

The Political Benefits of Taking a Pro-Climate Stand in 2012

Connie Roser-Renouf, Anthony Leiserowitz, Edward Maibach

This brief report draws upon data from a nationally representative survey conducted in March 2012 (*Climate Change in the American Mind*) and other research to investigate the question: On balance, will candidates for political office benefit or be harmed by talking about and supporting action to reduce global warming?

The short answer is that – at the national level and among ten key swing states – taking a pro-climate stand appears to benefit candidates more than hurt them with registered voters. Of course, the political dynamics in any given district may be an exception to this pattern, but it is important to note that the pattern is similar at both the national and swing-state scales.

A few highlights:

- A majority of all registered voters (55%) say they will consider candidates' views on global warming when deciding how to vote.
- Among these climate change issue voters, large majorities believe global warming is happening and support action by the U.S. to reduce global warming, even if it has economic costs.
- Independents lean toward “climate action” and look more like Democrats than Republicans on the issue.
- A pro-climate action position wins votes among Democrats and Independents, and has little negative impact with Republican voters.
- Policies to reduce America’s dependence on fossil fuels and promote renewable energy are favored by a majority of registered voters across party lines.
- These patterns are found nationally and among ten swing states.

Many registered voters are concerned about global warming.

- In particular, majorities of registered Democrats and Independents believe global warming will harm Americans and future generations.

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
I am (somewhat or very) worried about global warming	61	49	35
Global warming will harm future generations (a moderate amount or a great deal)	72	66	48
Global warming will harm people in the U.S. (a moderate amount or a great deal)	54	51	28
<i>Ns*</i>	(298)	(206-207)	(185-186)

**NOTE: The ranges in parentheses indicate the largest and smallest Ns for the items shown in this and all other tables.*

A majority of registered voters say that presidential candidates' views on global warming are important to them.

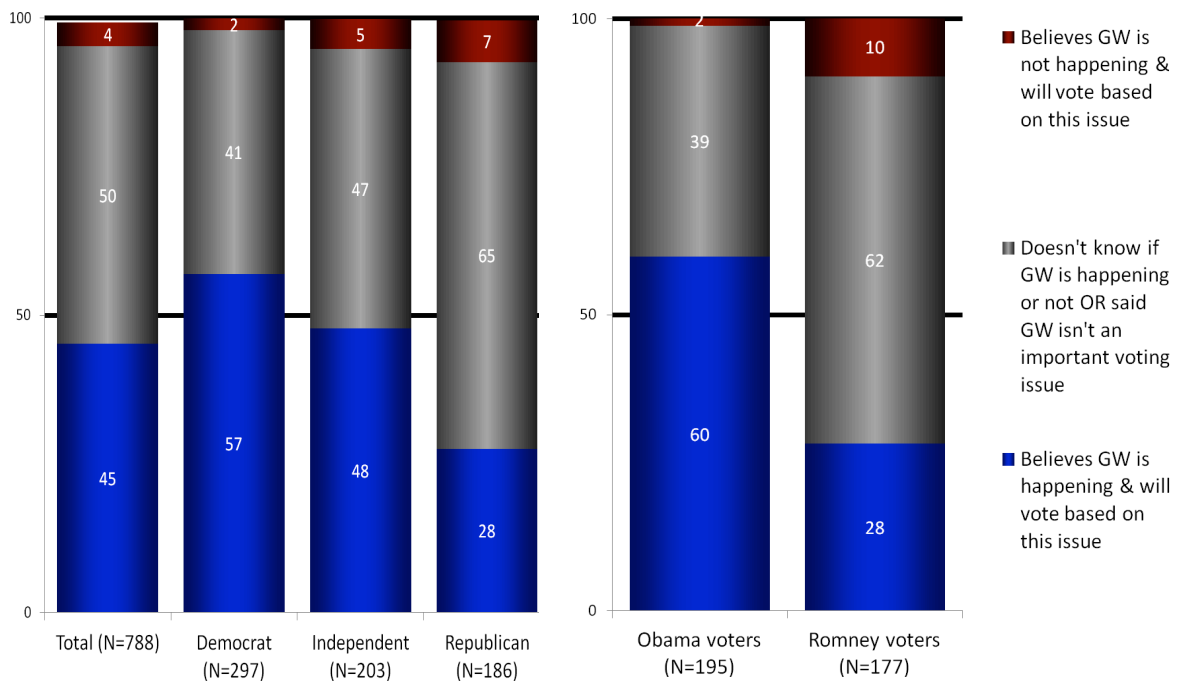
- A majority of all registered voters (55%), including Democrats (63%) and Independents (58%) say that the candidates' views on global warming will be an important factor in determining their vote for President.
- Although the economy remains voters' highest concern, majorities of registered Democrats, Independents, and Republicans say that global warming should be a priority for the President and Congress.
- Large majorities of registered Democrats and Independents say that the U.S. should undertake a medium- to large-scale effort to reduce global warming.

