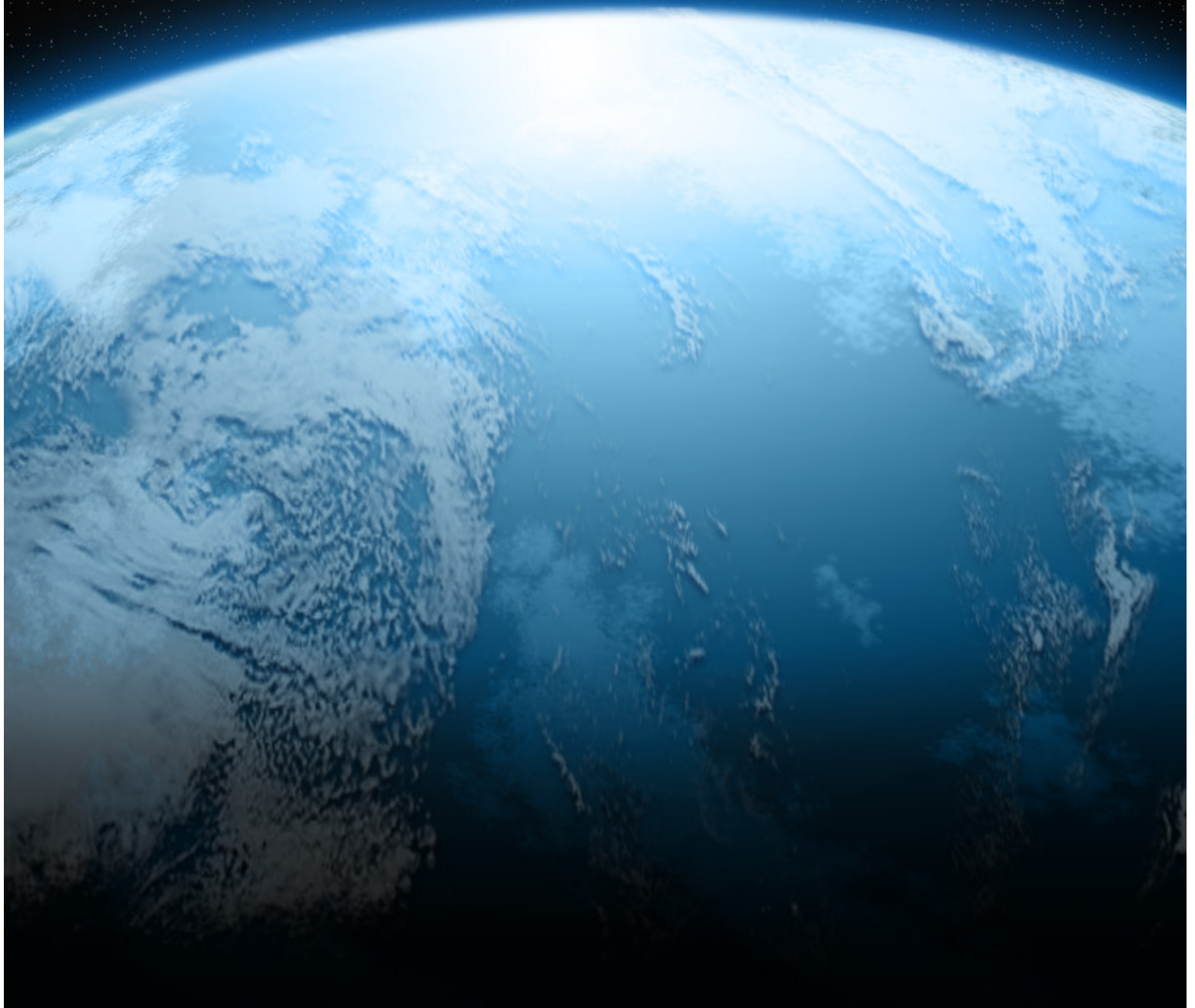


# Climate Change in the American Mind

September 2012

The Potential Impact of Global Warming  
on the 2012 Presidential Election

Yale Project on Climate Change Communication  
George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication



## Overview

A new national survey of Americans finds that among likely voters, 11% remain undecided about their vote for president. These “Undecideds” are much more similar to likely Obama voters than likely Romney voters across a range of climate change and energy-related beliefs, attitudes and policy preferences.

