

# ATTITUDES & OPINIONS ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN INDIANA

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## Attitudes and Opinions About Environmental Issues in Indiana

A representative sample of 800 Indiana registered voters were interviewed by telephone to determine their opinions and attitudes about environmental issues in the state. Interviews were conducted March 13-18, 2017, and were about 11 minutes in length. The sample was quota-selected from 72 strata based on party, age, gender and race to match the political and demographic characteristics of Indiana based on the latest voter data. The sampling frame included both landline- and cell-based telephones. Interviews were conducted in English or in Spanish as needed. The following report summarizes the findings from the study.

### Importance of Issues

In an effort to determine how important Indiana residents consider environmental issues relative to other pressing issues in the state they were asked, “Which one of the following do you believe should be the top priority for the governor and the legislature?” Predictably, “improving the education system” and “making health care more accessible and affordable” rise to the top of the list as the two most important issues – both cited by 27 percent of Indiana adults as the state’s top priority. As the following table illustrates, “protecting the state’s air and water quality, land use and wildlife” (the measure used for environmental issues) is the fourth most frequently selected top priority among state residents, selected by slightly more than one in 10 (11 percent) of Indiana respondents.

	Total	<u>Age</u>			<u>Political Party</u>		
		18-35	36-64	65 +	Dem	Ind	Rep
Improving the public education system	27%	37%	24%	26%	33%	29%	22%
Making health care more accessible and affordable	27	21	30	26	29	27	24
Attracting and retaining businesses and jobs	14	14	10	8	15	12	16
<b>Protecting the state’s air and water quality, land use and wildlife</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>
Lowering taxes	10	13	15	16	10	14	18
Improving public safety	7	8	8	4	2	9	8

Reforming the state's immigration policies	4	1	4	7	2	3	7
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As the table shows, while there are some minor differences by age and political affiliation, the basic order of issue priorities remains consistent. This is not to say, of course, that environmental issues are unimportant to the state's citizens, it only indicates that education, health care and economic development are a higher priority for them.

However, survey respondents also were asked to rank their top three priorities from the above list. Fewer than one-half of the state's citizens (46 percent) rank "protecting the state's air and water quality, land use and wildlife" as one of their top three priorities among the choices provided.

	<u>Total</u>
Improving the public education system	65%
Making health care more accessible and affordable	61
Attracting and retaining businesses and jobs	49
Protecting the state's air and water quality, land use and wildlife	46
Lowering taxes	36
Improving public safety	29
Reforming the state's immigration policies	14

Nearly all Indiana voters (87 percent) feel the state's "parks, preserves, forests and open spaces are either "very important" (68 percent) or "somewhat important" (28 percent) to them. Only 3 percent say they are "not very important" to them. This finding is consistent among all age categories, men and women, all ethnic groups and all political affiliations.

**Attitudes Toward Environmental Concerns**

For the most part Indiana registered voters view the environmental issues facing the state as a serious problem. When asked whether environmental issues are “very serious and need to be addressed immediately,” serious but not critical,” or “not very serious,” 28 percent indicate the issues are “very serious” while 47 percent rate the issues as “serious.” Only 20 percent responded “not very serious.”

While women and those 18 to 35 years of age are more likely to see environmental issues as serious, the difference between them and their male and older counterparts is slight. However, there are significant differences based upon political affiliation. While more than four in 10 registered Democrats (42 percent) see environmental issues as a “very serious” problem, only 17 percent of Republicans concur. In fact, 37 percent of registered Republicans indicate environmental issues are “not a very serious problem” compared with just 10 percent of Democrats. Independents straddle the two political parties, with 29 percent rating environmental issues as a “very serious” problem while 14 percent say they are “not very serious.”

Similarly, about one-third of Indiana voters (34 percent) say they are “very concerned” about “the state’s overall natural environment,” 39 percent are “somewhat concerned” and 26 percent are “not too concerned. There are no significant differences in opinion among the three age groups analyzed. Women show higher levels of concern (80 percent are “very” or “somewhat concerned”) than men (66 percent). As is true for many of the questions asked in this survey, differences are greatest comparing registered Democrats (86 percent are “very” or “somewhat concerned”) and registered Republicans (59 percent).

Survey participants were asked which of the following two statements is closest to their own position:

“Protecting the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of slowing economic growth.”

“Economic growth should be given priority, even at the risk of damaging the environment.”

Seventy-one percent selected the first choice, “protecting the environment should be given priority.” Twenty percent selected the second choice, while 9 percent said “neither” or didn’t know. Young adults (79 percent) and women (76 percent) are more likely to make the environmental choice than adults 65 and older (62 percent) and men (67 percent) although, again, differences are not great. However, the percentage of Democrats (82 percent) who select the environment over economic growth is significantly higher than among Republicans (56 percent). And, as is true for most questions, the opinions of independents fall between the two major political parties (77 percent).

