PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT: WHO FINDS IT MOST IMPORTANT?
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Right now in this country one of the most talked about movements is the idea of “going green.” Celebrities, politicians, television shows, and retail stores are all promoting a more environmentally conscious agenda. It would seem that most people find the idea of having a clean and healthy environment to live in appealing.

However, studies have shown that there is a lot of conflicting data on what an “environmentalist” looks like. Although there seems to be general broad based support for environmental policy, time has shown that “environmental issues are frequently hotly disputed, and environmental protection efforts often lose.”1 This idea begs the question: what specific factors affect a person’s level of concern for the environment?

Research has shown that there are a few factors which have produced conflicting results over the years as to their effect on a person’s level of concern for the environment, and so these are the factors which were focused on in this study. This study looked at what effects, if any, race, socioeconomic status, gender, and political party identification have on an individual’s level of concern for the environment.

To answer this question, the study looked at data from the 2000 General Social Survey. This year was chosen because the environment was an extremely important topic at the time and so there was a lot of data to work with. Environmental issues simply have not been given the same amount of importance in surveys since then.

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The dependent variable investigated in this study was made up of two separate measures of environmental concern found in the General Social Survey. One question had to do with increasing spending to protect the environment and the other had to do with the respondent’s personal commitment to protecting the environment. To test the independent variables against the dependent variables, this study used a regression model.

The study found that none of the independent variables were accurate predictors of an individual’s personal commitment to protecting the environment. Race, gender, socioeconomic status and political party identification all have no effect on a respondent’s personal commitment to protecting the environment.

The study also found that race, gender, and socioeconomic status were not accurate predictors of a respondent’s support for increased government spending to protect the environment. However, political party identification was an accurate predictor. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support increased government spending to protect the environment.

The results from this study agree with some past studies and dispute some past studies. More research needs to be done in this area to determine what factors affect an individual’s level of concern for the environment so that policy makers can increase the support base for environmental preservation measures.