

Climate Change Concern Cools

A Canadian Perspective



About the Survey

The Nielsen/Oxford University Environment and Climate Change Barometer is an annual survey that measures consumer attitudes towards the environment and climate change, trust of information sources, and climate change solutions. The most recent survey was conducted in October 2009, among 27,548 online consumers in 54 countries.

Climate Change Concern Falls

Has concern about climate change cooled off? Somewhat, for consumers around the world, and especially for those in Canada.

According to research released in December 2009 by The Nielsen Company and the Oxford University Institute of Climate Change, 37% of global consumers say they are "very concerned" about climate change. That compares to 41% who said the same in 2007.

Thirty-five out of the 54 countries surveyed recorded a decline in climate change concern, led by Poland (a 23% decline) and Canada (a 22% decline). In Canada, 30% of respondents are "very concerned" about climate change (another 29% are "quite concerned"), lagging behind the global consensus, but ahead of the 25% of Americans who are "very concerned."

The research suggests that concern and awareness for the environment and climate change peaked in 2007, at the time of the Live Earth concerts and the launch of Al Gore's documentary *An*

Inconvenient Truth. Since then, "The global recession and economic woes temporarily knocked the climate change issue off the top line agenda," says Jonathan Banks, Business Insights Director Europe, The Nielsen Company.

As the recession begins to recede, Banks expects that climate change may well come to the forefront again.

Top Environmental Issue in Canada

Despite its decline in importance, climate change remains the top environmental issue in Canada, barely, with the 30% of Canadians who are "very concerned" edging the 29% who are "very concerned" about water pollution, and the 28% who are "very concerned" about air pollution.

Trailing these on the list of Canadians' environmental concerns: packaging waste, surface/ground pollution, water shortages, and pesticides.

Globally, however, air and water pollution are the top two environmental concerns, ahead of climate change. That doesn't surprise Banks.

"These are measurable and visible to the population, compared with the concept of climate change which, unfortunately, many people only take seriously when human lives are endangered through freak weather patterns," he says.

That may partly explain the rising concern about climate change in the Philippines (up 14% from the 2007 survey) and Vietnam (up 9%). The nations with the highest totals of residents who are "very concerned" about climate change are the Philippines (78%), Indonesia (66%), and Thailand and Mexico (62% each).

Banks says there could be a logical explanation for such high levels of concern. "These countries have all experienced the direct effects of climate change through freak weather conditions and natural disasters," he says. For instance, Typhoon Ketsana devastated both the Philippines and Vietnam in September 2009, while Indonesia has been struck by two earthquakes and tsunami warnings this year.

Divided Views on Solutions

What are the biggest contributions that society can make to combat global warming/climate change? Here are the responses from global, Canadian, and American consumers:

What are the biggest contributions that society can make to combat global warming/climate change?

Action	GL	CA	US
Governments should restrict companies' emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants	36%	37%	29%
Major government-led initiative for research into scientific/technological solutions (e.g. low-emissions cars, houses and renewable energy)	34%	31%	26%
Recycle consumer waste when possible	28%	31%	37%
Government incentives (tax breaks/subsidies) to individuals for good, less- or non-polluting behaviour	29%	24%	19%
Governments should tax individuals for polluting behaviour	16%	20%	10%
Incentives for climate-friendly corporate behaviour	16%	20%	14%
Major government investment in improved public transport systems	19%	17%	18%
Save electricity, e.g. lowering the temperature in their homes or washing clothes at lower temperatures	18%	17%	25%
Purchase local goods whenever possible (e.g. local seasonal foods)	8%	16%	9%
Use private cars less	16%	12%	8%
Change to more energy efficient light bulbs, fixtures and electrical appliances	18%	11%	20%
Homeowners should insulate their homes	6%	6%	11%
Take care not to buy excess food that will be wasted	7%	6%	5%
Don't know	5%	6%	10%
Choose supermarkets and shops that are ethically supportive of global warming/climate change	5%	4%	2%
Reduce air travel	4%	3%	4%
Buy more organically produced food	4%	3%	5%
Eat less meat	3%	3%	3%

Globally, the majority of consumers still believe that the main responsibility for solving climate change should lie with their governments. But there are significant regional differences.

More than one-third of global consumers, 36%, say that governments should restrict companies' emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants, closely followed by 34% who say

there should be major government-led initiatives for research into scientific and technological solutions such as low emission cars, houses and renewable energy.

About one in three global consumers also believe there should be government incentives (tax breaks or subsidies) to individuals for good, less or non-polluting behavior and that the population should recycle waste when possible.

North Americans, however, are the least in favour of government intervention or action towards climate change. Consumers here top the regional rankings in favour of taking personal actions.

Overall, Europeans and Latin Americans feel most favourable about major government-led research into climate change solutions. In Asia Pacific, consumers prefer that governments restrict companies' emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants. And consumers in Middle East/Africa are most in favour of major government investment into improving public transport systems.

Who Does the Public Trust?

Climate scientists remain the most trusted source of information about climate change, with 58% of global consumers believing climate scientists more than any other source. That confidence is fairly consistent across the 54 countries in the survey.

In Canada, 64% of consumers trust climate scientists the most. The second-most trusted source for Canadians is media, but just garnering 11% of responses. Only 1% of Canadians trust politicians the most on climate change, less than the percentages that trust family (3%) and charities (2%), and the same as who trust businesses (1%) and celebrities (1%) on this issue.

Concern Varies by Age

In North America, there are some significant differences in the concern expressed about the environment by various age groups. The group most likely to say they are "very concerned" about the environment are 40-44 (28%) and 55-59 (also 28%). The least concerned groups – those either under 20 or aged 65 and over.

Regarding climate change specifically, the group that says they are "very concerned" the most are 55-59 (39%) and 30-34 (32%). In fact, the percentage of 55-59-year-old North Americans who are "very concerned" about climate change is almost twice that of the percentage of under-20-year-olds who say they are "very concerned" (21%).

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