

American Climate Values 2014 Implications and Recommendations Supplement

The following is a supplement to accompany the findings in ecoAmerica's **American Climate Values 2014** report. Included below are the implications and recommendations relating to the ten prior and eight new psychographic findings, providing insights and areas of opportunity for climate advocates to engage Americans in solutions.

Prior Psychographic Synthesis Recommendations (Stable over Time)

1. Americans Follow their Tribes

Americans rely on views from their trusted tribes such as: political party leaders, pastors, favorite TV channels, neighbors, and community groups. Many Americans do not think of environmentalists and science as part of their tribal groups, categorizing each as “not for me.” Additionally, “science” does not often supercede established tribal priorities and worldviews.

- a. **Form deep and lasting collaborations with leaders who connect with Americans in their daily lives, and to whom they look to for guidance.**
- b. **Empower leaders to talk about local impacts and realities—personalize climate, and connect it with local solutions.**

2. Not Ready to Abandon the American Dream

Upwardly mobile, status-seeking Americans strongly reject sacrifice and “doing more with less.” These “keep up with the Jones” types represent the core of American consumers – whom advertisers target, and whom other Americans look to for cues on how to behave. This group of Americans works hard and seeks better homes, cars, education and “things.” They believe they have “earned” the right not to be denied what others have.

- a. **Messages like “The Story of Stuff” do not resonate well with middle-class, knowledge workers and those seeking to get ahead.**
- b. **Don’t emphasize changes and newness. These Americans dislike change, don’t want new rules, and don’t want their goalposts moved.**
- c. **Focus on extrinsic motivations: rewards and recognition.**
- d. **Show examples of success and being part of the group—peer pressure will activate following.**

3. Competing Priorities

Climate change is not a top priority for any American—family, health, jobs, community, and faith all exert priority pressure. Americans are struggling with jobs, kids, aging parents, financial pressures, and other facets of daily life. Their focus is on what is of immediate value in the near future.

- a. **Acknowledge personal priorities in messaging. Humanize yourself, and show you care about people.**
- b. **Incorporate your audience’s personal priorities into climate solutions.**
- c. **Demonstrate how climate solutions can provide tangible and immediate benefits for everyday American people.**

4. **Politics & Denial**

*The American political divide is the biggest barrier to climate solutions in America. In fact, politics can be somewhat synonymous with climate denial. Deniers come in two flavors: **Intellectual deniers** base their denial in decreasing the priority of climate change relative to other social issues, utilize science to reject the norm, and relish their denial as intellectual duty or sport. Intellectual denial is very problematic because it permits other influential groups to discount possible solutions. The other deniers are **cultural deniers**. These deniers reject climate change because the science and/or solutions conflict with their economic, partisan, or faith interests. These deniers are loud, influential, and will not engage because they don't want their lives to change.*

for intellectual deniers:

- a. “Overwhelming evidence...” doesn't work with this group. They will see this statement as an intellectual challenge and opportunity to argue.
- b. **Tap into their curiosity—what they don't know—and their pro-active mindset through appeals such as wager logic or “what if you're wrong.”**
- c. **Don't try to change their minds. It's better to undermine their credibility with their constituency.**

for cultural deniers:

- a. **Provide this audience with solutions focused on the foundations of their denial (economy, faith, etc.)**
- b. **Influence cultural leaders to accept, act, and speak about climate change and solutions.**
- c. **Co-opt cultural deniers' messages and moral frames by focusing on how family, business, morality, security will all be enhanced with effective climate solutions.**

5. **One Size Does Not Fit All**

Our strength and values are rooted in America's great diversity, which extends to attitudes on nature, the environment, and climate change. The two primary competing worldviews in American culture are: 1) We're In This Together (WITT), about community and safety nets, and: 2) You're On Your Own (YOYO), which encompasses self reliance and individualism. Different groups of Americans also have different perspectives and values on nature or environmental protection.