The majority of these undecided voters also say that the presidential candidates’ positions on global warming will be one of several important factors determining how they cast their votes on November 6, suggesting that candidates may wish to communicate and clarify their position on climate change as election day approaches.

## How the survey was conducted

This briefing is based on findings from a nationally representative survey – *Climate Change in the American Mind* – conducted by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication. It was funded by the Surdna Foundation, the 11th Hour Project, and the Grantham Foundation.

The data are based on a nationally representative survey of 1,061 American adults, aged 18 and older, conducted from August 31 – September 12, 2012. The sample was drawn from Knowledge Networks’s KnowledgePanel®, an online panel of members drawn using probability sampling methods. Prospective members are recruited using a combination of random digit dial and address-based sampling techniques that cover virtually all (non-institutional) resident phone numbers and addresses in the United States. Those contacted who would choose to join the panel but do not have access to the Internet are loaned computers and given Internet access so they may participate.

The sample therefore includes a representative cross-section of American adults – irrespective of whether they have Internet access, use only a cell phone, etc. Key demographic variables were weighted, post survey, to match US Census Bureau norms.

The survey instrument was designed by Anthony Leiserowitz and Geoff Feinberg of Yale University, and Edward Maibach and Connie Roser-Renouf of George Mason University.

## Margins of error

All surveys are subject to some degree of sampling error—that is, statistical results obtained from a sample can be expected to differ somewhat from results that would be obtained if every member of the target population was interviewed.

Average margins of error, at the 95% confidence level, are as follows:

- Likely Romney voters: +/- 5 percentage points
- Likely Obama voters: +/- 5 percentage points
- Undecideds: +/- 11 percentage points

On the charts, statistically significant differences are noted as follows:

- <sup>R</sup> = Significantly higher than likely Romney voters
- <sup>O</sup> = Significantly higher than likely Obama voters
- <sup>U</sup> = Significantly higher than Undecideds

## Reading notes

### *Likely voters*

This briefing focuses on respondents we have identified as “likely voters.”

- “Likely Obama voters” are defined as those who say they intend to vote for Barack Obama or are undecided but lean towards voting for Mr. Obama
- “Likely Romney voters,” similarly, are defined as those who say they intend to vote for Mitt Romney or are undecided but lean towards voting for Mr. Romney
- “Undecideds” are those who intend to vote, but are undecided and, as of the survey, leaned towards neither Mr. Obama nor Mr. Romney

### *Rounding error*

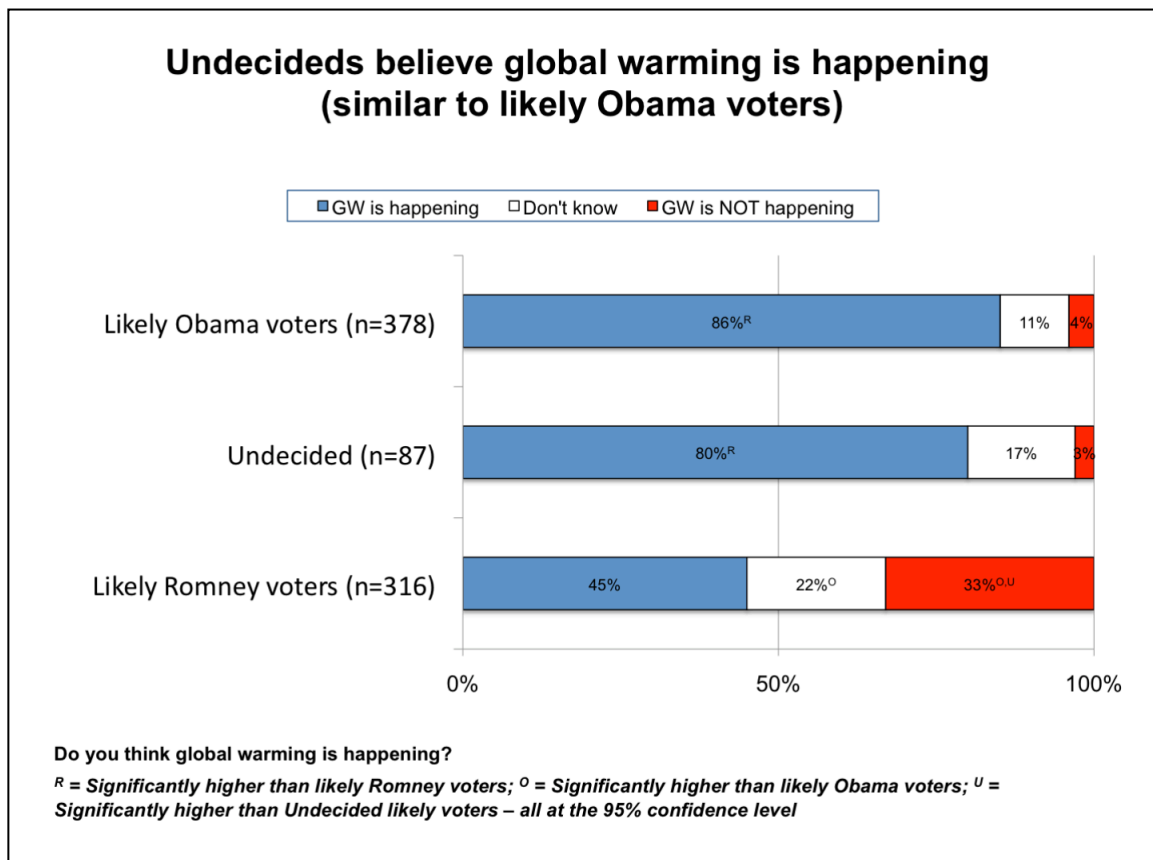
For tabulation purposes, percentage points are rounded off to the nearest whole number. As a result, percentages in a given chart may total slightly higher or lower than 100%.

