

Changing the Message and the Messenger on Climate Change

People respond to some threats but not others. There are several compelling reasons why climate change, despite posing so many threats, has not prompted many people to take action. Despite an unprecedented frequency and degree of floods, droughts, wildfires, heatwaves and hurricanes, to many, the threat still seems too distant in the future. Depending upon where one lives, it may also seem geographically distant as well. Only 43% of respondents in a recent [Resources for the Future \(RFF\)](#) poll said that their own county's weather patterns seemed more unstable in recent years. A recent [Yale University poll](#) produced a similar result, indicating that almost half of Americans (47%) believe that global warming will not harm them personally, or if it does, 'just a little'. These surveys show that a large portion of the population still does not see climate change as a personal threat and therefore experience no personal motivation to take action.

Even those who perceive a potential personal threat may feel powerless to act because they view the scale and complexity of action to be overwhelming. This helpless feeling includes wondering if their individual actions could make a difference. Their consequent inaction is not unlike the decision many make not to vote. Finally, many may fail to act because they perceive climate solutions to be too costly, lower performing or otherwise objectionable.

We can do better

We know the relative power and efficacy of certain messages. This is the backbone behind marketing – it is why we choose to buy what we buy. Most of the climate messaging has been primarily about its negative consequences. Fear is an ineffective tool for motivating personal action and scare tactics don't work even though it seems that they should if we want people to take action. Impacts are better understood when they relate to local conditions that personally affect individuals and communities. And actions can best be motivated by using simple, positive and empowering messages. Such messages can be exciting – displaying innovative technology that is clean, often more powerful or effective and less costly than the alternatives. Or they can be connective– enabling people to connect with others in their community or interest groups and facilitating participation in a powerful social movement.

The delivery mechanism, or the messenger, is also important. We are often motivated by people we trust, and messages can also come from different sources – TV shows, movies, YouTube and games among others. Using these platforms, it is possible to make taking action economically rewarding – providing economic value, such as retail rewards, for qualifying actions. Or they can be performance-oriented – allowing people to experience the joys of constructive competition towards a common goal (e.g., much as charity auctions or other fundraising strategies stimulate competition).

We know we have work to do

Recent polling confirms that a large portion of the US population (above 40%) don't believe that climate change will harm them over the next 25 years and more than a quarter (28%) believe that it will actually benefit them. While there are regional differences in these perspectives, the numbers or people that don't believe global warming will harm them are dispersed across the country, with a few hotspots. The maps below show the percent by county and by congressional district. There are few counties in which more than 50% of the population believes that global warming will harm them and there are many more in which less than 40% believe it will harm them.

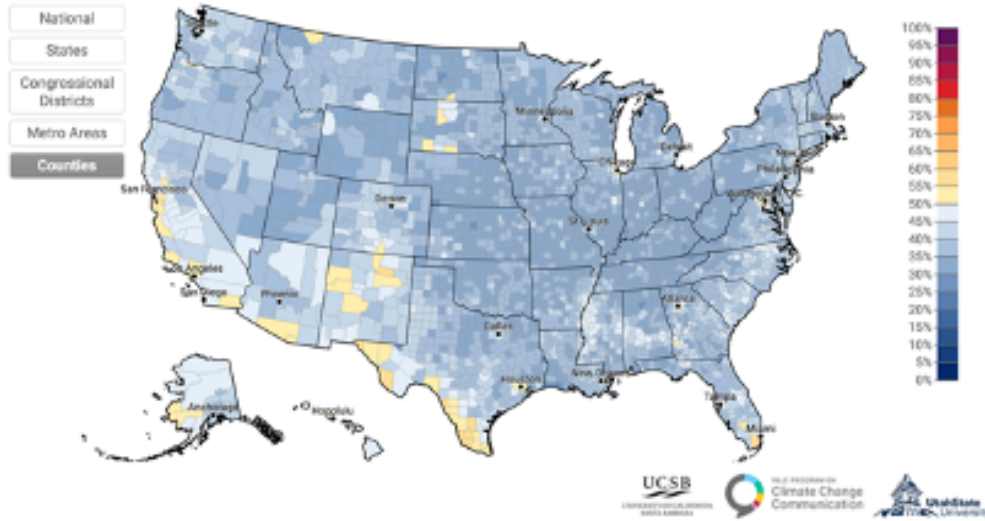
Likewise, there are many congressional districts in which less than 40% of the people don't believe global warming will harm them. There are 145 congressional districts and 28 states that fall below 40%.

