

Climate change concerns much higher in Latin America, Caribbean than U.S., Canada

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By Liz Entman



Climate change is a far more partisan issue in the U.S. than anywhere else in the Western Hemisphere

More than eight in 10 adults in Mexico and Central America believe climate change is a very serious problem for their country, more than twice the proportion of adults in the United States and Canada, according to a new report according to a new “Insights” report from Vanderbilt’s Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) titled “Education and Risk Assessments Predict Climate Change Concerns in Latin America and the Caribbean.” Elizabeth Zechmeister, LAPOP’s director and Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science, and graduate student Claire Evans wrote the report.

“Climate change is a highly politicized and partisan issue in the United States, and we wanted to examine whether that is a common characteristic of this issue in other countries in the region,” said Zechmeister. “If not politics, then what predicts attitudes about climate change in these other places?”

Using data collected from LAPOP’s 2016-17 AmericasBarometer survey, Zechmeister and Evans analyzed responses to the question: “If nothing is done to reduce climate change in the future, how serious of a problem do you think it will be for [country]?”

They found that concern was highest in Mexico and Central America, where 81.5 percent characterized climate change as a “very serious” problem, with an additional 10.4 percent characterizing it as “somewhat serious.”

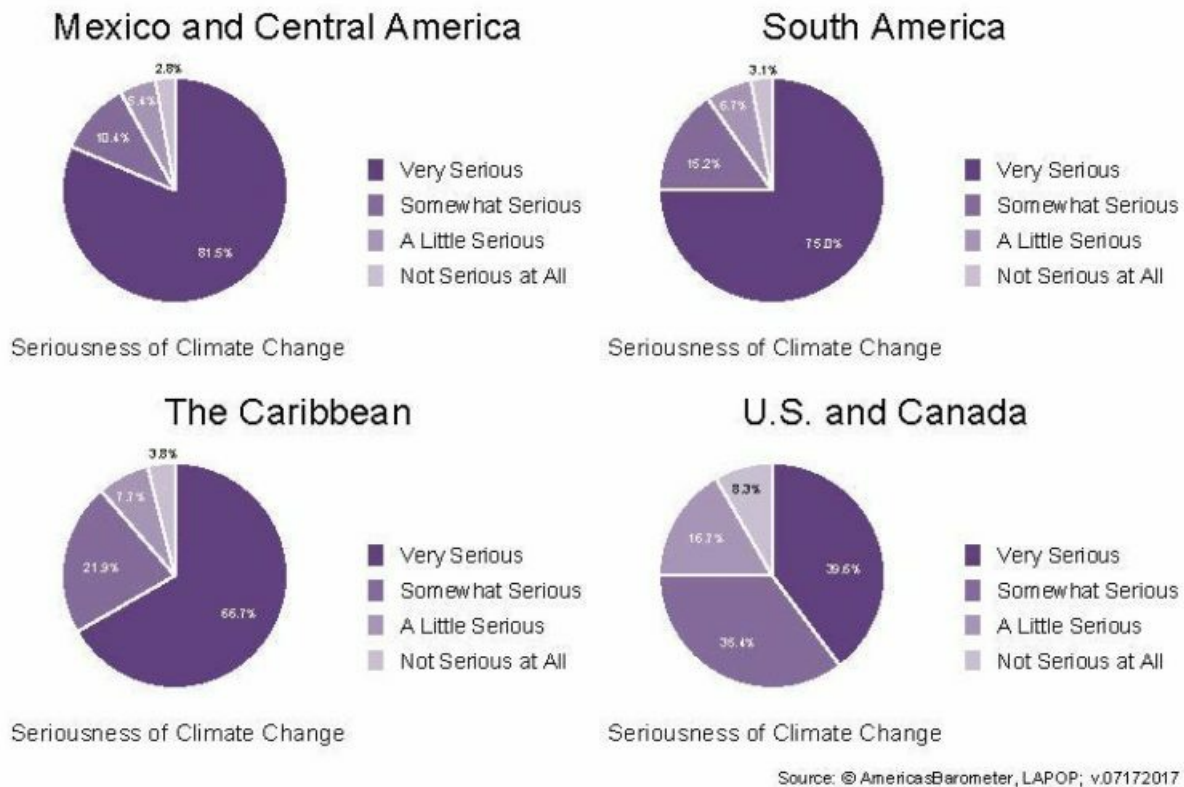
South America followed close behind, with 75 percent answering “very serious” and 15.2 percent saying “somewhat serious.”

In the Caribbean, 66.7 percent answered “very serious” and 21.9 percent said “somewhat serious.”

The United States and Canada trailed their neighbors considerably, with just 39.6 percent saying unchecked climate change was a “very serious” problem. However, a much larger proportion of adults in these areas considered it a “somewhat serious” issue—35.4 percent.



Liz Zechmeister (Vanderbilt University)



In the Latin America and Caribbean region, the most significant predictors of climate change concern are education and worries about being affected by a natural disaster, though wealth also plays a role. Education increases concern for climate change nearly 11 percent, while worries about natural disasters increases that concern 8.3 percent. Wealth is also linked to increased climate change concern, raising it by 3.3 percent.

The findings confirmed the researchers' hypothesis that climate change is a much more partisan issue in the United States than it is anywhere else in the hemisphere. Identifying as a liberal in the U.S. is associated with a 16.7 percent increase in climate change concern compared to political centrists, while identifying as a conservative is associated with a 25 percent decrease in concern.

South of the U.S. border, however, concern is quite high across the political spectrum, with almost no difference in concern between centrists and liberals, and only a slight reduction in concern among conservatives.

Zechmeister and Evans say this broad consensus about the seriousness of climate change in Latin America and the Caribbean suggests that government policies and programs to mitigate climate change could be well supported by the populations in those nations.

About LAPOP

LAPOP, hosted by Vanderbilt University, is the leading expert in public opinion polling in the Americas, with more than 40 years of experience. LAPOP's AmericasBarometer is the only scientifically rigorous comparative survey project that covers 34 nations in the Americas. More

than 43,500 interviews comprise the 2016–17AmericasBarometer. The surveys are based on national sample designs and conducted with the assistance of partners across the region. Core support for the AmericasBarometer is provided by USAID and Vanderbilt University.