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
A candidates' view on global warming will be (one of several important 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
<i>Ns*</i>	(291-298)	(203-206)	(184-185)

Issue voters who believe that global warming is happening outnumber issue voters who do not believe it is happening by more than 10 to 1.

- 45 percent of registered voters believe global warming is happening and will consider a candidate’s views on global warming as part of their vote. By contrast, only 4 percent do not believe global warming is happening and will factor a candidate’s views into their voting decision.
- 57 percent of registered Democrats, 48 percent of Independents, and 28 percent of Republicans believe global warming is happening and will consider a candidate’s views on global warming as part of their voting decision.
- 60 percent of Obama voters and 28 percent of Romney voters believe global warming is happening and will consider a candidate’s views as part of their vote. By contrast, only 2 percent of Obama voters and 10 percent of Romney voters do not believe global warming is happening and will consider a candidate’s views as part of their voting decision.

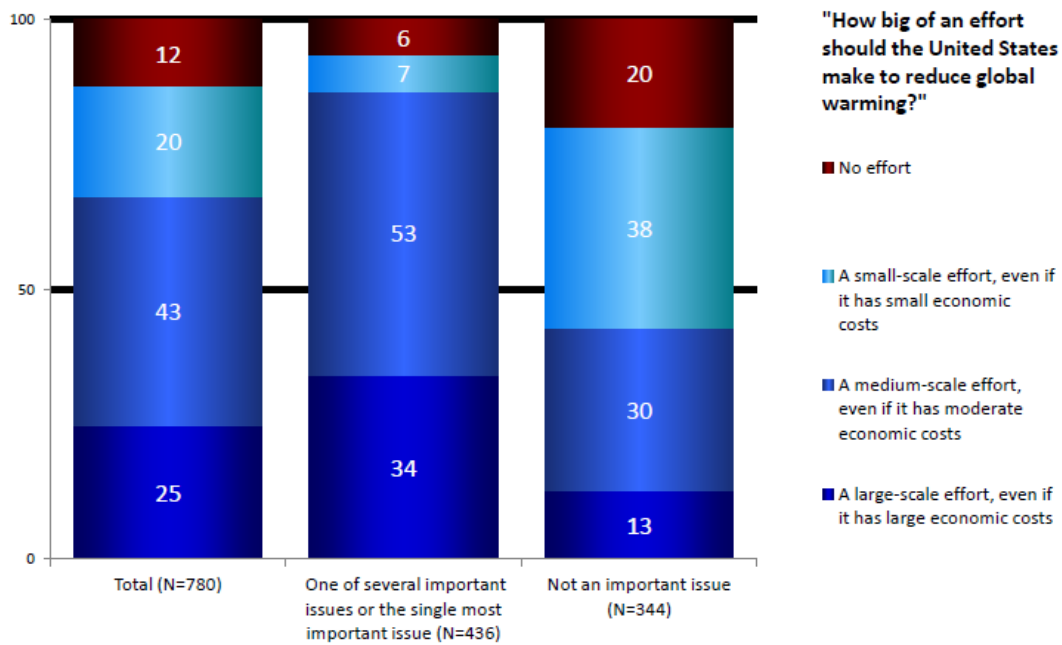
**Global Warming Beliefs and Issue Voting Intentions
Among Registered Voters**



A large majority of registered voters (88%) support action to reduce global warming, even if it has economic costs.

