

ATTITUDES & OPINIONS ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN ARIZONA

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ASU Morrison Institute
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Attitudes and Opinions About Environmental Issues in Arizona

A representative sample of 800 Arizona 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 Arizona 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 Arizona 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” rises to the top of the list as the most important issue, cited by 43 percent of Arizona 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 one in 10 adults (10 percent).

	<u>Age</u>				<u>Political Party</u>		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>18-35</u>	<u>36-64</u>	<u>65 +</u>	<u>Dem</u>	<u>Ind</u>	<u>Rep</u>
Improving the public education system	43%	53%	42%	35%	50%	45%	35%
Making health care more accessible and affordable	17	14	17	18	22	18	10
Attracting and retaining businesses and jobs	12	10	16	9	5	9	23
Protecting the state’s air and water quality, land use and wildlife	10	11	8	10	13	10	5
Reforming the state’s immigration policies	8	4	5	18	5	4	15
Lowering taxes	5	3	5	6	4	5	6
Improving public safety	4	3	6	2	1	6	5

Addressing the state’s

Gun policies 1 1 1 2 1 3 0

As the table shows, while there are some differences by age and political affiliation (Republicans are more concerned about jobs and immigration than are Democrats, while Democrats are more concerned about education and the environment than are Republicans), the basic order of issue priorities remains relatively 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 were also asked to rank their top three priorities from the above list. Fewer than one-half of the state’s citizens (44 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. Environment ranks third as a top-three choice among the choices provided while “attracting and retaining businesses and jobs” drops to fifth.

	<u>Total</u>
Improving the public education system	74%
Making health care more accessible and affordable	55
Protecting the state’s air and water quality, land use and wildlife	44
Reforming the state’s immigration policies	32
Attracting and retaining businesses and jobs	29
Lowering taxes	22
Improving public safety	22
Addressing the state’s gun policies	11

Nearly all Arizona voters (96 percent) feel the state's "parks, preserves, forests and open spaces" are either "very important" (71 percent) or "somewhat important" (25 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 Arizona 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," 32 percent indicate the issues are "very serious" while 49 percent rate the issues as "serious." Only 17 percent responded "not very serious."

While those 18 to 35 years of age are more likely to see environmental issues as serious, the difference between them and their older counterparts is slight. However, there are significant differences based upon political affiliation. While more than four in 10 registered Democrats (46 percent) see environmental issues as a "very serious" problem only 18 percent of Republicans agree. In fact, 32 percent of registered Republicans indicate environmental issues are "not a very serious problem" compared with just 4 percent of Democrats. Independents straddle the two political parties, 34 percent rate environmental issues as a "very serious" problem while 15 percent say they are "not very serious."

Similarly, about one-third of Arizona voters (35 percent) are "very concerned" about "the state's overall natural environment," 45 percent are "somewhat concerned" and 19 percent "not too concerned." There are no significant differences in opinion among the three age groups analyzed. Women show higher levels of concern (84 percent are "very" or "somewhat concerned") than men (74 percent). As is true for many of the questions asked in this survey differences are greatest comparing registered Democrats (87 percent are "very" or "somewhat concerned") and registered Republicans (68 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."

Sixty-eight percent selected the first choice, "protecting the environment should be given priority." Twenty-two percent selected the second choice while 10 percent said "neither," or simply didn't know. Young adults (74 percent) and women (73 percent) are more likely to make the environmental choice than adults 65 and older (67 percent) and men (62 percent). Again,

differences are not great and all groups favor the environment over economic growth. However, the percentage of Democrats (84 percent) who select the environment over economic growth is significantly higher than among Republicans (46 percent). And, as is true for most questions, the opinions of independents fall between the two major political parties (76 percent).

Regardless of age, sex or political affiliation, Arizona voters generally believe that the air quality in cities and large towns is “good” (33 percent) to “fair” (43 percent). Few rate air quality as “excellent” (4 percent) while nearly one in five rate it as “poor” (19 percent).

The governor and state legislature get only mediocre reviews for their “care of the state’s natural resources” – 3 percent rate it as “excellent”; 25 percent “good”; 38 percent “fair”; and 23 percent “poor.” The remainder say they don’t know. There is clearly a political divide on this issue, however, with 46 percent of Republicans rating the governor and legislature as either excellent (6 percent) or good (40 percent), while registered Democrats rate them at 2 percent and 14 percent, respectively. On the other end of the scale, 74 percent of Democrats rate the governor and legislature either as “fair” (37 percent) or “poor” (37 percent) in “their care for the state’s natural resources,” compared with 43 percent of Republicans (33 percent and 10 percent, respectively).

Nearly six in 10 Arizona registered voters (59 percent) believe “the governor and legislature should require further regulation to reduce greenhouse gases” including 73 percent of adults 18 to 35; 64 percent of women; 80 percent of Democrats; and 64 percent of independents. Republicans are the only subgroup analyzed with fewer than half (35 percent) favoring additional regulation.

Two-thirds of Arizona voters (65 percent) also feel Arizona should do more “to develop alternative energy sources such as solar and wind power.” Again, while there is a slight difference by sex (women are more likely to feel not enough is being done) the big difference is political – 80 percent of Democrats believe more should be done, compared with 49 percent of Republicans. Two-thirds of independents (66 percent) believe the state should do more.

