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Houston cares about climate change: policy preferences and partisan gaps

The Greater Houston area has experienced more frequent natural disasters—often associated with climate change—such as hurricanes, flooding, and extreme heat. Our recent poll reveals that most residents are concerned, believe the impacts of climate change are already being felt, and worry even more about the effects of natural disasters on future generations. While views differ along partisan lines, Houstonians broadly support policies aimed at enhancing energy efficiency, with less backing for strategies like carbon capture and storage.

SPACE CITY PANEL

Center for Public Policy
Hobby School of Public Affairs

Key Takeaways

1. **Houstonians acknowledge climate change is happening:** Only 3.7% of respondents deny it. Two out of three Houstonians think that climate change affects future generations, and 57.7% identify the oil and gas industry as one of the main culprits.
2. **Perceptions vary by party alignment:** There is a significant divide over the causes of climate change, with almost half of Democrats stating it is caused by human activities versus 13.3% of Republicans.
3. **Support for policy interventions:** Regardless of political views, respondents support efficiency-enhancing policies, such as improving industrial facilities and energy infrastructure, which curb carbon emissions without eliminating reliance on fossil fuels. Preferences of respondents who don't identify with either major party identified align closer to those of Democrats.
4. **Creating more urban green spaces is viewed favorably:** 67.6% consensus that more green space does more good than harm for the Greater Houston area, compared to other climate change-related policies.

Over the past 15–20 years, the Greater Houston area has endured a steady rise in federally declared disasters, ranging from major hurricanes like Harvey in 2017 to severe floods, winter storms, and wildfires. These repeated events have underscored the region's vulnerability and highlighted the urgent need for stronger infrastructure, flood protection, and emergency response systems.

The year 2025 marks five years since the City of Houston released its first ever Climate Action Plan (CAP) (City of Houston Mayor's Office, 2020). The CAP, overseen by the Office of Recovery and Resilience, was part of the Resilient Houston strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, and improve urban resilience. The CAP focuses on four main target areas: transportation, energy transition, building optimization, and material management. A two-year progress update from the plan in 2022 highlighted some progress, including a 37% drop in emissions since 2005 and 92% of municipal facilities powered by renewable energy (City of Houston Mayor's Office, 2022).

In light of these ongoing challenges, the University of Houston's Hobby School of Public Affairs has designed a module of the **SPACE City Panel** to track the evolution of Houstonians' views and attitudes on climate change–which is linked to the higher incidence of natural disasters and extreme weather events–and the policies they believe can help mitigate these effects. This report presents findings from the second wave of the panel, showing how residents understand the risks and the types of interventions they see as most effective in safeguarding their community's future.

Methodology

Sample & data collection. *SPACE City Panel, Wave 2, Sep. 2025*; $N = 1{,}573$; mode: *online*. *MOE*. $\pm 2\%$.
Weights. *Post-stratified to age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, county*. Missing demographics imputed.
Exclusions. *Skipped* responses excluded from figures and analyses unless otherwise noted.

Climate Change Views

Climate has been a pressing challenge for communities, with far-reaching consequences ranging from rising global temperatures and shifting precipitation patterns to increasingly extreme weather events. These events, particularly in cities like Houston, threaten natural systems as well as the health, safety, and livelihoods of residents.

The second wave of the SPACE City panel survey asked respondents how much they think climate change harms both themselves personally and future generations.

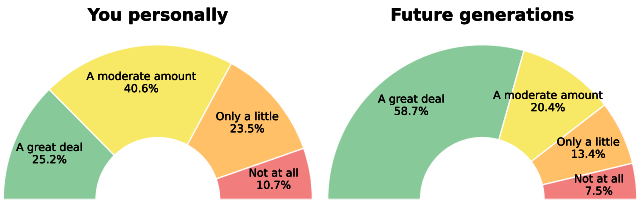

Figure 1 How much do you think climate change will harm you personally and future generations?