- Among issue voters (who will consider candidates' views on global warming when deciding how to vote), 94 percent support a small (7%), medium (53%), or large-scale effort (34%) to reduce global warming, even if it has small, moderate, or large economic costs respectively.
- Among non-issue voters (who will not consider candidates' views on global warming), 80 percent support action to reduce global warming, even if it has economic costs.

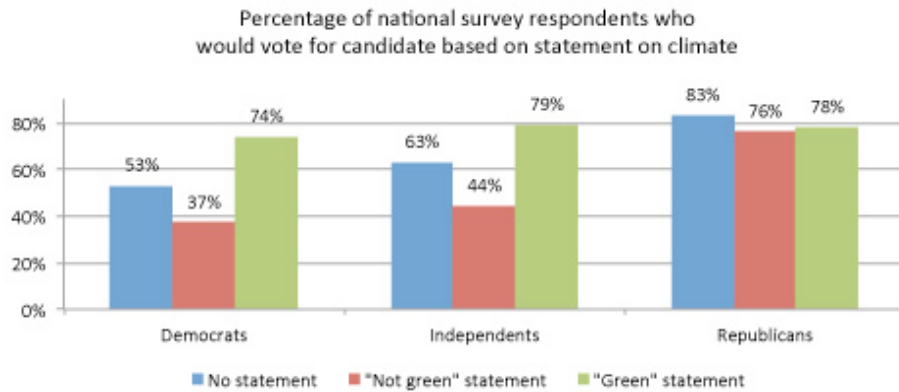
Desired Level of Effort to Reduce Global Warming among Issue Voters



"How important will a candidate's views on global warming be in determining your vote for president this year?"

A 2010 Stanford study found that pro-climate stands are advantageous for candidates.

- A nationally representative study by researchers at Stanford in late 2010 found that hypothetical candidates gained votes from Democrats and Independents with "green" statements on climate, and lost votes with "not-green" statements. Meanwhile, candidate statements on climate did not have a significant impact on the voting intentions of Republicans.



Registered voters trust Obama more than Romney as a source of information about global warming.

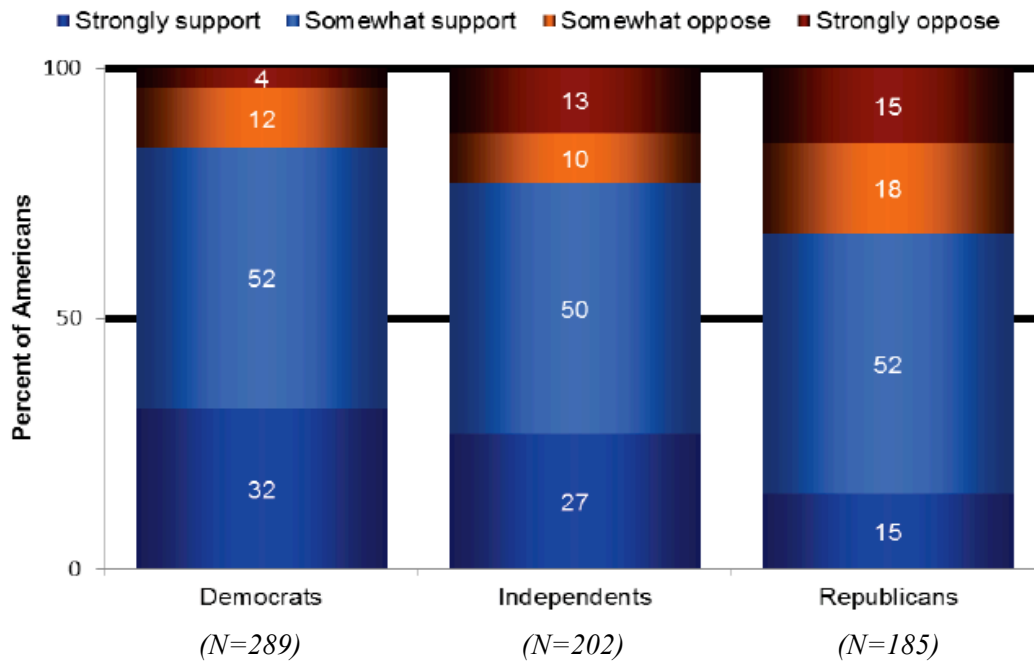
- 47 percent of Americans trust President Obama as a source of information about global warming, but only 21 percent trust Mitt Romney. Romney's trust levels have dropped 5 points since November 2011, with "strong distrust" increasing 8 points to 39 percent.

