

The Political Benefits to Taking a Pro-Climate Stand in 2013

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This brief report examines findings from our previously released September 2012 nationwide *Climate Change in the American Mind* survey and previous research to answer the question: Do political leaders stand to benefit, or not, from talking about and supporting action to address global warming?

In short, we found:

- Concern about the effects of global warming is high across political groups, with majorities of Democrats and Independents expressing concern about global warming and its potential harm for themselves and future generations.
- Across party lines, there is support for taking action to reduce global warming, with pluralities of all groups favoring medium-scale efforts. Even among Republicans, a sizeable majority support making some effort to address global warming.
- Independents more closely resemble Democrats in their attitudes and beliefs about global warming, and like Democrats, most support efforts to address global warming. Thus, the issue of global warming is an opportunity to connect with most Independents.
- A majority of registered voters (58%) say they will consider candidates' position on global warming when deciding how to vote.
- Among those who say they will consider candidate positions on global warming when voting, large majorities say global warming is happening (83%) and is caused by human activity (65%). Only 5% of registered voters believe global warming is not happening and said this issue would influence their choice for President in fall 2012.
- Policies to promote renewable energy are favored by the majority of voters across party lines. Majorities support eliminating federal subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, while opposing ending subsidies to the renewable energy industry. Instead, solid majorities support funding more research into renewable energy sources.

- Voters support regulating carbon dioxide as a pollutant, but their willingness to support a candidate who promotes a carbon tax depends on how the money is used. Candidates garner greater support when the money is used to create jobs, decrease pollution, or pay down the national debt compared to giving a tax rebate to American families.
- Democratic and Independent majorities want Congress and President Obama to do more to address global warming, as do increasing numbers of Republicans.

Detailed Findings

Concern about the issue is high among registered voters.

- Many Americans worry about global warming. Majorities of Democrats and Independents worry about global warming and believe global warming will harm Americans and future generations.
- Nearly half of Republicans say that global warming will harm future generations of people and plant and animal species.

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
I am (somewhat or very) worried about global warming.	73	63	33
Global warming will harm people in the U.S. (a moderate amount or a great deal).	73	57	35
Global warming will harm future generations (a moderate amount or a great deal).	84	66	46
Global warming will harm plant or animal species (a moderate amount or a great deal).	83	65	46
Ns*	328	213	224

Many registered voters said that the 2012 presidential candidates' views on global warming were important to them.

- The majority of Democrats and Independents said that the presidential candidates' views on global warming would be an important factor in determining their vote. Large majorities of these groups also believe that the U.S. should undertake a medium- to large-scale effort to address global warming.
- A majority of all groups say that global warming should be at least a medium priority for the President and Congress. Further, these numbers rose by 7 percentage points among Independents and by 9 percentage points among Democrats in the six months between spring and fall, 2012, while holding constant among Republicans.

