Communicating Climate Change and the Case for Action

Climate Leadership Conference
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My remit – to answer four key questions:

• What does the public think about climate change?
• Who are they listening to?
• Who do they expect to take action?
• What do they want to see done?
Five key beliefs about climate change contribute to a range of helpful attitudes and actions

Experts agree: human-caused climate change is happening

- Climate change is real
- It’s human-caused
- It’s harmful to humans
- It’s solvable

Support for Societal Response
Support for Climate Policies
Political & Consumer Activism

The “big five” key beliefs

Sources: Ding-Ding et al., 2012; Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Roser-Renouf et al., 2014; Krosnick et al., 2006
Majority of Americans Think Global Warming Is Happening
- Continuing decline in the number of Americans who think it is not happening -
Half of Americans Think That If Global Warming Is Happening, It Is Mostly Human Caused

Assuming global warming is happening, do you think it is...

Four in Ten Americans Believe Most Scientists Think Global Warming Is Happening

Which comes closest to your own view?

Base: Americans 18+. 
Most Americans Think Global Warming Is a Relatively Distant Threat

How much do you think global warming will harm…?

One in Three Americans Thinks People in the U.S. Are Being Harmed “Right Now” by Global Warming

When do you think global warming will start to harm people…?
Over Half of Americans Are Worried About Global Warming, But Few Are “Very” Worried

How worried are you about global warming?
Few Americans Are Optimistic Humans Will Reduce Global Warming

Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?

My remit – to answer four key questions:

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• **Who are they listening to?**
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How much do you trust or distrust the following as a source of information about global warming?

Base: Americans 18+.
My remit – to answer four key questions:

• What does the public think about climate change?
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• **Who do they expect to take action?**
• What do they want to see done?
Americans Are Most Likely to Say Corporations and Industry, as Well as Citizens Themselves, Should be Doing More to Address Global Warming

- Corporations and industry: 35% should be doing much more, 32% more, 20% currently doing right amount, 5% less, 7% much less
- Citizens themselves: 23% should be doing much more, 39% more, 24% currently doing right amount, 6% less, 8% much less
- The U.S. Congress: 21% should be doing much more, 36% more, 23% currently doing right amount, 10% less, 11% much less
- My member of Congress: 17% should be doing much more, 37% more, 27% currently doing right amount, 9% less, 10% much less
- My local government officials: 15% should be doing much more, 39% more, 28% currently doing right amount, 8% less, 10% much less
- My governor: 16% should be doing much more, 37% more, 28% currently doing right amount, 9% less, 10% much less
- President Obama: 16% should be doing much more, 34% more, 26% currently doing right amount, 9% less, 13% much less

Do you think each of the following should be doing more or less to address global warming?

My remit – to answer four key questions:

- What does the public think about climate change?
- Who are they listening to?
- Who do they expect to take action?
- What do they want to see done?
Majorities of Americans Think Developing Clean Energy And Global Warming Should Be Priorities For The President and Congress

Do you think that global warming should be a low, medium, high, or very high priority for the president and Congress?

Do you think that developing sources of clean energy should be a low, medium, high, or very high priority for the president and Congress?

Base: Americans 18+. 
Americans Support a Broad Range of Policies That Will Help Reduce or Prepare for the Impacts of Global Warming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Strongly support</th>
<th>Somewhat support</th>
<th>Somewhat oppose</th>
<th>Strongly oppose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase funding for improvements to local roads, bridges, and buildings to make them more resistant to extreme weather</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund more research into renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide tax rebates for people who purchase energy-efficient vehicles or solar panels</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulate carbon dioxide (the primary greenhouse gas) as a pollutant</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Require electric utilities to produce at least 20% of their electricity from wind, solar, or other renewable energy sources, even if it costs the average household an extra $100 a year</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How much do you support or oppose the following policies?

How much do you support or oppose the following policy? Set strict carbon dioxide emission limits on existing coal-fired power plants to reduce global warming and improve public health. Power plants would have to reduce their emissions and/or invest in renewable energy and energy efficiency. The cost of electricity to consumers and companies would likely increase.

A very important caveat:

Only 1 in 4 Americans holds strong views about climate change
Global Warming’s “Six Americas”

- Alarmed: 13%
- Concerned: 31%
- Cautious: 23%
- Disengaged: 7%
- Doubtful: 13%
- Dismissive: 13%

Highest Belief in Global Warming: Most Concerned, Most Motivated

Lowest Belief in Global Warming: Least Concerned, Least Motivated

Proportion represented by area

Yale/George Mason, Oct. 2014; N=1,272
In summary:

• What does the public think about climate change?
  – About 2/3rds are on board, but only 13% have strong views
  – However, the 13% who object also have very strong views

• Who are they listening to?
  – They aren’t hearing much (except from politicians & pundits)

• Who do they expect to take action?
  – The business community, government, ordinary Americans

• What do they want to see done?
  – Clean energy ➔ clean air & water ➔ better health