In general, the majority of respondents think that climate change is harming them personally as well as future generations, though future generations are perceived to be affected to a greater extent. Almost two in three Houstonians (58.7%) say that climate change harms future generations a great deal, compared to 25.2% who believe it harms themselves a great deal (see Figure 1).

We also asked respondents to indicate the statement they most agreed with regarding the causes of climate change: is it mostly caused by human activities; caused by natural changes in the environment; caused by both; climate change is not happening; or not sure/do not have enough information. We find that 86.8% of respondents selected

the first three statements that presume climate change is happening in contrast to 3.7% (58 of 1,569 respondents) who think it is not happening and 9.5% who are not sure or feel they do not have enough information. From the majority of respondents who accept climate change is happening, 13.9% think it is mostly caused by natural changes in the environment, 32.6% think that climate change is mostly caused by human activities, and 40.3% think that climate change is mostly caused by a combination of both human activities and natural changes in the environment (Figure 2).

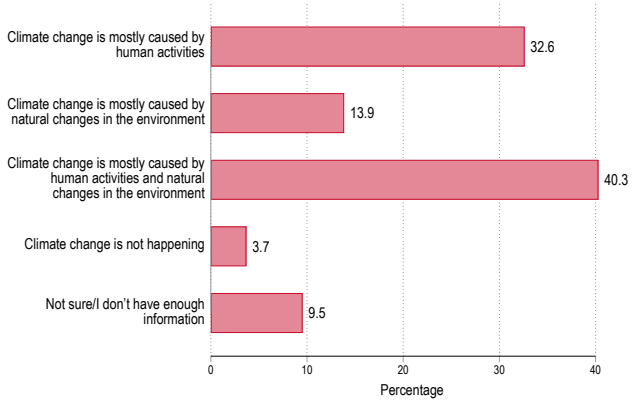

Figure 2 Please indicate which of the following statements you most agree with.

Activities such as deforestation, agriculture, oil and gas operations, energy and transportation industries, and commercial activities are the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions according to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In the United States, an estimated 28% of greenhouse emissions come from transportation, 25% from electric power, 23% from industry, 13% from residential and commercial activity, and 10% from agriculture (United Nations).

To understand how respondents view responsibility for climate change, we asked them, assuming climate change is happening, how responsible they think various entities are. Figure 3 shows that the top entities considered very responsible are the oil and gas industry (57.7%) and the governments of developed countries (51.1%).

These two categories are followed by the coal industry (48.3%), transportation and industry in general (47.5%), governments of developing countries (40.4%), and individual consumption and behavior (34.1%). Finally, the meat and dairy industry (25.2%) was considered the least responsible, with 19.4% of respondents saying it is not responsible at all.

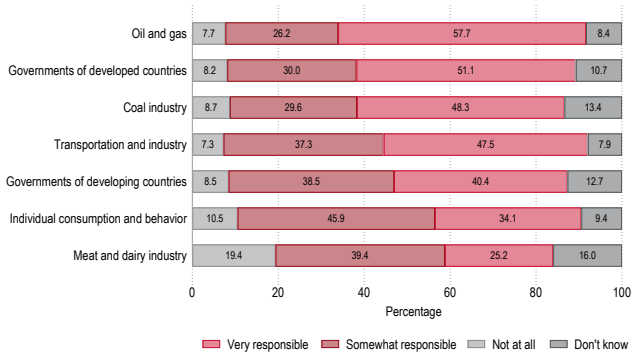

Figure 3 Now, assuming that climate change is happening, how responsible or not responsible for climate change do you think each of the following entities are?

When it comes to how others view the urgency of climate change, respondents think that those less concerned about climate change include people older than themselves and family members (Figure 4). In contrast, they believe that younger people, their friends, and people in the United States are the most concerned.

