

# The Second Annual “America’s Report Card on the Environment”

## Survey

by

The Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University

in collaboration with The Associated Press

The second annual installment of Stanford’s national survey on the public’s perceptions of the environment shows that Americans remain pessimistic and want a lot to be done to improve its health. This report compares our new results to those from the first installment of this survey, done in 2006.

### **Most Americans Remain Pessimistic**

52% of Americans expect the world’s natural environment to be in worse shape in ten years than it is now (55% in 2006, not a significant difference), with a further 8% saying the environment is currently in poor or very poor shape and will not improve (5% in 2006). We refer to this 60% of Americans as “pessimists” (60% in 2006).

These pessimists closely resemble the entire American public in terms of gender, level of education, and whether they live in an urban, suburban, or rural setting, although white people are now significantly less likely to be pessimists than people of other races. As in 2006, partisan loyalties are related to pessimism: Democrats are more likely to be pessimistic than Republicans. 72% of Democrats are pessimists vs. 36% of Republicans (67% vs. 48% in 2006). The decrease in pessimism among Republicans is significant, while the increase in pessimism among Democrats is not.

Among pessimists, Democrats outnumber Republicans and Independents: 36%, 12%, and 25%, respectively. Democrats outnumber Republicans now significantly more than they did in 2006: the figures then for Democrats, Republicans, and Independents were 35%, 25%, and 29%.

### **Tremendous Remedial Effort Is Still Desired**

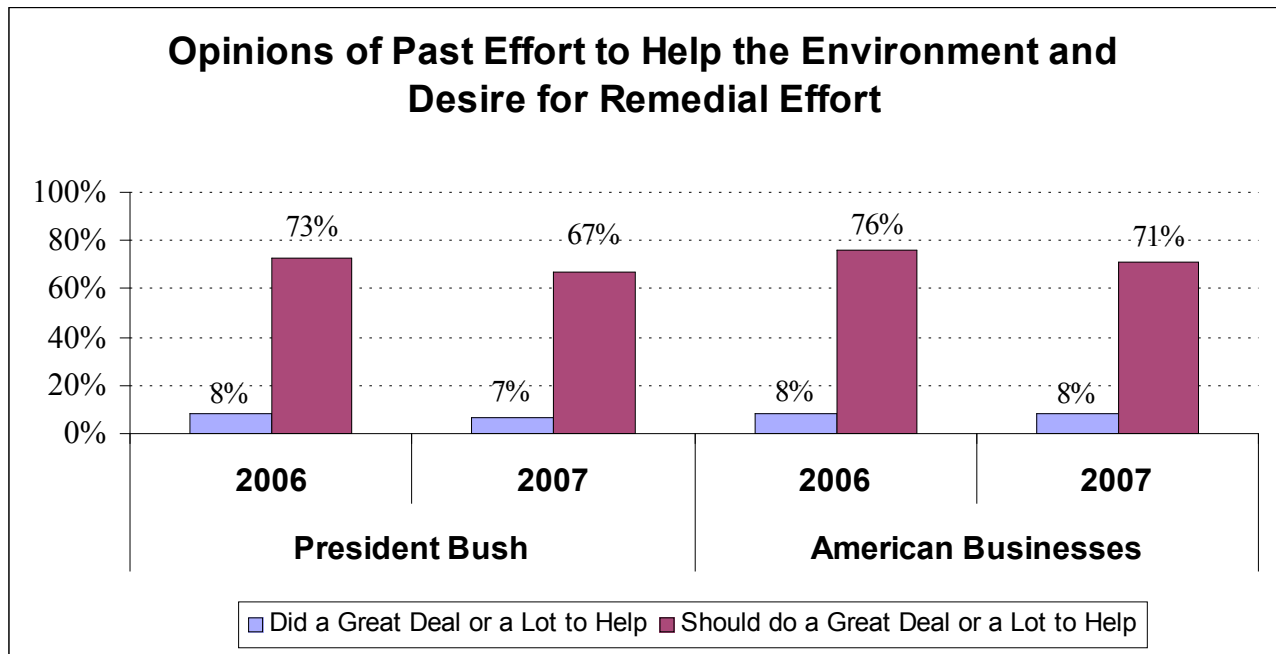
A striking 84% want a great deal or a lot to be done to help the environment during the next year, by President Bush, the U.S. Congress, American businesses, and/or the American

public. This figure is unchanged from 2006 (86%).

This figure was 92% among Democrats (94% in 2006) and 77% among Republicans (76% in 2006). As in 2006, the proportion of people wanting a great deal or a lot of effort did not vary according to age and race. However, those who want more to be done are now more likely to be female than male, are more likely to have completed high school but no further education than to be more educated, and are less likely to live in a rural area and more likely to live in other parts of the country.

