

CLIMATE CHANGE



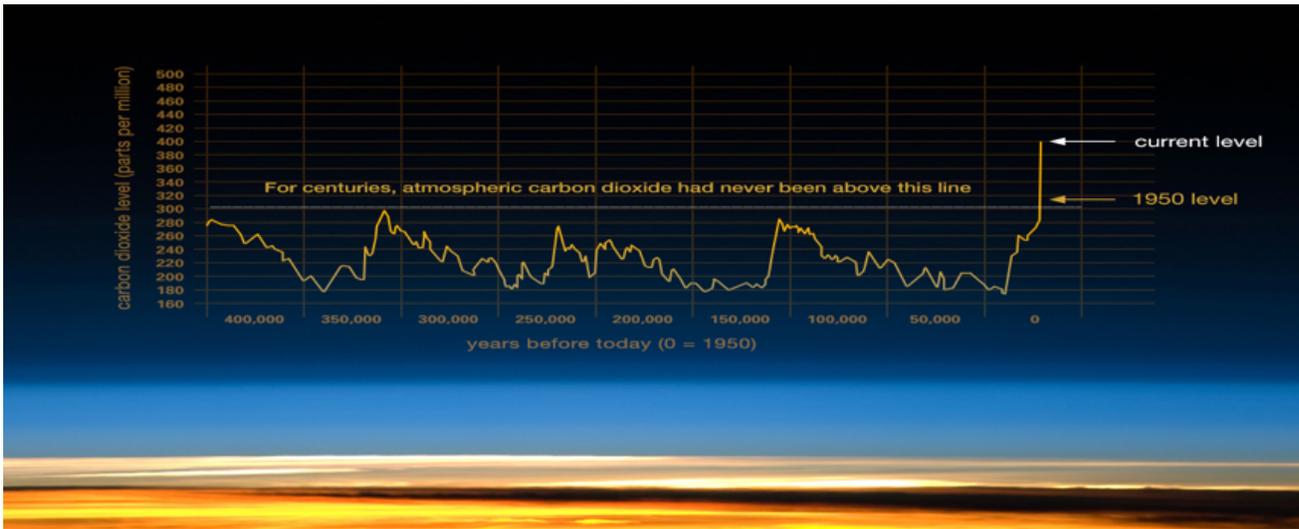
James Madison Center
for Civic Engagement

BACKGROUND

Climate change is an alteration of weather patterns that are observed as a consistent trend over a long period of time. These recent trends can be largely attributed to anthropogenic factors, most notably elevated levels of carbon dioxide present in the atmosphere. Global warming trends can be difficult to monitor due to large fluctuations that occur year to year, yet over long time spans, there have been trends indicating that temperatures are steadily increasing.

WHY DOES THIS ISSUE CONSTITUTE A NEED FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

On average, the planet's surface temperature has increased 1.62 degrees Fahrenheit since the end of the 19th century. The most prominent driving factors are increased carbon dioxide levels and other human-made emissions into the atmosphere. Within the past 35 years, there has been a significant increase in surface temperature. In fact, the five warmest years recorded in history have occurred after 2010. Oceans have absorbed heat from the higher atmospheric temperatures, recording an average increase of 0.4 degrees Fahrenheit since 1969. The overall increase in temperature of the ocean is causing thermal expansion and along with this, ice caps are melting; this combination is generating a larger volume of water present on Earth. These dangers may not appear relevant in comparison to current pressing issues, but once a certain threshold is reached, it is predicted that these changes will occur at a rapid, irreversible rate.



WHAT ARE THE CURRENT PROPOSED POLICIES?

The Green New Deal takes into account the severity of climate change, offering a framework of reforms that would quickly and effectively convert the current economy into a sustainable, environmentally-friendly economy. The goal is to transition to 100% renewable energy by 2030, and the technology currently exists to do so. There is an emphasis on moving away from fossil fuels as a large source of energy and instead using renewable energy and conservation. The Green New Deal would also directly provide 16 million jobs related to sustainable energy. This initiative ideally would correct much of the damage created by human emissions, but requires an extremely large scale, rapid mobilization in order to be most effective.



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PROS OF GREEN NEW DEAL

- Reduce air and water pollution, creating a more sustainable environment
- Reduce carbon emissions and fossil fuels
- Prevent the Earth from irreversible damage caused by human-emissions
- Very minimal alternative proposals right now to reduce the damage that is currently occurring on Earth
- Creates more job opportunities in sustainable energy
- Non-binding, passed proposal does not make it a law

CONS OF GREEN NEW DEAL

- Many believe this plan is too "idealistic" and would be extremely costly
- Changes will impose on the lives of many people
- Goals are outlined, but the pathway to achieve them is unspecific
- Currently, clean energy provides less than half of the energy humans use & there isn't a transmission infrastructure
- People working in fossil fuel industries will lose their jobs

WHAT ARE DIFFERENT POSITIONS, ARGUMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE ISSUE?

