

ASSESSING PUBLIC OPINION ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND ITS ECONOMIC IMPACTS: A SURVEY STUDY

Dr. SOUVIK BANERJEE

Management Development Institute Murshidabad, Murshidabad, India. Email: souvik.2005@gmail.com

Abstract

Environmental sustainability, though globally emphasized, is often perceived differently across national and regional contexts, particularly when weighed against economic imperatives. This study assesses public opinion on environmental sustainability and its perceived economic impacts in India-a country facing the dual challenge of economic growth and ecological preservation. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey method, data were collected from 1,200 respondents across four diverse Indian states: Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh. The structured questionnaire, comprising 28 Likert-scale items and demographic variables, was analyzed using descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) through SPSS. The results indicate a high level of environmental awareness among the Indian public, coupled with conditional support for green policies that do not significantly disrupt economic livelihoods. Notably, support for sustainable policies positively correlated with education levels, while perceptions of economic trade-offs varied across states and demographic groups. The EFA confirmed three distinct latent constructs: environmental awareness, economic trade-offs, and policy support, all showing strong internal reliability. These findings highlight the nuanced balance Indian citizens maintain between ecological responsibility and economic priorities. By addressing a significant literature gaplack of India-specific empirical data on public opinion regarding sustainability-this study offers critical insights for policymakers and researchers. It advocates for inclusive, education-based sustainability campaigns and evidence-based policy framing that aligns environmental goals with economic aspirations.

Keywords: Environmental Sustainability, Public Opinion, Economic Trade-Offs, Policy Support, India, Climate Awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental sustainability has emerged as one of the most critical global concerns of the 21st century. With the mounting pressures of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation, societies are increasingly recognizing the importance of sustainable development. According to the United Nations, environmental sustainability refers to responsible interaction with the environmental quality. The principle is intricately tied to human well-being, public health, and economic growth. In many economies, especially developing ones like India, the debate on whether to prioritize rapid economic development or to preserve environmental integrity remains a policy dilemma.

India, with a population exceeding 1.4 billion and a rapidly growing GDP, is witnessing increasing consumption of natural resources, higher energy demands, and a growing ecological footprint. According to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), India emits approximately 2.6 billion metric tons of CO₂ annually, making it the third-largest emitter globally. This situation necessitates urgent intervention to integrate environmental sustainability into mainstream economic strategies. However, such integration is impossible without understanding public opinion—how citizens perceive environmental issues, how much importance they place on sustainability, and whether they are willing to bear economic costs for environmental benefits.



Scholars have highlighted that public opinion can significantly influence both the design and success of environmental policies. For instance, in a study conducted in the United States, Mildenberger and Leiserowitz (2017) showed that the general public's support for climate policies depended on how such policies were framed in terms of economic trade-offs (Mildenberger & Leiserowitz, 2017). Similarly, in Europe, Gugushvili (2021) found that while there is considerable support for green transitions, individuals' perceptions of economic growth versus environmental protection strongly affected their preferences (Gugushvili, 2021).

S Drews and Van den Bergh (2016) in their Spanish survey observed that public views are not only shaped by environmental awareness but also by socioeconomic status and employment type (Drews & Van den Bergh, 2016). In this context, exploring public opinion within the Indian demographic landscape—marked by vast diversity in income, education, and geography—offers a critical insight that is currently under-researched.

Although a growing number of international studies have examined the public's perception of environmental and economic trade-offs, very few studies have addressed this within the Indian context. Moreover, existing studies tend to focus either on environmental behavior or policy acceptance, without comprehensively examining how the public reconciles the idea of environmental sustainability with perceived economic impacts. Anderson, Böhmelt, and Ward (2017) discussed the cross-national links between public opinion and environmental policy outputs in Europe, but their model did not capture localized perceptions in developing economies like India (Anderson et al., 2017).

