceptions finds that Midwesterners see climate change as a credible phenomenon that is caused by human activity. Eighty percent of adults surveyed believe that global temperatures are increasing, and nearly three-quarters of this group believes that human activity is largely responsible.

This finding is good news for advocates of energy sustainability and others seeking greater action by individuals to address climate change. Believing that a solvable problem exists is the first prerequisite to personal action. The study finds that 58 percent of Midwesterners fall into this category despite past expressions of uncertainty about climate change presented by the media and from some opinion leaders.

Furthermore, Midwesterners see individuals as part of the solution and offered a rich set of ideas for ways they can help to address climate change. Many of these suggestions focused on reducing the use of energy generally (offered by 14 percent of those who believe that climate change is occurring), reducing the use of gasoline (27 percent), or saving energy at home (9 percent).



More Education Needed

RAMIFICATIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE POORLY UNDERSTOOD

However, the study also finds that additional public education is needed. The level of concern about climate change is lower than that for eight other societal issues. Thirty-one percent of Midwesterners are “very concerned” about climate change, compared to 58 percent who expressed a similar level of concern about the economy. Public education would do well to stress economic and health impacts of climate change alongside the well-publicized environmental effects.

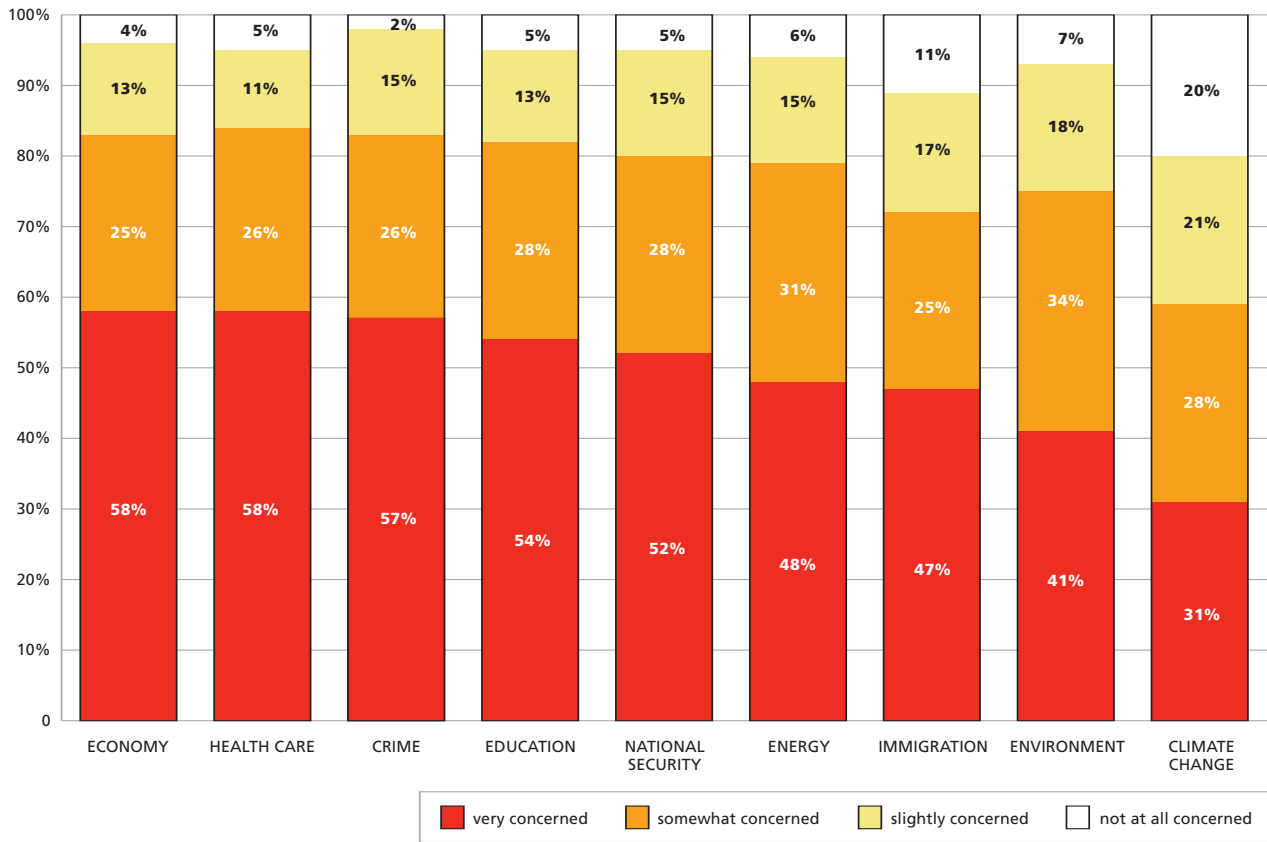
MIDWESTERN LEVELS OF CONCERN ABOUT SELECTED SOCIETAL ISSUES

Midwesterners’ level of concern may be influenced by the degree to which the public believes climate change will be a problem. Among those who believe in human-caused climate change, only 62 percent see the consequences as primarily negative. Most of the remainder perceives a balance of positive and negative effects. More study is needed to determine what positive consequences people anticipate. One possibility is that residents of colder climates see benefits in

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The Energy Center of Wisconsin is an independent nonprofit that seeks solutions to energy challenges. We serve members, clients, and society through innovative research and education in support of economic and environmental sustainability.

MIDWESTERNERS' LEVELS OF CONCERN ABOUT SELECTED SOCIETAL ISSUES



ABOUT THE STUDY

The *Climate Change and Energy Study of Public Opinion* is an on-going Energy Center of Wisconsin initiative. Project sponsors include the Integrys Energy Group; Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corporation; Wisconsin Power and Light Company, an Alliant Energy company; Wisconsin Public Power Inc.; and Xcel Energy.

Results presented here are based on 3,284 comprehensive surveys completed by residents of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin in late November and early December 2007. High-level results are being made public through three communiqués. Detailed reports were presented to project sponsors. The study will be repeated in 2008 to track changes, expand coverage beyond the Midwest, and explore some issues in more depth.

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shorter and milder winters, which might suggest a need for more public education about the potential depth of economic, agricultural, and environmental problems from climate change.

Furthermore, Midwesterners' understanding of what they can do about climate change is still somewhat unsophisticated. While many Midwesterners think of reducing energy use, less effective solutions like recycling and reducing the use of aerosols were offered as suggestions by 22 percent of survey respondents. Recycling is certainly an excellent environmental practice, but its benefits to address climate change are limited. Reducing the use of aerosols manufactured in countries that have banned chlorofluorocarbons is even less effective. More public education is clearly needed to inform those willing to take individual actions on what they can do.

CLIMATE CHANGE OR GLOBAL WARMING?

Finally, the study sought insight to better understand public understanding and reactions to two terms—climate change and global warming—that are most commonly used to describe variations to global temperatures and climate caused by changes in the balance between solar energy gains and heat losses in the atmosphere. Midwesterners appear to understand both terms, but more accurately associate “climate change” with the wide range of atmospheric and climatic interactions. Furthermore, “global warming” elicited a greater number of charged emotional responses, including similar numbers of alarmist and skeptical reactions, which suggests that climate change is the better term for most public communications. 🌀

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS STUDY

Please contact Ingo Bensch at ibensch@ecw.org or 608.238.8276 x145.