

Americans' Attitudes Toward Government Spending on the Environment, 2006 - 2016

Research Question

- How have American adults' attitudes toward government spending on the environment changed in the past decade?
- How have these changes varied based on a person's education and age?

Significance

- We are facing a multitude of environmental problems, both locally and globally.
- Americans' concerns over environmental issues have declined since 2008 (Scruggs & Benegal, 2012).
- Research is needed to examine trends in the past decade and how trends have varied based on key demographic groups, such as education and age.

Background

- Hard economic conditions, e.g., recession, affect respondents to believe that the government is spending too much on the environment (Conroy & Emerson, 2014).
- Political affiliation has led to polarization in attitudes towards government spending (McCright et al., 2014).
- Higher education and younger ages are both associated with attitudes that the government is spending too little on the environment (Conroy, 2014; Klineberg et al., 1998).

Hypotheses

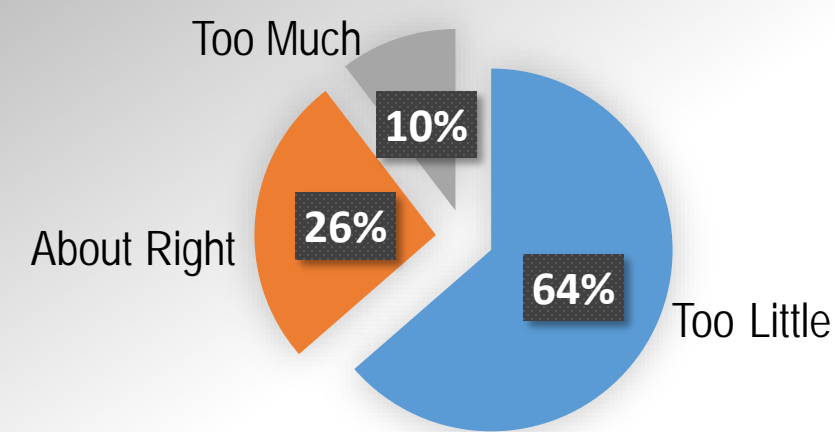
- Attitudes toward government spending on the environment became less accepting around the Great Recession (2008 – 2012).
- The recession effects were smaller for younger adults and the highly educated.

Data

- The 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 General Social Survey (N = 15,956)
- Nationally representative sample of American adults aged 18 and older.

Dependent Measure

Figure 1. Attitudes Toward Government Spending on the Environment



Independent Measure

- The independent variable is Year. The years being analyzed are 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016.

Control Measures

Figure 2. Age

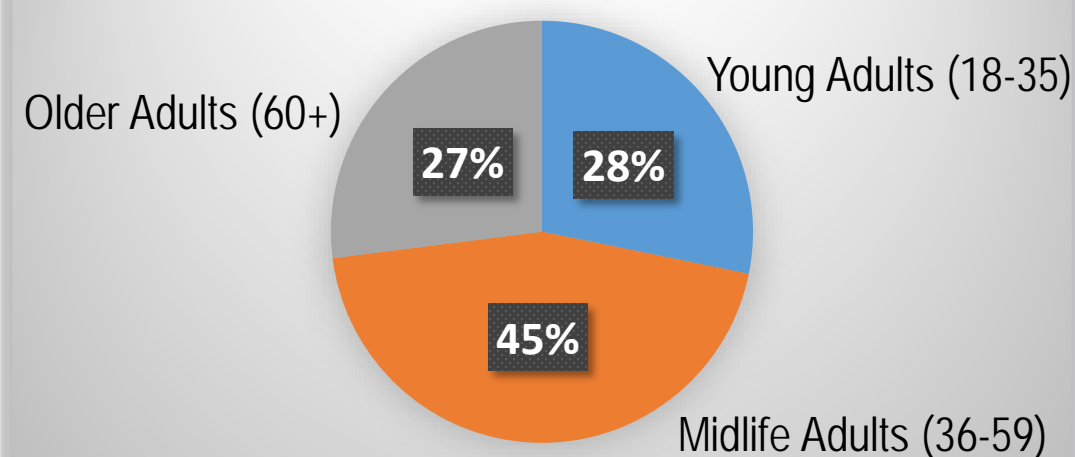
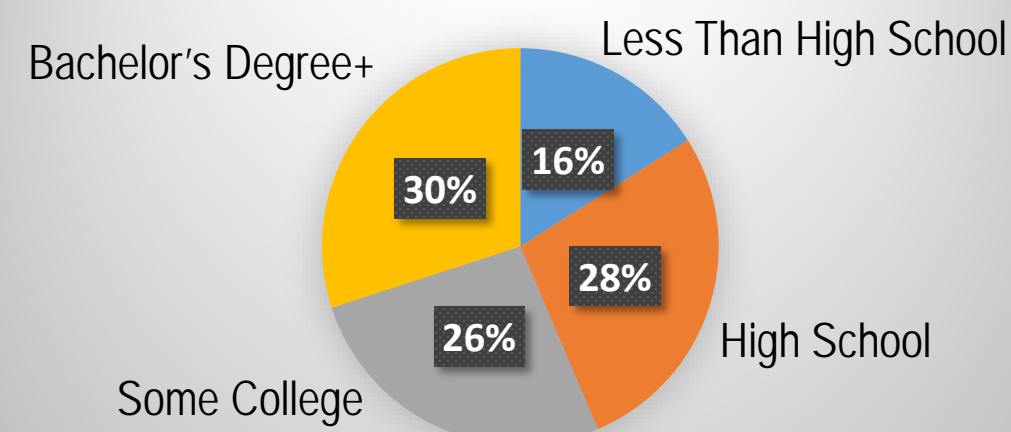