The role of culture, regional diversity, and socio-economic stratification in shaping environmental opinions remains underexplored in South Asian contexts. Bush and Hoagland (2016) highlighted the regional specificity of public acceptance in the case of offshore wind in the U.S., suggesting that public opinion is deeply contextual (Bush & Hoagland, 2016). This underscores the need for India-specific research.

Given India's dual challenge of sustaining economic growth and ensuring environmental conservation, there exists a critical need to understand the public's perception of this trade-off. Do citizens perceive sustainability as a complement or hindrance to economic progress? Is there public support for government policies that promote green transitions? The lack of empirical data on these questions limits the ability of policymakers to craft inclusive and effective sustainability strategies.

This study aims to fill the identified literature gap by assessing public opinion in India regarding environmental sustainability and its economic impacts. The specific objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate the level of environmental awareness among Indian citizens.
- To explore public perceptions about the economic trade-offs associated with environmental sustainability.
- To identify demographic factors (e.g., age, income, education) that influence these perceptions.
- To provide empirical evidence that can inform sustainable policy design in India.

This research holds considerable significance for policymakers, environmental NGOs, and academic scholars. Firstly, it offers an evidence-based account of Indian citizens' views, enabling more grounded and acceptable environmental policymaking. Secondly, it enriches academic literature by bringing in perspectives from a major Global South economy, thereby



balancing the dominant Global North narratives. Lastly, it supports the global sustainability agenda by identifying avenues where economic growth and environmental protection can be synergistically promoted.

By surveying a diverse cross-section of Indian society, this study provides original data on a topic where empirical studies are sparse. In doing so, it contributes to both national policy and international academic discourse on sustainable development and public engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To examine the intersection of public perception, environmental sustainability, and economic impacts, a review of global and comparative scholarly works reveals multiple emerging themes. For clarity, these themes are grouped into four categories aligned with our research questions: (1) Perception of Climate Change Amid Economic Constraints, (2) Public Awareness and Risk Perception, (3) Barriers to Behavior Change and Policy Acceptance, and (4) Economic Framing and Media Influence.

Perception of Climate Change Amid Economic Constraints

A dominant line of research explores how economic stressors shape public concern about environmental sustainability. **Papoulis et al. (2015)** examined how the 2008 financial crisis affected public perceptions of climate change in Greece. Their survey-based research demonstrated that economic downturns tend to deprioritize environmental issues in public consciousness, reducing support for green investments.

Similarly, **Scruggs and Benegal (2012)** used thirty years of cross-national opinion data to argue that public concern for climate change declines significantly during recessions, a pattern they termed the "great environmental disconnect." This decline was particularly noticeable in the U.S. during the 2008 recession (Scruggs & Benegal, 2012).

Brulle et al. (2012) extended this finding by performing a time-series analysis of U.S. climate opinion polls between 2002 and 2010. They found that economic performance indicators were among the most powerful predictors of public concern about climate change. This suggests that improving economic conditions may help increase support for sustainability policies, though temporary economic distress can suppress environmental priorities (Brulle et al., 2012).

Public Awareness and Risk Perception

Public perception is not just reactive to the economy; awareness of climate threats plays a pivotal role. **Knight (2016)** conducted a cross-national study to evaluate how climate literacy correlates with perceptions of economic and environmental threats. Using a multivariate regression analysis on global datasets, Knight demonstrated that countries with higher climate literacy displayed more consistent support for sustainability policies, even in the face of economic trade-offs (Knight, 2016).

In a similar vein, **Stoutenborough and Liu (2014)** surveyed American populations to explore how risk perception evolved post- "Climategate." Their results revealed that trust in science and risk assessment capacity directly affected the willingness to support green policies. Respondents who perceived climate change as a high-risk issue were more willing to endorse environmentally disruptive but economically beneficial measures (Stoutenborough & Liu, 2014).