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
I (somewhat or strongly) trust Barack Obama as an information source on global warming	76	40	15
I (somewhat or strongly) trust Mitt Romney as an information source on global warming	12	17	38
<i>Ns*</i>	(287-294)	(195-199)	(183-184)

Across party lines, Americans favor policies that reduce America’s reliance on fossil fuels and promote the development of renewable energy sources.

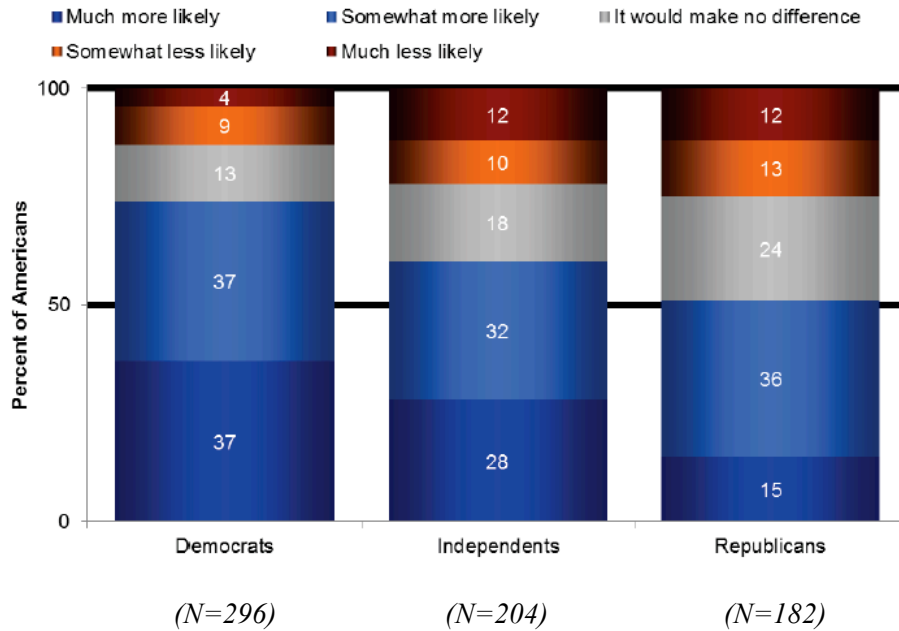
- Among registered voters, 91 percent of Democrats, 80 percent of Independents, and 74 percent of Republicans support funding more research on renewable energy sources.
- Among registered voters, 84 percent of Democrats, 77 percent of Independents, and 67 percent of Republicans support regulating CO₂ as a pollutant.