## Is global warming happening?

Most undecided likely voters (80%) believe that global warming is happening, while only 3% say it is not happening – which is very similar to likely Obama voters (86% and 4%, respectively).

Undecideds are markedly different than likely Romney voters, fewer than half of whom believe global warming is happening (45%). In fact, one in three likely Romney voters say it is *not* happening.

Likely Romney voters are two times more likely than Obama voters to say they “don’t know” whether global warming is happening (22% versus 11% respectively).

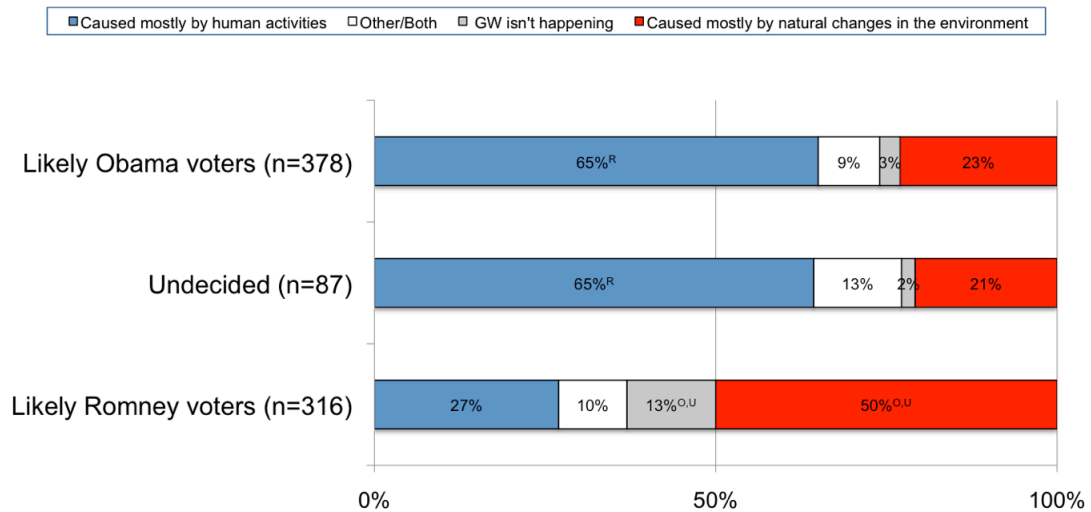


## The cause of global warming

Two out of three Undecideds (65%) say that if global warming is happening, it is mostly human caused, the same as likely Obama voters (65%).

Only 27 percent of likely Romney voters, however, say that if it is happening, global warming is mostly human caused, while 50 percent say global warming is caused by natural changes in the environment.