Only 7% of Americans believe that President Bush did a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the past year (8% in 2006). 67% want him to do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year, slightly but significantly less than the 73% we saw in 2006. This decrease was greatest among Republicans (from 58% in 2006 to 47% in 2007).

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 (as in 2006), 71% want them to do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year, again, slightly but significantly lower than the 76% we saw in 2006. Again, this decrease was greatest among Republicans (from 64% in 2006 to 53% in 2007).



70% of Americans believe that Congress should do a great deal or a lot to help the environment during the next year, also slightly but significantly less than the 75% we saw in 2006. Again, this decrease was most marked among Republicans (from 63% in 2006 to 49% in 2007).

78% of people believe that the American public should do a great deal or a lot to help the

environment during the next year (77% in 2006).

### **Businesses Remain Most Blamed, With a Growing Partisan Split**

Nearly all Americans still believe that environmental damage is at least partly attributable to the actions of American businesses. 90% said that businesses harmed the environment a little or more during the past year (91% in 2006). In 2006, this view was expressed about as often by Democrats and Republicans (93% vs. 90%). But now, this view was expressed significantly more often by Democrats than by Republicans (93% vs. 87%).

A large majority (71%) said that President Bush's policies harmed the environment a little or more during the past year (a significant decrease from 79% in 2006). As in 2006, there was a substantial partisan split on this question: Democrats were substantially more likely than Republicans to attribute blame to President Bush (88% vs. 56% in 2007; 89% vs. 66% in 2006). Nonetheless, even a majority of Republicans believe that some environmental damage is attributable to the President.

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

Smaller but nonetheless large numbers of Americans still say that American businesses and President Bush's policies did at least a little to help the environment during the last year (82% and 61%, respectively, 83% and 62% in 2006).

Whereas 51% of respondents said that businesses did more to harm the environment than to help it, less than a third of that number (15%) said businesses did more to help than to harm it.<sup>1</sup> This gap was significantly smaller in 2006: 46% and 20%. Thus, negative views of businesses have increased.

Likewise, whereas 47% of respondents said that President Bush's policies did more to harm the environment than to help it, less than half that number, 22%, said the President's policies did more to help than to harm it.<sup>2</sup> This gap was also significantly smaller in 2006: 46% and 28%. Thus, negative views of President Bush have increased.

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

Approval of the President's handling of the environmental issues remained as low as one year ago, at 20% (21% in 2006).<sup>3</sup>

This low approval is reflected among Republicans: 50% of Republicans approved of the

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<sup>1</sup> 31% said that businesses did as much to harm the environment as to help it (30% in 2006).

<sup>2</sup> 24% said that the President's policies did as much to harm the environment as to help it (22% in 2006).

<sup>3</sup> 52% disapproved, and 26% neither approved nor disapproved (53% and 25% in 2006).

president’s performance on this issue (47% did so in 2006). Essentially no Democrats approved of the President’s handling of the issue in 2006 (5%), and this is still true today: only 8% do so (not a significant increase).

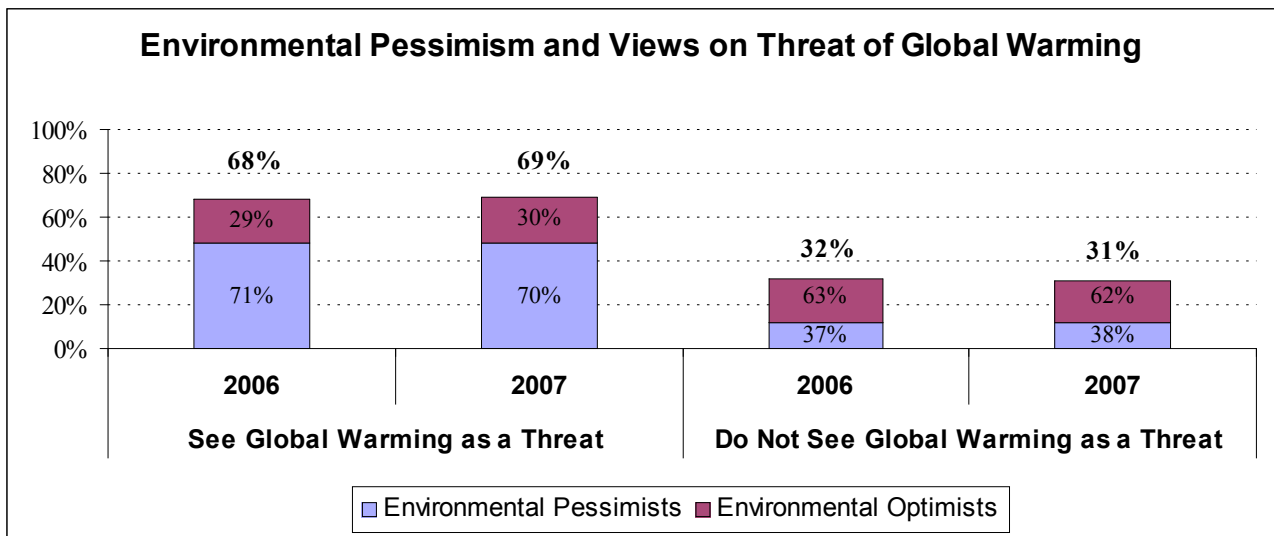
Americans’ approval of Congress’s handling of the environment remained constant during the past year, at 16% (15% in 2006). Among Democrats, there was no change during the past year, with approval of Congressional performance at 10% (11% in 2006). Among Republicans, approval is at 19% (25% in 2006). Approval of U.S. businesses’ handling of the environment also stayed constant, at 22% (21% in 2006).<sup>4</sup> Republicans approve of U.S. businesses significantly more than do Democrats (31% vs. 19%), and this was true in 2006 as well (32% vs. 20%).