Support for Regulating Carbon Dioxide as a Pollutant



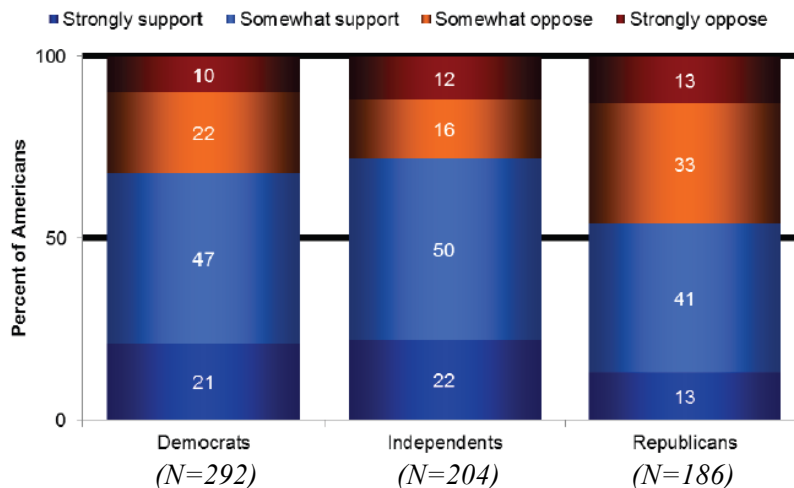
- By a margin of 3 to 1, registered voters – across party lines – are more likely to vote for a political candidate who supports a revenue-neutral tax shift that increases taxes on fossil fuels and reduces the federal income tax by an equal amount.

Likelihood of Voting for a Candidate Who Supports A Revenue Neutral Tax Shift



- A majority of registered voters – across party lines – support holding the fossil fuel industry responsible for "all the hidden costs we pay for citizens who get sick from polluted air and water, military costs to maintain our access to foreign oil, and the environmental costs of spills and accidents."

Support for Holding the Fossil Fuel Industry Responsible for All Hidden Costs



Analysis of Swing States

All national analyses shown above were replicated among the subset of registered voters residing in ten swing states (n = 217).¹ Because the number of survey respondents in the swing states is small, the margins of error are larger and the results should be interpreted with caution.

Statistically significant group differences are indicated below.

Concern:

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
I am (somewhat or very) worried about global warming	55	46	33
Global warming will harm future generations (a moderate amount or a great deal)	61	66	55
Global warming will harm people in the U.S. (a moderate amount or a great deal)	42	51	38
<i>Ns</i> *	<i>(54-55)</i>	<i>(76-77)</i>	<i>(57-58)</i>

Issue Priority:

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
A candidates' view on global warming will (be one of several important issues or the single most important issue) that influences my vote for President this year	57	49	44
Global warming should be a (medium, high or very high) priority for the President and Congress ^a	79	60	61
The U.S. should make a (medium- or large-scale) effort to reduce global warming	73	69	49
<i>Ns</i> *	<i>(54-55)</i>	<i>(71-76)</i>	<i>(55-58)</i>