### Majority of Undecideds believe global warming is human caused (similar to likely Obama voters)



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

<sup>R</sup> = Significantly higher than likely Romney voters; <sup>O</sup> = Significantly higher than likely Obama voters;

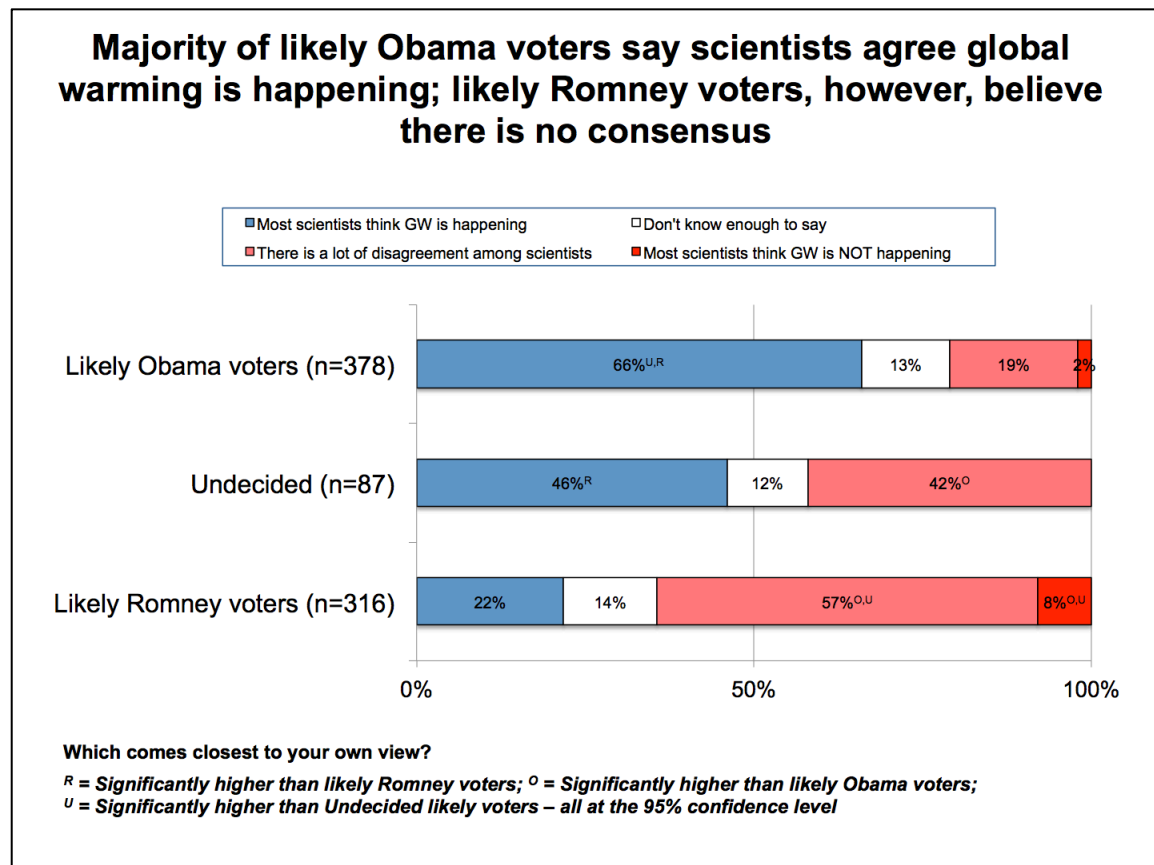
<sup>U</sup> = Significantly higher than Undecided likely voters – all at the 95% confidence level

## Perceptions of scientists' agreement on global warming

The great majority of climate scientists have concluded that global warming is happening, human caused, and if left unchecked, will have serious consequences for humans and the natural world.

Yet there exists considerable confusion about this scientific agreement among American voters. While two out of three likely Obama voters (66%) believe that most scientists think global warming is happening, few likely Romney voters do (22%) – a three to one margin.

