

# Fueled by 'Eco-Anxiety,' Majority in US Believe Climate Crisis Most Crucial Issue Facing Society: Poll



The youth-led Sunrise Movement held a three-day protest in July 2019 outside the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee to demand a climate-specific 2020 debate. (Photo: Sunrise Movement)

By [Jessica Corbett](#), | [Common Dreams](#)

New polling results published Thursday [revealed](#) that a majority of U.S. adults believe climate change is the most important issue facing society, have made an effort to reduce their contribution to the global crisis, and are willing to vote for a candidate based on their position on the topic.

Among those aged 18–34, 47% indicated that “the stress they feel about climate change affects their daily lives.”

The American Psychological Association (APA) survey—conducted in December 2019 by the Harris Poll—comes on the heels of Iowa’s first-in-the-nation caucuses for this year’s presidential race, where entrance polling [showed](#) that the climate crisis was the second-most important issue to caucusgoers, behind healthcare.

According to the online APA poll, 56% of respondents said climate change is the most important issue, 60% have changed a behavior to cut their contribution—such as reducing waste, using renewable energy, and altering transportation or diet choices—and 62% are willing to vote for a political candidate based on their climate position.

The survey showed that people were most motivated to change their behavior based on a desire to preserve the planet for future generations (52%) and after hearing news reports about the climate crisis and its impacts like more devastating extreme weather (43%). APA also found that respondents, particularly those aged 18–34, are stressed about how the planetary emergency impacts their lives.

More than two-thirds of all adults surveyed (68%) said that they have at least a little “eco-anxiety,” which Oxford Dictionaries [defines](#) as “extreme worry about current and future harm to the environment caused by human activity and climate change.” Among those aged 18–34, 47% indicated that “the stress they feel about climate change affects their daily lives.”

In a statement announcing the poll results, APA chief executive officer Arthur C. Evans Jr. [said](#) that “the health, economic, political, and environmental implications of climate change affect all of us. The tolls on our mental health are far-reaching.”

“As climate change is created largely by human behavior,” Evans added, “psychologists are continuing to study ways in

which we can encourage people to make behavioral changes—both large and small—so that collectively we can help our planet.”

*Concern about [#climatechange](#) may be having an impact on [#mentalhealth](#), with 68% of U.S. adults saying they have at least a little “eco-anxiety” and 47% of those age 18-34 saying the stress they feel affects their daily lives.*

*Read the full results: <https://t.co/DcwgCms0vPpic.twitter.com/gGnA9aY80i>*

*– American Psychological Association (@APA) [February 6, 2020](#)*

The number of young American adults stressed about the climate crisis, as captured in the APA’s new survey, could have an impact on upcoming political contests in the United States, including the Democratic presidential primary race and the general election in November.

The nation is still waiting on the final outcome of the Iowa caucuses due to a debacle with collecting and reporting the results. However, the data released so far from 97% of precincts—which are “riddled with inconsistencies and other flaws,” [according to](#) a *New York Times* analysis—[show](#) Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) [leading](#) the popular vote while effectively tied with former South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg when it comes to state delegates.

Entrance polling from Iowa [reported](#) by the *Washington Post* showed that 21% of caucusgoers said climate change was the “most important issue” in the vote. That compared with 42% who said healthcare, 18% who said income inequality, and 13% who said foreign policy. That polling also showed 37% of participants were first-time caucusgoers and the youth voter share [rose](#) a third from 2016.

Responding to those results in a statement Tuesday, the youth-led Sunrise Movement—which [endorsed](#) Sanders last

month—[said](#) that “we don’t yet know everything that happened last night—but we do know this: there is a broad, [widespread mandate for the Green New Deal](#), and Iowans turned out in force last night to make sure presidential candidates don’t forget it.”

“We’re particularly proud of the historic levels of turnout among young people who caucused last night, many of whom were brought into the movement by our efforts to engage them in college classes and high school gyms across the state,” Sunrise said. “The level of youth turnout and concern about climate change in the Iowa entrance polls is incredible. It’s a major mark of success for our Iowa team’s work these past six months. They got 7,000 young people to pledge to vote for the Green New Deal, organized hundreds of volunteers, and canvassed thousands of people across the state.”

Now, all eyes are on New Hampshire, which will hold the nation’s second nominating contest on Feb. 11. The Sunrise Movement took to Twitter Thursday to share a report from *The New Republic* [entitled](#) “The Youth Climate Movement Comes to New Hampshire.”

*New Hampshire is the first primary in the country, and people have been coming from all over the country to help get out the vote.*

*Last weekend organizers knocked on 14,000 doors in New Hampshire for [@BernieSanders](#) and the [#GreenNewDeal](#) <https://t.co/LrxymYoTsw>*

*– Sunrise Movement ☐ (@sunrisemvmt) [February 6, 2020](#)*

As *The New Republic* reported Wednesday:

*Many of the volunteers and organizers spoke of the difficulty balancing urgency and sustainability in building a youth movement. [Climate anxiety](#) can be either a motivating or*

*paralyzing factor. “Sometimes you’re thinking ahead about the future, and then you’re like, Oh, but is that even going to exist then?” said Esther, 16, from New Jersey. “Like, fuck, New York City is going to be underwater in 50 years, according to these reports.”*

Though it takes a personal toll, a sense of urgency may be needed to address the climate crisis, the report noted. “The only time that we have seen substantial change in society,” Dana Fisher, a professor at the University of Maryland who studies the environment and American protest movements, said, “is when there is this extreme sense of risk that either comes from a true disaster or a sense that a disaster is looming.”

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