



DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

IN WHAT DEMOGRAPHICS HAVE OPINIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE MOVED THE MOST?

Zachary L. Hertz

December 2020

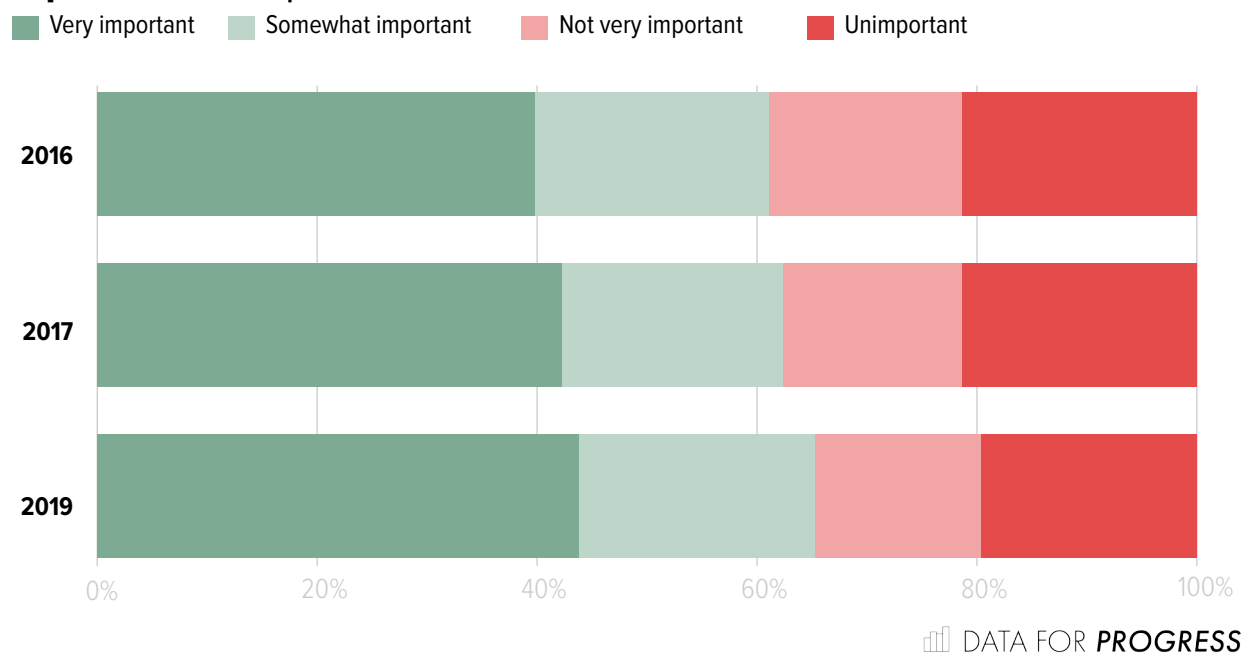
Executive Summary

- ▶ The electorate increasingly and indiscriminately sees climate change as an important issue, with consensus growing consistently across demographic groups.
- ▶ Black and Asian American respondents both overwhelmingly viewed climate change as important at significantly higher levels than in 2016.
- ▶ One of the most prominent shifts in opinion on climate change occurred among Independent voters, with a margin widening from 11 to 25 percentage points.
- ▶ Generally, opinions on climate change were similar and increased at a similar pace across demographic groups separated by education level.

Research shows that a strong majority of Americans see climate change as an important issue, suggesting the climate debate will play a critical role in November- but in what demographics do these views lie, and where have they been changing? As part of the VOTER Survey (Views of The Electorate Research Survey), individuals were asked in 2016, 2017, and 2019 to state how important the issue of climate change is to them. We are especially interested in discovering in which demographic groups opinions about climate change have shifted the most.

Because the VOTER survey draws from a regularly interviewed panel, we can directly examine how opinions on climate change have shifted over time within the same group of voters. Overall, the number of respondents who view climate change as an important issue have grown by 4 percent, to 65 percent of respondents, and this trend is observed consistently in various degrees across demographics.