Figure 3. Education

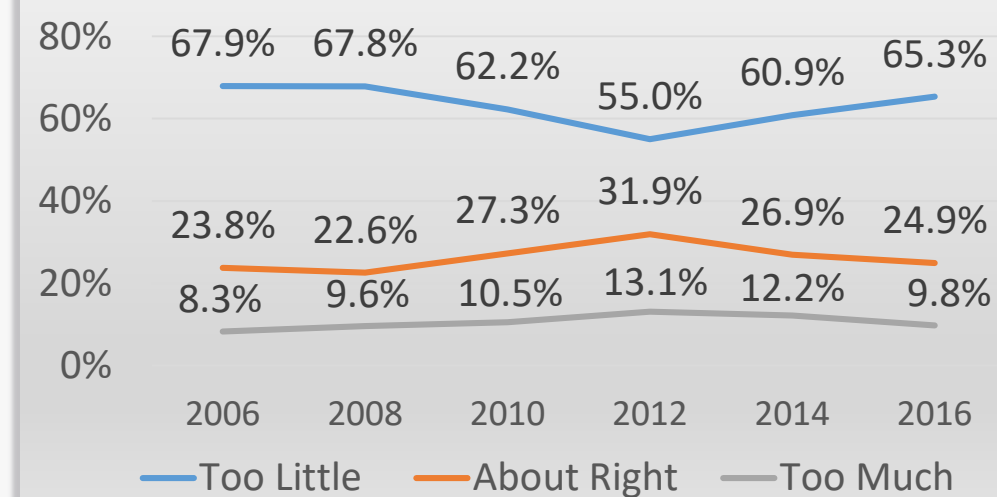


Analytical Plan

- Cross-tabulation and Chi-square test using GSS

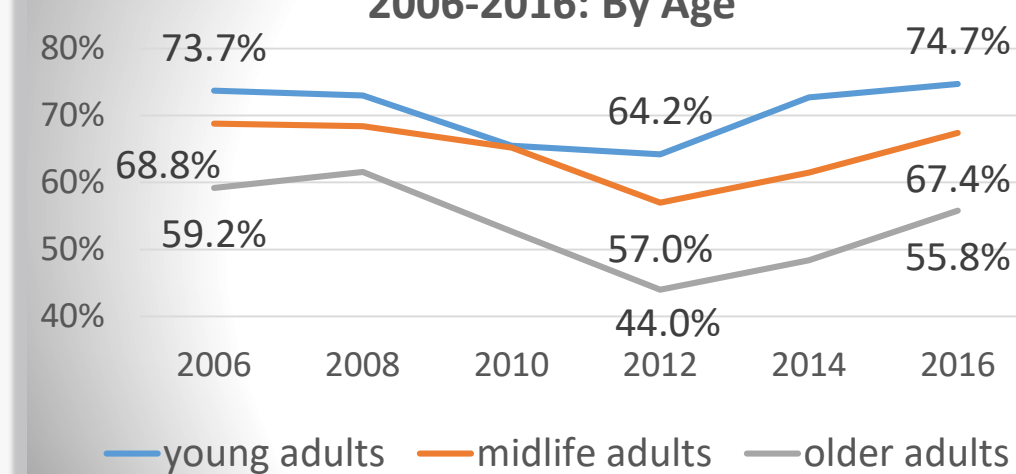
Results

Figure 4. Trend in % of Americans' Attitudes Toward the Government Spending on the Environment 2006-2016