Climate Change

The climate change debate is alive and well in Arizona although, based on responses to the following statements, two-thirds to three-quarters of Arizona voters feel it is, in fact, real, and more should be done to combat it. Respondents were asked whether they “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> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

The federal government needs to do

more to combat climate change	71%	94%	74%	47%	29%	6%	26%	53%
The state government needs to do more to combat climate change	69%	93	74	44	31	7	26	56
Climate change is a made-up problem and does not need to be addressed	21%	9	19	33	79	91	81	67
Climate change is one of the most serious problems facing the world today	65%	90	70	38	35	10	30	62

While political divides are apparent, one-third to one-half of Arizona Republicans see a need to more aggressively address climate change.

Further, three-quarters of Arizona voters (75 percent) believe the earth’s average temperature is rising, including 87 percent of 18-to-35-year-olds; 78 percent of women; 96 percent of Democrats; and 79 percent of independents. Among those least likely to believe the earth’s average temperature is rising are Republicans, with 52 percent believing the average temperature is rising and, to a lesser extent, those 65 years of age and older (69 percent).

And, the pattern persists. Among those voters who believe the earth’s average temperature is rising, eight in 10 (79 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) although, obviously, even among this group the large majority believe climate change is primarily caused by human activity.

There is divided opinion about Arizona’s drought. About four in 10 (41 percent) believe Arizona is in a “long-term” drought, one-third (33 percent) view the drought as “short-term,” and one in five (20 percent) do not believe the state is experiencing a drought. There are no meaningful differences by age category or gender, but the political divide persists. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to view Arizona’s drought as “long-term” (48 percent compared with 32 percent), while Republicans are more likely than Democrats to believe no drought exists (29 percent and 12 percent, respectively).

Among those who believe there is either a long-term or short-term drought, 53 percent believe it is “the result of climate change,” including 74 percent of Democrats, 63 percent of those 18 to 35 years of age, and 59 percent of women. Only 28 percent of Republicans see the drought as the result of climate change.

Only one-third of Arizona voters (34 percent) believe Arizona has “enough water to cover all its needs into the foreseeable future,” with an additional 13 percent saying they “don’t know.” Consequently, more than half (53 percent) believe the state will have a water shortage at some point in the foreseeable future. Republicans are more positive about the state’s water future (45 percent believe there will be enough water) than are Democrats (28 percent), although neither group is optimistic.

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 Arizona voters (77 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 8 percent of Arizona voters.

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.” “Air quality in the state’s cities and large towns” and “the protection of the state’s wildlife” are tied for second. 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 53 percent of Democrats are “very concerned” about greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants, only 16 percent of Republicans show the same level of concern. Three-quarters of registered Democrats (74 percent) are “very concerned” about pollution in the rivers, lakes and reservoirs, compared with 37 percent of registered Republicans and 56 percent of independents. This pattern persists for all environmental issues addressed in this research.

Pollution in the rivers, lakes and reservoirs

55%	Very concerned
36%	Somewhat concerned
9%	Not at all concerned

Air quality in the state’s cities and large towns

45%	Very concerned
44%	Somewhat concerned
11%	Not at all concerned

The protection of the state’s wildlife

45%	Very concerned
42%	Somewhat concerned
13%	Not at all concerned

Greenhouse gas emissions from coal-fired power plants

37%	Very concerned
39%	Somewhat concerned
25%	Not at all concerned

Land and land use policies

31%	Very concerned
47%	Somewhat concerned
22%	Not at all concerned

Pollution from concentrated animal-feeding operations

23%	Very concerned
38%	Somewhat concerned
39%	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 (51 percent of those 65 and older, compared with 25 percent of those age 18 to 35). Meanwhile, the likelihood of selecting a computer-based source decreases by age category (53 percent of those 18 to 35 years of age selected “a local online news site,” compared to only 28 percent of those 65 and older). For “non-news online sites,” 27 percent of 18-to-35-year-olds chose a “non-news online site,” compared to 23 percent of those 65 and older.

55%	TV
36%	A printed local newspaper
43%	A local online news site
34%	Radio
33%	Social media
30%	Friends and family
25%	A non-news online site

20%	Advocacy groups
7%	Or some other source

Those who selected “social media” or “friends and family” as a source 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, respectively.

49%	Facebook
5%	Twitter
3%	YouTube
1%	LinkedIn
1%	Instagram
1%	Reddit
0.3%	Snapchat
26%	None
13%	Other (each less than 1/10 of 1percent)

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 shows, one-third of voters (34 percent) were motivated to sign a petition and/or donate to an environmental cause (29 percent) based on information they gathered from their information sources. On the other end of the spectrum of activity, slightly more than one-third admit they had done none of these things.

34%	Sign a petition
29%	Donate money to an environmental or wildlife cause
23%	Write (or email) a congressperson, senator or other elected official
21%	Attend a public meeting on town or school affairs
20%	Donate money to a political candidate, party, campaign or organization
16%	Participate in an online discussion about an environmental topic

- 14% Attend a political rally or speech
- 13% Write a blog or social media post
- 9% 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
- 4% Write a letter to the paper

- 2% Run for political office

- 35% None

Nearly everyone (94 percent), however, 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.” More than one in five Arizona voters (22 percent) has “helped sustain the state’s natural environment as a volunteer,” including 28 percent of 18-to-35-year-olds.

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