

Europeans Tend to Care More Strongly about Climate Change than Americans

Fewer Americans than people in 5 largest European countries give “green” responses in 6-nation Financial Times/Harris Poll on climate change

New York, NY — October 22, 2009 — A new **Financial Times/Harris Poll** in the United States and the five largest European countries finds that Americans under 65 are less likely than Europeans to see climate change as a major threat, to see the need for a new international agreement on climate change as a top priority or to favor increased aid to developing countries to help them deal with climate change. However, most people in all six countries agree, when asked, that signing a new treaty on climate change should be one of our top priorities.

These are some of the findings of a **Financial Times/Harris Poll** conducted online by Harris Interactive among 6,463 adults aged less than 65 in France, Germany, Britain, Spain, Italy and the United States between September 30 and October 7, 2009.

While there are a few exceptions, smaller proportions of Americans than of Europeans under 65 seem to be worried about climate change or to support policies to address it.

For example:

- While large majorities of people over 65 in all six countries see **climate change as posing a threat to the world**, fewer Americans (27%), than people in Britain (31%), France (46%), Italy (49%) or Spain (35%) see it as a “*large threat*.”
- In Europe, between 60% (in Britain) and 89% (in Italy) believe that, when governments meet in Copenhagen, “**signing a new treaty . . . on climate change**” should be one of the top priorities. In the United States, a lower 53% feel this way.
- Majorities of working people in France (67%), Spain (67%), and Italy (57%) believe that their employers “**should be doing more**” to “**reduce their environmental impact**.” Slightly less than half of workers in the United States (45%), Britain (44%) and Germany (48%) feel this way.
- Not many people under 65 in any of the six countries say **they would be willing to pay more taxes to cut greenhouse gas emissions**, and on this question the United States (21%) is in the middle of the pack, below Spain (29%), and Italy (23%) but above Britain (16%) France (15%) and Germany (15%).
- Far fewer people under 65 in the United States (12%) and in Britain (12%) than in Spain (36%), France (30%), Italy (26%) and Germany (20%) would like the **products they buy to have labels showing “the amount of carbon emitted in the course of their production.”**
- Americans (20%) are also much less likely than the Italians (54%), Spaniards (53%), French (52%) or Germans (51%) to support **additional aid to developing countries to help them deal with climate change**. The British (31%) are somewhat closer to Americans on this issue.

- Majorities in all five European countries, 51% in Britain and more than 60% in France, Italy, Spain and Germany believe that **the world will be in a worse position “if there is no agreement at the Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December.”** In the United States, a lower 45% believe this.

There is one related issue, however, on which Americans are more likely to feel strongly. Fully 83% of Americans under 65 believe the United States needs to **reduce oil and gas imports from other countries.** Those who feel this way in the other five countries vary from 50% in France to 71% in Italy.

So what?

In the early days of the environmental movement, following the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, Americans were probably more concerned about the environment than people in most, possibly all, other countries. This poll shows that this is no longer the case. This is important because democratically elected governments are responsive to public opinion, even if they do not always do what majorities would like them to do.

Having said that, it is important to note that majorities, mostly large majorities, in all six countries including the United States, believe that signing a new climate change treaty should be “one of the top priorities.”

TABLE 1
COUNTRY BY COUNTRY DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES TO CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES

[These are replies to 8 different questions]

Base: All EU adults in five countries and U.S. adults

	United States	Great Britain	France	Italy	Spain	Germany
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Climate change poses a large threat to the world	27	31	46	49	35	23
Signing a new treaty at Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen “one of top priorities”	53	60	76	89	80	70
My employer should be doing more to reduce environmental impact (% of working)	45	44	67	57	67	48
Would pay more in taxes to cut greenhouse gas emission	21	16	15	23	29	15
Would like products I buy have labels showing carbon emitted in production	12	12	30	26	36	20
Developed countries should give more aid to developing countries to deal with climate change	20	31	52	54	53	51
IF there is not agreement in Copenhagen in December, the world will be in a worse position	45	51	64	65	67	63
Own country (US/UK/France, etc.) needs to reduce oil and natural gas imports	83	66	50	71	52	43

Note: The full questions asked can be seen [here](#)

Methodology

This **FT/Harris Poll** was conducted online by Harris Interactive among a total of 6,463 adults aged 16-64 within France (1,151), Germany (1,033), Great Britain (1,126), Spain (1,076) and the United States (1,017), and adults aged 18-64 in Italy (1,060) between September 30 and October 7, 2009. Figures for age, sex, education, region and Internet usage were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult populations of the respective countries. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls and of the British Polling Council.

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