Results: September 2012

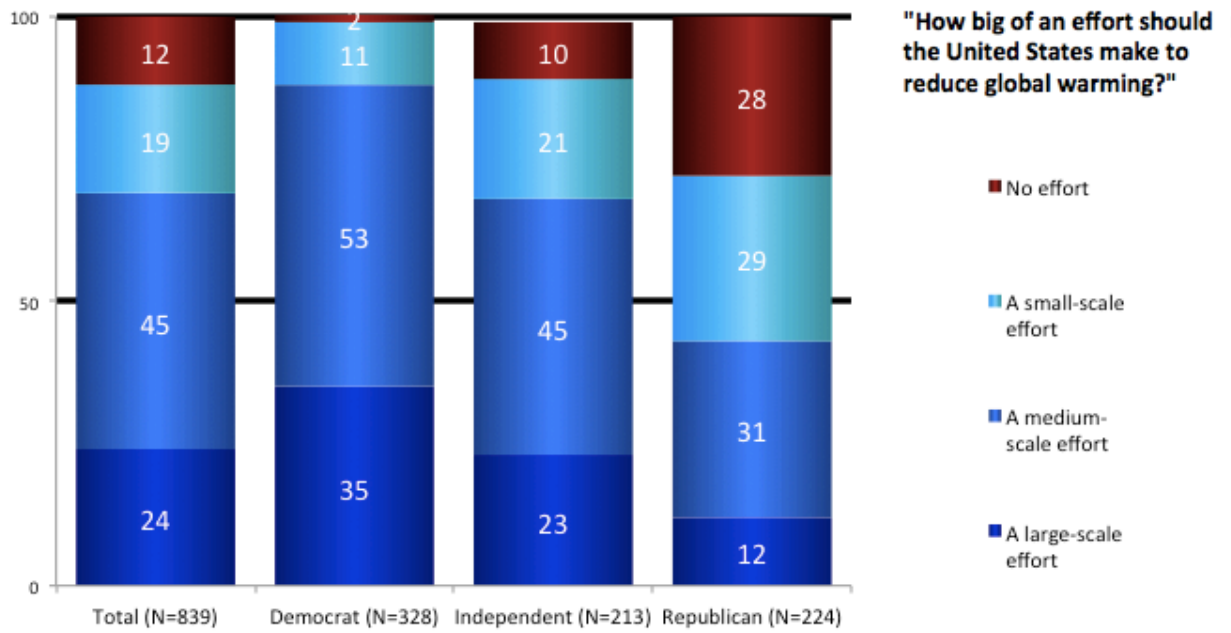
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
A candidate's views on global warming will be (one of several issues or the single most important issue) that influences my vote for President this year.	76	52	38
Global warming should be a (medium, high, or very high) priority for the President and Congress.	93	75	52
The U.S. should make a (medium- or large-scale effort) to reduce global warming.	87	69	44
Ns*	308-328	195-213	209-224

Results: March 2012

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
A candidate's views on global warming will be (one of several issues or the single most important issue) that influences my vote for President this year.	63	58	43
Global warming should be a (medium, high, or very high) priority for the President and Congress.	84	68	52
The U.S. should make a (medium- or large-scale effort) to reduce global warming.	82	68	44
Ns*	291-298	203-206	184-185

Very few voters say that no effort should be made to reduce global warming.

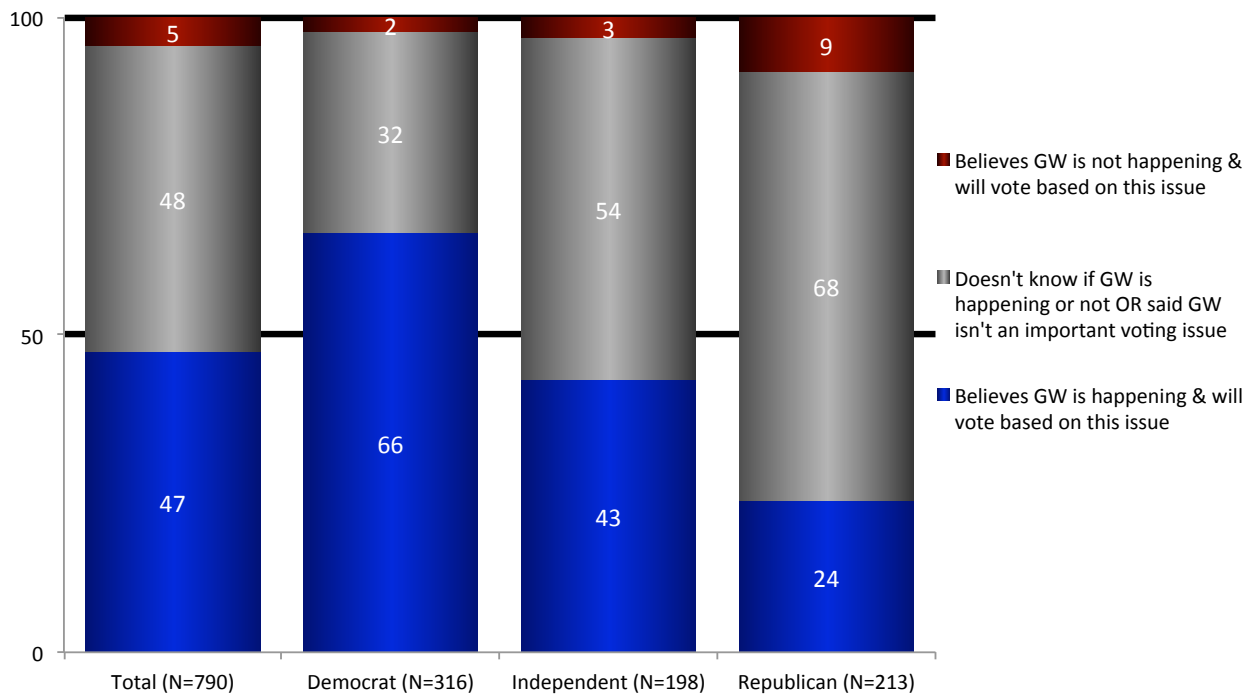
- Only 2 percent of Democratic voters, 10 percent of Independent voters, and 28 percent of Republican voters say the United States should make no effort to reduce global warming.



