

New survey finds climate change concerns much higher in C'bean than US, Canada

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NASHVILLE, United States (CMC) — A leading university here has found that climate change concerns are much higher in Latin America and the Caribbean than in the United States and Canada.

According to a new “Insights” report from Vanderbilt University’s Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), titled “Education and Risk Assessments Predict Climate Change Concerns in Latin America and the Caribbean,” 66.7 per cent of Caribbean nationals were “very serious” about climate change.

The report says 21.9 per cent of Caribbean nationals said they were “somewhat serious” about the phenomenon.

Meanwhile, 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, the report says.

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 politicised 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 Americas Barometre survey, Zechmeister and Evans analysed 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 per cent characterised climate change as a “very serious” problem, with an additional 10.4 per cent characterising it as “somewhat serious.”

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

The United States and Canada trailed their neighbours considerably, with just 39.6 per cent, 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 per cent, the report finds.

In the Latin America and Caribbean region, the report says 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 per cent, while worries about natural disasters increase that concern 8.3 per cent, the report says. Wealth is also linked to increased climate change concern, raising it by 3.3 per cent.

Vanderbilt University said 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 US is associated with a 16.7 per cent increase in climate change concern compared to political centrists, while identifying as a conservative is associated with a 25 per cent decrease in concern, the researchers find.

Zechmeister and Evans said 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.

LAPOP, hosted by Vanderbilt University, is considered the leading expert in public opinion polling in the Americas, with more than 40 years of experience.

LAPOP said its Americas Barometer is the “only scientifically rigorous comparative survey project that covers 34 nations in the Americas,” including the Caribbean.

More than 43,500 interviews comprise the 2016–17 Americas Barometer. The surveys are based on national sample designs and conducted with the assistance of partners across the region.