



Contraception and Consumption in the Age of Extinction:

U.S. Survey Results

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Executive Summary

Over the past two centuries the Earth's human population has doubled, and doubled again, and nearly doubled yet again, increasing from 1 billion to more than 7.6 billion people today.ⁱ Species extinctions and die-offs of wild animals and plants are unfortunately keeping pace. Over the past 50 years, as human populations have doubled, wildlife populations have plummeted by half.ⁱⁱ

Humans have an enormous influence on wildlife and the environment. Only [one-fifth of ice-free land on the planet](#) has very low human impacts. Agriculture and grazing, fossil fuel use, logging, urban sprawl, climate change and the introduction of invasive species have fragmented habitat and transformed landscapes across the globe. In the United States, reckless extraction, production and consumption have an outsized impact on the planet. If everyone in the world lived the way Americans do today, it would take five Earths to sustain us.ⁱⁱⁱ

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. Researchers, academics and activists acknowledge population growth and consumption affect the environment, but few social scientists have studied what the general public thinks of these subjects. This research fills that knowledge gap.

Key Survey Findings

The survey's key findings are broken down into four topics: population, family planning, climate change and consumption.

Population Key Findings

1. Seventy-three percent of respondents think the world's population is growing too fast. This is a 23% increase over 2013 survey results. Nearly three-fourths of respondents (73%) agree human population growth is driving other animal species to extinction, a 13% increase over 2013 survey results.^{iv}
2. More than half of respondents (60%) see biodiversity loss as caused by both human population growth and consumption levels.
3. A vast majority of respondents (85%) think society has a moral responsibility to prevent wildlife extinctions and a majority (69%) think society has a moral responsibility to slow human population growth if it would help prevent extinctions.

Family Planning Key Findings

1. Lack of healthcare access was the most critically important topic for survey respondents. Eighty percent agree that all types of birth control should be legal, free and easily accessible. Additionally, 68% of respondents agree that immigrants, people of color and other marginalized communities lack access to healthcare.
2. Over 50% of respondents are talking with partners, family and/or friends about desired future family size.
3. Actions of respondents, such as voting for supportive policymakers and advocating for reproductive health policies, vary between federal, state and local issues, with actions focused primarily on federal policies.



Climate Change Key Findings

1. Seventy-one percent of respondents agree that human population growth is making climate change worse. This is a 14% increase over 2013 survey results.
2. Those that believe the climate crisis is very or critically important are more likely to see the connection between climate change and population, consumption and the extinction crisis.
3. One-third of respondents believe climate change may compel others to choose to have fewer children.

Consumption Key Findings

1. Three out of 4 respondents say the United States isn't doing enough to protect natural resources. This is a 24% increase from 2013 survey results.
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.
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 best solutions to address population pressure are those that advance human rights, like education for all, voluntary family planning, universal access to contraception and reproductive healthcare — including abortion.

It's also necessary to address consumption by focusing upstream on reuse and waste prevention and building a just, sustainable economy that supports shorter supply chains, local jobs and resilient, equitable communities. Sustainability is not just about having enough resources for human beings but about sharing the planet and creating a livable future for all creatures and organisms that share and constitute our ecosystems.

ⁱ United Nations. 2019. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://www.un.org/en/sections/what-we-do/promote-sustainable-development/index.html>

ⁱⁱ Scott, J.M. 2008. Threats to Biological Diversity: Global, Continental, Local. U.S. Geological Survey, Idaho Cooperative Fish and Wildlife, Research Unit, University of Idaho. <https://scholar.law.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=water-resources-and-transformation-of-American-West>

ⁱⁱⁱ Global Footprint Network. 2020. Country Trends: North America. http://data.footprintnetwork.org/?_ga=2.10602418.728955779.1599258986-871759858.1599258986#/countryTrends?type=earth&cn=2004

^{iv} Public Policy Polling. 2013. National Survey Results for Center for Biological Diversity. https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/pdfs/NationalSurveyResults2-2.pdf