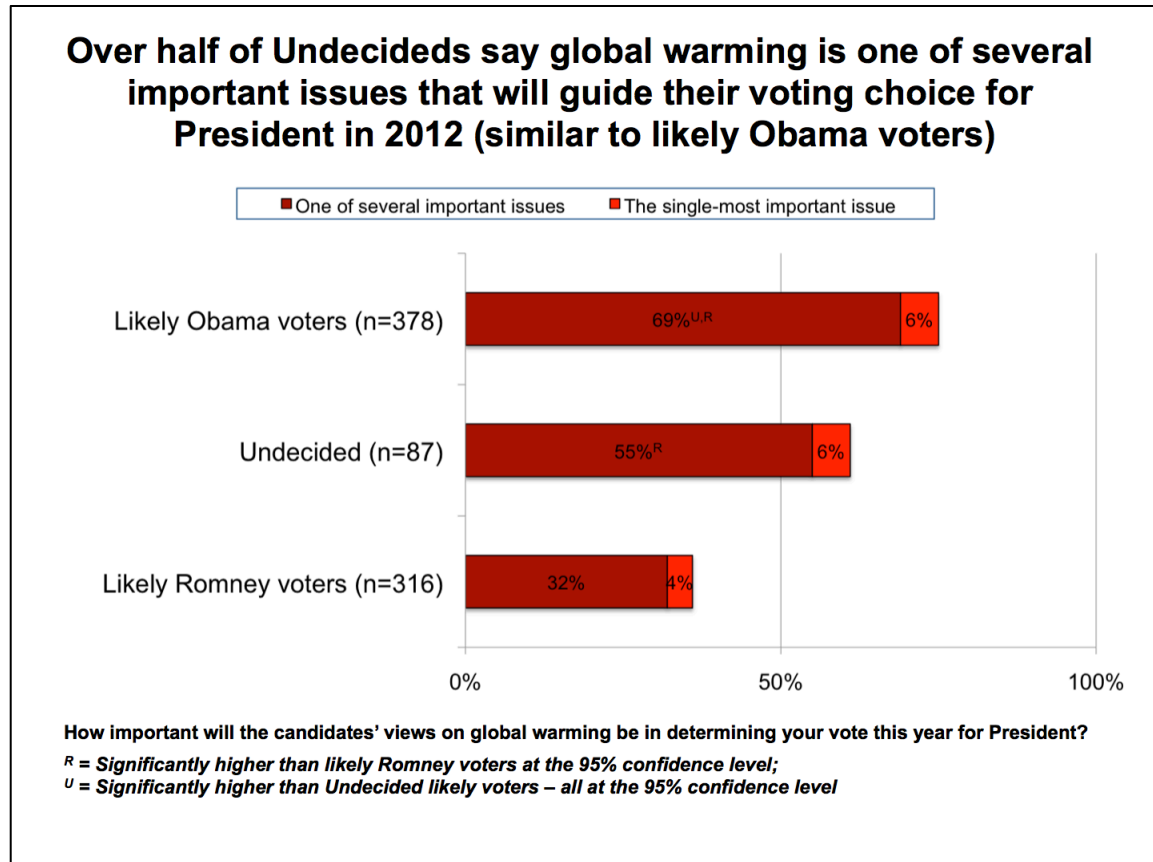
In fact, a majority of likely Romney voters believe “there is a lot of disagreement among scientists” on the issue (57%). Undecideds fall in the middle, with about half (46%) saying that most scientists agree, while nearly as many (42%) think there is still a lot of disagreement among scientists.



## Global warming is an important issue for Undecideds and likely Obama voters when voting for President

Though few likely voters say global warming is the “single-most important” issue to them in this election, majorities of both likely Obama voters (75%) and Undecideds (61%) say it will be one of several important issues determining their vote for President.

The issue is of notably less importance to likely Romney voters.



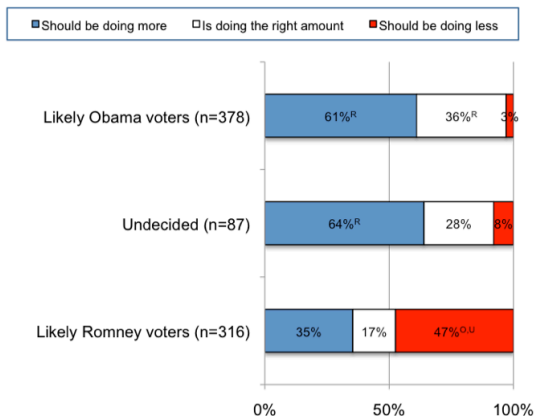
## Desired actions by the President and Congress

Undecideds as well as likely Obama voters say that President Obama (64% and 61% respectively) and Congress (72% and 78%) should be “doing more” about global warming.