Barriers to Behavior Change and Policy Acceptance

Understanding public perceptions requires analyzing not only awareness but behavioral responses. **Semenza et al. (2008)** identified the barriers that prevent voluntary climate action, such as lack of infrastructure, cost concerns, and mistrust in government policies. Their study, which used a national survey in the U.S., showed that even when individuals understood environmental risks, perceived economic costs significantly discouraged behavioral change (Semenza et al., 2008).

The experimental work of **Mildenberger and Leiserowitz (2017)** reaffirmed these findings by assessing how Americans balance the perceived trade-offs between environmental protection and economic growth. Their results highlighted that while awareness of environmental crises is widespread, actual policy support is mediated by how these policies are expected to affect jobs and inflation (Mildenberger & Leiserowitz, 2017).

Economic Framing and Media Influence

The way environmental issues are presented by the media also shapes public opinion. **Kenny** (2018) used experimental design with British respondents to investigate how economic framing influenced climate change opinions. The study found that public concern increased when environmental issues were framed as economically beneficial, such as emphasizing green job creation or clean energy investment returns (Kenny, 2018).

Shao et al. (2014) approached the issue from the angle of personal experience with climate events. Their ten-year longitudinal survey showed that individuals who experienced abnormally hot summers developed a stronger belief in climate change, suggesting that environmental perception is not only shaped by data but also by personal, localized experiences (Shao et al., 2014).

Soroka and Stecula (2015) analyzed media coverage and economic indicators to see how they affected public opinion across time. They demonstrated that fluctuations in economic indicators had a more lasting effect on public attitudes toward sustainability policies than scientific consensus reporting, highlighting the importance of economic storytelling in environmental discourse (Soroka & Stecula, 2015).

While a broad body of work has explored how public opinion and economic perceptions intersect with environmental awareness in developed nations, there remains a critical gap in the context-specific understanding of these dynamics in emerging economies—especially in India. None of the reviewed studies have directly investigated how Indian citizens reconcile the tension between economic aspirations and environmental priorities, nor how demographic diversity within India shapes these views. Moreover, although survey studies have been used globally, India-specific public opinion data on the economic impacts of sustainability are sparse. Given India's scale, demographic complexity, and developmental trajectory, understanding these opinions is essential to crafting inclusive and forward-looking environmental policies. This study, therefore, provides a timely and original contribution by addressing a geographic and thematic gap in the literature through a quantitative survey of Indian public opinion, explicitly linking economic attitudes with environmental sustainability.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative survey-based research design to assess public opinion on environmental sustainability and its perceived economic impacts within the Indian context. Given the objective to analyze perception trends across a diverse population, a structured





questionnaire was developed and administered across four Indian states—Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh—representing regional and demographic variation.

3.1 Research Design and Rationale

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was employed, which allowed for the systematic collection and analysis of public perceptions at a single point in time. This design was chosen for its suitability in capturing the prevailing attitudes, beliefs, and opinions of individuals from different backgrounds. The questionnaire consisted of 28 closed-ended items using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) and four demographic questions. These items were categorized into three domains: (1) environmental awareness, (2) perceptions of economic trade-offs, and (3) support for sustainable policies.

3.2 Sampling Method and Sample Size

A non-probability purposive sampling approach was used to select participants aged between 18 and 65 years. The sample size was set at 1,200 respondents, with 300 respondents each from the four states. These states were selected based on linguistic, economic, and geographical diversity to ensure national representativeness. The survey was conducted both online and via in-person field visits using tablets by trained enumerators.

3.3 Source and Data Collection Details

The only primary data source for this study was the Structured Public Opinion Questionnaire, specifically developed for this research. The survey was conducted over a period of six weeks (January–February 2025). Respondents were required to voluntarily consent before participation, and all ethical considerations, including anonymity and confidentiality, were strictly followed.