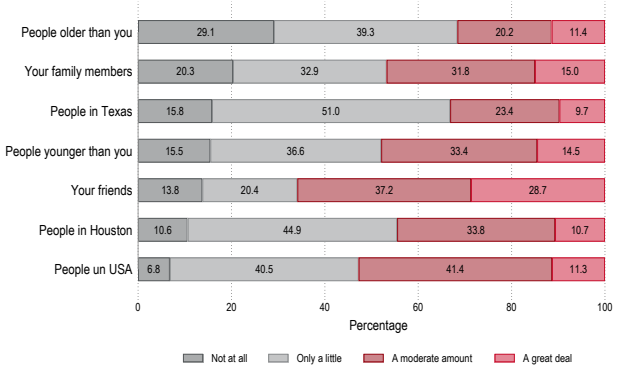

Figure 4 Generally speaking, how concerned do you think members of the following groups are about climate change?

Partisan Gaps

Partisan differences in perceptions about climate change are large. Public opinion survey data consistently show that Democrats are far more likely than Republicans to acknowledge climate change and support policies to mitigate it (Pew Research Center, 2024). Recent opposing climate agendas across administrations have widened this divide, altering how Americans perceive scientific evidence, climate policies, and solutions.

When breaking down responses by partisan alignment, presented in Figure 2, almost half (48.4%) of Democrats in the Greater Houston Area think climate change is mostly caused by human activities compared to only 13.3% of Republi-

cans (Figure 5). The gap is smaller–less than one percentage point–when it comes to those who think it is caused by both human activities and natural changes. However, only 9.3% of the Democrats think climate change is caused mainly by natural changes in the environment, compared to one-fourth (24.8%) of the Republicans. There is also a higher percentage of Republicans who think climate change is not happening (12.9%) compared to 0% of Democrats.

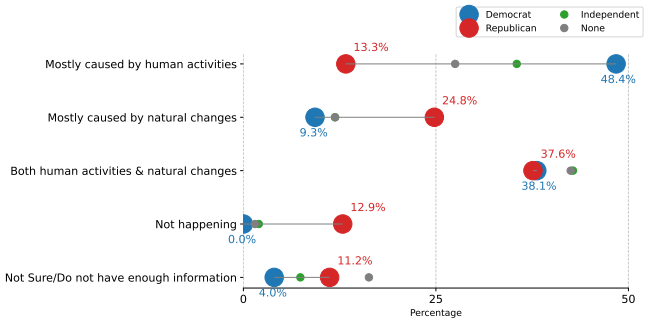

Figure 5 Please indicate which of the following statements you most agree with.

Environmental Policies

Achieving carbon neutrality has been a global priority in the fight against climate change since the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015, according to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. To reach this goal, countries and organizations have proposed and advanced initiatives that focus on reducing carbon emissions in key sectors such as energy and transportation, while promoting the adoption of renewable energy sources (e.g., wind and solar) and the use of electric vehicles. Additionally, strategies for carbon capture and storage are being developed to directly remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, utilizing both technological and nature-based approaches.

Respondents were asked about their beliefs regarding policies that could help reduce carbon emissions while still using some fossil fuels (Figure 6).

Generally, we observe significant partisan differences in perceptions of carbon reduction strategies. Democrats consistently show higher support for all measures, especially efficiency improvements and cleaner fuels, while Republicans are less supportive of all options, especially carbon capture. We also find that Independents and non-affiliated respondents in the Greater Houston area typically align closer to Democrats.

Figure 6 also shows that over half of Democrats support most of the initiatives, while less than half of Republicans do.

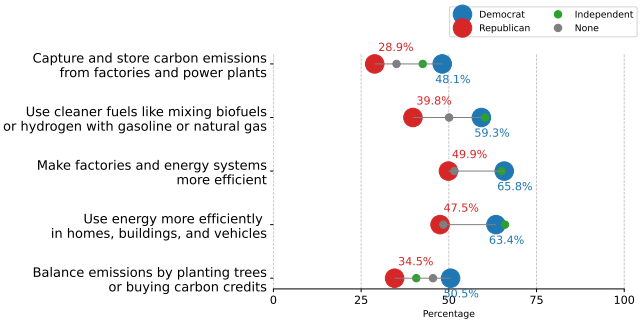

Figure 6 Some people believe we can reduce carbon emissions while still using fossil fuels. Which of the following ideas do you think would help reduce carbon emissions while still using some fossil fuels?

