

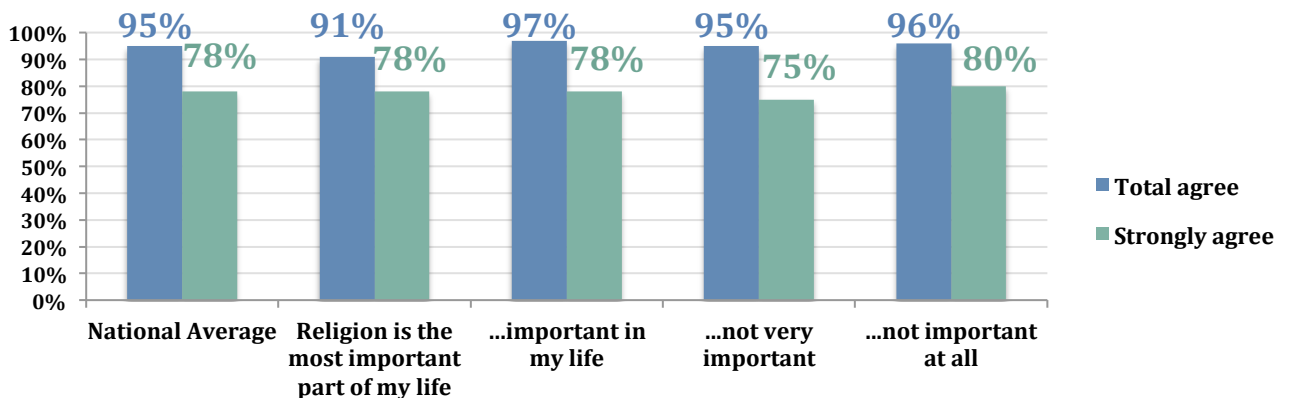
Finding Common Ground: Over 95% of Americans Agree We Have a Moral Responsibility To Be Good Stewards of Nature

Our daily news is flooded with stories on the myriad of ways America is divided, causing us to lose sight of our commonality. Climate change is a topic notoriously rife with polarized political viewpoints. But the gaps in opinion and support are narrowing, and alignment on the issue is on the rise. ecoAmerica decided to explore a key factor thought to influence climate attitudes—religion—in the pursuit of common ground. In their **August 2017 American Climate Perspectives Survey** ecoAmerica asked respondents to categorize themselves by religious conviction, and the following are the findings.

ecoAmerica found that over 95% of Americans, spanning religious conviction, agree (78% strongly agree) we have a moral responsibility to be good stewards of nature. Significant numbers of respondents also reported being affected by heat waves, extreme weather, and increased pests. This indicates that stewardship of nature, and concern about climate impacts, are common ground attitudes, rooted in both American and religious values. These findings illustrate avenues for America to explore in building common cause and support for climate solutions.

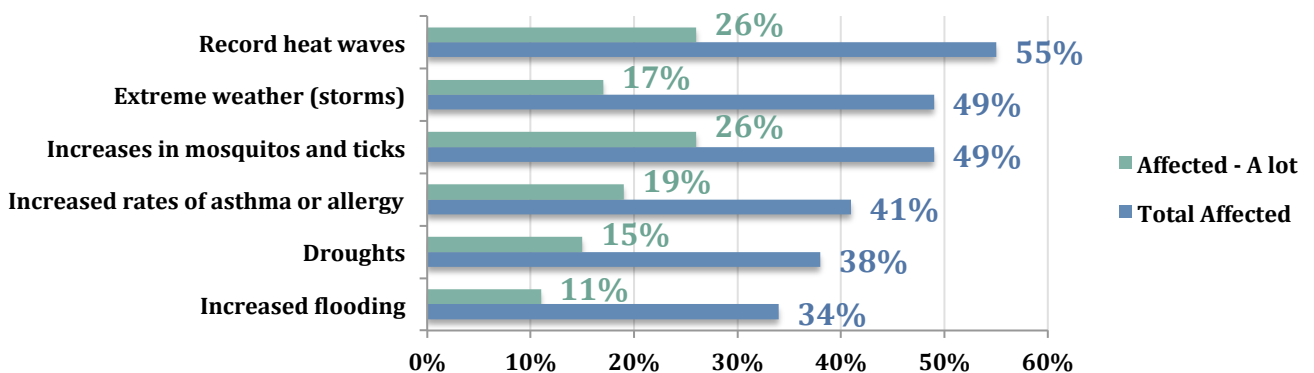
I believe we have a moral responsibility to be good stewards of nature/our natural world.

