Contraception and Consumption in the Age of Extinction: U.S. Survey Results

In order to understand how people in the United States perceive their impact on wildlife and the environment, the Center for Biological Diversity conducted a nationally representative online survey in the winter of 2019. The survey’s key findings are broken down into four topics: population, family planning, climate change and consumption. This fact sheet outlines the key findings of the Consumption survey questions. To read the full report visit biologicaldiversity.org/Contraception_Consumption.
Consumption

Most products in the United States come from virgin materials and the extraction, processing and distribution systems associated with everything we consume have an environmental impact. The amount of waste produced in the country has steadily increased over the past 60 years. Each person generates nearly twice as much waste now as a person did in 1960.[i]

By including questions about consumption, the Center wanted to understand whether the public believes the United States is doing enough to stop environmental degradation caused by our outsized consumption and see if the public makes the connection between their personal consumption habits and the extinction crisis.

Key finding 1: Three out of 4 respondents say the U.S. isn’t doing enough to protect natural resources. This is a 24% increase from 2013 survey results.

Chart 1. Do you think the U.S. is doing too much, too little, or the right amount to protect natural resources like water, air, wildlife and land? (2013/2019 response comparison)

Key finding 2: Most respondents (74%) say Americans consume too many natural resources. This sentiment grew by 26% since the 2013 survey. However, nearly half of respondents (48%) also believe they personally consume less than the average American.

This discrepancy between what people believe others are doing versus what they believe they are personally doing could be leading to an increase in guilt-free overconsumption.

Three out of 4 people in the U.S. think the average American consumes too many natural resources.

Of the 19% of respondents that believe consumption is primarily responsible for the rapid loss of biodiversity, 28% believe world consumption is the primary cause, 14% believe U.S. consumption is the main cause and 60% believe both world and U.S. consumption are the cause of biodiversity loss.

Survey respondents do not see a distinction between consumption patterns of the global north and the global south even though research has shown that the average American has an environmental footprint nearly 700% larger than the average person in most African countries.[ii]
Consumption

The survey included many questions about respondents’ behavioral intentions and previous actions. One-third of respondents in this section said they are willing to act in the following ways if they had more information:

**1. They would reduce personal consumption by buying only what they need**

According to survey respondents, over half (51%) are willing to reduce their personal consumption by buying only what they need and an additional 31% are willing to buy only what they need but need more information. A majority (67%) of respondents say they have reduced their personal consumption in the past.

**2. They would vote for policymakers who acknowledge that consumption patterns impact the environment**

Thirty-nine percent of respondents say they are currently voting for policymakers who acknowledge consumption impacts the environment. Over three-fourths of respondents (77%) are willing to do this, but 34% of them need more information.

**Key finding 3: Respondents who say there is a moral responsibility to prevent extinctions are more likely to acknowledge that consumption patterns have an impact on the environment.**

The vast majority (85%) of respondents feel a moral responsibility to prevent wildlife extinctions. As shown above, 39% of respondents voted for policymakers who acknowledge that consumption patterns impact the environment. Of those who say there is a moral responsibility to prevent extinctions, that number jumps to 42%.

**Survey Methodology**

We surveyed 899 people distributed evenly across each of the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, proportionate to the U.S. Census Bureau’s population estimates for 2018, to achieve statistically accurate results (95% confidence level). Respondents were recruited online via the Amazon platform Mechanical Turk (“MTurk”) using both an English and Spanish survey, and Survey Monkey was used to collect the data.

The survey included questions from a previous survey conducted by the Center in 2013 to gauge change over time. Results were analyzed using a series of basic statistical approaches in SPSS software. We implemented several quality-control measures into our survey to eliminate false respondents. For more information about the survey’s methodology visit: [biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/pdfs/Contraception-and-Consumption-Survey-Report-Survey-Methodology-2020.pdf](http://biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/pdfs/Contraception-and-Consumption-Survey-Report-Survey-Methodology-2020.pdf).