For both parties, we find slightly less support for *capturing and storing carbon emissions from factories and power plants* (48.1% of Democrats and 28.9% of Republicans) and the highest support for *making factories and energy systems more efficient*(65.8% of Democrats and 49.9% of Republicans). Independent voters generally align with Democrats while non-affiliated voters generally align closer to republicans on efficiency-related policies. Both Independent and non-affiliated differ from Republicans and Democrats in views about *balancing emissions by planting trees or buying carbon credits* and *carbon capture*.

When we asked about specific policies aimed at reducing the effects of climate change, Figure 7, we find that most respondents consider the proposed policies under consideration to do more good than harm, or have both positive and negative effects. Few respondents think the policies do more harm or say they do not know.

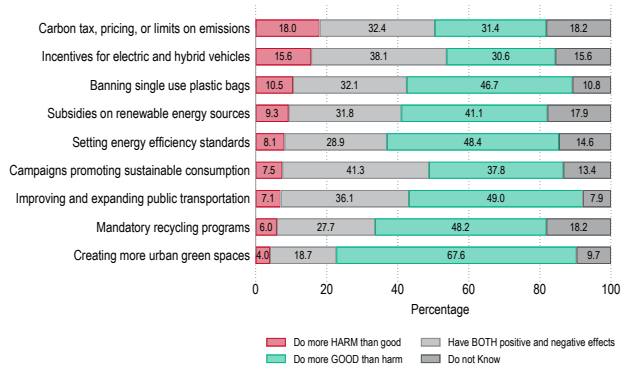

Figure 7 Do you think the following policies aimed at reducing the effects of climate change generally do more good than harm for the Greater Houston Area?

The policy option with the largest share of respondents (41.3%) thinking it has both positive and negative effects is *campaigns promoting sustainable consumption*. Among the

policies suggested, those considered to do more harm than good are *carbon tax, pricing, or limits on emissions* (18.0%), *incentives for electric and hybrid vehicles* (15.6%), and *banning single-use plastic bags*.

The policy with the greatest consensus is *creating more urban green spaces* with 67.6% support, followed by *improving and expanding public transportation* (49% support), *setting energy efficiency standards* (48.4% support), and *mandatory recycling programs* (48.2% support).

Conclusion

A year after the Greater Houston region was hit by back-to-back extreme weather events—a derecho and Hurricane Beryl—and as the region seeks to lead in carbon solutions and energy investments, it is crucial to understand public opinion about climate change and potential solutions. Data indicate that Houstonians overwhelmingly accept that climate change is happening, with only 3.7% of respondents denying that it is happening, and two-thirds believing its effects will impact future generations. Three-fourths of the respondents view climate changes as caused by human activities or by both human activities and natural changes in the environment. Greater Houston area residents are concerned about climate change but perceive some groups as less concerned than others (e.g., older generations, family members). When it comes to assigning responsibility, almost three-fifths of respondents identified the oil and gas industry.

Findings from this wave of the SPACE City panel suggest that, although political affiliation appears to shape beliefs about the causes and responsibilities for climate change, policies promoting efficiency and visible community benefits have the best chance of garnering bipartisan support in the Greater Houston Area. These trends are reflected in the recent Texas legislative session. During the 2025 session, lawmakers passed bills aimed at strengthening the state's power grid and expanding the reliable energy supply. However, proposed legislation targeting renewable energy development, such as bills requiring new wind and solar installations paired with reliable backup power sources, did not advance in the Senate and ultimately failed to pass (Ramos, 2025).

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