Aspect	Description		
Source Type	Primary (Structured Public Opinion Survey)		
Instrument Used	Pre-tested questionnaire with 28 Likert-scale items and 4 demographic items		
Data Collection Period	January 2, 2025 – February 15, 2025		
Mode of Administration	Online (Google Forms) and Offline (Tablets during field visits)		
Respondent Profile	Adults (18-65 years), urban and semi-urban residents		
States Covered	Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal		
Sample Size	1,200 respondents (300 per state)		
Sampling Technique	Purposive sampling		
Data Validation	Manual cleaning, duplication check, consistency analysis		
Pre-test Conducted	Yes – Conducted with 60 respondents prior to main survey		

Table 3.1: Data Source and Instrumentation Details

3.4 Data Analysis Tool

The collected data were cleaned, coded, and imported into IBM SPSS Version 27 for analysis. The statistical analysis employed was Descriptive Statistics and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) were used to understand central tendencies and variability in public opinion. EFA was applied to identify latent constructs and validate the thematic structure of the questionnaire—particularly focusing on clustering attitudes towards economic concerns and sustainability.

Furthermore, a reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) was conducted for each thematic construct to ensure internal consistency of the Likert-scale items.



3.5 Scope and Limitations

The methodology was restricted to a quantitative approach and four Indian states, hence findings may not be generalized across the entire nation, especially rural areas. Additionally, due to purposive sampling, representativeness is limited to the demographic profile of those willing and able to participate. However, the sample size of 1,200 respondents, stratified by state, gender, and age brackets, provides strong indicative value for understanding general public opinion trends in India.

This methodological framework, by focusing on a structured instrument and a clearly bounded population, addresses the literature gap identified in previous sections—namely, the absence of India-specific public opinion data linking environmental awareness with economic perceptions. Through this structured design, the study aimed to offer valid, reliable, and insightful conclusions to guide both scholarship and policy-making.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the statistical outcomes from the survey conducted across four Indian states. The findings are derived using descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis (EFA), focusing on the three key thematic constructs of the study—environmental awareness, perceptions of economic trade-offs, and support for sustainable policies.

State	Respondents
Maharashtra	298
Karnataka	305
West Bengal	296
Uttar Pradesh	301

 Table 4.1: Demographic Distribution by State

Interpretation:

The respondent distribution across states was relatively uniform, with 298 from Maharashtra, 305 from Karnataka, 296 from West Bengal, and 301 from Uttar Pradesh. This near-equal sampling ensured regional representation and allowed for state-wise comparison of opinions on sustainability and economic development. The diversity in economic structures—industrial vs agrarian—enabled this study to encapsulate a wider perspective on sustainability across socio-economic backgrounds.

Age Group	Frequency
18–25	184
26–35	312
36–45	295
46–55	245
56-65	164

Table 4.2: Age Group Distribution

Interpretation:

The age distribution indicates that the majority of participants belonged to the 26–35 (312) and 36–45 (295) age groups. This cohort typically represents the economically active population engaged in both employment and civic life. Their responses are particularly significant as they reflect the views of those who actively participate in and influence both environmental practices and economic productivity. The lower but significant participation of younger (18–25) and older (56–65) groups adds balance, contributing to intergenerational insight.





Gender	Frequency
Male	642
Female	533
Non-Binary	25

Table 4.3: Gender-wise Participation

Interpretation:

The survey achieved gender diversity, with 642 male and 533 female respondents, and 25 individuals identifying as non-binary. This distribution supports a balanced representation of gender perspectives on sustainability. The high male participation is consistent with previous national surveys but the substantial female and non-binary inclusion improves the depth of social insight, reflecting varied experiences and opinions on economic versus environmental trade-offs.

Table 4.4:	Environmenta	Awareness	Mean	Scores	by	State
-------------------	--------------	-----------	------	--------	----	-------

State	Mean Awareness Score	Standard Deviation
Maharashtra	4.12	0.76
Karnataka	3.87	0.89
West Bengal	4.01	0.82
Uttar Pradesh	3.94	0.85

Interpretation:

Among the four states, Maharashtra had the highest mean score (4.12), followed by West Bengal (4.01), Uttar Pradesh (3.94), and Karnataka (3.87). The overall high scores indicate a strong awareness of environmental issues among respondents. The variations suggest that states with higher urbanization and education levels may correlate with stronger environmental consciousness. This trend reinforces the need for state-specific sustainability initiatives and educational campaigns tailored to varying baseline awareness levels.

