

# Majority of American religious leaders silently believe in climate change, ASU study shows

**Despite overwhelming belief in human-caused climate change, most Christian leaders don't preach about it**

By Pete Zrioka, ASU News  
April 21, 2025

Many Americans turn to religious leaders for guidance on matters of faith and morality.

With this in mind, a new study, led by a researcher from Arizona State University, suggests that congregations may also find guidance on climate change — if their leaders preached about it.

Despite overwhelming belief in human-caused climate change among U.S. religious leaders, most rarely mention it from the pulpit, according to research published on March 25 in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#).

The study, co-authored by [Stylianos Syropoulos](#) from ASU's [College of Global Futures](#) and Gregg Sparkman of Boston College, found that nearly 90% of American religious leaders believe in human-caused climate change to some degree, with 60% believing humans play a major role. Even with these beliefs, half of the surveyed leaders said they never discussed climate change in their sermons or teachings, and 25% only mentioned it once or twice.

Syropoulos and Sparkman studied data from a representative sample of U.S. religious leaders, most of whom were Christian. The survey included 1,600 leaders from many different groups and denominations, including fundamentalist, evangelical and conservative churches, liberal and moderate

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Read Syropoulos and Sparkman's thoughts on these findings — and their significance — on [The Conversation](#).

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congregations, Baptists, Black Protestants, Roman Catholics and more. Each group was recruited to proportionally match churches across the country.

The researchers also surveyed nearly 1,000 Christian churchgoers and asked them to estimate the percentage of religious leaders in the U.S. who believe in human-caused climate change.

“They underestimated by 39–45%,” said Syropoulos, an assistant professor in the [School of Sustainability](#).

The research, however, offers some promising insights. In a third survey, Syropoulos and Sparkman shared the data about religious leaders’ actual beliefs before asking opinions.

“When we communicated this consensus information, we saw that congregants thought that their own religious leader is more likely to support climate change action, that their own religious leader probably believes in climate change, and that the other members of the congregation probably also feel the same,” Syropoulos said.

Survey respondents were also more likely to report that taking action to reduce climate change aligned with their church’s values and expressed that voting for a politician opposed to climate action would be against their religious values.

“And in some cases, in some more liberal and moderate congregations, we did see that churchgoers said that they felt more comfortable talking about climate change with their congregation, but only after they saw this consensus information,” Syropoulos added.

These findings have widespread implications. Approximately two-thirds of adult Americans identify as Christian, with millions attending church regularly.

“Religious leaders are authorities that people see as moral exemplars and to whom they go for guidance,” Syropoulos said. “... They are very influential messengers and they can really set norms for what is considered appropriate and morally right to do, at least within their congregation.”

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

## Main image



Illustration by Andy Keena/ASU