“America’s Report Card on the Environment”

A New Annual Survey by

The Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University

in collaboration with ABC News and Time Magazine

According to the first annual installment of a new national survey, majorities of Americans are pessimistic about the state of the natural environment and want a lot to be done to improve its health.

Most Americans Are Pessimistic

55% of Americans said they expect the world’s natural environment to be in worse shape in 10 years than it is now, and an additional 5% said the environment is currently in poor or very poor shape and will not improve. We refer to this group of 60% of Americans as “pessimists.”

These pessimists closely resemble the entire American public in terms of gender, race, education, and whether they live in an urban, suburban, or rural setting. But current partisan loyalties are related to pessimism: Democrats are more likely to be pessimistic than Republicans. 67% of Democrats are pessimists vs. 48% of Republicans.

Among pessimists, however, Democrats outnumber Republicans and Independents by only small margins (35%, 25%, and 29%, respectively).

Tremendous Remedial Effort is Desired

A striking 86% want a great deal or a lot to be done to help the environment during the next year, by President Bush, the U.S. Congress, American businesses, and/or the American public.

This figure was 94% among Democrats and 76% among Republicans. The proportion of people wanting a great deal or a lot of effort did not vary according to gender, age, race, education, or residence in an urban, suburban, or rural place.

Whereas only 8% of Americans believe that President Bush did a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the past year, 73% want him to do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year.
Likewise, whereas only 8% of Americans believe that U.S. businesses did a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the past year, 76% want them to do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year.

In addition, 75% and 77% of Americans believe that Congress and the American public, respectively, should do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year.

![Opinions of Past Effort to Help the Environment and Desire for Remedial Effort](image)

**Businesses are Blamed Most**

Nearly all Americans agree that environmental damage is at least partly attributable to the actions of American businesses. 91% said that businesses harmed the environment a little or more during the past year, a view expressed equivalently often by Republicans and Democrats (90% vs. 93%).

A large majority (79%) also said that President Bush’s policies harmed the environment a little or more during the past year, but there was a substantial partisan split on this question. Democrats were substantially more likely than Republicans to attribute blame to President Bush (89% vs. 66%). Nonetheless, even a majority of Republicans acknowledged some environmental damage attributable to the President.

**Businesses and the President Have Helped Less Than They Have Harmed**

Smaller but nonetheless large numbers of Americans said that American businesses and President Bush’s policies did at least a little to help the environment during the last year (83% and 62%, respectively).
Whereas 46% of respondents said that businesses did more to harm the environment than to help it, less than half that number (20%) said businesses did more to help than to harm it.¹

Likewise, whereas 46% of respondents said that President Bush’s policies did more to harm the environment than to help it, about half that number (27%) said the President’s policies did more to help than to harm it.²

**Low Approval of Environmental Stewardship by the President, Congress, and Businesses**

Only 21% of Americans approve of the way President Bush is handling environmental issues.³

As expected, approval was much lower, a mere 5%, among Democrats, but not even a majority of Republicans (47%) approved of the president’s performance on this issue.

Americans’ approval of Congress and U.S. businesses is no higher: 15% and 21%, respectively.⁴

**Pessimism Linked to Views on Global Warming**

Pessimism about the health of the natural environment is strongly related to beliefs about global warming.

Among the 69% of Americans who are at least somewhat sure that global warming has been happening and believe that it will have at least somewhat serious effects if unchecked, 70% are pessimists about the environment in general.

Among the 31% of Americans who are skeptical about the existence or damaging effects of global warming, only 37% are environmental pessimists.

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¹ 31% said that businesses did as much to harm the environment as to help it.
² 22% said that the President’s policies did as much to harm the environment as to help it.
³ 53% disapproved, and 25% neither approved nor disapproved.
⁴ For Congress, 53% disapproved, and 32% neither approved nor disapproved; for businesses, 47% disapproved, and 30% neither approved nor disapproved.
Conclusions

1) A majority of Americans is pessimistic about the health of the world’s natural environment, believing it will get worse or is in poor shape and will not improve.

2) A large majority of Americans want a substantial increase in effort to help the environment.

3) Blame for poor and declining environmental conditions is frequently placed on American businesses, and to a lesser degree on President Bush’s policies.

4) People who believe in the existence and damaging effects of global warming are especially likely to be pessimistic about the environment’s future.

5) Despite partisan splits on many of these issues (Democrats are more pessimistic and more supportive of remedial efforts than Republicans), even majorities of Republicans share discontent about the health of the environment and human stewardship of it.

METHODOLOGY – This survey, the first annual installment of “America’s Report Card on the Environment,” is modeled after the well-known national surveys measuring Americans’ perceptions of the national economy, which yield the well-known economic indicators.

The survey was conducted by telephone March 9-14, 2006, among a random national sample of 1,002 adults. Sampling and data collection were done by TNS of Horsham, PA.
Results for the questions described above follow. Other questions were asked in this survey and will be described in other releases.

(*=less than 0.5 percent)

1. How would you rate the condition of the natural environment in the world today—excellent, good, fair, poor, or very poor?

   Excellent   3
   Good        21
   Fair        43
   Poor        25
   Very poor   8
   DK/No opinion  *

2. Compared to 10 or so years ago, do you think the natural environment in the world today is better, worse or about the same?