**Pessimism Linked to More Negative Views on Global Warming**

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

84% of Americans believe that global warming is occurring (not a significant difference<sup>5</sup> from the 85% that did so in 2006).

69% of Americans are now at least somewhat sure that global warming has been happening and believe that it will have at least somewhat serious effects if unchecked (68% in 2006). Among these people, 70% are pessimists about the environment in general (71% in 2006).



<sup>4</sup> For Congress, 51% disapproved (52% in 2006), and 32% neither approved nor disapproved (as in 2006). For businesses, 44% disapproved (47% in 2006), and 30% neither approved nor disapproved (as in 2006).

<sup>5</sup> A statistically significant difference is one that is less than 5% likely to have happened by chance alone.

## **Conclusions**

- 1) As in 2006, a majority of Americans is pessimistic about the health of the environment, believing that it will get worse or is already in poor shape and will not improve.
- 2) Blame for poor and declining environmental conditions is frequently placed on American businesses, and to a lesser degree on President Bush's policies.
- 3) A large majority of Americans still wants to see substantially greater effort to help the environment, but this majority has decreased slightly since 2006, especially among Republicans.
- 4) A large majority of Americans are at least somewhat sure that global warming has been happening and believe it will have at least somewhat serious consequences. These people are particularly likely to be pessimistic about the environment's future.
- 5) Democrats are more pessimistic about the environment and more supportive of remedial efforts than are Republicans, but even majorities of Republicans have manifested negative views during the past year.

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METHODOLOGY – This survey, the second 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 during September 21-23, 2007, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults. Sampling and data collection were conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs. Interviews were conducted in Spanish with respondents who preferred to do so – our results were comparable regardless of whether the 65 Spanish-language interviews were included or excluded.

The questionnaire was designed by Jon Krosnick of Stanford University and Gary Langer of ABC News. This survey was conducted by Jon Krosnick of Stanford University and Trevor Tompson of the Associated Press, with support from the Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University.

This report was written by Jon Krosnick and Brent Bannon of Stanford University, in collaboration with Matthew DeBell of Stanford University.

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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?

	2007	2006
Excellent	3	3
Good	18	21
Fair	35	43
Poor	34	25
Very poor	8	8
DK/No opinion	2	*

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

	2007	2006
Much better	3	4
Somewhat better	9	9
About the same	32	27
Somewhat worse	34	38
Much worse	22	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...

	2007	2006
Much better	5	5
Somewhat better	10	16

About the same	31	23
Somewhat worse	31	31
Much worse	21	24
DK/No opinion	2	1

4. Construction of environmental pessimism measure:

	2007	2006
Think environment will get somewhat worse or much worse	52	55
Think environment is poor or very poor and will stay the same	8	5
<b>Environmental pessimists</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>
Think environment will get somewhat better or better	15	21
Think environment is excellent or good and will stay the same	11	8
<b>Environmental optimists</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Others</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>10</b>

5. Thinking about the way President Bush is handling issues involving the natural environment, do you...

	2007	2006
Strongly approve	11	10
Somewhat approve	9	11
Neither approve nor disapprove	26	25
Somewhat disapprove	14	14
Strongly disapprove	39	39
DK/No opinion	2	1

