

Poll Finds Worldwide Agreement That Climate Change is a Threat

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Publics Divide Over Whether Costly Steps Are Needed

[Full Report \(PDF\)](#)

[Questionnaire \(PDF\)](#)

[Methodology/Research Partners \(PDF\)](#)



An international poll finds widespread agreement that climate change is a pressing problem. This majority, however, divides over whether the problem of global warming is urgent enough to require immediate, costly measures or whether more modest efforts are sufficient.

Glacier along the coast of Columbia, Alaska. (NOAA)

The survey was conducted by [The Chicago Council on Global Affairs](#) and WorldPublicOpinion.org, in cooperation with polling organizations around the world. It includes 17 countries--China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Russia, Thailand, Ukraine, Poland, Iran, Mexico, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, Argentina, Peru, Israel, Armenia--and the Palestinian territories. These represent more than 55 percent of the world population.

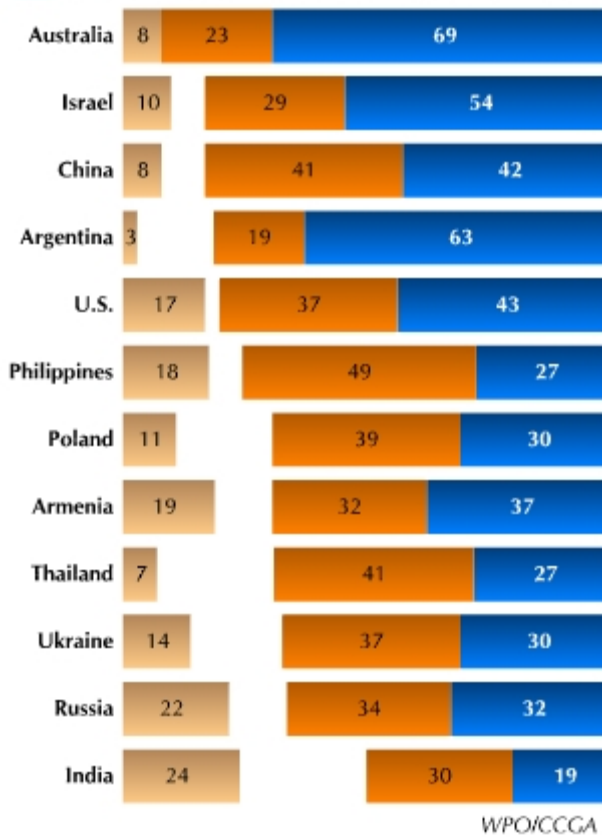
This is the first in a series of reports based on the findings of this survey that will analyze international attitudes on key international issues. Not all questions were asked in all countries.

Twelve countries were asked whether steps should be taken to address climate change and majorities in all but one of them favored action. The largest majority in favor of measures to combat global warming is found in Australia (92%).

China and Israel are the next most likely (83%) to favor such measures. Eighty percent of respondents in the United States--the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases--also support taking such measures. The lowest level of support for taking steps to address the problem is found in India, nonetheless nearly half (49%) favor taking action while just 24 percent oppose it (26% do not answer).

Views of Global Warming

- Until we are sure that it is really a problem, we should not take any steps that would have economic costs
- ...should be addressed, but its effects will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost
- ...a serious and pressing problem. We should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs



In no country (out of 12 asked) does more than one in four endorse the statement, "Until we are sure that global warming is really a problem, we should not take any steps that would have economic costs." The countries where the highest percentages favor delaying any action are India (24%), Russia (22%) and Armenia (19%). The countries with the lowest are Argentina (3%), and Thailand (7%).

A separate question, asked in 10 countries, allowed respondents to evaluate the threat posed by "global warming" in the next ten years. Strong majorities in all of the countries say such climate change is an important threat with only small minorities calling it unimportant. The highest percentages of climate change skeptics are found in Armenia (16%) and Israel (15%).

While majorities in all countries agree that the threat posed by global warming is at least important, there is less agreement over whether it is critical. Majorities call it critical in Mexico (70%), Australia (69%), South Korea (67%), Iran (61%), Israel (52%), and India (51%). Pluralities agree in Armenia (47%), China (47%) and the United States (46%). Ukraine is the only country divided about whether the problem is critical (33%) or important but

not critical (33%).