Registered voters who said they would consider a candidate's position on global warming as a part of their voting decisions are convinced the climate is changing.

- Among registered voters who said they would take candidates' views on global warming into consideration when deciding how to vote, a large majority (83%) accept the reality of global warming, while only 8 percent believe it's not happening, and 9 percent say they don't know.
- A majority of these voters also report that global warming is mostly caused by human activities (65%), almost triple the number of those who believe it is caused mostly by natural changes in the environment (23%).
- Overall, 47 percent of registered voters believe global warming is occurring and said they would consider the candidates' stands on this issue while voting, while only 5 percent believe it is not occurring and said they would consider the issue while voting.
- Voters who believe global warming is occurring and said they would vote based on the issue are not solely Democrats: Sizeable minorities of Independents (43%) and Republicans (24%) shared these beliefs, offering an opportunity to speak to voters across party lines.

Belief in Global Warming Among Issue Voters



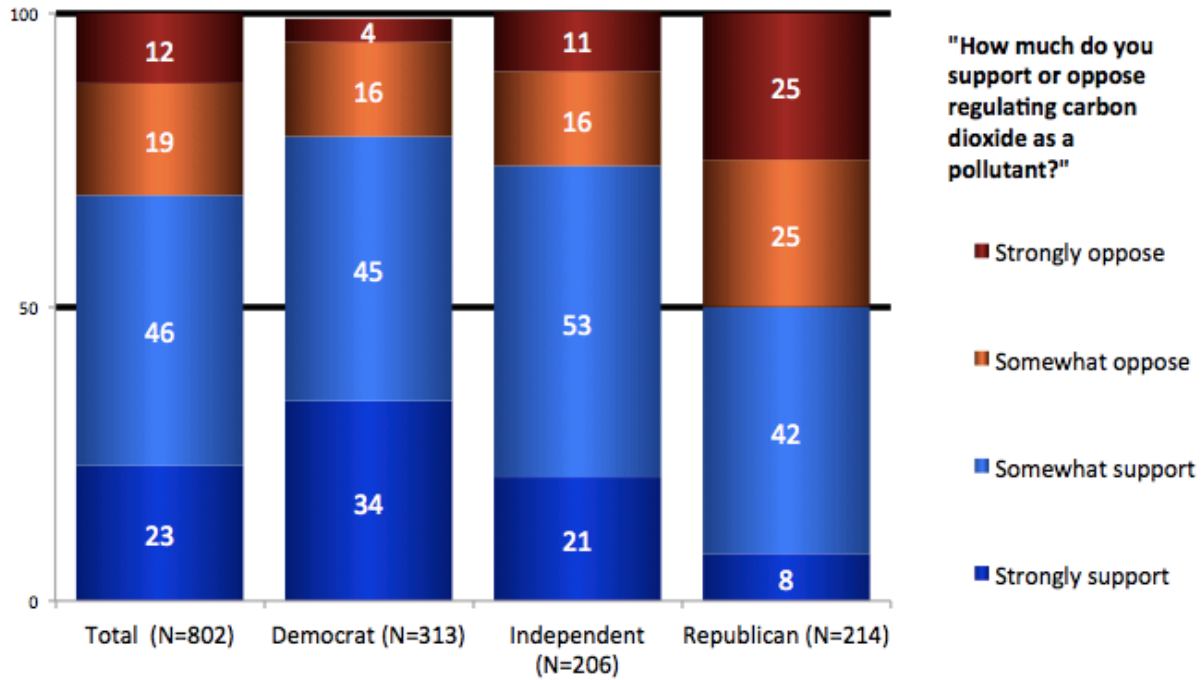
Registered voters believe renewable energy is the future.