6. Thinking about the way American businesses are handling issues involving the natural environment, do you...

	2007	2006
Strongly approve	6	7
Somewhat approve	16	15
Neither approve nor disapprove	30	30
Somewhat disapprove	23	23
Strongly disapprove	22	24
DK/No opinion	3	1

7. Thinking about the way the U.S. Congress is handling issues involving the natural environment, do you...

	2007	2006
Strongly approve	5	4
Somewhat approve	10	11
Neither approve nor disapprove	32	32
Somewhat disapprove	20	22
Strongly disapprove	30	31
DK/No opinion	2	1

8. During the past year, how much did President Bush's policies do to help the natural environment?

	2007	2006
A great deal	3	4
A lot	4	4
A moderate amount	17	23

A little	40	31
Nothing	35	35
DK/No opinion	4	3

9. During the past year, how much did American businesses do to help the natural environment?

	2007	2006
A great deal	4	3
A lot	4	5
A moderate amount	28	35
A little	46	40
Nothing	16	14
DK/No opinion	3	3

10. During the past year, how much did President Bush's policies do to harm the natural environment?

	2007	2006
A great deal	16	16
A lot	13	12
A moderate amount	20	22
A little	22	28
Nothing	22	19
DK/No opinion	6	2

11. During the past year, how much did American businesses do to harm the natural environment?

	2007	2006
A great deal	15	11
A lot	19	18
A moderate amount	31	37
A little	24	24
Nothing	8	7
DK/No opinion	3	2

12. During the next year, how much do you want President Bush to do to help the natural environment...

	2007	2006
A great deal	38	49
A lot	29	23
A moderate amount	17	18
A little	7	4
Nothing	8	4
DK/No opinion	*	*

13. During the next year, how much do you want the U.S. Congress to do to help the natural environment...

	2007	2006
A great deal	40	49
A lot	31	27
A moderate amount	15	17
A little	8	4
Nothing	6	3
DK/No opinion	*	*

14. During the next year, how much do you want American businesses to do to help the natural environment...

	2007	2006
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A great deal	39	48
A lot	33	28
A moderate amount	18	19
A little	8	4
Nothing	2	1
DK/No opinion	*	*

15. During the next year, how much do you want the American public to do to help the natural environment...

	2007	2006
A great deal	40	51
A lot	35	26
A moderate amount	15	17
A little	6	3
Nothing	3	2
DK/No Opinion	*	*

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?

	2007	2006
Do you think this has probably been happening	84	85
Do you think it probably hasn't been happening	15	13
DK/No opinion	2	2

17. How sure are you that the world's temperature has been going up?

	2007	2006
Extremely sure	28	19
Very sure	33	26
Somewhat sure	31	44
Not sure at all	8	11
DK/No opinion	*	*

18. How sure are you that the world's temperature has not been going up?

	2007	2006
Extremely sure	21	10
Very sure	26	24
Somewhat sure	29	38
Not sure at all	23	28
DK/No opinion	1	*

19. 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? (IF Q16=1, think global warming probably has been happening)

	2007	2006
Very serious	67	62
Somewhat serious	20	28
Not so serious	9	5
Not serious at all	4	3
DK/No opinion	1	1

20. 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? (IF Q16=2, think global warming probably hasn't been happening)

	2007	2006
Very serious	21	27

Somewhat serious	20	31
Not so serious	28	25
Not serious at all	30	16
DK/No opinion	1	*
21. Construction of global warming threat perception measure:		
	2007	2006
Believe temperatures are increasing, are at least somewhat sure of it, and believe it is a somewhat or very serious threat	69	69
Others	31	31
22. Do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent or none of these?		
	2007	2006
Republican	20	31
Democrat	30	31
Independent	24	29
None of these	23	8
DK/No opinion	2	1
23. What is the last year of school you completed?		
	2007	2006 <sup>†</sup>
Grade school or some high school	7	
Completed high school	23	
Some community college or university, but did not finish	20	
Completed technical school or a community college	13	
Completed a university or Bachelor's degree	21	
Completed a post-graduate degree such as a Master's or Ph.D.	14	
DK/No opinion	1	
24. Age		
	2007	2006
18-29	17	20
30-39	20	18
40-49	19	22
50-64	24	23
65+	19	17
25. Metropolitan status		
	2007	2006
Urban	35	31
Suburban	47	50
Rural	18	20
26. Race/ethnicity		
	2007	2006
White	68	75
Black	11	10
Hispanic	13	7
Asian	3	1
Other race	2	6

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<sup>†</sup> Different response options were offered in 2006 that are not directly comparable with those in 2007.

27. Gender

	2007	2006
Male	48	48
Female	52	52