Regardless of age, sex or political affiliation, Indiana voters generally believe that the air quality in the cities and large towns is “good” (48 percent) to “fair” (33 percent). Few rate it as

“excellent” (9 percent) or “poor” (8 percent).

The governor and state legislature get only mediocre reviews for their “care of the state’s natural resources” – 4 percent say “excellent;” 30 percent “good;” 35 percent “fair;” and 16 percent “poor.” The remainder said they did not know. There is clearly a political divide on this issue, with 52 percent of Republicans rating the governor and legislature either as excellent (9 percent) or good (43 percent), while registered Democrats rate them at 2 percent and 18 percent, respectively. On the other end of the scale, 67 percent of Democrats rate the governor and legislature either as “fair” (43 percent) or “poor” (24 percent) in “their care for the state’s natural resources,” compared with 34 percent of Republicans (26 percent and 8 percent, respectively).

More than six in 10 Indiana registered voters believe “the governor and legislature should require further regulation to reduce greenhouse gases,” including 71 percent of adults age 18 to 35; 66 percent of women; 75 percent of Democrats; and 70 percent of independents. Republicans are the only subgroup analyzed with fewer than half (43 percent) favoring additional regulation.

Six in 10 Indiana voters also feel Indiana should do more “to develop alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power.” Again, while there are slight differences by age categories and sex (young adults and women are more likely to feel not enough is being done), the big difference is political – 76 percent of Democrats believe more should be done compared with 39 percent of Republicans. Two-thirds of Independents (65 percent) believe the state should do more.

**Climate Change**

The climate change debate is alive and well in Indiana although, based on responses to the following statements, two-thirds to three-quarters of Indiana voters feel more should be done to combat it. Respondents were asked whether the “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with each of the following statements.

	<u>Strongly agree/agree</u>				<u>Strongly disagree/disagree</u>			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<u>Rep</u>
The federal government needs to do more to combat climate change	71%	87%	79%	47%	29%	13%	21%	53%
The state government needs to do more to combat climate change	71%	87	77	49	29	13	23	51

Climate change is a made-up problem

and does not need to be addressed 25% 12 20 41 75 88 80 59

Climate change is one of the most serious problems facing the world today 63% 83 67 42 37 17 33 58

While political divides are apparent, even among nearly one-half of Republicans, Indiana voters see a need to more aggressively address climate change.

Further, more than three-quarters of Indiana voters (76 percent) believe the earth's average temperature is rising, including 85 percent of 18-to-35-year-olds, 79 percent of women, 93 percent of Democrats and 80 percent of independents. Among those who do not believe the earth's average temperature is rising most prominent are Republicans (33 percent) and those 65 years of age and older (23 percent).

And, the pattern persists. Among those who believe the earth's temperature is rising, three-quarters of Indiana voters (75 percent) believe "climate change is primarily the result of human activity." The only subgroup analyzed in which less than 70 percent believe climate change is primarily the result of human behavior is among registered Republicans (63 percent), who believe the earth's temperature is rising, although, obviously, even among this group a large majority believe climate change is primarily caused by human activity.

### **Water and Waterways**

As the following table illustrates, nearly three-quarters of registered Indiana voters believe the state will have enough water to meet its needs into the foreseeable future. While Democrats are slightly less optimistic than are Republicans, even among Democrats two-thirds believe there will be enough water for Indiana's future.

While the majority of registered voters (57 percent) believe Indiana's drinking water is healthy and unpolluted, nearly half (43 percent) are not convinced of the purity of Indiana's drinking water, including the majority of Democrats (53 percent) and nearly half of independents (46 percent).

Nearly three-quarters of voters (73 percent) agree that Indiana's waterways are polluted and need to be cleaned up, including 84 percent of Democrats and 74 percent of independents.

Nearly everyone (88 percent) agrees that healthy, unpolluted waterways increase the state's property values.

Only 55 percent of registered voters agree that Indiana's waterways are well maintained including fewer than half of registered Democrats (47 percent) compared with 62 percent of Republicans.

Four out of five (82 percent) registered voters agree that Indiana’s waterways are easily accessible to the general public, and 81 percent take pride in Indiana’s waterways.

	<u>Strongly agree/agree</u>				<u>Strongly disagree/disagree</u>			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<u>Rep</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<u>Rep</u>
There is plenty of water available in Indiana to cover all its needs into the foreseeable future	72%	65%	69%	82%	28%	35%	31%	19%
Indiana’s drinking water is healthy and unpolluted	57	47	54	68	43	53	46	33
Indiana’s waterways are polluted and need to be cleaned up	73	84	74	62	27	16	27	38
Healthy, unpolluted waterways increase the state’s property values	88	89	88	90	12	11	12	10
Indiana’s waterways are well maintained	55	47	54	62	45	53	46	38
Indiana’s waterways are easily accessible to the general public	82	81	79	86	18	19	21	14
I take pride in Indiana’s waterways	81	77	80	86	19	23	20	14

About one in five registered voters (22 percent) use Indiana’s waterways for recreational purposes at least one a month, including nearly one in 10 who use the waterways once a week or more often. Four in 10 use the waterways only a few times a year and 23 percent never use them.

