

“America’s Report Card on the Environment”

A New Annual Survey by

The Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University

in collaboration with ABC News and Time Magazine

According to the first annual installment of a new national survey, majorities of Americans are pessimistic about the state of the natural environment and want a lot to be done to improve its health.

Most Americans Are Pessimistic

55% of Americans said they expect the world’s natural environment to be in worse shape in 10 years than it is now, and an additional 5% said the environment is currently in poor or very poor shape and will not improve. We refer to this group of 60% of Americans as “pessimists.”

These pessimists closely resemble the entire American public in terms of gender, race, education, and whether they live in an urban, suburban, or rural setting. But current partisan loyalties are related to pessimism: Democrats are more likely to be pessimistic than Republicans. 67% of Democrats are pessimists vs. 48% of Republicans.

Among pessimists, however, Democrats outnumber Republicans and Independents by only small margins (35%, 25%, and 29%, respectively).

Tremendous Remedial Effort is Desired

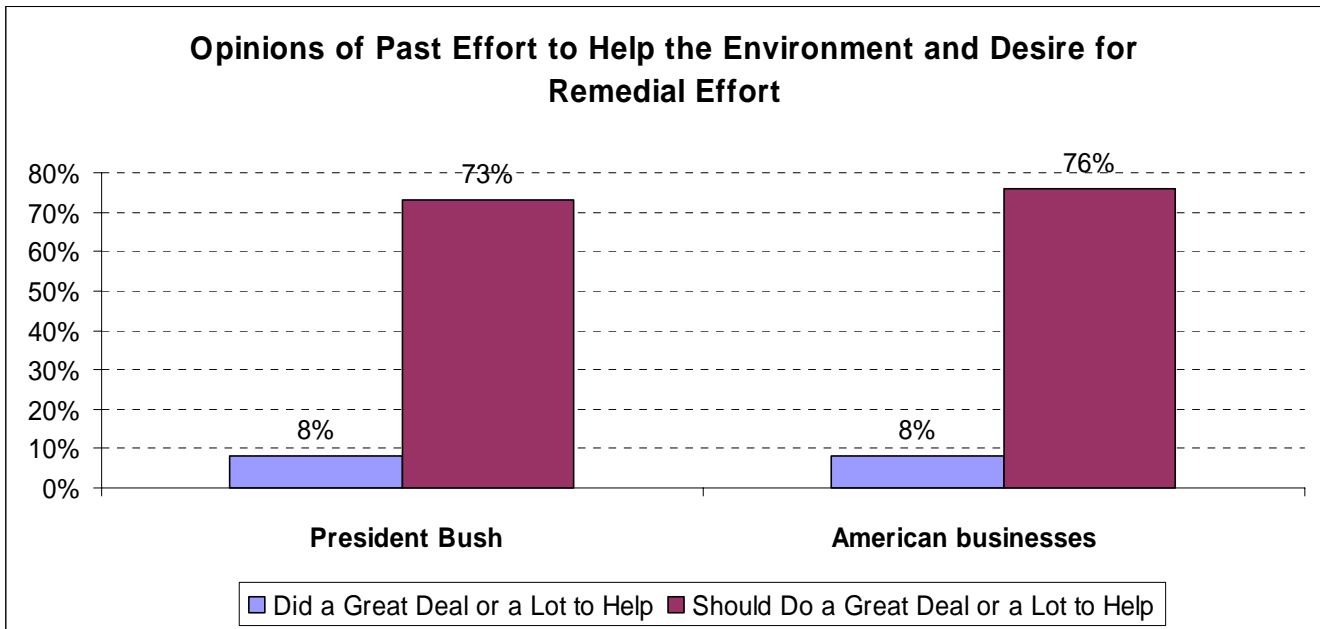
A striking 86% want a great deal or a lot to be done to help the environment during the next year, by President Bush, the U.S. Congress, American businesses, and/or the American public.

This figure was 94% among Democrats and 76% among Republicans. The proportion of people wanting a great deal or a lot of effort did not vary according to gender, age, race, education, or residence in an urban, suburban, or rural place.