Even though these districts and states represent less than 25% of the U.S. population, they are represented by one-third of the representatives in the House and 56 of the 100 Senators. If people don't believe climate change will harm them, they won't take action, nor will they pressure their representatives to do anything.

Estimated % of adults who think global warming will harm them personally (43%), 2020

Select Question: Absolute Value

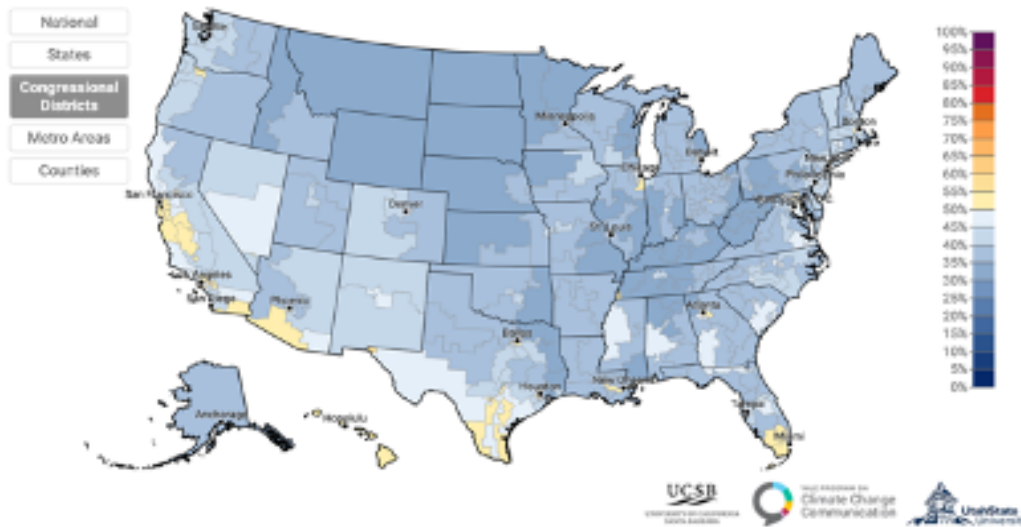
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If we are going to change attitudes, we need a different approach to getting the word out. This is Earthshot's™ core mission. Over 65% of American adults say they play video games, and the current number is likely higher now as COVID has driven much of life indoors. Gaming spans all age groups - from gen-Zrs to baby boomers. People can take away many different messages from playing games. We are creating innovative and exciting games that people will want to play. The games and experiences will display exciting opportunities that new technologies bring and show how tackling climate change can improve their quality of life - today.

Join us at Earthshot™ as we inspire people to take action. <https://www.earthshot.us/>

Some fun reading

Rachel Becker. Why scare tactics won't stop climate change: Doomsday scenarios don't inspire action, *The Verge*, Jul 11, 2017

<https://www.theverge.com/2017/7/11/15954106/doomsday-climate-science-apocalypse-new-york-magazine-response>

P.S. Hart, and Lauren Feldman. Threat without efficacy? Climate change on US network news. *Sci. Commun.* 36, 2014

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1075547013520239>

Jennifer Marlon, Brittany Bloodhart, Matthew Ballew, Justin Rolfe-Redding, Connie Roser-Renouf, Anthony Leiserowitz & Edward Maibach. How Hope and Doubt Affect Climate Change Mobilization, *Front. Commun.*, 21 May 2019 <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2019.00020/full>

Saffron O'Neill and Sophie Nicholson-Cole. Fear Won't Do It": Promoting Positive Engagement With Climate Change Through Visual and Iconic Representations, *Sci. Commun.* 30, 2009

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1075547008329201>

Diane Osgood and Daniel Aronson. Do consumers reward companies for their climate leadership?, *Greenbiz.com*, August 2020

<https://www.greenbiz.com/article/do-consumers-reward-companies-their-climate-leadership>

Adele Peters. [5 Ways To Convince People To Actually Do Something About Climate Change](#)
Fast Company, August 2015

[Pew Research Center](#), 2018

[Resources for the Future poll](#)

Elke Weber. Experience-Based and Description-Based Perceptions of Long-Term Risk: Why Global Warming does not Scare us (Yet). *Climatic Change* 77, 2006.

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10584-006-9060-3>

[Yale University poll](#)