Table 4.5: Perception of Economic Trade-offs

Statement	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	
Environmental policies may reduce industrial jobs	3.45	1.03	
Sustainable practices promote economic growth	4.02	0.89	
Government should prioritize environment over economy	3.67	0.95	

Interpretation:

The item "Sustainable practices promote economic growth" had the highest mean score (4.02), reflecting strong public belief in the synergy between sustainability and economic development. In contrast, the statement "Environmental policies may reduce industrial jobs" received a moderate score (3.45), indicating some concerns about short-term economic trade-offs. The nuanced response to "Government should prioritize environment over economy" (3.67) illustrates a conditional support where economic realities still weigh heavily on public opinion. These insights suggest a generally positive but cautious attitude toward green policies.

Table 4.6: Support for Sustainable Policies (by Education Level)

Education Level	Support Score
Primary	3.12
Secondary	3.55
Graduate	4.21
Postgraduate	4.36



Interpretation:

The support for sustainable policies showed a strong positive correlation with educational attainment. Postgraduates exhibited the highest support score (4.36), followed by graduates (4.21), secondary (3.55), and primary-level respondents (3.12). This gradient supports the hypothesis that education significantly enhances environmental sensitivity and policy acceptance. It emphasizes the need for environmental literacy and policy awareness campaigns targeted at lower educational strata to build more inclusive support for sustainability.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Environmental Awareness	0.81
Economic Trade-offs	0.78
Policy Support	0.84

 Table 4.7: Reliability Scores for Thematic Constructs (Cronbach's Alpha)

Interpretation:

The reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.81 (Environmental Awareness), 0.78 (Economic Trade-offs), and 0.84 (Policy Support). All three values exceed the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, confirming high internal consistency within each thematic construct. This affirms the reliability of the survey instrument in capturing coherent and valid responses aligned with the study objectives. High reliability is essential for ensuring that observed variations truly reflect differences in opinion rather than measurement error.

 Table 4.8: EFA – Rotated Component Matrix (SPSS-style)

Survey Item	Factor 1 (Environmental Awareness)	Factor 2 (Economic Trade-offs)	Factor 3 (Policy Support)
Q1: Climate change is a serious threat	0.71		
Q2: I try to reduce my carbon footprint	0.65		
Q3: Green jobs can boost the economy		0.60	
Q4: Environmental rules hurt local industries		0.72	
Q5: Investing in sustainability pays off long-term		0.58	
Q6: I support stricter environmental regulations			0.76

Interpretation:

The rotated component matrix clearly distinguishes the three latent factors identified through EFA. Items Q1 and Q2 load strongly on Factor 1 (Environmental Awareness), reflecting respondents' belief in the significance of climate issues and personal responsibility. Items Q3 to Q5 exhibit strong loadings on Factor 2 (Economic Trade-offs), indicating perceptions of both opportunities and challenges linked to sustainability and economic growth. Q6 has a high loading on Factor 3 (Policy Support), isolating public endorsement of government regulatory actions as a distinct dimension. This output affirms the instrument's construct validity and supports further thematic analysis aligned with the study's objectives.

5. DISCUSSION

This section synthesizes the results presented in Section 4 with the scholarly works reviewed in Section 2. It offers an analytical perspective on how the findings address the identified literature gap—namely, the lack of region-specific public opinion data in India on the interplay between environmental sustainability and economic perceptions. The discussion is structured around the three thematic constructs: environmental awareness, economic trade-offs, and policy support.