Whereas only 8% of Americans believe that President Bush did a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the past year, 73% want him to do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year.

Likewise, whereas only 8% of Americans believe that U.S. businesses did a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the past year, 76% want them to do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year.

In addition, 75% and 77% of Americans believe that Congress and the American public, respectively, should do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year.



Businesses are Blamed Most

Nearly all Americans agree that environmental damage is at least partly attributable to the actions of American businesses. 91% said that businesses harmed the environment a little or more during the past year, a view expressed equivalently often by Republicans and Democrats (90% vs. 93%).

A large majority (79%) also said that President Bush's policies harmed the environment a little or more during the past year, but there was a substantial partisan split on this question. Democrats were substantially more likely than Republicans to attribute blame to President Bush (89% vs. 66%). Nonetheless, even a majority of Republicans acknowledged some environmental damage attributable to the President.

Businesses and the President Have Helped Less Than They Have Harmed

Smaller but nonetheless large numbers of Americans said that American businesses and President Bush's policies did at least a little to help the environment during the last year (83% and 62%, respectively).

Whereas 46% of respondents said that businesses did more to harm the environment than to help it, less than half that number (20%) said businesses did more to help than to harm it.¹

Likewise, whereas 46% of respondents said that President Bush's policies did more to harm the environment than to help it, about half that number (27%) said the President's policies did more to help than to harm it.²

Low Approval of Environmental Stewardship by the President, Congress, and Businesses

Only 21% of Americans approve of the way President Bush is handling environmental issues.³

As expected, approval was much lower, a mere 5%, among Democrats, but not even a majority of Republicans (47%) approved of the president's performance on this issue.

Americans' approval of Congress and U.S. businesses is no higher: 15% and 21%, respectively.⁴

Pessimism Linked to Views on Global Warming

Pessimism about the health of the natural environment is strongly related to beliefs about global warming.

Among the 69% of Americans who are at least somewhat sure that global warming has been happening and believe that it will have at least somewhat serious effects if unchecked, 70% are pessimists about the environment in general.

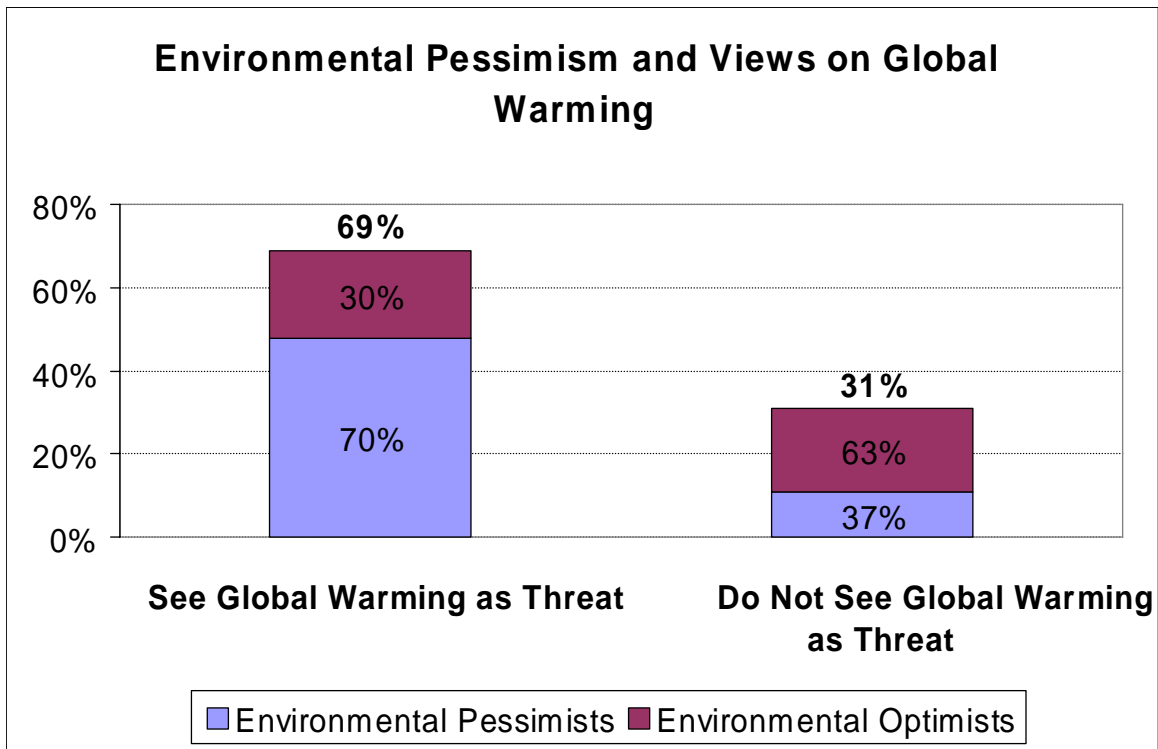
Among the 31% of Americans who are skeptical about the existence or damaging effects of global warming, only 37% are environmental pessimists.

