

With an eye on their future, global youth rally against climate change

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Children and their parents gathered in front of Leinster House in Dublin, Ireland, on January 19, 2019, to tell Irish leaders that 2019 must be the year of ambitious climate action before it's too late. Photo by: Artur Widak/NurPhoto via Getty Images

A years-long drought has been going on in Australia that has turned farms in parts of the country into wastelands. On January 24, as urban temperature records in the country were broken, high school students on the opposite side of the world rallied against the driving force behind rising temperatures: climate change.

Climate change, or global warming, is the gradual warming of the temperatures on Earth. As temperatures rise, sea levels are also rising. Droughts are becoming more common in some regions, while other places are experiencing increased flooding. Some parts of the world may soon face dangerously high temperatures on a regular basis and the production of food could also be disrupted.

Fourth Week Of Student Protests In Belgium

Now in its fourth week, protests in Belgium against inaction on climate change drew more than 30,000 high school and university students to the city of Brussels. That's roughly triple in size

compared to the previous week.

"The planet can do without us, but we cannot do without the planet," one sign at the march read, according to the Associated Press.

Many of the protests are inspired by 16-year-old climate change activist Greta Thunberg. She skipped school last year to protest in front of key Swedish government buildings, demanding more decisive action on climate change. Thunberg and others have pointed out at rallies that their generation is protesting against government inaction on climate change because they are the ones who will live with the effects.

Worst Consequences Could Become Reality As Early As 2040

The United Nations (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change studies why and how climate change happens. A recent report from them reviewed about 6,000 scientific studies. It found that some of the worst consequences of global warming could become reality for much of the world's population as early as in 2040. Most babies born today won't have completed college by that point. Such effects might include rising sea levels, widespread droughts and mass extinction of vulnerable species.

Since Thunberg's first public appearances, tens of thousands of students in Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Australia and other countries have followed her example. Rallies earlier this month drew students in over 50 German cities, with organizers estimating that 30,000 joined the rallies.

More than 26,000 students have so far pledged in an online manifesto that they will never work for a company they deem to be a heavy polluter. They hope this will shame companies into becoming more forceful players in stopping global warming.

Taking The Future Into Their Own Hands

"Either we stick to the destructive path our societies have chosen, being content with the commitment of only a minority of people, waiting to sift through its aftermath," the authors of the manifesto write. "Or we take our future into our own hands" and "take action."

The manifesto's ambitions largely fit into French President Emmanuel Macron's stated goal of reducing emissions in the country. Still, other governments have openly attacked the young climate change protesters in recent months.

In Australia, thousands of students skipped school late last year despite government warnings not to do so. They rallied across the country in major cities such as Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Australia's conservative government has been under criticism from climate change activists for continuing to back coal as an energy source. Critics say it is only a halfhearted implementation of emissions reduction goals. Unlike the United States, however, Australia has vowed to stick to its pledges under the Paris climate agreement, from 2015. World leaders then signed an agreement to limit the increase of the world's average temperature to no more than 2 degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, above levels before industrialization began.

The students who rallied across Australia last November argued that far more needs to be done to address climate change, beyond the goals already set by the international community. In

protesting, the students ignored warnings by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison. He had urged them to stay in school rather than join the rallies.

"We don't support our schools being turned into parliaments. What we want is more learning in schools and less activism in schools," Morrison said last year. The government's resources minister, Matt Canavan, later sparked more outrage among climate change activists after his comments on a Sydney radio station. The "best thing you'll learn about going to a protest is how to join the dole queue," he said, referring to people who don't have jobs and seek help from the government.

Critics Dismiss Protests

In Australia and elsewhere, critics of climate change science quickly tried to dismiss the protests. They said that just environmental activists were behind the protests. However, supporters see the rallies as a sign of a widening generational divide. Younger people across the world are holding older generations accountable over climate change inaction and the growing threat of global warming. Their sense of urgency is backed by a number of experts, including by researchers with the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. That group recently concluded that the world only has 12 years left to limit global warming to an increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius this century. If temperatures rise above that, scientists predict a dire climate crisis. There could be more floods, devastating heat and worsening poverty across the globe, it said.

That will be about the time many of the young people currently protesting will be deciding whether to bring children of their own into this changing world.

Growing pressure on political leaders from young protesters comes at a time as more studies have come out with warnings. These are suggesting that some of the worst impacts of climate change could come even quicker than bodies such as the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have so far predicted. Earlier this month, a new research paper found that annual Antarctica ice loss had multiplied by sixfold since the 1970s. It concluded that the East Antarctic ice sheet has already become a major contributor to sea level rise.

Quiz

1 Read the list of sentences from the article.

1. *"The planet can do without us, but we cannot do without the planet," one sign at the march read, according to the Associated Press.*
2. *More than 26,000 students have so far pledged in an online manifesto that they will never work for a company they deem to be a heavy polluter.*
3. *In Australia, thousands of students skipped school late last year despite government warnings not to do so.*
4. *That will be about the time many of the young people currently protesting will be deciding whether to bring children of their own into this changing world.*

Which two sentences, taken together, provide the BEST evidence to support the idea that the student protesters are very determined to put an end to global warming?

- (A) 1 and 2
- (B) 1 and 4
- (C) 2 and 3
- (D) 3 and 4

2 Is the author of the article suggesting that governments are doing all that they can to reduce climate change?

Which selection from the article BEST supports your answer?

- (A) Yes; "Either we stick to the destructive path our societies have chosen, being content with the commitment of only a minority of people, waiting to sift through its aftermath," the authors of the manifesto write.
- (B) No; Australia's conservative government has been under criticism from climate change activists for continuing to back coal as an energy source.
- (C) Yes; Unlike the United States, however, Australia has vowed to stick to its pledges under the Paris climate agreement, from 2015.
- (D) No; That group recently concluded that the world only has 12 years left to limit global warming to an increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius this century.

3 How does the author connect global warming with the students?

- (A) by explaining that students consume the most fossil fuels and thus contribute more to global warming
- (B) by showing that students are being educated about global warming in their school courses
- (C) by pointing out that students are the only group that has indicated concern about global warming
- (D) by emphasizing that the students will be the ones who have to deal with the worst effects of global warming

What are the reasons why global warming is an issue that urgently needs to be resolved?

1. *Global warming has already affected some areas by causing droughts, flooding and high temperatures.*
2. *According to a study, the world only has 12 years left to act in order to reduce temperature increases this century.*
3. *Students are risking their educations and job opportunities to raise awareness about global warming in public.*
4. *A recent research paper revealed that Antarctica's ice loss has increased drastically in recent decades and is contributing to sea level rise.*

- (A) 1 and 2
(B) 3 and 4
(C) 1, 2 and 4
(D) 2, 3 and 4