Topline shift in opinion

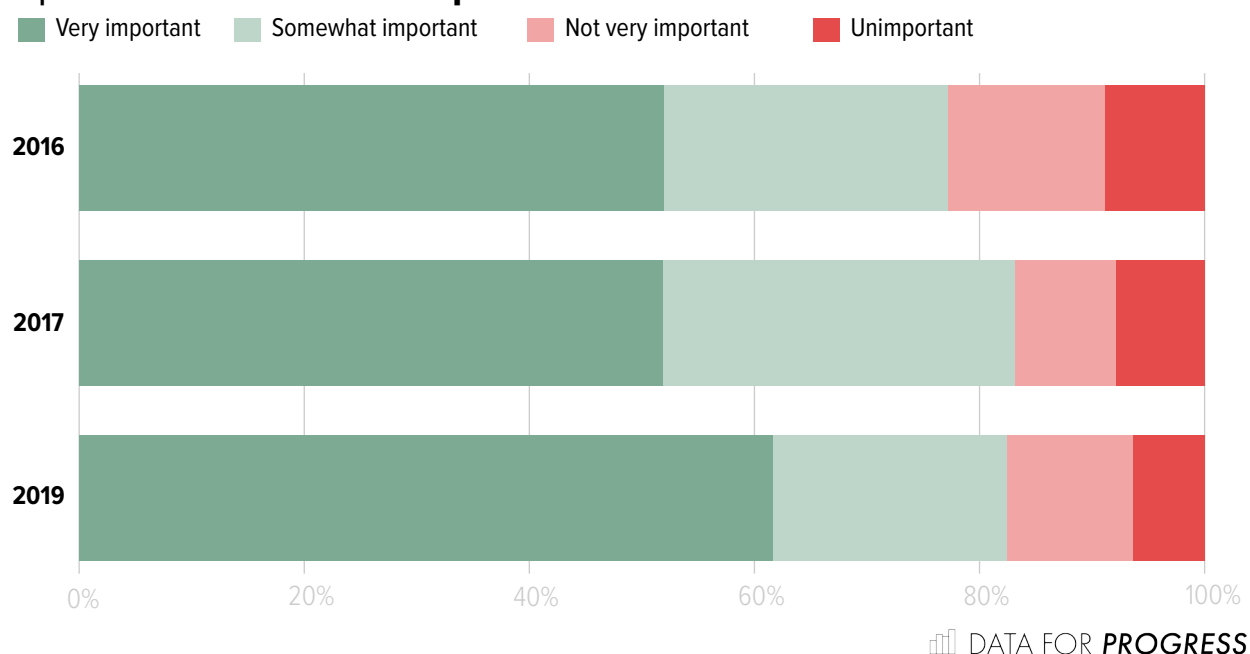


RACE: White respondents were one of only a few demographic groups where both the share of respondents that viewed climate change as important was smaller than the share of overall respondents (59.9 percent versus 65.2 percent) and the shift in opinion between 2016 and 2019 among white respondents (3.94 percent) fell short of the shift among all respondents (4.15 percent).

The share of Hispanic respondents who viewed climate change as important in 2019 grew only 2.84 percentage points in comparison to 2016, though the share of Hispanic respondents who viewed climate change as important in 2019 was a considerable majority at 71.7 percent.