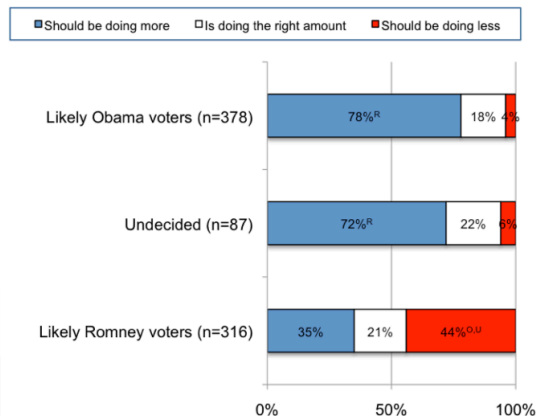
By contrast, fewer than half of likely Romney voters think the President or Congress should be doing more (35% and 35% respectively) and, in fact, are more inclined to say they should be doing *less* to address global warming (47% and 44%).

### Majority of Undecideds say President Obama and Congress should be doing more to address global warming (similar to likely Obama voters)

#### About global warming, President Obama...



#### About global warming, the U.S. Congress...



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

<sup>R</sup> = Significantly higher than likely Romney voters; <sup>O</sup> = Significantly higher than likely Obama voters;

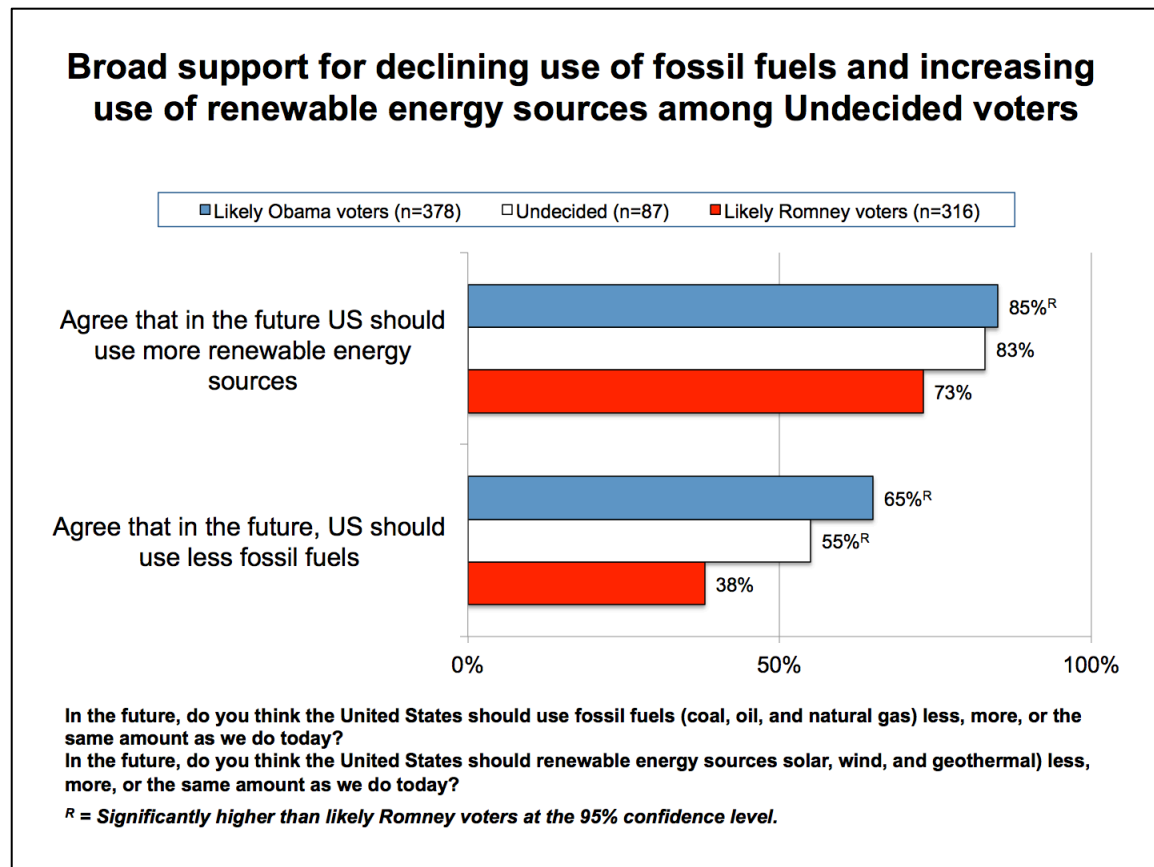
<sup>U</sup> = Significantly higher than Undecided likely voters – all at the 95% confidence level



## Should the U.S. use more or less fossil fuels vs. renewable energy in the future?

There is broad agreement among all likely voters – including likely Romney voters – that the U.S. should use more renewable energy sources (e.g., solar, wind, and geothermal) in the future.