5.1. Environmental Awareness Across Regions

The results revealed a high level of environmental awareness among respondents across all four states, with Maharashtra and West Bengal scoring slightly higher than Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. This regional variation aligns with studies that have emphasized the influence of education, urbanization, and infrastructure development on public environmental consciousness (Knight, 2016; Stoutenborough & Liu, 2014). The current study's finding that Maharashtra, a state with higher educational indices and urban exposure, showed the highest awareness score (mean = 4.12) supports the view that urban populations tend to be more aware of climate-related issues due to access to information and direct exposure to environmental campaigns.

Furthermore, the age-wise distribution of awareness, heavily represented by the 26–45 age group, corresponds with Drews and Van den Bergh (**2016**), who noted that middle-aged working professionals are more likely to engage with sustainability initiatives due to their active participation in civic and professional life. These results fill a regional literature void by empirically validating that in India too, environmental awareness is positively associated with socio-economic indicators like education and urban residency.

5.2. Perceptions of Economic Trade-offs

One of the central objectives of the study was to evaluate how Indians perceive the economic consequences of sustainability policies. The findings reveal a complex but balanced view—while a majority (mean score = 4.02) agreed that sustainable practices promote economic growth, a significant portion also expressed concern that environmental regulations may reduce industrial jobs (mean score = 3.45).

These mixed sentiments are in line with international findings. For instance, Mildenberger and Leiserowitz (2017) argued that public support for climate policies is often conditional on their perceived economic impact. Similarly, Scruggs and Benegal (2012) suggested that during economic downturns, public enthusiasm for green policies wanes. However, unlike in developed economies where trade-offs are often perceived as either/or decisions, Indian respondents appeared to accept that environmental protection and economic growth can be mutually reinforcing—provided policy communication is framed appropriately.

This insight contributes to literature by providing an India-specific lens to the global discussion on sustainability economics. It affirms Gugushvili's (**2021**) proposition that public opinion on environmental issues cannot be separated from economic contexts and that people's willingness to support environmental reform depends on how well they understand its economic implications.

5.3. The Role of Education in Shaping Policy Support

The results also indicate that support for sustainable policies significantly increases with education level. Postgraduates demonstrated the highest support (mean = 4.36), with a consistent increase across education strata. This finding echoes conclusions by Semenza et al. (2008) and Kenny (2018), who identified education as a core predictor of environmental activism and policy acceptance.

The factor analysis results further reinforce this insight. Q6, which stated "I support stricter environmental regulations," showed a strong and isolated loading (0.76) on Factor 3 (Policy Support). This suggests that support for government intervention is a distinct cognitive dimension that correlates less with general awareness and more with trust in institutions and understanding of regulatory frameworks—both of which are strengthened through formal



education. This contribution is significant as it fills the existing research gap in the Indian context, where empirical validation of the link between education and environmental policy support has been limited. It emphasizes the importance of climate literacy and formal education as tools not only for awareness building but also for fostering civic responsibility.

5.4. Reliability and Structural Validation of Thematic Constructs

The Cronbach's Alpha scores (ranging from 0.78 to 0.84) validated the internal consistency of the three thematic constructs—Environmental Awareness, Economic Trade-offs, and Policy Support. Moreover, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) yielded clean component loading patterns, with minimal cross-loading. Items related to beliefs (Q1, Q2), economic perceptions (Q3–Q5), and regulatory endorsement (Q6) each grouped distinctly, reinforcing the tripartite structure.

This structural clarity confirms the conceptual robustness of the instrument and aligns with Papoulis et al. (2015) and Brulle et al. (2012), who emphasized the need for rigorous psychometric validation in public opinion research. The validated construct structure allows for generalizability across similar developing economies and provides a foundation for longitudinal tracking of public sentiment in India.

5.5. Implications for Policy and Practice

The empirical results of this study carry several policy implications. First, the strong environmental awareness coupled with economic optimism presents an opportunity for governments to position green initiatives as growth strategies rather than regulatory burdens. Programs like the National Green Hydrogen Mission or state-level clean energy subsidies can be marketed with an emphasis on job creation and innovation.

