

Climate

“Globally, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and population growth remained the strongest drivers of CO2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion in the last decade (high confidence).” - [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) 2022 report](#).¹

U.S. population growth has global consequences.

- Per capita emissions in the United States are among the highest in the world.²
- Population growth in the United States, therefore, has a [bigger impact](#) than population growth in most other parts of the world.
- The United States and just five other countries - Russia, Canada, Brazil, Australia, China - contain 36% of the carbon sequestered in natural habitats for the entire planet, yet loses roughly 1.5 million acres of nature every year³, mostly due to population growth.⁴
- U.S. per capita CO2 emissions have [decreased by 19%](#) since 1990⁵, but that has been offset by a 35% increase in population over the same period.

"[By] contributing to climate and environmental disintegration, the continued growth of the U.S. population constitutes a serious threat to the security and wellbeing not only of the 333 million people residing in the country today but also to future generations." - [Joseph Chamie](#), demographer and former Director at the U.N. Population Division.⁶

¹ 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Climate Change 2022 Mitigation of Climate Change Working Group III Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Technical Summary, p. 60.

https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg3/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGIII_FullReport.pdf

² World Bank, 2020. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.CO2E.PC>

³ Lee-Ashley, Matt, and the CAP Public Lands and Oceans teams, 2019. How Much Nature Should America Keep? Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/08/NatureAmerica-report.pdf>

⁴ Kolankiewicz, Leon, with Roy Beck and Eric Ruark, 2022. From Sea To Sprawling Sea. NumbersUSA. <https://sprawlusa.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/NatlSprawl.pdf>

⁵ Leandro Vigna and Johannes Friedrich, "9 Charts Explain Per Capita Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Country," World Resources Institute, May 8, 2023. <https://www.wri.org/insights/charts-explain-per-capita-greenhouse-gas-emissions>

⁶ Chamie, "Population stabilization, not growth, is the key to America's future," *The Hill*, May 17, 2022. <https://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/3491009-population-stabilization-not-growth-is-the-key-to-americas-future/>

New technologies, changes in lifestyle, and population stabilization are all important factors in reducing emissions, but population is the great multiplier.

- Americans already eat a third less beef than we did in the 1970s and if every American went vegetarian, we would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by a significant but not sufficient [5 percent](#).⁷
- [Transportation](#) is the largest contributor to greenhouse gasses in America.⁸ Increased density is correlated with a "[modest decrease](#)" in urban transportation emissions (but also increased housing costs and congestion)⁹, while 85% of city emissions associated with goods and services are generated [outside the city](#).¹⁰
- The Census Bureau projects the U.S. population to grow by 79 million people between 2017-2060, with roughly 90 percent of that growth resulting from Congress' [immigration](#) policies.¹¹

*"For those who care about the consequences of U.S. carbon emissions, it matters a great deal whether the U.S. population remains at 330 million, or is pushed by immigration to more than 400 million by 2060 and more than 500 million (half a billion) by 2100. It also matters that, by settling in the United States, immigrants, on average, increase their carbon emissions by 400 percent over those of their countries of origin." - Leon Kolankiewicz, environmental scientist.*¹²

⁷ Jillian Mock and John Schwartz, "What if We All Ate a Bit Less Meat?," *The New York Times*, August 21, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/climate/what-if-we-all-ate-a-bit-less-meat.html>

⁸ Nadja Popovich and Denise Lu, "The Most Detailed Map of Auto Emissions in America," *The New York Times*, Oct. 10, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/10/10/climate/driving-emissions-map.html>

⁹ Thomas A. Clark, Metropolitan density, energy efficiency and carbon emissions: Multi-attribute tradeoffs and their policy implications, *Elsevier*, Volume 53, February 2013, Pages 413-428. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0301421512009718?via%3Dihub>

¹⁰ C40 Cities (not available online), reported by Poppy Bootman, "Urban consumption accounts for 10% of global emissions," *Climate Action*, June 12, 2019. <https://www.climateaction.org/news/urban-consumption-accounts-for-10-of-global-emissions>

¹¹ Sandra Johnson, *A Changing Nation: Population Projections Under Alternative Immigration Scenarios*, February 2020, U.S. Census. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1146.pdf>

¹² Kolankiewicz, "Population and Immigration Denialism in the Climate Debate," *NumbersUSA*, September 16, 2019. <https://www.numbersusa.com/blog/population-and-immigration-denialism-climate-debate>