

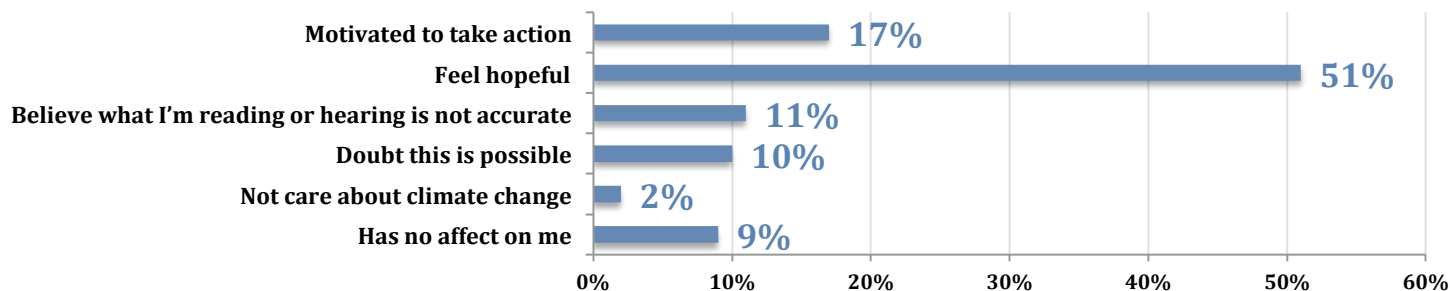
Climate Doomsday or A Livable Future? Americans Motivated by Both

A recent New York Magazine article “The Uninhabitable Earth” stirred up attention and controversy by synthesizing the worse case scenarios of climate change. While it is easy to get gloomy discussing the impacts or latest predictions of climate change, the article provides climate communicators the opportunity to reframe how we discuss the issue. As *ecoAmerica’s 15 Steps To Create Effective Climate Communications* points out, solutions inspire and empower, while doom and gloom messages promote fatalism and cause people to disengage. It also states we don’t have to choose—successful communications balance both aspects.

ecoAmerica decided to explore positive vs. negative climate messages further in their **September 2017 American Climate Perspectives Survey**. They found that 68% of Americans feel hopeful or motivated when they hear or read that “America is moving rapidly towards clean energy, and this will ensure a livable future.” Similarly, 63% of Americans feel hopeful or motivated when they hear or read that “we can heal our climate by removing climate change pollution from our oceans and atmosphere.” And, 61% of Americans are concerned or motivated to take action when they hear/read the doomsday message, “climate change is a threat to our lives and will eventually destroy our ability to live on Earth.” Looking more closely, the percentage of respondents who are motivated to take action by positive themes averages at 19%, while those who are motivated by the doomsday theme are slightly higher, at 26%, but within the range of parity.

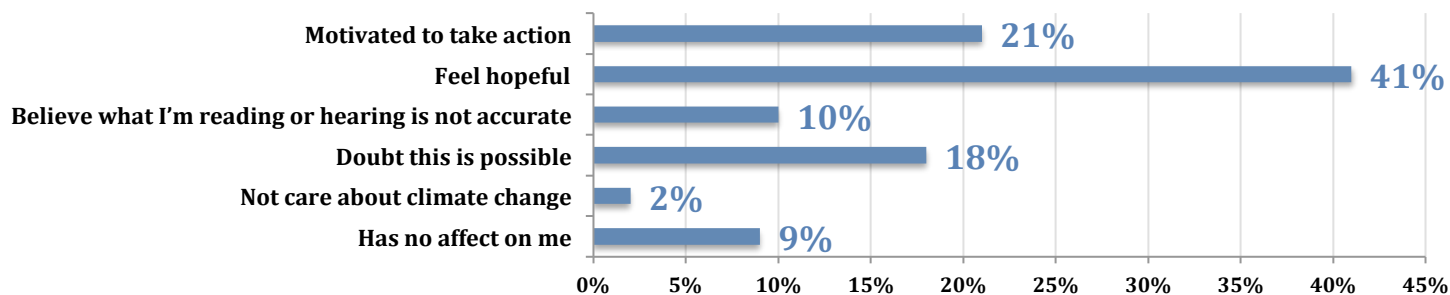
America is moving rapidly to clean energy, and this will ensure a livable future. Hearing or reading this makes me...