- a. **Don't use WITT arguments with YOYO audiences. Know your audience. Ground appeals in their values.**
- b. **Tap into libertarian values to broaden appeal to new audiences.**
- c. **Appeal to different groups of Americans with different messages through different channels.**

6. **Tough vs. Tender**

If climate change is such a large problem, then Americans expect effective solutions at scale. Americans, in general, need bold solutions to motivate bold action – they are drawn to masculinity, and a solutions orientation. Sacrifice, reduce and “must do” themes are passive and perceived as weak. Anti-green attitudes (drill, burn) are masculine and action-oriented.

- a. **Talk about and demonstrate that climate solutions are big, bold, and actionable.**
 - **New technology can solve climate without big sacrifice.**
 - **Highlight how farmers (iconic masculine American figures) are noticing and motivated by solutions.**

- Talk about solutions as avoiding giving money to terrorists.
 - Compare how threats to wildlife are the same as threats to humans.
- b. Focus on conservationists instead of environmentalists.

7. **The Curse of Techno-Optimism**

Americans have an affinity for technological solutions because they are drawn to ingenuity, innovation, and entrepreneurialism. The downside of techno-optimism is that it can lead to Americans ignoring policy or other social change. This ultimately leads to disengagement, and a lack of personal responsibility.

- a. Tap into American leadership and innovation messages and opportunities.
- b. Harness support for clean energy advancement and redefine “all of the above.”
- c. Emphasize the need for ‘action,’ not just ‘faith’ to achieve technological solutions.

8. **Indifference**

The “so what, who cares” philosophy is widely apparent, especially among lower economically-resourced groups of Americans who consistently give statements concerning climate that are along the lines of, “It’s going to happen anyways, so why should I care.” Even though these Americans are difficult to motivate, they will follow accepted social norms and modify their behavior if those norms change.

- a. Stay away from using “doom and gloom” images of environmental trauma and destruction.
- b. Emphasize tangible economic benefits, which can be easily demonstrated.

9. **Fatalism & Resignation**

Growing numbers of Americans think that climate change is unsolvable. This is due to fatigue and competing priorities—some examples include: “It’s too late,” “We have no control,” and “There’s nothing we can do.” Young Americans see climate solutions as more of an obstacle and trade-off than other Americans.

- a. Pragmatic appeals emphasizing comprehensive and effective solutions, control, and benefits will empower people to listen.
- b. Associate problems with inaction on climate, and point out how solutions will lead to a better future.
- c. Get new, trusted voices to deliver messages to reenergize action.

10. **Emerging Connections on Climate**

Linking climate issues to health and weather can get more constituencies on board, but these connections are emerging unevenly. Most health organizations and professionals are not yet engaged and communicating on climate. Similarly, most extreme weather events are reported without reference to their unusual or climate-related nature. In any case, Americans need assistance to make the connections.

- a. Don’t assume Americans get the climate-weather or climate-health connections. Make the case by emphasizing the unusualness of the weather and that all weather events are influenced by climate change.
- b. Simplify the connection of health and weather with climate via leading health and weather organizations and professionals.

2014 Psychographic Findings Recommendations

1. **Saying Isn't Doing: Concern About Climate Change Doesn't Mean You Act**

Americans self-report being somewhat or very convinced that climate change is happening (71%), and say that humans can definitely, or might be able to, reduce climate change (76%). However, these statistics obscure a deeper reality—Americans who are only “somewhat convinced” consider climate change to be a low priority issue and are not inclined to take action. Only the “very convinced” take action on climate.

- a. People with high intensity convictions will be receptive to appeals for political, behavioral and financial support.
- b. Americans with low intensity convictions (e.g. “somewhat convinced”) are followers, not leaders on the issue.
- c. To motivate the “somewhat convinced” see the other ACV 2014 findings and recommendations.

