

Most Protestant pastors believe humans cause global warming

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NASHVILLE—For the first time, a majority of Protestant pastors believe global warming is happening and caused by humans.

A survey from [LifeWay Research](#) found 53 percent of Protestant pastors agree with the statement, “I believe global warming is real and man-made,” including 34 percent who strongly agree.

More than a third (38 percent) disagree, including 24 percent who strongly disagree. One in 10 (10 percent) say they’re not sure.

In [previous LifeWay Research surveys on the topic](#), pastors were evenly split or more skeptical. In 2008, 47 percent agreed. That fell to 36 percent in 2010 and bounced back to 43 percent in 2012.

“Fewer pastors are rejecting global warming and climate change out of hand,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “Yet pastors are still split on the subject, likely following along with political divides.”

A [2019 Pew Research study](#) found 49 percent of U.S. adults say human activity contributes to global climate change a great deal, 30 percent say some, and 20 percent say not too much or not at all.

When asked how much natural patterns in the Earth’s environment contribute, 35 percent of Americans say a great deal, 44 percent say some, and 20 percent say not too much or not at all.

Demographic and denominational differences

Differences of opinion among pastors in the LifeWay Research survey emerge throughout demographics and denominational ties.

African American pastors (78 percent) are most likely to agree.

The youngest pastors, ages 18-44, (59 percent) are more likely to agree than pastors 65 and older (47 percent).

Pastors with a doctoral (59 percent) or master's degree (58 percent) are more likely to agree than those with a bachelor's degree (43 percent) or no college degree (35 percent).

Mainline pastors (71 percent) are significantly more likely to agree than evangelical pastors (39 percent).

Pastors from Methodist (80 percent), Presbyterian/Reformed (67 percent), or Lutheran churches (63 percent) are more likely to agree than those from Restorationist movement (43 percent), Baptist (37 percent) or Pentecostal churches (32 percent).

Most try to reduce carbon footprint

A majority of Protestant pastors (54 percent) also say their church has taken tangible steps to reduce its carbon footprint, up from 45 percent in 2012. More than a third (36 percent) say they have not taken those steps, while 10 percent aren't sure.

Among those pastors who agree global warming is real and man-made, 70 percent say their church has worked to reduce their carbon footprint.

“Climate change can be a difficult issue to address because the causes and effects are not always easily seen where you live,” McConnell said. “Much like the current coronavirus pandemic, environmental mitigation efforts require trust in the scientists measuring the problem and finding the best solutions that balance all of the concerns involved.”

Pastors in the Northeast (62 percent) are more likely to agree than those in the South (50 percent).

Mainline pastors (67 percent) are also more likely to agree than evangelicals (47 percent).

Among the denominational families, Presbyterian/Reformed (69 percent), Methodist (67 percent), and Lutheran pastors (64 percent) are more likely to say their church has taken tangible steps to reduce their carbon footprint than Pentecostal (41 percent) or Baptist pastors (39 percent).

The phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors was conducted Aug. 30 to Sept. 24, 2019. The calling list was a stratified random sample, drawn from a list of all Protestant churches and using quotas for church size. Each interview was conducted with the senior pastor, minister or priest of the church called. Analysts weighted responses by region to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,000 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.3 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

Do you believe global warming is real and man-made?

Among Protestant Pastors

● Agree ● Disagree