- Sizeable majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents say the United States should rely more on renewable energy in the future. Majorities of Democrats and Independents also say the United States should reduce its use of fossil fuels for energy, as do pluralities of Republicans.
- Majorities of all three groups support eliminating federal subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, while majorities in each group *oppose* ending subsidies to the renewable energy industry. Instead, solid majorities support funding more research into renewable energy sources.
- In terms of support for renewable energy, Independents closely resemble Democrats in their policy preferences. In particular, Independents oppose efforts to eliminate subsidies for the renewable energy industry, support research into renewable energy sources, and support increasing the use of renewable energy in the future.

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
Agree that in the future, the United States should use renewable energy sources more than we do today.	83	85	70
Agree that in the future, the United States should use fossil fuels less than we do today.	62	61	38
Support eliminating subsidies for the fossil fuel industry (coal, oil, & natural gas), which currently total an estimated \$10.4 billion a year.	68	69	53
Oppose eliminating subsidies for the renewable energy industry (solar, wind, and geothermal), which currently total an estimated \$1.7 billion a year.	75	70	52
Support funding more research into renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power.	83	83	63
Support providing tax rebates for people who purchase energy efficient cars.	86	78	61
Ns*	311-328	207-213	212-224

Across party lines, registered voters support regulation of carbon dioxide as a pollutant.

- There is overwhelming support for regulation of carbon dioxide as a pollutant among Democrats (80%) and Independents (74%).
- Republicans are divided on the issue, with 50 percent supporting regulation and 50 percent opposing it.



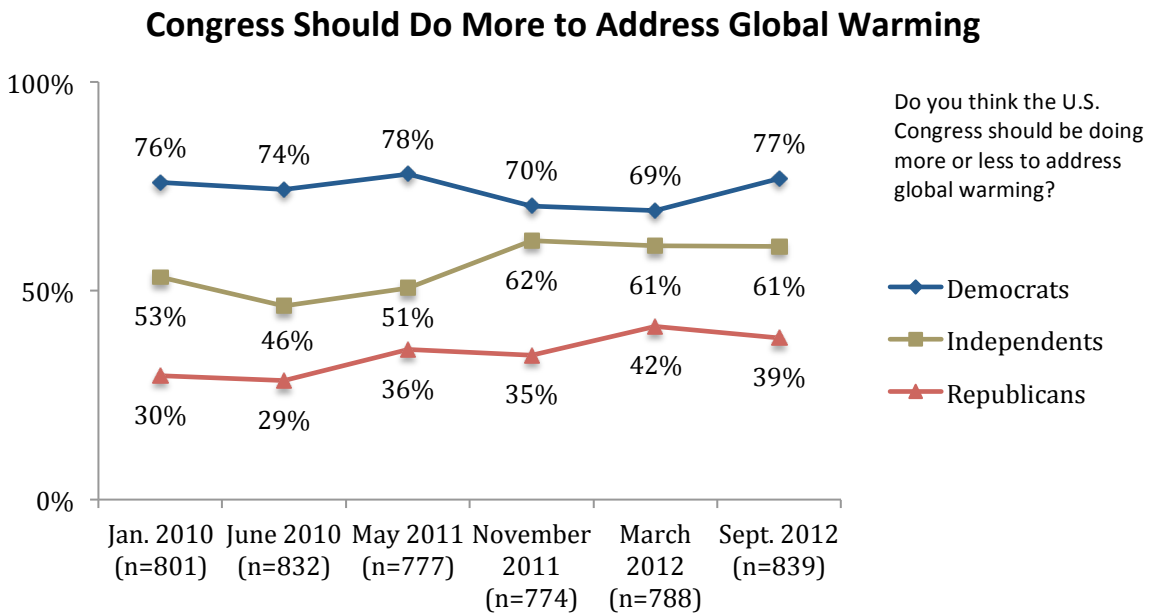
Support for a “revenue neutral” carbon tax – as assessed via support for candidates who support a carbon tax – appears to be contingent on both the benefits promised and on how the new revenue will be used; there is more support for using the revenue to pay down the national debt than for refunding the money to tax payers.