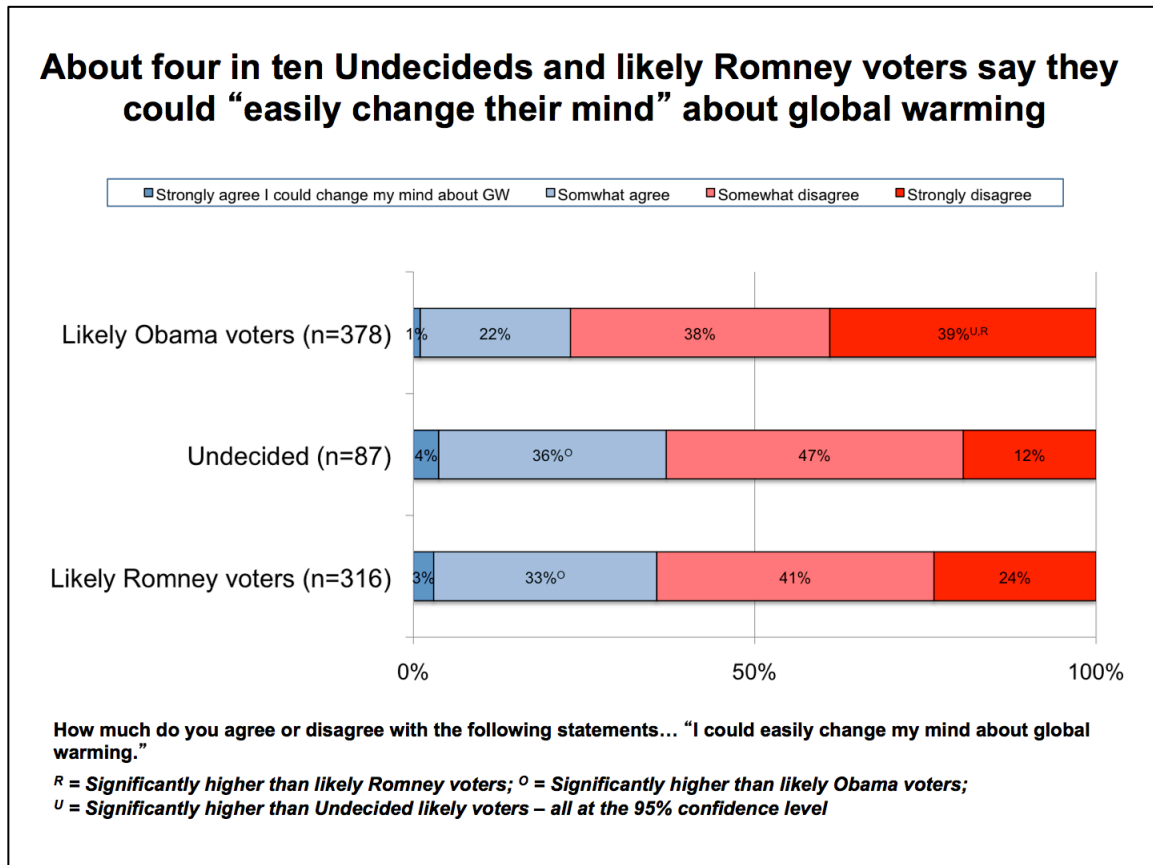
However, while over half of Undecideds and likely Obama voters say that in the future the U.S. should use fewer fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas (55% and 65% respectively), fewer than half of likely Romney voters agree (38%).



## Many could change their minds

About four out of ten Undecideds and likely Romney voters (40% and 36% respectively) – say they could “easily change their mind” about global warming.

This suggests that a large part of the electorate is receptive to learning more about this issue.



## Desire for more information about global warming

Over half of likely voters – particularly Undecideds – say they need more information about global warming, underscoring the fact that many Americans say they could change their minds about the issue.

It also suggests that Americans across the political spectrum are receptive to new information on the topic – so long as communication efforts are effectively targeted and communicated in ways appropriate to the audience.