Nearly six in 10 Indiana voters (58 percent) believe Indiana has “enough water to cover all its needs into the foreseeable future and an additional 24 percent said they “don’t know.”

Consequently, only 17 percent believe the state will have a water shortage at some point in the foreseeable future. Republicans are more optimistic about the state’s water future (71 percent believe there will be enough water) than are Democrats (47 percent).

When asked, “Assuming that having enough water for home use is the highest priority, which of the following do you consider to be the second highest priority – water for landscaping, swimming pools and non-essential home uses; water to support new industries in the state; water for further development and new homes; water to support agriculture; or water to support the mining industry?” more than three-quarters of Indiana voters (76 percent) cite “water for agriculture.” These findings are consistent across all the subgroups analyzed. None of the other choices provided was selected by more than 9 percent.

### **Concern About Environmental Issues**

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of concern about each of the issues listed below. As the findings indicate, highest levels of concern are for pollution in the rivers, lakes and reservoirs and, secondly, for protection of the state’s wildlife. Among all the listed environmental issues there is a significant difference in level of concern between Democrats and Republicans (with independents’ level of concern between the two major parties). For example, while 52 percent of Democrats are “very concerned” about greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants, while only 21 percent of Republicans indicate they are “very concerned.” Two-thirds of registered Democrats (67 percent) are “very concerned” about pollution in the rivers, lakes and reservoirs, compared with 34 percent of registered Republicans and 51 percent of independents. This pattern persists for all environmental issues addressed in this research.

#### Pollution in the rivers, lakes and reservoirs

50%	Very concerned
40%	Somewhat concerned
10%	Not at all concerned

#### The protection of the state’s wildlife

41%	Very concerned
43%	Somewhat concerned
16%	Not at all concerned

#### Greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants

37%	Very concerned
39%	Somewhat concerned
23%	Not at all concerned



### Air quality in the state's cities and large towns

34%	Very concerned
46%	Somewhat concerned
20%	Not at all concerned

### Pollution from concentrated animal-feeding operations

28%	Very concerned
43%	Somewhat concerned
30%	Not at all concerned

### Land and land use policies

22%	Very concerned
52%	Somewhat concerned
27%	Not at all concerned

## Information Gathering

Respondents were asked, "From which of the following sources do you get your information about the state's environmental issues and problems?" The following list of choices was presented to the respondents (read in a different order to each respondent). The table below shows the percentage of respondents who selected each of the choices (respondents could select as many choices as applicable). Predictably, there are differences by age. As age increases the likelihood of selecting a printed local newspaper increases (53 percent of those 65 and older compared with 28 percent of those age 18 to 35). The likelihood of selecting a computer-based source decreases as age decreases (48 percent of those 18 to 35 years of age selected "a local online news site," compared to only 21 percent of those 65 and older). Twenty-eight percent of those age 18 to 35 chose a "non-news online site" compared to 14 percent of those 65 and older.

56%	TV
40%	A printed local newspaper
39%	Friends and family
36%	Social media
36%	A local online news site
34%	Radio
23%	A non-news online site
17%	Advocacy groups
5%	Or some other source

The 53 percent of respondents who selected “social media” or “friends and family” from the sources they use to get information about the state’s environmental issues and problems were asked, “From which social media sites do you gather environmental news and information?” As the data indicate, Facebook dominates with Twitter and YouTube a distant second and third.

48%	Facebook
5%	Twitter
3%	YouTube
0.5%	LinkedIn
0.5%	Instagram
0.5%	Reddit
0.5%	Snapchat
0.2%	Tumblr
28%	None
14%	Other (each less than 1/10 of 1 percent)

### **Personal Activity**

Respondents were asked, “Has anything you’ve read or seen about the environment resulted in you doing any of the following?” (The list of items was read to the respondents). As the table below shows, nearly one-third of voters were motivated to sign a petition and donate to an environmental cause based on information they gathered from their information sources. On the other end of the spectrum of activity, one-third admitted they had done none of these things.

35%	Sign a petition
31%	Donate money to an environmental or wildlife cause
27%	Write (or email) a congressperson, senator, or other elected official
25%	Attend a public meeting on town or school affairs
21%	Donate money to a political candidate, party, campaign or organization
18%	Participate in an online discussion about an environmental topic
14%	Attend a political rally or speech
12%	Write a blog or social media post
10%	Become a member of some environmental group

- 9% Volunteer for an environmental campaign
- 8% Serve as an officer of some club or organization
- 6% Work for a political party
- 6% Write a letter to the paper
  
- 1% Run for political office
  
- 33% None

Nearly everyone (91 percent) has “made a personal change in their habits to help the environment such as recycling, using LED lighting, watering their lawn less often or using low-flow faucets,” and one-quarter of Indiana voters (26 percent) has “helped sustain the state’s natural environment as a volunteer,” including 34 percent of 18-to-35-year-olds.



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