2. **Benefits Are Essential for Action on Climate**

There is a direct correlation between belief in climate change and belief in solutions. Most mainstream Americans currently don't see the benefits of climate solutions, believe they will be negatively affected personally by the solutions, and don't see any relevant penalties for not acting on climate.

- a. Over-emphasize real solutions and personally relevant benefits that will occur soon.
- b. Show how climate action now will preserve and protect our quality of life—what we have worked so hard to achieve.

3. **Afraid to Stray: Americans Need Local Leadership on Climate Solutions**

Approval is an inherently conservative dimension emphasizing the fear of being excluded. Individuals will not support climate solutions if their “tribes” don't support them already. Americans trust people in their daily lives (tribal leaders), and look to them for guidance.

- a. Focus on convincing groups of people, rather than individuals.
- b. Empower respected leaders to speak and lead by examples in relevant ways that supports the needs of their constituencies.
- c. Tell “conversion” stories for authenticity, and to bring others along.

4. **My Family First**

Achievement-oriented Americans have a strong “me-and-my-family-first” orientation. Current climate action is often conveyed as sacrifice or collective action, which conflicts with their values around caring and providing for their family. If this key group of Americans doesn't embrace climate action, they will block the path for many more Americans who look to them for guidance.

Achievement-oriented Americans are family-oriented and a key solutions audience—they vote and influence the rest of middle-America.

- a. Solutions that threaten their pocketbooks also threaten their families.
- b. Provide solutions that are “smart,” responsible, and protect one's children and/or family.
- c. Empower these Americans with quick facts and tips they can send via social media.
- d. Infuse extrinsic motivation: rewards, success stories, leadership, and workplace programs.

5. **Climate Change Arguments are Often Elite and Alienating**

Climate beliefs are associated with educational, financial, and social networks of the privileged and powerful. Climate change is not a practical, real issue for ordinary Americans. In addition, “doing something” about climate appears to involve personal sacrifice and/or changing one’s behavior and values, which isn’t part of many Americans’ daily lives and social norms.

- a. Utilize influential messengers Americans can relate to, who are not profiled as intellectual environmental elitists.
- b. Emphasize how solutions benefit every Americans’ pocketbooks and values.

6. **There’s No Such Thing as Shared Common Sense on Climate**

Different groups of people think about and respond to the environment, nature, and climate change in different ways. Climate advocates call for solidarity and care for welfare of all, whereas mainstream Americans are more personally pragmatic—concerned about their personal and daily lives.

- a. Know your audience, and connect with their pragmatic concerns to make climate solutions a higher priority
 - For elite Americans, talk about planetary and long-term solutions.
 - For achievement-oriented Americans, make calm, practical asks that enhance their daily lives and make them appear “smart.”
 - For traditional Americans, talk about saving money by saving energy and good clean American jobs.

7. **Weather Isn’t Enough: Climate Conviction is a Package Deal**

Those who believe in climate change are able to associate it with extreme weather and personal impact. They believe in the economic benefits of climate solutions, taxing pollution, and support organizations that protect our environment. Disbelievers exhibit a comprehensively opposite set of beliefs. We cannot use less oil and keep our standard of living. Threats to the environment are among the least important issues that we face.

- a. Find the most relevant point or points of connection. Convincing Americans about any aspect of climate change can tip them into accepting it overall and help them shift climate solutions toward a high priority.

8. **Preparedness Can Motivate Climate Action for Some Americans who Hold Traditional Values**

Local preparedness resonates with white-collar information workers and others who have not yet engaged on climate. These Americans include many nurses, lawyers, public administrators, and higher education faculty. In addition, being prepared is politically neutral and evokes personal responsibility.

- a. Preparedness taps into urgent, sensible, and practical action.
- b. Preparedness can include actions and policies that help prevent climate change (mitigation).
- c. Be transparent with information and support efforts to educate citizens to prepare.
- d. Empower healthcare providers and the public to prepare for climate change impacts.