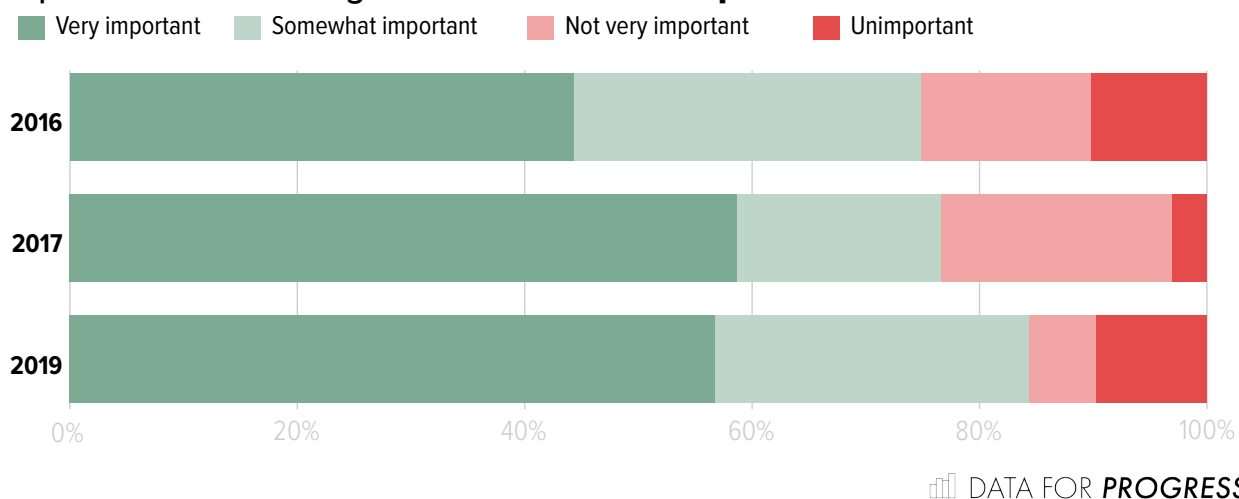
One of the largest shifts in opinion occurred among black respondents; while 77.2 percent of black respondents in 2016 thought climate change was important, this grew by 5.26 percentage points to 82.4 percent of black respondents in 2019. The shift was largely driven by an increase from 51.9 to 61.6 percent of black respondents who viewed climate change as “very important”.

Opinion shifts in **Black respondents**



Asian American respondents also saw a sizeable shift in opinion of 9.4 percentage points, with 84.2 percent of Asian American respondents in 2019 viewing climate change as important. Similarly, this seemed to be driven by an 12.4 percentage point increase in respondents who viewed climate change as “very important.”

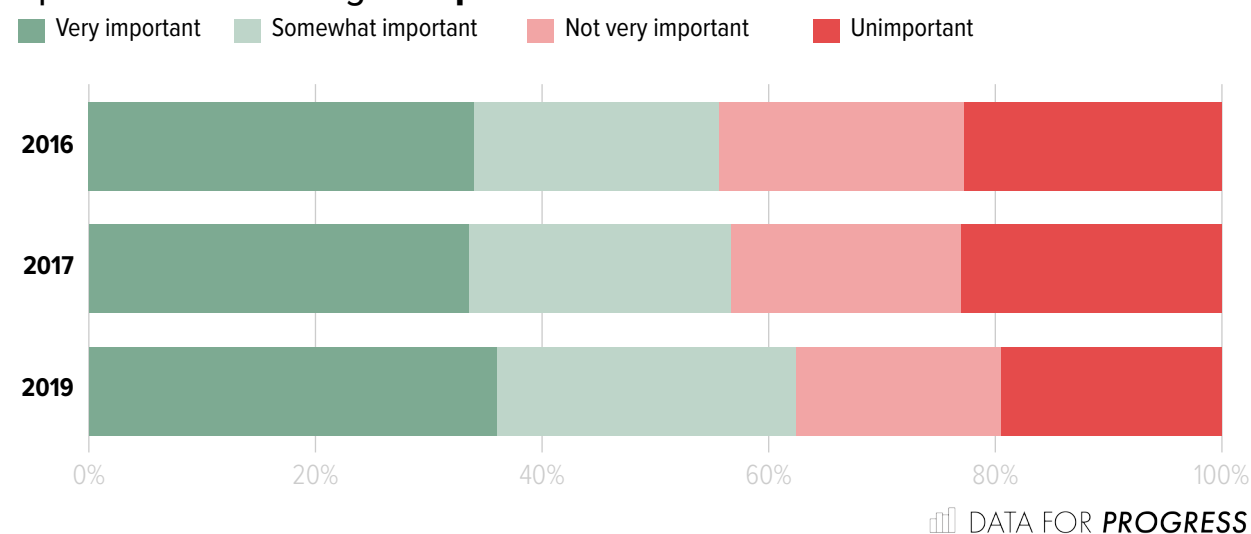
Opinion shifts among Asian American respondents



PARTY ID: In 2016, an unambiguous majority (91.2 percent) of Democrats viewed climate change as important, so it is perhaps unsurprising that the percent of Democrats who viewed climate change as important in 2019 was only 1.33 percentage points higher.

