

PRESS RELEASE
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Youth Climate Study Indicates Supermajority of Young Americans are Distressed about Climate Change and Want Bolder Action from Government and Corporations

85% report being worried about climate change, with distress running high across political spectrum

NEW YORK, NY October 17, 2024 – A new peer-reviewed academic study published in *The Lancet Planetary Health*, a leading international scientific journal, has found widespread distress among young Americans about climate change and a strong desire across the political spectrum for governmental and corporate action.

The study led by researchers affiliated with NYU Grossman School of Medicine, College of Wooster (Ohio), Stanford University, Suffolk University (Massachusetts), Utah State University, University of Washington, George Washington University, and other national and international partners, is the largest survey of its kind, with nearly 16,000 respondents aged 16-25 from all 50 states. Key findings from the survey, which was conducted between July and November 2023, include:

- **[On overall worry]** 85% of respondents reported being worried about the impact of climate change on people and the planet (96% of respondents who identify as Democrats, 86% independent or other, 74% Republican), including over 75% of respondents in every state and state cluster. In almost all states and state clusters, at least 50% reported being very or extremely worried.
- **[On emotional impact]** More than 60% say that climate change makes them feel anxious, powerless, afraid, sad, and angry. Over one third (38%) say their feelings about climate change affect their ability to function daily.
- **[On the future]** 76% reported that the future is frightening. The majority report that their concerns about climate change are affecting their future life decisions such as where to live (69%) and whether to have children (52%). 66% believe that climate change will threaten their health.
- **[On what should be done]** 77% of respondents want the U.S. government to carry out a plan to prevent the worst impacts of climate change; 77% want world governments to collaborate to execute a global plan. There is similarly strong consensus around corporations and the education system taking action.
- **[On the effect of severe weather events]** Distress and desire for action increased as respondents said their area of residence was affected by more types of climate-related severe weather events. This was true for respondents of all political party identification, suggesting that as people perceive impact from more climate-related weather events, distress and desire for action will increase across the political spectrum.

“Given the environmental crises happening all around, these findings should not be surprising. Nonetheless, it is stunning to find such high levels of distress, and desire and plans for action, in young people across the country, in every state and of every political stripe,” said **lead author Eric Lewandowski, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, NYU Grossman School of Medicine.** “These findings represent a call to action from leaders in government and industry to address climate change with the urgency it demands. Most fundamentally, they are a call, to everyone concerned with the well-being and mental health of young people, for empathy - a willingness to acknowledge the emotional burden and consequences on young people, to hear them, and to accept responsibility to act.”

“The findings from this study corroborate what I often hear from young people in my roles as clinician, researcher, and educator - youth are worried about climate change, disappointed with the action of government so far, and making choices about the future that are driven by anticipated climate impacts,” said **co-author McKenna Parnes, Ph.D., Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Washington.** “With youth on the frontlines of the climate crisis, adult decision makers have a responsibility to involve young people in climate decisions that will affect their lives and the lives of future generations. We know from past research that empowering youth to take action and participate in policy-making has benefits for mental health. Data from this survey further highlight the importance of addressing the emotional and mental health consequences of the climate crisis, and centering youth voice in this process.”

“With the release of this nation-wide survey of climate distress in nearly 16,000 US youth, the largest of its kind, we now have data to support what many of us have been seeing with our own eyes: young people in America are struggling emotionally and psychologically with the effects of climate change,” said **co-author Lise Van Susteren, M.D., Psychiatrist, Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences.** “They are afraid and angry and doubting their future prospects. As we decry the mental health crisis in America’s youth, and search for answers to address it, this survey helps to spotlight climate change as a significant source of distress. These findings show that elected officials, health care professionals, faith leaders, teachers and parents all have a role to play in responding.”

	Full Sample (n=15,793)		Democrat (n=4,388) ^a		Independent/ Other (n=5,055)		Republican (n=2,477)	
<i>How worried, if at all, are you about the impacts of climate change on people and the planet?</i>	13364/15693	85.0%	4034/ 4362	92.6%	4337/ 5022	86.5%	1787/ 2453	73.5%
<i>How much, if at all, does climate change make you feel the following?</i>	
Anxious	10580/15732	65.8%	3421/ 4375	77.2%	3443/ 5038	67.2%	1332/ 2464	53.7%
Powerless	10521/ 15726	65.8%	3322/ 4373	75.5%	3429/ 5034	66.8%	1381/ 2465	55.3%
Afraid	10402/ 15724	65.1%	3398/ 4370	77.2%	3375/ 5034	65.3%	1302/ 2463	51.9%
Sad	9981/ 15707	62.4%	3248/ 4362	73.5%	3274/ 5030	64.1%	1242/ 2464	51.1%
Angry	9773/ 15721	61.3%	3248/ 4367	74.5%	3177/ 5036	61.6%	1199/ 2468	49.2%
Despair	8219/ 15706	51.2%	2845/ 4372	64.8%	2707/ 5032	52.2%	968/ 2461	39.4%
Ashamed	7487/ 15706	47.3%	2452/ 4358	56.8%	2395/ 5031	46.3%	958/ 2467	39.0%
Grief	7578/ 15697	46.9%	2588/ 4364	58.5%	2504/ 5032	48.5%	926/ 2459	38.4%
Depressed	7338/ 15727	45.5%	2541/ 4376	57.4%	2468/ 5034	48.2%	860/ 2464	33.8%
Guilty	7147/ 15703	44.6%	2360/ 4366	52.4%	2317/ 5030	43.8%	843/ 2461	33.6%
Indifferent	5610/ 15676	35.5%	1335/ 4359	30.9%	1872/ 5023	37.3%	1044/ 2462	41.5%
Optimistic	4392/ 15707	29.2%	1144/ 4367	27.7%	1409/ 5029	29.6%	827/ 2465	35.6%

[†] All proportion estimates are weighted according to census estimates for age, sex, race, and ethnicity

Full sample and state-level results can also be viewed in an interactive graphical appendix to the publication at: www.us-climate-emotions-map.org. Please note that the map graphic cannot be used to make direct statistical comparisons between states.

This survey follows [a 2021 survey from researchers](#) published in *The Lancet Planetary Health* which found climate anxiety and dissatisfaction with government responses are widespread in children and young people in ten countries throughout the world and impact their daily functioning.

"I often hear adults say that our generation, Gen Z, will fix what they have broken. What they may not understand is the pressure this puts on all of us," said **Zion Walker, student and member of the Climate Mental Health Network's Gen Z Advisory Board**. "Yes, we are taking steps and fighting for the future, but many of us are overwhelmed by the daily reality of climate disasters—waking up to news of wildfires engulfing homes and hurricanes taking lives. This is our reality, and it's heavy. The climate crisis isn't just a future problem, it's affecting us right now, detrimentally."

Learn more about the study [here](#). To interview the researchers who worked on this project, contact brandon@brandonlorenz.net.