836 respondent(s), select one, % Total Agree vs. Strongly agree, how important religion is in their life



For each of the following issues, please indicate how much they are personally affecting you or your community.

836 respondent(s), select one, % Total Affected vs. % A lot



An Opportunity for Faith Leadership on Climate

Over half (57%) of the respondents reported religion as “an important” or “the most important” part of their life, so ecoAmerica decided to take a closer look at climate awareness and attitudes of these respondents.

When asked if they noticed more severe local weather over the past several years, respondents reported results with double-digit variances. Slightly more than half of the respondents who considered religion to be the most important part of their lives reported noticing more severe weather or changing seasonal weather patterns vs. nearly three quarters of respondents who say religion is not important at all.

Have you noticed more severe weather or changing seasonal weather patterns where you live over the last several years? 836 respondent(s). select one, by religious affiliation

	Yes	No	Not Sure
Religion is the most important part of my life	56%	32%	11%
Religion is an important part of my life	64%	27%	9%
Religion is not a very important part of my life	74%	19%	7%
Religion is not important at all in my life	73%	21%	6%

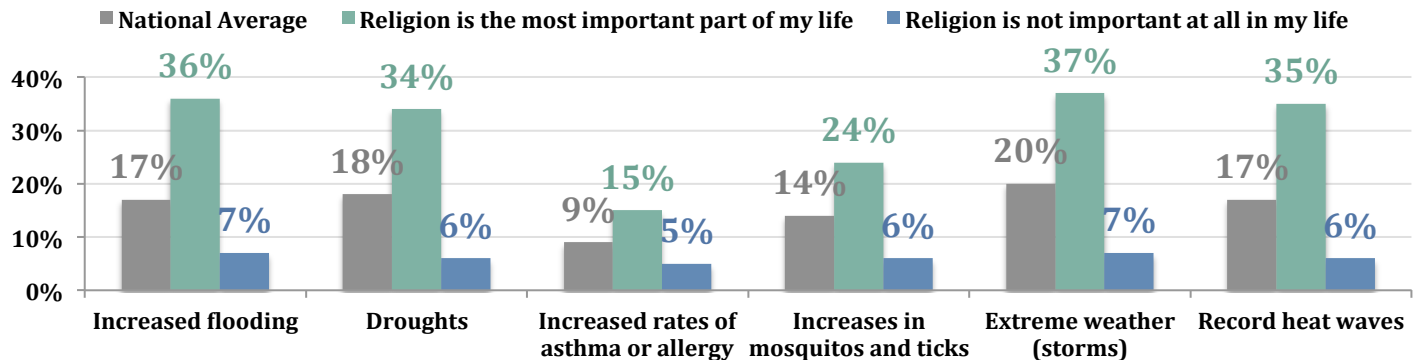
For Americans that consider religion to be the most important part of their life, over one-third say extreme storms, record heat waves, flooding, and droughts are caused by God’s will, with very few linking these impacts to pollution caused by humans. On the contrary, well over half of Americans that say religion is not an important part of their life at all attribute these climate impacts to human-caused pollution.

These findings indicate an opportunity for faith leaders to ensure their moral leadership on climate involves education and engagements, to help their congregants make the climate and weather connection, and to reverse the sentiment that belief in climate is at odds with their faith. “Climate science has been very deliberately framed as an alternate religion,” says Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, who directs Texas Tech’s Climate Science Center and is an Evangelical who has engaged deeply with faith communities around the issue of climate science along with her husband who is a pastor. “Very cleverly, this issue of climate change has been framed as one of false prophets versus true believers.”ⁱ

Reverend Jim Antal, Conference Minister and President of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ, reflected on these findings “When people of faith led the civil rights movement in the 60s, it wasn’t the case that every churchgoer in America was supportive of the cause. In fact, many clergy who spoke their conscience from their pulpit quickly learned that not all their parishioners agreed. But they also found that by speaking out, they were able to awaken the conscience of many,” he said. “As this survey shows, our pews are filled with churchgoers who still need to be convinced that God’s creation – our common home – is in jeopardy. When church is faithful, it is speaking truth and awakening conscience. Science is doing its part – there is no scientific debate about the reality of human caused climate change. While many church leaders are witnessing to this truth, this survey makes clear that God’s creation is crying out for additional effective witnesses. Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and many Protestant denominational leaders have provided outspoken leadership. It’s time to bring this message to every congregation.”