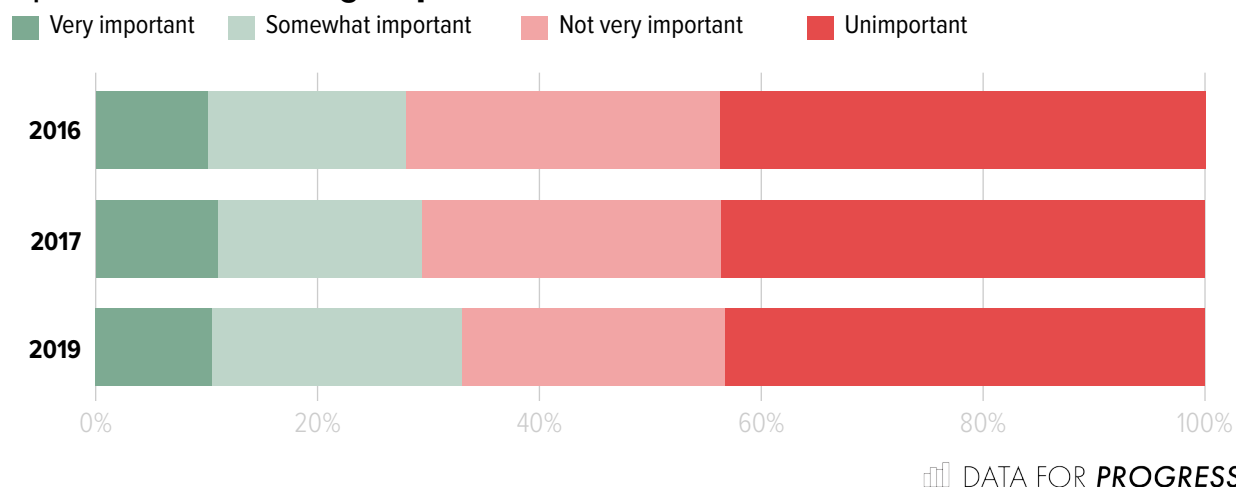
On the importance of climate change, Independents in 2019 strikingly shifted nearly 7 percentage points. This increase was driven mainly by the 5 percentage point increase in Independent respondents who viewed climate change as “somewhat important”.

Opinion shifts among Independents



Finally, while a minority of Republicans viewed climate change as important (just 33 percent in 2019), there was still a substantial increase of 5.1 percentage points between 2016 and 2019. This was driven almost entirely by Republicans moving from viewing climate change as “not very important” to “somewhat important”.

