

Demographics and the Environment

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Abstract: Our research will investigate the effect of various predictors, including age, race, and socioeconomic status, on environmentally-conscious behaviors. There are significant barriers to making sustainable choices, including higher cost of organic or local food, accessibility to public transportation, and cultural resistance, all of which are potentially magnified by lower socioeconomic status, age, and race. We predict that people across all age and race indicators who are less affluent will make less environmentally-conscious decisions. We also speculate that people 25-35 years of age make environmentally-conscious decisions more frequently than other age groups, and that white people are most likely to make sustainable decisions. Our method includes a survey of questions asking respondents to provide age, race, and socioeconomic demographics, as well as answer questions about personal sustainable life choices on a modified Likert scale. Results will be analyzed to examine environmentally-conscious behaviors as a function of age, race, and socioeconomic status. The survey has been shared on personal social media platforms, meaning the pool of respondents is not randomly sampled. Results will provide insight into the prevalence of sustainable life choices, as well as barriers that may exist, with an objective of increasing environmentally-conscious behaviors across all predictors



Background:

Our individual lifestyle choices impact the environment in a variety of ways. What we eat, how we dispose of our waste, the products we buy, and the frequency with which we purchase new things all affect our carbon footprint. Some people choose to alter their behavior to be more environmentally-friendly, while others do not. Sustainable alternatives are oftentimes expensive, not accessible, or both, and in some communities, there may be a cultural resistance to environmentally-friendly behaviors which impede sustainability. Furthermore, some people may not have the knowledge to make sustainable choices. In the past, environmentalism has been seen as a white, upper-middle class cause, not inclusive of people of color, working class, or of all ages (Manning 2009). The objective of this study was to test whether the frequency of environmentally-conscious decisions were affected by one's age, race, or socioeconomic class.

References:

- <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/p-ee1-01.pdf>
- Manning, Christy. The Psychology of Sustainable Behavior. Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Sept. 2009, www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/p-ee1-01.pdf

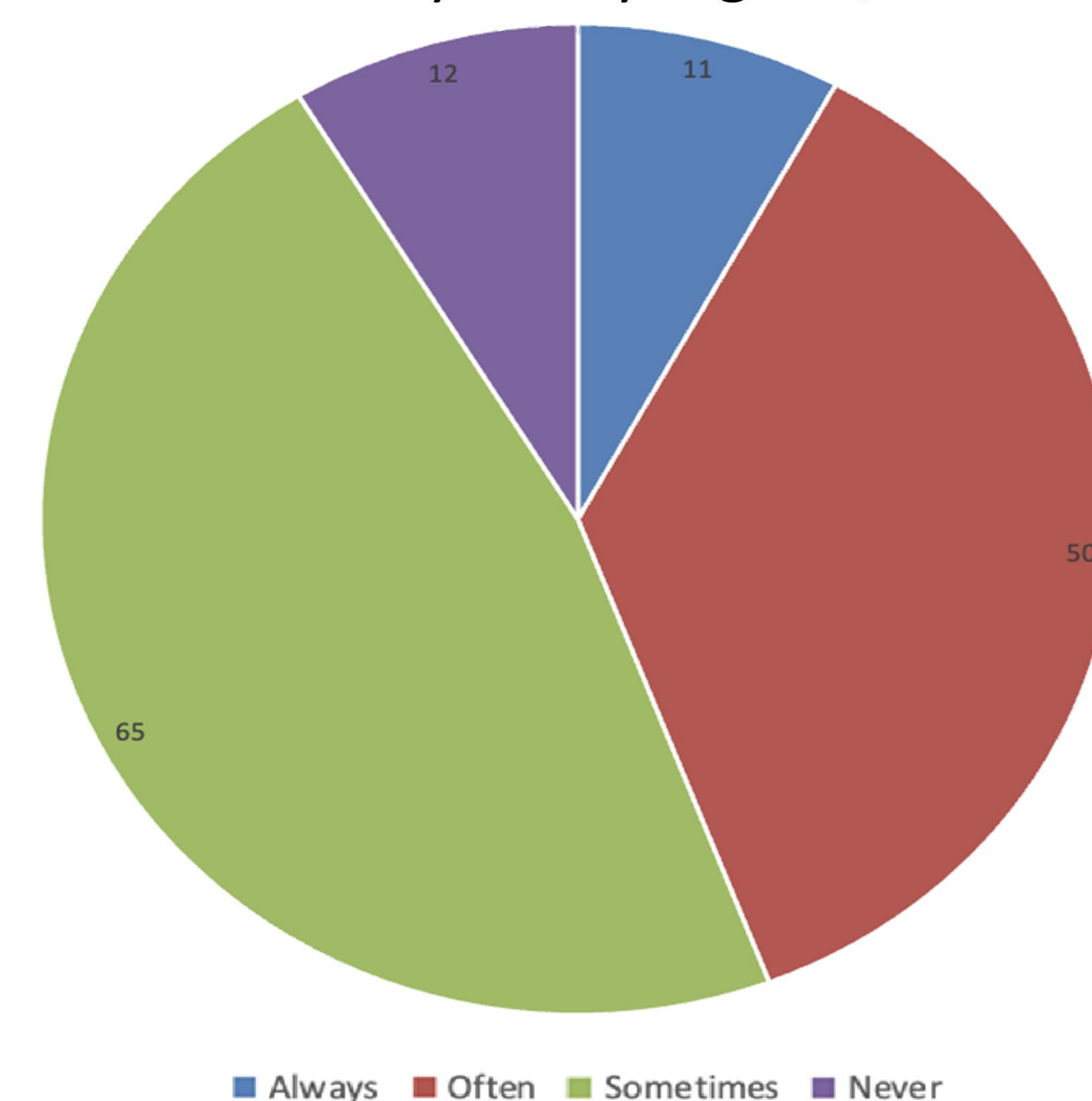
Research Questions & Hypotheses:

- Q- How does being in different demographics affect one's views on environmental issues?
- H1 (Age)- People 25-35 years of age make environmentally conscious decisions more frequently than other age groups.
- H2 (Class)- People within I higher socioeconomic class are more likely to make environmentally conscious decisions
- H3 (Race)- White people are more likely to make environmentally conscious decisions than non- white people.

Methods:

This study was conducted through an online survey shared on various social media platforms. The survey asked participants to disclose basic demographic information about their race, age, and annual income, and then answer a variety of questions about the sustainability of their lifestyle choices to establish whether demographics were predictors of green behavior. The survey asked respondents about their diet-- if they eat meat or organic/local food, their consumer habits-- if they buy second-hand or search for sustainable alternatives, and whether they compost or recycle. Due to the nature of the survey's distribution, the respondent sampling was not random.

How often do you buy organic/local food?



Results:

The data we collected ultimately wasn't able to answer our hypothesis. Although the relationship between any of the race, age, or socioeconomic class indicators and environmentally-friendly behavior was not statistically significant, our data gave us an interesting insight into how prevalent certain sustainable behaviors are. We know how an arbitrarily-selected group of people feel about the environmental lifestyle choices we described. For example, 57% of respondents thought environmental advocacy was very important and 7.9% of respondents said they always searched for a more sustainable alternative to a product or experience. Our sample size was too limited to make any universal conclusions about the influence of our predictor variables on a sustainable lifestyle, so more research will need to be done. However, the data that we did collect can help inform local environmental education initiatives as well as provide a better understanding of the challenges facing personal sustainability.

What's stopping you from living a more sustainable life?