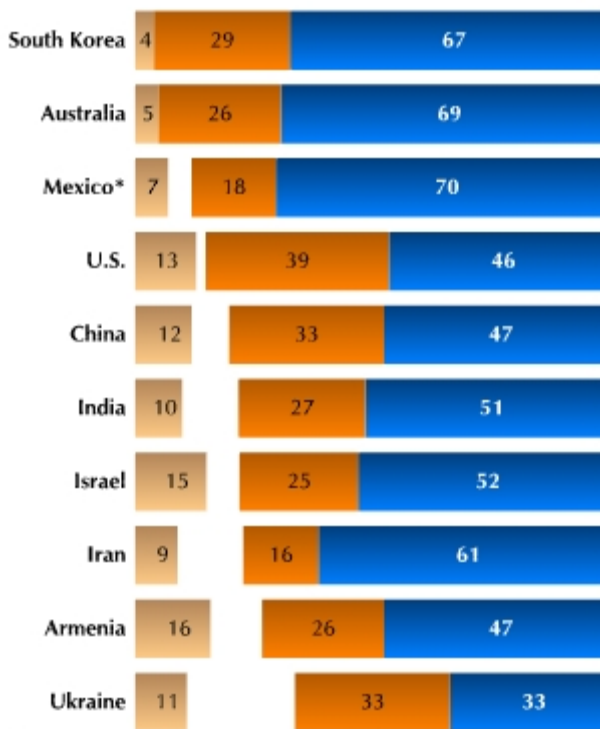
Differences Over How Much to Spend

There is general agreement in 12 countries, as discussed above, that steps must be taken to address the problem of global warming, though there are differences over how much should be spent. In five countries, the most common view is: "Global warming is a serious and pressing problem. We should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs." These include: Australia (69%), Argentina (63%), Israel (54%), the United States (43%), and Armenia (37%).

Threat Assessment: Global Warming

Please select whether you see global warming as...

- Not an important threat at all
- An important but not critical threat
- A critical threat



* Mexicans were offered 4 response options "Critical; Important, but not critical; of little importance; and not important." For the purposes of this questionnaire, "of little importance" has been combined with "not important."

WPO/CCGA

In another five countries, the most commonly held opinion is: "The problem of global warming should be addressed, but its effects will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost." The countries endorsing a go-slow, low-cost approach are the Philippines (49%), Thailand (41%), Poland (39%), Ukraine (37%) and India (30%).

In two countries, the public is evenly divided between those who favor less expensive measures and those who believe the problem merits action involving significant cost: China (low cost 41%, significant costs 42%) and Russia (low costs 34%, significant costs 32%).

In Peru, only those who indicated they were informed about climate change--39 percent of the total sample--were asked whether steps should be taken to address the problem. Among these respondents, 92 percent favor action, including 69 percent who favor taking steps even if they involve significant costs.

Support for Developing Nations

Some governments, such as China's and India's, have argued that developing countries should not be obliged to limit greenhouse gas emissions as they struggle to catch up with the highly industrialized economies of Western Europe and the United States. The developing world, such countries say, releases far less CO₂ and other greenhouse gasses per capita than do industrialized nations, whose cumulative emissions over the past century have caused the current problem.

Some have proposed that an equitable approach would be for developed nations to provide aid to developing nations if they would agree to impose some limits on their emissions. Publics in five developing countries were asked, "If the developed countries are willing to provide substantial aid, do you think the less-developed countries should make a commitment to limit their greenhouse gas emissions?" In all of five countries, majorities or pluralities say they should.

Most significantly, this includes a very large 79 percent majority of Chinese respondents and nearly half of those polled in India (48% agree, 29% disagree, 23% no answer). Majorities in Argentina (68%) and Armenia (63%) also concur. Results in Thailand are similar to those in India: about half of Thai respondents (49%) agree and only 9 percent disagree, though large numbers (43%) are uncertain.

China, India, Argentina, Armenia and Thailand are among the 169 countries that have ratified or accepted the [Kyoto Protocol](#) on climate change. They are not, however,

considered industrialized countries under the treaty, which means they are not legally obliged to cut back emissions of CO₂ or other pollutants.

The survey also asked respondents in three developed countries whether developed countries should provide "substantial aid" to less-developed countries that "make a commitment to limit their greenhouse gas emissions." Respondents in all three show a high level of support for providing such assistance: 64 percent of Americans, 84 percent of Poles, and 72 percent of Ukrainians.

The United States, Poland and Ukraine are all considered Annex 1 or industrialized countries under the Kyoto accord, which means they are obligated to reduce emissions. Poland and Ukraine have both ratified the Kyoto Protocol; the United States has signed but refused to ratify it.

General Concern about Global Environment

The survey also finds that world publics are very concerned about the global environment in general. Seven countries were asked to rate the importance of a number of foreign policy goals, including "improving the global environment." Overwhelming majorities in all seven countries rate improving the global environment as at least an "important" goal and majorities in all call it a "very important" one: Australia, 99 percent (very 88%); South Korea, 96 percent (very 60%); the United States 93 percent (very 54%), Armenia 86 percent (very 54%), China, 85 percent (very 54%); Thailand, 83 percent (very 61%); and India, 79 percent (very 51%).

Respondents were also asked whether "international trade agreements should or should not be required to maintain minimum standards for protection of the environment." In all 10 countries where this question was asked, very large majorities believe such standards should be required while in one country views are divided. Those in favor of standards include developing countries, whose governments have sometimes resisted environmental regulations, arguing that implementing such costly rules would put their economies at a competitive disadvantage.

In Asia, the Chinese support environmental standards by an overwhelming 85 percent. Seven in ten Thais (69%) also favor such standards as do six in ten Indians (60%).

In Latin America, an overwhelming majority of Argentines (90%) say such standards should be required. There is also strong support in Mexico (76%), where the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has required the government to enact certain environmental measures. In Eastern Europe, environmental measures are favored in Poland (90%), Ukraine (88%) and Armenia (82%), both of which suffer from severe air and water pollution as well as deforestation dating from the Soviet era.

Support for environmental standards is also strong among the relatively wealthy publics of Israel (93%) and the United States (91%).

To read more about opinion in the individual countries surveyed, click [here](#) to view the full report (PDF).