

NEW AP-NORC/EPIC POLL: CONCERN ABOUT AI'S ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT HAS RISEN OVER THE PAST YEAR, ESPECIALLY AMONG YOUNG ADULTS

Most Americans are also concerned about the impact of data centers on electricity prices, water supply, and power outages, and they support policies regulating data centers.

CHICAGO, September 16, 2026— Americans are increasingly concerned about the environmental consequences of artificial intelligence (AI), according to a new survey from [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) and the [Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago \(EPIC\)](#). Fifty-three percent of Americans are extremely or very concerned about the environmental impacts of AI, up from 41% a year ago. And 47% of Americans think AI will do more to hurt rather than help the environment, up from 33% who said the same in 2025.

While concern has grown among Americans of all age groups, the increase was largest for younger Americans. Adults ages 18-29 went from being in line with other age brackets in 2025 to the most concerned today (38% to 60%). Americans are more concerned about the environmental impacts of AI than about the impact of meat production, air travel, and cryptocurrencies, and it is the only industry to see a large increase in concern over the past year.

And while about half of U.S. adults feel data centers will be at least somewhat beneficial for technological advancement (55%) and job creation (49%), most are concerned about their potential impact on local electricity prices (84%), water supply (79%) and power outages (78%). Most Americans, including majorities of both parties, support policies that would require data centers to cover electric grid upgrade costs (73%), use clean energy sources (65%), and limit the number of new data centers that can be built (62%).

“Americans are increasingly concerned about the environmental impacts associated with artificial intelligence and are concerned about the infrastructure that supports it,” said Jennifer Benz, Director of The AP-NORC Center. “The survey shows concern has grown since last year, particularly among younger adults, and that many Americans support policies intended to address the demands data centers place on energy and water resources.”

In addition to AI and data centers, the survey explored attitudes toward climate change, energy policy, and electric vehicles (EVs). Views on climate change have remained stable in recent years, with most Americans agreeing that climate change is happening and is caused by human activity. There remains a large partisan divide, as Democrats are more likely than Republicans to believe climate change is occurring (92% vs. 55%) and to say it is caused mostly by human activity (68% vs. 34%).

Nearly all Americans (94%) believe they have experienced extreme weather in their community in the past year, and about 8 in 10 or more believe that climate change was at least one of the contributing factors. A third of Americans have experienced an increase in premiums or deductibles for homeowners or renters' insurance as a result of extreme weather events, and a quarter have considered moving to avoid the impacts of extreme weather. Those who experienced extreme weather were twice as likely as

those who did not experience extreme weather to have purchased additional or separate insurance coverage specifically for extreme weather (14% vs 7%).

About half of Americans consider energy policy and climate change policy very or extremely important, and about another third consider each issue somewhat important—in line with views on immigration and foreign policy. As in prior years, Americans agree that oil and gas companies (66%), the federal government (64%), and large businesses and corporations (64%) have a lot of responsibility to address climate change, while just 4 in 10 say the same about developing countries and individual people.

When it comes to specific policies, 8 in 10 Americans, including a large majority of Democrats and Republicans, support protecting conservation lands and wildlife. A majority of Americans also support enforcing strict clean air and water regulations (69%) and providing incentives for new renewable energy projects (63%), including 6 in 10 Republicans and 8 in 10 Democrats. Few support rolling back environmental regulations. Americans' views on expanding U.S. oil and gas production have not changed from last year, before the war in Iran, and half of adults oppose auctioning off additional public land for oil drilling. Expanding U.S. oil and gas production is more popular among Americans ages 45 and older, and both policies are more popular among older Republicans.

And while more than half of Americans support companies paying a carbon tax, few are willing to pay a monthly carbon fee themselves. As in 2025, 38% of Americans support a \$1 monthly carbon fee to combat climate change, while fewer support higher fees. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support a carbon fee at any price point.

"The poll finds that the average American is willing to pay about \$29 a month to combat climate change, which is considerable but also the lowest amount since we started asking this question a decade ago, once adjusted for inflation," says Michael Greenstone, Milton Friedman Distinguished Service Professor in Economics and Director of EPIC. "It is more apparent than ever that people care about economic growth and climate change, not just one or the other. The message is that any durable climate policy must balance emissions reductions with affordability."

Gas prices rose this year, including hitting a [record Labor Day high](#). The survey finds more Americans say they would buy an EV to save money on gas than in 2025 (74% vs 68%). Half of Americans are cutting back on driving altogether. And while saving money on gas is a motivating factor for buying an EV, upfront vehicle costs are a barrier. About 8 in 10 Americans across income levels cite the purchase price of a new EV as an obstacle to buying one.

Financial concerns are also impacting Americans' willingness to pay a premium for an American-made EV over one made in China. When presented with a choice between purchasing a more expensive EV made in the U.S., about half or more Americans would prefer to purchase an American-made EV over the cheaper Chinese-made option when the price difference is \$5,000 or less. When the price gap reaches \$10,000, more would choose the Chinese-made EV. Most Republicans prefer American-made EVs over Chinese-made alternatives across price points, while most Democrats prefer the lower-cost Chinese-made EV over the American-made EV when the price difference is \$5,000 or more.

About the Survey

This survey was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, with funding from the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC). Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and EPIC collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Data were collected using both probability and non-probability sample sources. Interviews for this survey were conducted from July 6 – 24, 2026 with 3,424 adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The probability sample source is the AmeriSpeak® Panel, NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. The non-probability sample was provided by Forthright based on quotas related to age, race and ethnicity, gender, and education.

The overall margin of sampling error for the combined sample is +/- 2.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups. Sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error and there may be other unmeasured errors in this or any other survey.

About the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago

The Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) is confronting the global energy challenge by working to ensure that energy markets provide access to reliable, affordable energy, while limiting environmental and social damages. We do this using a unique interdisciplinary approach that translates robust, data-driven research into real-world impacts through strategic outreach and training for the next generation of global energy leaders. epic.uchicago.edu @UChiEnergy

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- NORC at the University of Chicago is one of the oldest objective and nonpartisan research institutions in the world. www.norc.org

The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. Learn more at www.apnorc.org.

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