804 respondent(s). select one



Some people think we can heal our climate by removing climate change pollution from our oceans and atmosphere. Hearing or reading this makes me...

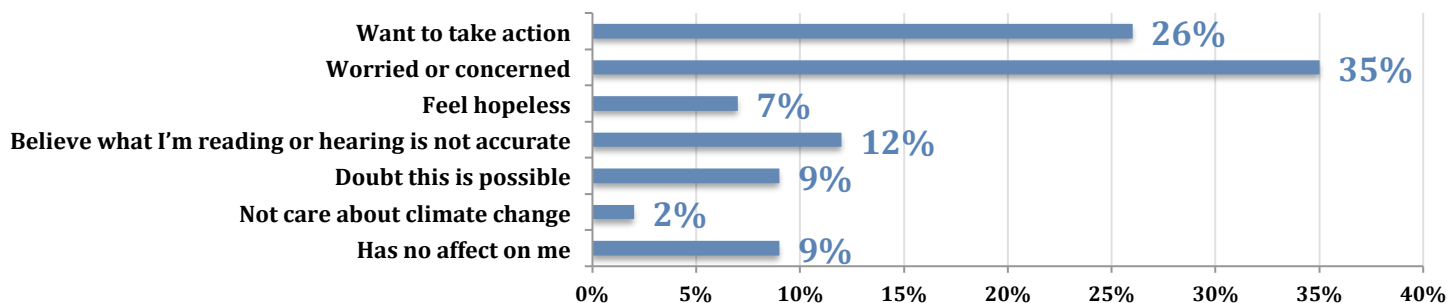
804 respondent(s). select one



Looking more closely at the doomsday-oriented message, the findings show that 35% of respondents are worried or concerned. And, 7% felt hopeless. As ecoAmerica points out, worry and concern can easily convert to fatalism and resignation if not addressed properly. Instead, climate communicators must harness the opportunity to convert worry to action. Rather than choosing doomsday versus utopia, we have the opportunity to communicate impacts, solutions, AND empowerment – it’s a matter of balancing tone, and appropriate sequence. As Renee Lertzman points out in her “How Can We Talk About Global Warming?” response to New York Magazine, “Climate communicators suddenly have a new opportunity to shift the narrative about how we are supposed to be talking about climate change, and how it’s supposed to sound.”

Reading or hearing that climate change is a threat to our lives and will eventually destroy our ability to live on Earth makes me...

804 respondent(s). Please indicate which of the following is closer to your opinion, select one



Fake News, Doubt, Disregard and Apathy – Variances by Political Affiliation

In addition to hope, concern and motivation ecoAmerica explored a spectrum of other responses to positive and negative climate messages. Doubt was pervasive, making up over 20% of responses to each message. An average of 10-12% of the respondents expressed doubt on whether what they were reading or hearing was accurate. However looking at doubt by political affiliation, Republicans expressed the highest doubt across all messages compared to other affiliations, and particularly expressed it on the accuracy of the information (as high as 25%). Democrats expressed the lowest amount of doubt (as low as 3%). An additional 9-18% of respondents doubted whether the positive or negative scenario was possible, with higher percentages driven mostly by Republicans and Independents. Disregard (“not care...”) was constant at 2% across all messages, as was apathy (“has no affect...”) at 9%.

Reading or hearing that climate change is a threat to our lives and will eventually destroy our ability to live on Earth makes me...

	Republican	Independent	Democrat
Believe what I'm reading or hearing is not accurate	25%	12%	4%
Doubt this is possible	17%	10%	3%

America is moving rapidly to clean energy, and this will ensure a livable future. Hearing or reading this makes me...

	Republican	Independent	Democrat
Believe what I'm reading or hearing is not accurate	9%	16%	5%
Doubt this is possible	13%	7%	9%

Some people think we can heal our climate by removing climate change pollution from our oceans or atmosphere. Hearing or reading this makes me...

	Republican	Independent	Democrat
Believe what I'm reading or hearing is not accurate	19%	11%	3%
Doubt this is possible	22%	21%	12%

Methodology

ecoAmerica designed and fielded this survey. It was conducted online from August 22 – August 25, 2017 using Survey Monkey. The nationally representative sample of 804 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

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