¹ 31% said that businesses did as much to harm the environment as to help it.

² 22% said that the President's policies did as much to harm the environment as to help it.

³ 53% disapproved, and 25% neither approved nor disapproved.

⁴ For Congress, 53% disapproved, and 32% neither approved nor disapproved; for businesses, 47% disapproved, and 30% neither approved nor disapproved.



Conclusions

- 1) A majority of Americans is pessimistic about the health of the world's natural environment, believing it will get worse or is in poor shape and will not improve.
- 2) A large majority of Americans want a substantial increase in effort to help the environment.
- 3) Blame for poor and declining environmental conditions is frequently placed on American businesses, and to a lesser degree on President Bush's policies.
- 4) People who believe in the existence and damaging effects of global warming are especially likely to be pessimistic about the environment's future.
- 5) Despite partisan splits on many of these issues (Democrats are more pessimistic and more supportive of remedial efforts than Republicans), even majorities of Republicans share discontent about the health of the environment and human stewardship of it.

METHODOLOGY – This survey, the first annual installment of “America’s Report Card on the Environment,” is modeled after the well-known national surveys measuring Americans’ perceptions of the national economy, which yield the well-known economic indicators.

The survey was conducted by telephone March 9-14, 2006, among a random national sample of 1,002 adults. Sampling and data collection were done by TNS of Horsham, PA.

This survey was designed by Jon Krosnick of Stanford University and Gary Langer of ABC News, with support from the Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University.

This report was written by Jon Krosnick and Neil Malhotra of Stanford University.

Results for the questions described above follow. Other questions were asked in this survey and will be described in other releases.

(* = less than 0.5 percent)

1. How would you rate the condition of the natural environment in the world today - excellent, good, fair, poor, or very poor?

Excellent	3
Good	21
Fair	43
Poor	25
Very poor	8
DK/No opinion	*

2. Compared to 10 or so years ago, do you think the natural environment in the world today is better, worse or about the same?

IF BETTER: Do you think it's much better or somewhat better?

IF WORSE: Do you think it's much worse or somewhat worse?

Much better	4
Somewhat better	9
About the same	27
Somewhat worse	38
Much worse	22
DK/No opinion	*

3. Thinking ahead to 10 or so years from now, do you think the natural environment in the world will be better, worse, or about the same as it is today?

IF BETTER: Do you think it will be much better or somewhat better?

IF WORSE: Do you think it will be much worse or somewhat worse?

Much better	5
Somewhat better	16
About the same	23
Somewhat worse	31
Much worse	24
DK/No opinion	1

4. Construction of environmental pessimism measure:

Think environment will get somewhat worse or much worse	55
Think environment is poor or very poor and will stay the same	5
Environmental pessimists	60

Think environment will get somewhat better or better	21
Think environment is excellent or very good and will stay the same	8
Environmental optimists	29

Others	11
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5. Thinking about the way President Bush is handling issues involving the natural environment, do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove?

IF APPROVE: Do you approve strongly or somewhat?

IF DISAPPROVE: Do you disapprove strongly or somewhat?