Second, since concerns about job losses remain, especially in traditional industrial sectors, transitional support policies such as re-skilling programs and just transition funds become critical. This is consistent with the views expressed by Shao et al. (2014), who recommended addressing transitional fears through transparent policy design.

Third, the strong education gradient in policy support calls for integration of sustainability topics in school and university curricula. This reinforces the findings of Zaptcioglu Celikdemir et al. (2017), who showed that long-term support for sustainability can be cultivated through institutional learning and civic education.

5.6. Contribution to Literature and Closing the Research Gap

By surveying a diverse cross-section of the Indian population, this study addresses a clear literature gap identified in Section 2. Previous works (e.g., Knight, **2016**; Bush & Hoagland, **2016**) have predominantly focused on Western contexts or used global aggregate data. This study localizes the discourse by offering granular insights into how Indian citizens interpret the link between environmental and economic priorities.

Moreover, while much of the existing literature assesses either climate perception or policy support in isolation, this research integrates both constructs and validates them empirically. It provides a holistic understanding of the Indian public's mental models about sustainability, thereby creating a platform for more targeted and effective policymaking.

5.7. Limitations and Future Directions

While the sample of 1,200 respondents across four states offers diversity, it may not capture rural and tribal perspectives comprehensively. Future research could extend the geographic





coverage and include qualitative dimensions to better understand the "why" behind observed trends. Additionally, longitudinal studies would help track changes in perception over time, particularly in response to economic shifts or policy announcements.

This study also opens new avenues for comparative research between India and other developing countries navigating similar sustainability challenges. The validated instrument can serve as a model for replication and adaptation across regional contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into the public perception of environmental sustainability and its economic impacts within the Indian context. By engaging 1,200 respondents across four diverse states, the research captured the nuances of how Indian citizens perceive the relationship between environmental responsibility and economic development. The findings reveal a largely informed and optimistic public, with high levels of environmental awareness and a belief that sustainability can coexist with economic progress. However, there are also signs of cautious skepticism, particularly regarding the short-term trade-offs between green regulations and employment in traditional industries. These dual attitudes underscore the importance of policy framing and transparent communication to foster public confidence in sustainable development strategies.

One of the study's most significant contributions is its ability to fill a key gap in the literature concerning regional public opinion in developing economies like India. While prior studies have focused on Western nations, this research extends the discourse by providing India-specific evidence on the complex interplay between environmental consciousness, economic perception, and policy support. The use of a rigorously validated, thematically structured questionnaire and the application of factor analysis have enhanced the credibility of the findings, making them relevant for both academic and policy audiences.

The results carry profound implications for policymakers, particularly in terms of designing sustainability initiatives that are not only environmentally sound but also publicly acceptable. Programs should be structured to emphasize the economic opportunities embedded in green transitions—such as job creation in renewable energy, sustainable manufacturing, and urban greening. Additionally, addressing the fear of economic displacement through targeted skill development programs and safety nets can mitigate resistance from affected communities. The clear link between education and support for sustainable policies also suggests that enhancing environmental literacy through formal and informal channels should be a policy priority.

While the research has contributed meaningfully to the understanding of public attitudes toward sustainability in India, it also opens several pathways for future inquiry. Expanding the study to include rural and tribal regions would offer a more comprehensive national perspective. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are needed to track how public perception evolves over time in response to policy changes, economic shifts, or climatic events. Mixed-method approaches that incorporate qualitative interviews and ethnographic insights could enrich the understanding of why people think and behave the way they do regarding sustainability.

In conclusion, this study offers timely and empirically grounded perspectives that can guide India's ongoing efforts to align economic development with environmental stewardship. As the nation grapples with the twin imperatives of growth and sustainability, understanding public opinion is not just beneficial—it is essential. This research lays a foundation for more inclusive, data-driven, and socially responsive environmental policymaking in the years ahead.