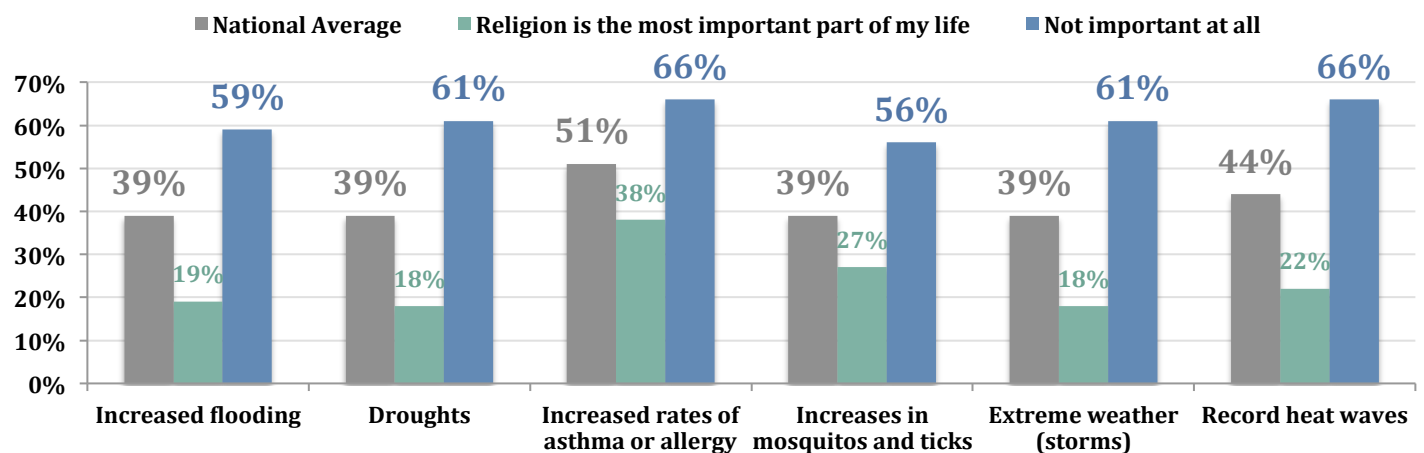
God's Will causes of the following problems:

836 respondent(s). select one, % **God's Will**, National Average vs. Religion is the most important part of my life vs. Religion is not important at all



Human-caused pollution causes of the following problems:

836 respondent(s). select one, **Human-caused pollution**, National Average vs. Religion is the most important part of my life vs. Religion is not important at all



Methodology

ecoAmerica designed and fielded this survey. It was conducted online from July 5 – July 9, 2017 using Survey Monkey. The nationally representative sample of 836 adults was drawn from an online panel and respondents were screened to be over the age of 18 residing in the United States. The margin of error for the sample is +/-3.5%. In interpreting survey results, all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error; that is, the results of a survey may differ from those, which would be obtained if the entire population were interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends upon both the total number of respondents in the survey and the percentage distribution of responses to a particular question. For example, if 50% of respondents in a sample of 900 respondents answered, "Yes" to a particular question, we can be 95% confident that the true percentage will fall within 3.5 points, or from 46.5% to 53.5%.

Suggested Citation

Speiser, M., and Fery, P. (2017). ecoAmerica, American Climate Perspectives: August 2017. Finding Common Ground: Over 95% of Americans Agree We Have a Moral Responsibility To Be Good Stewards of Nature. *ecoAmerica*. Washington, D.C.

For more information contact Meighen Speiser, ecoAmerica Chief Engagement Officer at meighen@ecoAmerica.org

ⁱ Bruinius, H. (August 8, 2017). "How climate change became a question of faith.". The Christian Science Monitor.