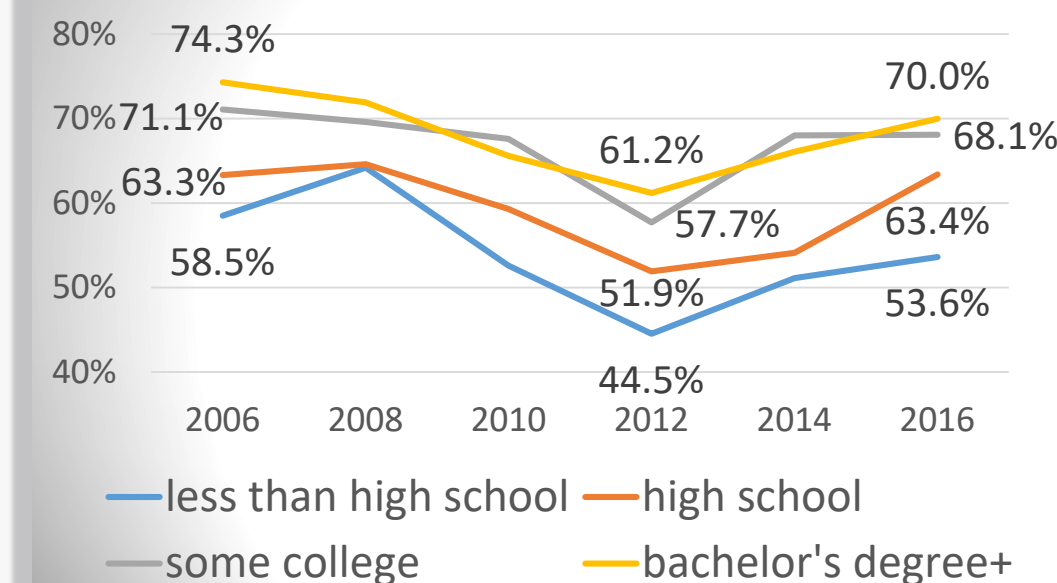
The results are statistically significant ($p < .001$)

Figure 5. Trend in % of Americans Reporting that the Government is Spending Too Little on the Environment 2006-2016: By Age



The results of young adults are not statistically significant ($p = .121$). The results for midlife & older adults are statistically significant ($p < .01$).

Figure 6. Trends in % of Americans Reporting that the Government is Spending Too Little on the Environment 2006-2016: By Education



The results for "less than high school" are not statistically significant ($p = .064$). The results for "high school", "some college", and "bachelor's degree" are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Summary of the Findings

- From 2008 to 2012, the percentage of respondents who selected "too little" in response to government spending on the environment dropped.
- Starting in 2014 and in the final year of analysis (2016), the percentage of respondents who selected "too little" rose.
- Drop from 2008 to 2012 may be due to the Great Recession.
- Year effects are not significant for those without high school degree, who are least likely to support spending on the environment, and the younger adults who are most likely to support it.

Policy Implications

- Economic hardships affect Americans' attitudes toward government spending.
- Policy makers should implement more cost-benefit materials to back up policy proposals.
- Future research could analyze attitudes on various environmental policies during a spectrum of economic conditions.

References

- Conroy, S., & Emerson, T. (2014). A tale of trade-offs: The impact of macroeconomic factors on environmental concern. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 145, 88 – 93.
- Klineberg, S., McKeever, M., & Rothenbach, B. (1998). Demographic predictors of environmental concern: It does make a difference how it's measured. *Social Science Quarterly*, 79(4), 734 – 753.
- Lopez, R. Galinato, G., & Islam, A. (2011). Fiscal spending and the environment: Theory and empirics. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, 62, 180-198.
- McCright, A. M., Xiao, C., & Dunlap, R. E. (2014) Political Polarization on support for government spending on environmental protection in the USA 1974 - 2012. *Social Science Research*, 48, 251 – 260.
- Rudolph, T., & Evans. J. (2005) Political trust, ideology, and public support for government spending. *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(3), 660 – 671.
- Scruggs, L., & Benegal, S. (2012). Declining public concern about climate change: Can we blame the great recession? *Global Environmental Change*, 22, 505-515.