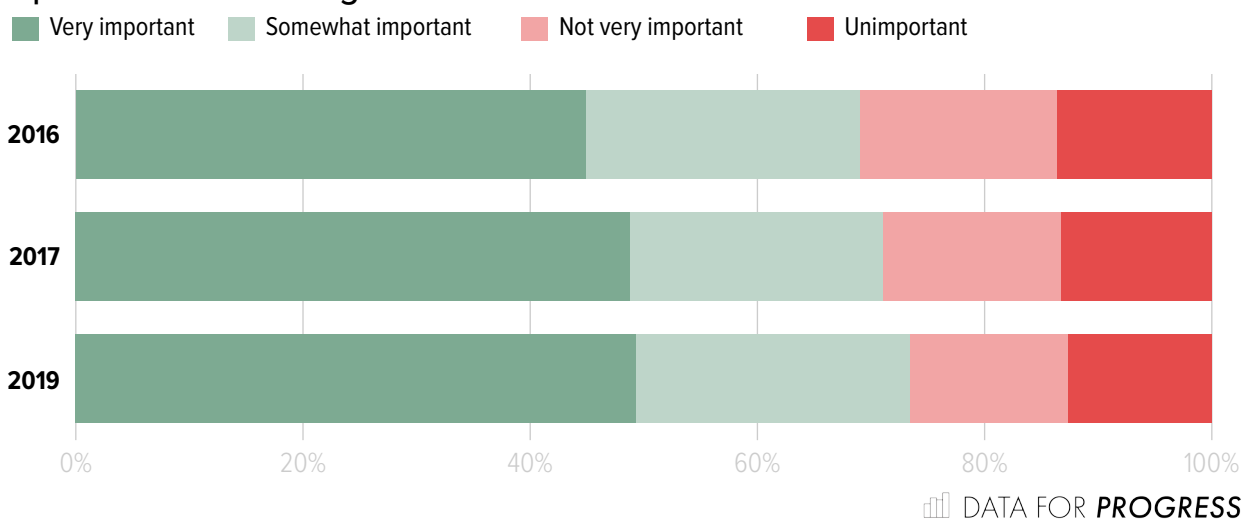
Opinion shifts among **Republicans**



GENDER: In 2019, only a modest majority of men (56.5 percent) saw climate change as important. While this was an increase of 3.9 percentage points from 2016, it was still a lower increase in support compared to respondents as a whole.

Women, however, overwhelmingly saw climate change as important (73.4 percent), in an increase of 4.4 percentage points over 2016. Like in other demographic groups, this was driven by a sizeable increase of 4.2 percentage points in respondents viewing climate change as “very important”.

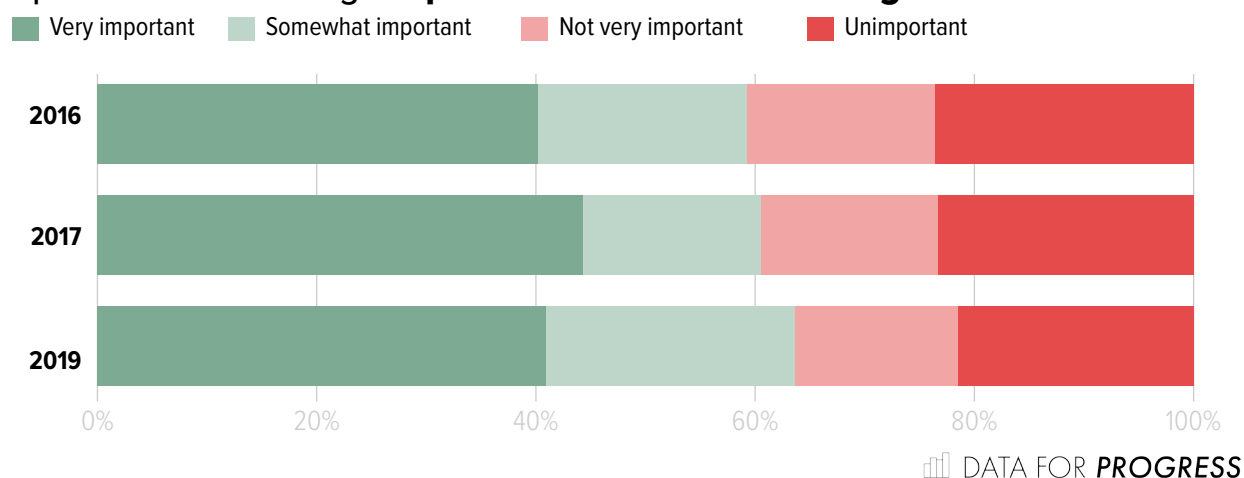
Opinion shifts among **women**



EDUCATION: Both topline results and shifts in opinions on the importance of climate change had little variance across respondents grouped by education level. Furthermore, most respondents when grouped by education level appeared similar to respondents in aggregate.