In order for policy changes to occur, there needs to be a clear solution, a clear pathway, and a clear reason on why this should happen. Low carbon economy requires a lot of people to change the way that they are currently living. Citizens have actually voted against eco friendly policy change in the past. For example, the carbon tax has been voted down twice by citizens in the State of Washington. Some people believe that creating a sense of urgency is key, while others believe there is no need for current change. There are also people who believe this issue is too large to be handled by the current government.

WHO OPPOSES GOVERNMENT ACTION AND WHY?

Those who oppose government action are not necessarily disregarding the negative effects that humans have on Earth, neither are they ignoring the fact that global warming is occurring. As of right now, there is evidence that the world is getting warmer and that something needs to be done, but where the controversy lies is how this should be done. Those who support the Green New Deal tend to believe that this issue is urgent and rapid, efficient action is required in order to prevent the damage from becoming irreversible. On the other hand, those who oppose the Green New Deal tend to believe that this idea is too idealistic and unplanned to effectively enact these changes. To begin with, the price to enact all these reforms in a rapid mobilization effort would be extremely costly; there is not an exact dollar amount but it has been estimated up to \$100 trillion dollars. Additionally, there are no specific steps to reach these goals as of right now. There has been change recently to create more green emissions; for example, natural gas has replaced coal in large amounts. Extreme government reform is typically where the problem lies with public opinion and the New Green Deal.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What creates policy inaction?
- Do you think the New Green Deal is feasible? Is there a better possible solution?
- What is the best way to inform citizens on the severity of this issue so that climate change can be prioritized?
- What steps can each of us take to address this issue?
- Do you think a top-down or bottom-up approach would be most effective in initiating change?

RESOURCES

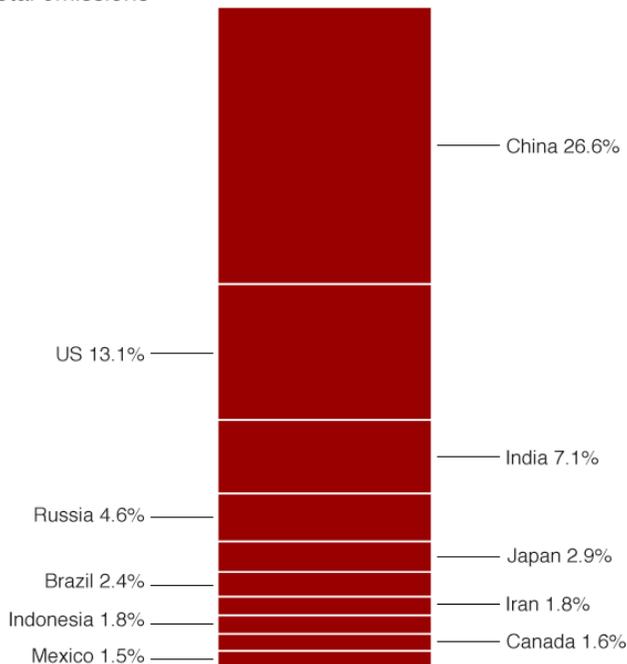
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: <https://www.ipcc.ch/>

NOAA: <https://www.noaa.gov/education/resource-collections/climate-education-resources>

NASA: <https://climate.nasa.gov/>

World's top greenhouse gas emitters

The top 10 greenhouse gas emitters make up 60% of total emissions

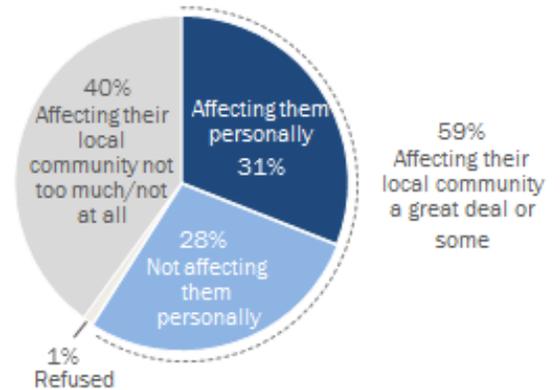


Source: EC Joint Research Centre/PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency



A majority of U.S. adults say climate change affects their local area; 31% say it affects them personally

% of U.S. adults who say the effects of global climate change are ...



Source: Survey conducted March 27-April 9, 2018.

"Majorities See Government Efforts to Protect the Environment as Insufficient"

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