Approve, strongly	10
Approve, somewhat	11
Neither approve nor disapprove	25
Disapprove, somewhat	14
Disapprove, strongly	39
DK/No opinion	1

6. Thinking about the way American businesses are handling issues involving the natural environment, do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove?

IF APPROVE: Do you approve strongly or somewhat?

IF DISAPPROVE: Do you disapprove strongly or somewhat?

Approve, strongly	7
Approve, somewhat	15
Neither approve nor disapprove	30
Disapprove, somewhat	23
Disapprove, strongly	24
DK/No opinion	1

7. Thinking about the way the U.S. Congress is handling issues involving the natural environment, do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove?

IF APPROVE: Do you approve strongly or somewhat?

IF DISAPPROVE: Do you disapprove strongly or somewhat?

Approve, strongly	4
Approve, somewhat	11
Neither approve nor disapprove	32
Disapprove, somewhat	22
Disapprove, strongly	31
DK/No opinion	1

8. During the past year, how much did President Bush's policies do to HELP the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

A great deal	4
A lot	4
A moderate amount	23
A little	31
Nothing	35
DK/No opinion	3

9. During the past year, how much did American businesses do to HELP the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

A great deal	3
A lot	5
A moderate amount	35
A little	40
Nothing	14
DK/No opinion	3

10. During the past year, how much did President Bush's policies do to HARM the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

A great deal	16
A lot	12
A moderate amount	22
A little	28
Nothing	19
DK/No opinion	2

11. During the past year, how much did American businesses do to HARM the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

A great deal	11
A lot	18
A moderate amount	37
A little	24
Nothing	7
DK/No opinion	2

12. During the next year, how much do you want President Bush to do to help the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

A great deal	50
A lot	23
A moderate amount	18
A little	4
Nothing	4
DK/No opinion	1

13. During the next year, how much do you want the U.S. Congress to do to help the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

A great deal	49
A lot	27
A moderate amount	17
A little	4
Nothing	3
DK/No opinion	1

14. During the next year, how much do you want American businesses to do to help the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

A great deal	48
A lot	28
A moderate amount	19
A little	4
Nothing	1
DK/No opinion	*

14. During the next year, how much do you want the American public to do to help the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

A great deal	51
A lot	26
A moderate amount	17
A little	3
Nothing	2
DK/No opinion	*

16. You may have heard about the idea that the world's temperature may have been going up slowly over the past 100 years. What is your personal opinion on this - do you think this has probably been happening, or do you think it probably hasn't been happening?

Has been happening	85
Hasn't been happening	13
DK/No opinion	2

17. How sure are you that the world's temperature has been going up - extremely sure, very sure, somewhat sure, or not sure at all? (Asked of respondents who believe global warming has been happening)

Extremely sure	19
Very sure	26
Somewhat sure	44
Not sure at all	11
DK/No opinion	*

18. If nothing is done to reduce global warming in the future, how serious of a problem do you think it will be for THE WORLD - very serious, somewhat serious, not so serious or not serious at all? (Asked of respondents who believe global warming has been happening)

Very serious	62
Somewhat serious	28
Not so serious	5
Not serious at all	3
DK/No opinion	1

19. Construction of global warming threat perception measure:

Believe temperatures are increasing, are at least somewhat sure of it, and believe it is a somewhat or very serious threat	69
Others	31

20. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as:

A Democrat	31
A Republican	31
An Independent	29
Other	8
DK/No opinion	1

21. What was the last grade of school you completed?

8th grade or less	1
Some high school	7
Graduated high school	40
Some college	24
Graduated college: Bachelor	15
Graduated college: Other degree	2
Post-graduate	11
DK/no opinion	*

22. What is your age?

18-30	23
31-44	27
44-60	28
61+	21

23. Would you describe the area in which you live as a:

Large city	22
Suburb of a large city	31
Small town	29
Rural area	18
Don't know / no opinion	1

24. Are you of Hispanic origin or background?

IF "YES," ASK: Are you White Hispanic or Black Hispanic?

IF "NO," ASK: Are you white, black, or some other race?

White	75
Black	10
Hispanic	7
Asian	1
Other race	6

25. Gender (recorded by interviewer)

Male	48
Female	52