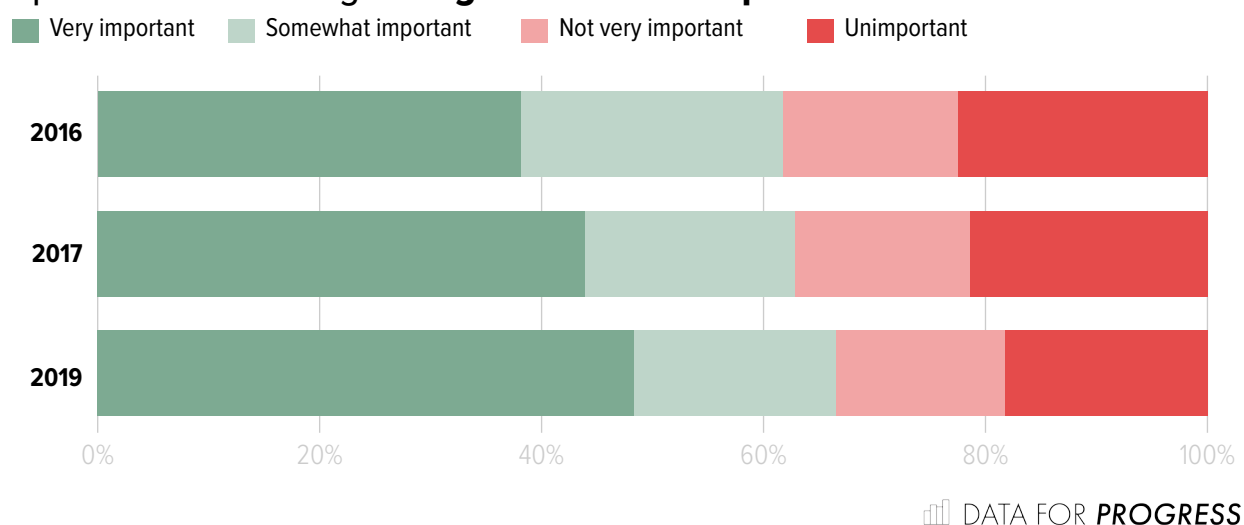
Of respondents whose highest level of education was high school or less, 64.2 percent of respondents viewed climate change as important, an increase of 4.2 percentage points from 2016. A slightly smaller percent of respondents whose highest level of education was some college thought climate change was important (63.6 percent), though it represented a larger increase from 2016 (4.4 percentage points). Notably, the shift among respondents with some college seemed to be driven by an increase in those responding to climate change as “somewhat important” rather than “very important”.

Opinion shifts among respondents with some college education



Nearly two-thirds of respondents with college degrees thought climate change was important, a 4.7 percentage point increase from 2016. This was driven by a significant shift of 10.2 percentage points in respondents saying climate change was “very important”.

Opinion shifts among college-educated respondents



Finally, while 68.2 percent of respondents whose highest level of education was post-grad viewed climate change as important, this represented only a 3.1 percentage point increase from 2016.

AGE: In 2019, respondents age 18-29 were decisively likely to find climate change important (84.0 percent), and had not shifted significantly (an increase of 3.2 percentage points) from 2016.

While respondents age 30-44 in 2019 also conclusively viewed climate change as an important issue (72.4 percent), this represented a larger shift of 4.3 percentage points from 2016.

Only 61.2 percent of respondents age 45-54 in 2019, meanwhile, thought climate change was important, an increase of just 3.3 percentage points from 2016.

While in 2019 just 59.1 percent of respondents age 55-64 said climate change was important, the group experienced a 5.1 percentage point shift in opinion between 2016 and 2019, with gains distributed fairly evenly between “very important” and “somewhat important”.

Finally, in 2019 more respondents thought climate change was important in the 65+ age group (64.5 percent) than among respondents ages 45-54 or ages 55-64, increasing 4.1 percentage points from 2016.

Conclusion

Between 2016 and 2019, all demographic groups increasingly saw climate change as important. These increases were particularly pronounced among black and Asian American voters, despite the already high rates at which they regarded climate change as important. Increases were also notable among Independents, Republicans, and voters age 55-64. Because a relatively smaller majority of these groups sees climate change as important, room remains for these trends to continue in future data.

Methodology

Data is taken from the 2019 VOTER Survey, conducted by the survey firm YouGov. In total, 6,779 adults (ages 18 and up) with internet access took the survey online between November 17, 2018 and January 7, 2019. The reported margin of error is plus or minus 1.8 percent.

Of this group, 5,948 respondents are long-term participants (“panelists”) in the VOTER Survey. 214 are part of an oversample of Asian Americans introduced in the January 2019 wave.

The December 2016 survey (N=8,000) was the first VOTER Survey, the July 2017 survey was the second VOTER Survey (N=5,000), the May 2018 survey was the third VOTER Survey (N=6,005), and the January 2019 survey was thus the fourth VOTER Survey.

Sample weights are an analysis of panelists who have responded in every wave up to the January 2019 survey (N=4,052).