   IF BETTER: Do you think it’s much better or somewhat better?
   IF WORSE: Do you think it’s much worse or somewhat worse?

   Much better  4
   Somewhat better  9
   About the same 27
   Somewhat worse 38
   Much worse    22
   DK/No opinion  *

3. Thinking ahead to 10 or so years from now, do you think the natural environment in the world will be better, worse, or about the same as it is today?

   IF BETTER: Do you think it will be much better or somewhat better?
   IF WORSE: Do you think it will be much worse or somewhat worse?

   Much better  5
   Somewhat better 16
   About the same 23
   Somewhat worse 31
   Much worse    24
   DK/No opinion  1

4. Construction of environmental pessimism measure:

   Think environment will get somewhat worse or much worse  55
   Think environment is poor or very poor and will stay the same  5
   Environmental pessimists                               60

   Think environment will get somewhat better or better  21
   Think environment is excellent or very good and will stay the same  8
   Environmental optimists                               29

   Others                                                11
5. Thinking about the way President Bush is handling issues involving the natural environment, do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove?

**IF APPROVE:** Do you approve strongly or somewhat?

**IF DISAPPROVE:** Do you disapprove strongly or somewhat?

- Approve, strongly: 10
- Approve, somewhat: 11
- Neither approve nor disapprove: 25
- Disapprove, somewhat: 14
- Disapprove, strongly: 39
- DK/No opinion: 1

6. Thinking about the way American businesses are handling issues involving the natural environment, do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove?

**IF APPROVE:** Do you approve strongly or somewhat?

**IF DISAPPROVE:** Do you disapprove strongly or somewhat?

- Approve, strongly: 7
- Approve, somewhat: 15
- Neither approve nor disapprove: 30
- Disapprove, somewhat: 23
- Disapprove, strongly: 24
- DK/No opinion: 1

7. Thinking about the way the U.S. Congress is handling issues involving the natural environment, do you approve, disapprove, or neither approve nor disapprove?

**IF APPROVE:** Do you approve strongly or somewhat?

**IF DISAPPROVE:** Do you disapprove strongly or somewhat?

- Approve, strongly: 4
- Approve, somewhat: 11
- Neither approve nor disapprove: 32
- Disapprove, somewhat: 22
- Disapprove, strongly: 31
- DK/No opinion: 1

8. During the past year, how much did President Bush’s policies do to HELP the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

- A great deal: 4
- A lot: 4
- A moderate amount: 23
- A little: 31
- Nothing: 35
- DK/No opinion: 3

9. During the past year, how much did American businesses do to HELP the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

- A great deal: 3
- A lot: 5
- A moderate amount: 35
- A little: 40
- Nothing: 14
- DK/No opinion: 3
10. During the past year, how much did President Bush’s policies do to HARM the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

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11. During the past year, how much did American businesses do to HARM the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

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12. During the next year, how much do you want President Bush to do to help the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

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13. During the next year, how much do you want the U.S. Congress to do to help the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

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<td>DK/No opinion</td>
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14. During the next year, how much do you want American businesses to do to help the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

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<td>DK/No opinion</td>
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14. During the next year, how much do you want the American public to do to help the natural environment - a great deal, a lot, a moderate amount, a little, or nothing?

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<td>A great deal</td>
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<td>A lot</td>
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<td>Nothing</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>DK/No opinion</td>
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16. You may have heard about the idea that the world’s temperature may have been going up slowly over the past 100 years. What is your personal opinion on this – do you think this has probably been happening, or do you think it probably hasn’t been happening?

Has been happening 85
Hasn’t been happening 13
DK/No opinion 2

17. How sure are you that the world’s temperature has been going up - extremely sure, very sure, somewhat sure, or not sure at all? (Asked of respondents who believe global warming has been happening)

Extremely sure 19
Very sure 26
Somewhat sure 44
Not sure at all 11
DK/No opinion *

18. If nothing is done to reduce global warming in the future, how serious of a problem do you think it will be for THE WORLD - very serious, somewhat serious, not so serious or not serious at all? (Asked of respondents who believe global warming has been happening)

Very serious 62
Somewhat serious 28
Not so serious 5
Not serious at all 3
DK/No opinion 1

19. Construction of global warming threat perception measure:

Believe temperatures are increasing, are at least somewhat sure of it, and believe it is a somewhat or very serious threat 69
Others 31

20. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as:

A Democrat 31
A Republican 31
An Independent 29
Other 8
DK/No opinion 1

21. What was the last grade of school you completed?

8th grade or less 1
Some high school 7
Graduated high school 40
Some college 24
Graduated college: Bachelor 15
Graduated college: Other degree 2
Post-graduate 11
DK/no opinion *

22. What is your age?

18-30 23
31-44 27
44-60 28
61+ 21
23. Would you describe the area in which you live as a:

Large city 22
Suburb of a large city 31
Small town 29
Rural area 18
Don’t know / no opinion 1

24. Are you of Hispanic origin or background?
IF "YES," ASK: Are you White Hispanic or Black Hispanic?
IF "NO," ASK: Are you white, black, or some other race?

White 75
Black 10
Hispanic 7
Asian 1
Other race 6

25. Gender (recorded by interviewer)

Male 48
Female 52