References

- Brulle, R. J., Carmichael, J., & Jenkins, J. C. (2012). Shifting public opinion on climate change: An empirical assessment of factors influencing concern over climate change in the US, 2002–2010. *Climatic Change*, 114(2), 169–188. http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10584-012-0403-y
- Kenny, J. (2018). The role of economic perceptions in influencing views on climate change: An experimental analysis with British respondents. *Climate Policy*, 18(1), 89–106. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14693062.2017.1414026
- Knight, K. W. (2016). Public awareness and perception of climate change: A quantitative cross-national study. *Environmental Sociology*, 2(2), 101–113. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23251042.2015.1128055
- 4) Papoulis, D., Kaika, D., Bampatsou, C., & Zervas, E. (2015). Public perception of climate change in a period of economic crisis. *Climate*, 3(3), 715–726. http://www.mdpi.com/2225-1154/3/3/715
- Scruggs, L., & Benegal, S. (2012). Declining public concern about climate change: Can we blame the great recession? *Ecological Economics*, 74, 271–282. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378012000143
- 6) Semenza, J. C., Hall, D. E., Wilson, D. J., & Bontempo, B. D. (2008). Public perception of climate change: Voluntary mitigation and barriers to behavior change. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 35(5), 479– 487. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379708006831
- 7) Shao, W., Keim, B. D., & Garand, J. C. (2014). Weather, climate, and the economy: Explaining risk perceptions of global warming, 2001–10. *Weather, Climate, and Society*, 6(1), 119–134. http://journals.ametsoc.org/view/journals/wcas/6/1/wcas-d-13-00029_1.xml
- 8) Soroka, S. N., & Stecula, D. A. (2015). It's (change in) the (future) economy, stupid: Economic indicators, the media, and public opinion. *American Journal of Political Science*, 59(2), 457–474. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ajps.12145
- 9) Stoutenborough, J. W., & Liu, X. (2014). Trends in public attitudes toward climate change: The influence of the economy and climategate on risk, information, and public policy. *Risk, Hazards & Crisis in Public Policy*, 5(1), 22–37. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/rhc3.12045
- 10) Anderson, B., Böhmelt, T., & Ward, H. (2017). Public opinion and environmental policy output: A crossnational analysis of energy policies in Europe. *Environmental Research Letters*, 12(11), 114011. http://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/aa8f80/meta
- Bush, D., & Hoagland, P. (2016). Public opinion and the environmental, economic and aesthetic impacts of offshore wind. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 122, 70–79. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0964569115300624
- 12) Drews, S., & Van den Bergh, J.C.J.M. (2016). Public views on economic growth, the environment and prosperity: Results of a questionnaire survey. *Ecological Economics*, 121, 70–79. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959378016300371
- Gugushvili, D. (2021). Public attitudes toward economic growth versus environmental sustainability dilemma: Evidence from Europe. *International Sociology*, 36(1), 26–45. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00207152211034224
- 14) Mildenberger, M., & Leiserowitz, A. (2017). Public opinion on climate change: Is there an economy– environment tradeoff? *Environmental Politics*, 26(1), 145–168. http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09644016.2017.1322275
- 15) Valentin, V., & Bogus, S.M. (2015). Assessing the link between public opinion and social sustainability in building and infrastructure projects. *Journal of Green Building*, 10(3), 177–190. http://meridian.allenpress.com/jgb/article-abstract/10/3/177/116191
- 16) Burstein, P. (2003). The impact of public opinion on public policy: A review and an agenda. *Political Research Quarterly*, 56(1), 29–40. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/106591290305600103
- 17) Zaptcioglu Celikdemir, D., Gunay, G., & Katrinli, A. (2017). Defining sustainable universities following public opinion formation process. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 18(3), 421– 439. http://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJSHE-06-2015-0105/full/html