- Voters are most supportive of a candidate supporting a carbon tax if the revenues are used to create more American jobs in the renewable energy and energy efficiency industries, and decrease pollution by encouraging companies to seek less polluting alternatives.

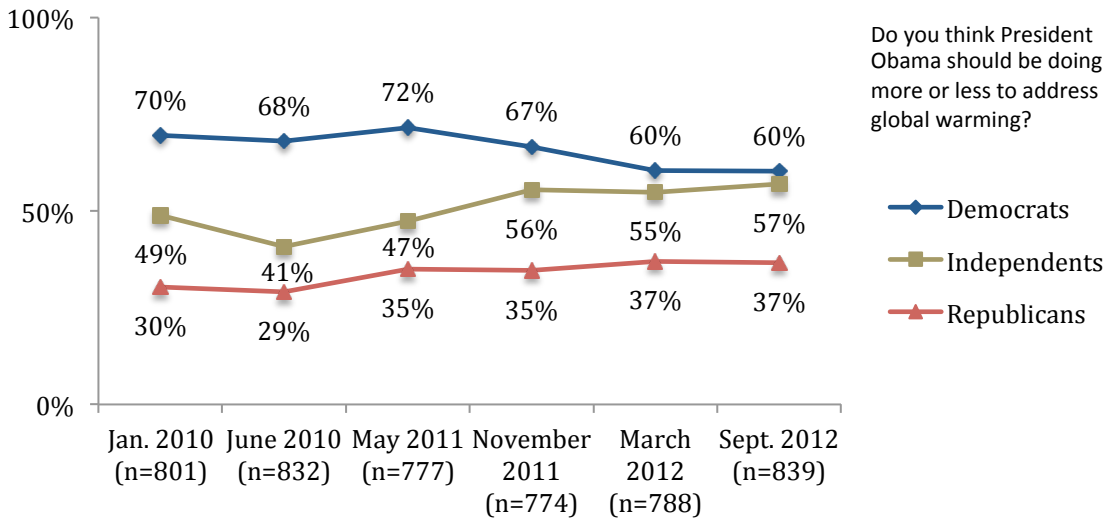
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Would be more likely to support a candidate who supported a carbon tax if...	%	%	%
The funds created more American jobs in the renewable energy and energy efficiency industries.	76	63	50
The funds decreased pollution by encouraging companies to find less polluting alternatives.	72	62	41
The funds were used to pay down the national debt.	65	52	45
The funds were used to reduce the federal income tax.	54	48	42
The funds were used to give a tax refund of \$180, on average, to each American household.	50	35	28
Ns*	325-327	212-213	219-221

A majority of Democratic and Independent voters believe President Obama and Congress should do more to address global warming.

- Majorities of Democrats consistently report that Congress and President Obama should do more to address global warming.
- An increasing number of Independents and Republicans also believe the U.S. Congress and President Obama should do more to address global warming. Over one third of Republicans and roughly 60 percent of Independents now want Congress and President Obama to do more on this issue.



President Obama Should Do More to Address Global Warming



Sources

Unless otherwise noted, the data cited in this brief come from a nationally representative survey of 839 registered voters conducted in September, 2012, by researchers at Yale and George Mason University using the online panel of Knowledge Networks. Results from this survey are available at:

Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C., Feinberg, G., & Howe, P. (2012) *Public support for climate and energy policies in September, 2012*. Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication.

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Additional information came from a previous survey of 795 registered voters in March, 2012, by researchers at Yale and George Mason University using the online panel of Knowledge Networks. Results from this survey are available at:

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