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Americans support action on global warming despite economic crisis

Science Centric | 19 March 2009 12:20 GMT

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Even in the midst of a growing economic crisis last fall, over 90 percent of Americans said that the United States should act to reduce global warming, according to a national survey released today by researchers at Yale and George Mason Universities. The results included 34 percent who said the United States should make a large-scale effort, even if it has large economic costs.

Two-thirds of Americans said that the United States should reduce its emissions of greenhouse gases regardless of what other countries do, while only seven percent said the nation should act only if other industrialised and developing countries reduce their emissions as well.

'When you make a mess, you're supposed to clean up after yourself,' said Anthony Leiserowitz of Yale University. 'We think many Americans view climate change in a similar way. The United States should act to reduce it's own emissions regardless of what other countries do.'

Americans strongly supported a wide variety of climate-change and energy policies, including funding for research on renewable energy (92 percent), tax rebates for people buying fuel-efficient vehicles or solar panels (85 percent) and regulation of carbon dioxide as a pollutant (80 percent).

Large majorities also supported policies that had a directly stated economic cost. Almost four out of five Americans supported a 45-mpg fuel-efficiency standard for cars, trucks and SUVs, even if that meant a new vehicle would cost up to \$1,000 more to buy. And over 70 percent supported a requirement that electric utilities produce at least 20 percent of their electricity from renewable energy sources, even if it would cost the average household an extra \$100 a year.

Only 53 percent of Americans, however, supported the creation of a national cap-and-trade system, one of the climate change policies being considered by President Obama and the U.S. Congress. Further, only 11 percent of Americans strongly supported this proposal, while it was strongly opposed by 23 percent.

'If the president and members of Congress want to pass cap-and-trade legislation this year, they would be wise to quickly take steps to educate the American people,' said Edward Maibach of George Mason University.

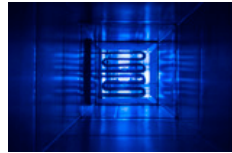
Large majorities said that everyone - companies, political leaders and



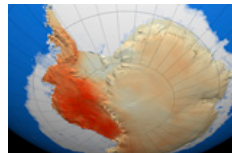
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individual citizens - should do more to reduce global warming. Willingness to take personal action through consumer choices was strong and growing: a third said they had rewarded companies taking action to reduce global warming by buying their products, while a quarter said they had punished companies opposing steps to reduce global warming by boycotting their products.

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Importantly, 48 percent said they intend to take companies' climate change-related activities into account when deciding what to buy over the coming year, a potentially dramatic increase in consumer pressure. The primary barrier to consumer action was simply knowledge: two-thirds said they did not know which companies to punish.

'Translating consumers' intentions into concrete action will largely depend on the success of efforts to educate, organise and mobilise this growing market force,' said Leiserowitz. 'Many companies are moving aggressively to tap this consumer market, which is increasingly willing to reward and punish different companies for their climate change-related activities.'

Americans believe that national action to reduce global warming will have multiple positive outcomes: two-thirds said it would provide a better life for their children and grandchildren and save many plant and animal species from extinction. About half said that it would improve people's health, free the nation from its dependence on foreign oil and protect God's creation.

Peoples' primary concerns about taking action to reduce global warming were that it would lead to more government regulation (44 percent), cause energy prices to rise (31 percent) or cost jobs and harm the economy (17 percent). However, among those who believed that both positive and negative outcomes will occur, 92 percent said that despite their concerns, the nation should act to reduce global warming.

The results come from a nationally representative survey of 2,164 American adults, age 18 and older. The sample was weighted to correspond with U.S. Census Bureau parameters for the United States. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2 percent, with 95 percent confidence. The survey was designed by researchers at Yale and George Mason Universities and fielded in September and October by Knowledge Networks, using an online research panel of American adults.

Source: [Yale University](#)

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