FAU analysis: climate change becoming a bipartisan issue in Florida

by Jordan Kirkland 1 Dec 2, 2021

Belief in climate change among Florida Republicans has climbed to nearly 9 out of 10 adults, according to a new analysis conducted by researchers at Florida Atlantic University.

The new analysis — consisting of five sequential surveys since 2015 — found that despite belief in climate change being found highest among Florida Democrats (88%), compared to their Republican counterparts (66%), the latter group’s share appears more than sufficient for Florida Republican lawmakers to embrace the science around climate change without it dampening support from their base.

RAI also noted in the report that the size of these numbers suggests no significant partisan divide on the question. Suggesting that the key issue may no longer be an effective campaign strategy for candidates heading into the midterm elections.

“This sequence of results begins to paint a picture of Floridians’ attitudes during a period of particularly dynamic political, economic and environmental conditions. During the period of these five surveys, public opinion about climate change was highly shaped negatively by the Trump Administration’s 2017 decision to withdraw the United States from the United Nations 2015 Paris Climate Accord,” said Colin Falcon, Ph.D., director of the Center for Environmental Studies and a professor of geosciences at FAU’s Charles E. Schmidt College of Science. “Similarly, the importance of climate change for the public was likely threatened in response to new, immediate and daily concerns associated with the coronavirus pandemic and economic crises it triggered. As such, these Florida opinion survey results about climate change can be viewed as reflecting public sentiment of at least two significant external and independent influences on public opinion.”

Additionally, RAI found that party affiliation is linked with differences of opinion about the cause of climate change: nearly half of Florida Republicans believe climate change is a human-caused issue, compared to three-quarters of Florida Democrats. Researchers added that the distinction may explain why the state’s Republican leaders appear willing to address climate change solutions but not willing to reference the underlying reasons for the changing climate.

RAI says these overarching general beliefs are echoed by respondents’ support for or against specific climate-related policies. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Floridians, including 66 percent of Republicans, support teaching climate change causes, consequences and solutions in K-12 classrooms.

It’s only at the national level that climate change opinions among Florida Republicans begin to diverge. RAI reported that approximately one-half of surveyed Republicans believe in global warming, and one-third in a human-caused global warming, according to recent national surveys.

Consequently, the national party may continue to oppose openly acknowledging the science behind global warming, even while statements and actions by Florida Republicans likely take a generally different approach to climate change, RAI added in a press release.

The latest of the five surveys was conducted in English from Sept. 1-18, by the Center for Environmental Studies at FAU. The sample consisted of 1,400 Floridians, ages 18 and older, with a margin of error of +/- 2.42 percent. The data was collected using an online panel provided by GoodRx Research. Responses for the entire sample were weighted to adjust for age, race, income, education and gender according to the 2018 American Community Survey from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. FAU’s Business & Economics Polling Initiative assisted with data collection for the first four surveys.