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Majority of Floridians call climate change a threat, FAU poll says

The partisan divide is less pronounced in a state already grappling with rising seas and stronger storms.



A motorist drives down a flooded Meadowlawn Dr. near Kingswood Dr. in St. Petersburg after Tropical Storm Colin dumped heavy rains over the Tampa Bay area Tuesday. [JAMES BORCHUCK | Times]

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More than two-thirds of Florida adults consider climate change a threat to future generations and say state and local governments should do more to address it, according to a poll released Monday by Florida Atlantic University.

The poll found 68 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that climate change “has them concerned about the well-being of future generations in Florida,” according to a news release from the university. Just 28 percent said state, county and city governments were doing enough to address it.



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Colin Polsky, director of the FAU Center for Environmental Studies, who led the effort, said the poll showed a surprising lack of a “grand partisan divide” on climate change in Florida, compared to the nation as a whole. While the split exists in Florida, it’s smaller in a state in which more [frequent coastal flooding](#) and the [threat of hurricanes](#) has made the issue more immediate.

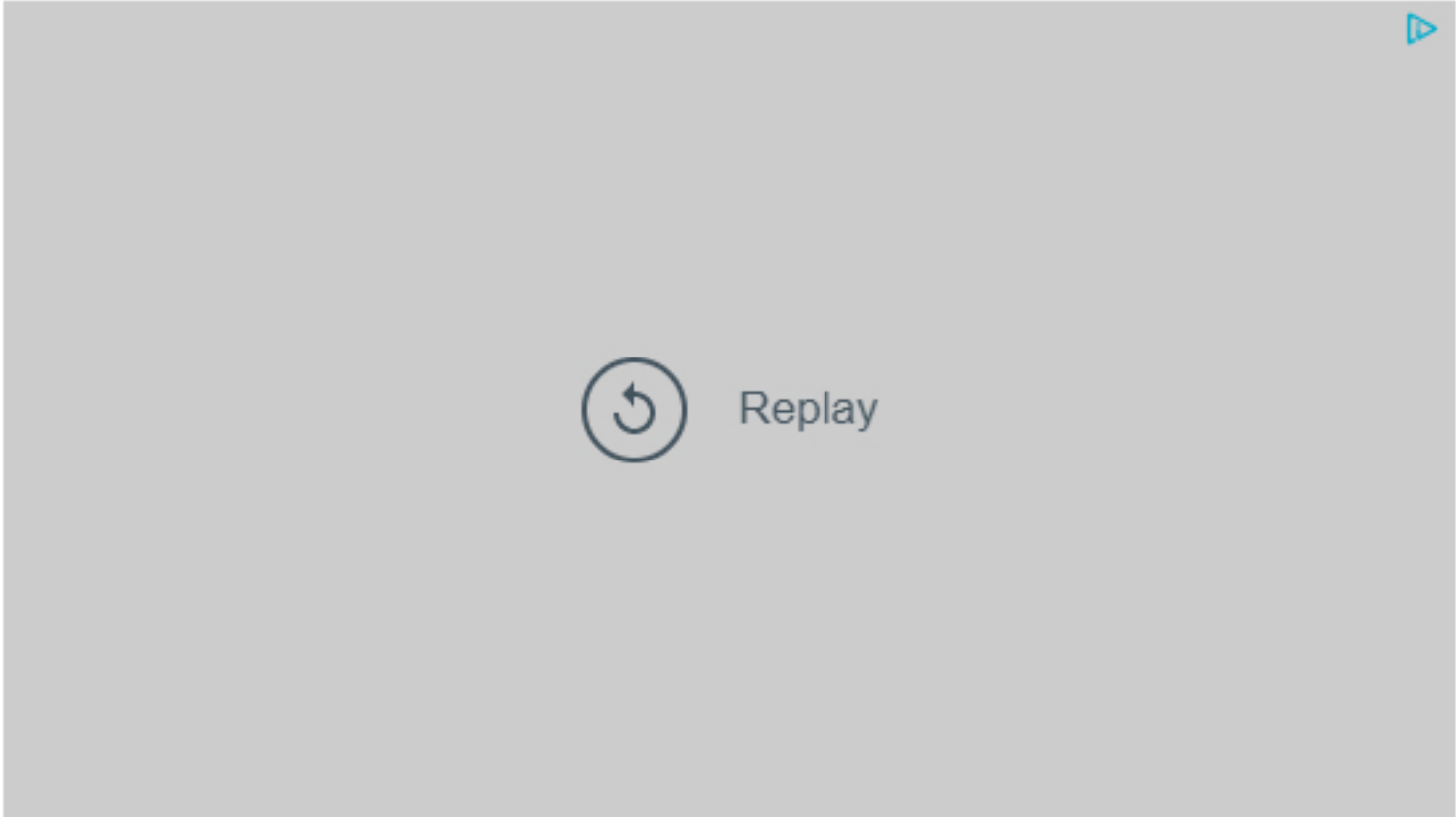
For example, he said, the poll found 44 percent of Republicans in Florida agreed that climate change was real and primarily caused by human activities. While that’s lower than the 59 percent of independents and 70 percent of Democrats who agreed with that statement, he said it was significant that nearly half of Republicans considered human-caused climate change to be real.

“Nationally we tend to expect and see Republicans score much, much lower on that question than independents or Democrats,” he said. “The results from the Florida survey show much less difference.”

Other results of the survey:

- Sixty-eight percent support teaching about climate change in the schools.
- The numbers were higher for specific hazards associated with climate change. Sixty-five percent expressed a moderate or extreme concern about hurricanes getting stronger, 61 percent about rising temperatures and 59 percent about rising seas levels.
- Among younger people, the belief in the scientific consensus on climate change was higher. Sixty percent of those aged 18-49 believed that climate change is real and caused by human activities, while for those aged 50-64 the percent was 51 percent and for those 65 or over it was 52 percent.

The poll of 1,045 Floridians was conducted by FAU’s Center for Environmental Studies and Business and Economics Polling Initiative in the university’s College of Business.



The possible impact of climate change on next year’s presidential election remains unclear in Florida, whose 29 electoral votes and evenly split electorate make the state a [crucial battleground](#).

The lines on the issue are likely to be fairly sharp between President Trump and his Democratic opponent.

Trump has dismissed climate change as a “hoax” invented by China, pledged to withdraw the United States from what he called the “job-killing” Paris agreement to limit greenhouse gases and authorized a lawsuit to block part of California’s climate-change reduction program. All the top contenders for the Democratic nomination consider climate change a reality that the United States needs to address.

Whether the issue can tip the balance in Florida remains unclear, although in a state with a recent history of electoral photo-finishes, any issue could make a difference.

“Historically, Floridians have usually gravitated toward three general issues, including education, the environment and crime,” said Kevin Wagner, chairman of the political science department at FAU, who was not involved in the poll. “With that said, which issue rises to the top can change. I think the easy takeaway is that yes, the environment matters to people. The question we don’t know yet is whether those concerns are going to be the thing that drives their vote.”