^a $p < .01$

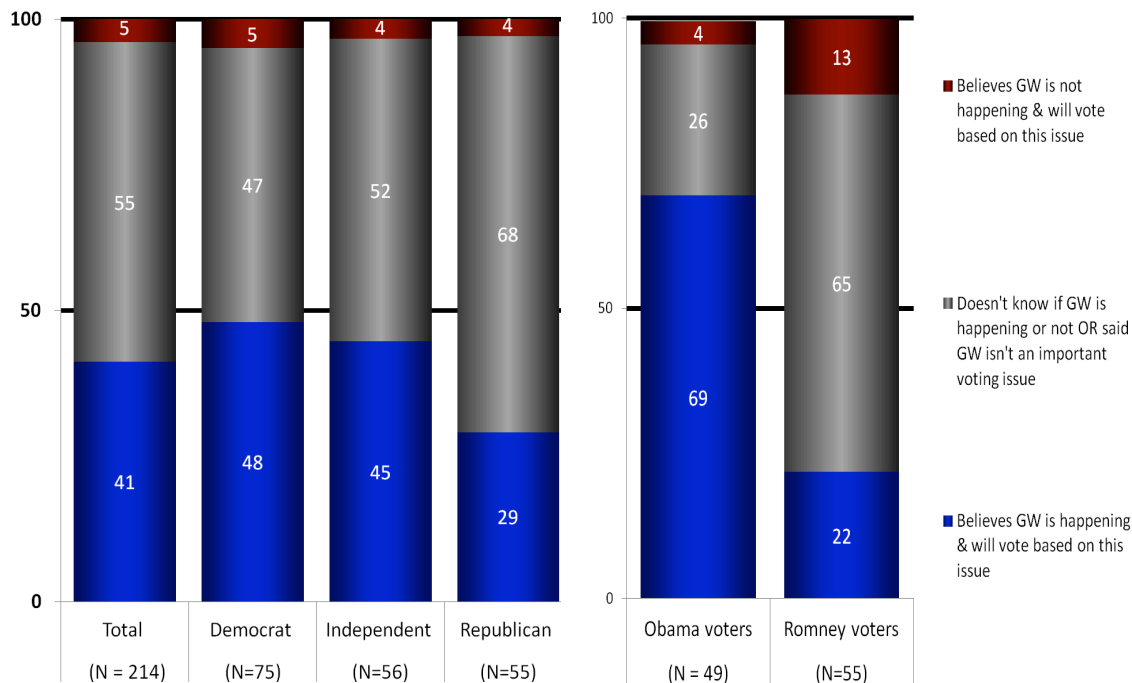
Trust in Candidates on Global Warming:

	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
	%	%	%
I (somewhat or strongly) trust Barack Obama as an information source on global warming ^a	69	41	20
I (somewhat or strongly) trust Mitt Romney as an information source on global warming ^b	18	21	44
<i>Ns</i> *	<i>(71-78)</i>	<i>(53-58)</i>	<i>(54)</i>

^a $p < .001$; ^b $p < .01$

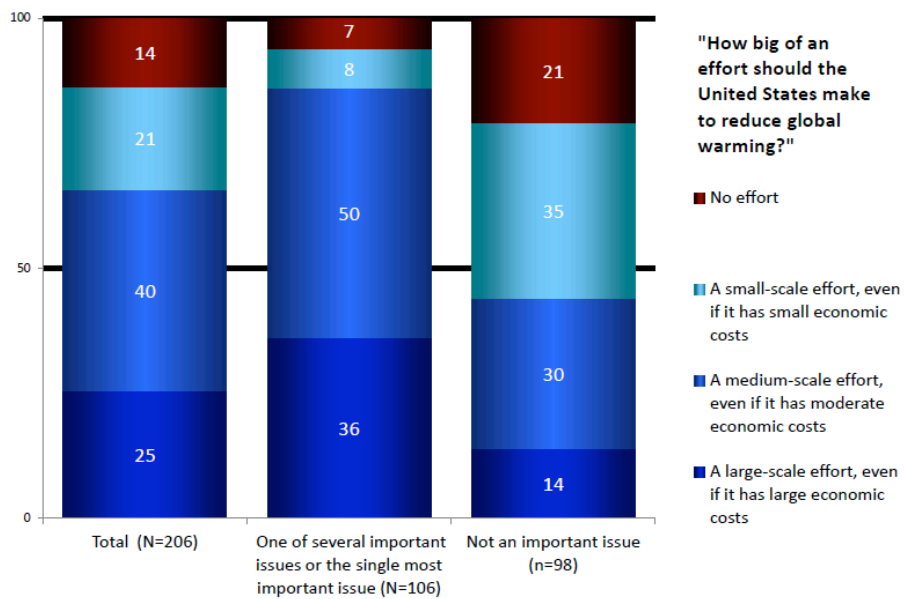
¹ Swing states for this analysis are: Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Global Warming Beliefs and Issue Voting Intentions among Swing State Voters



$p < .001$

Desired Level of Effort to Reduce Global Warming among Swing State Issue Voters

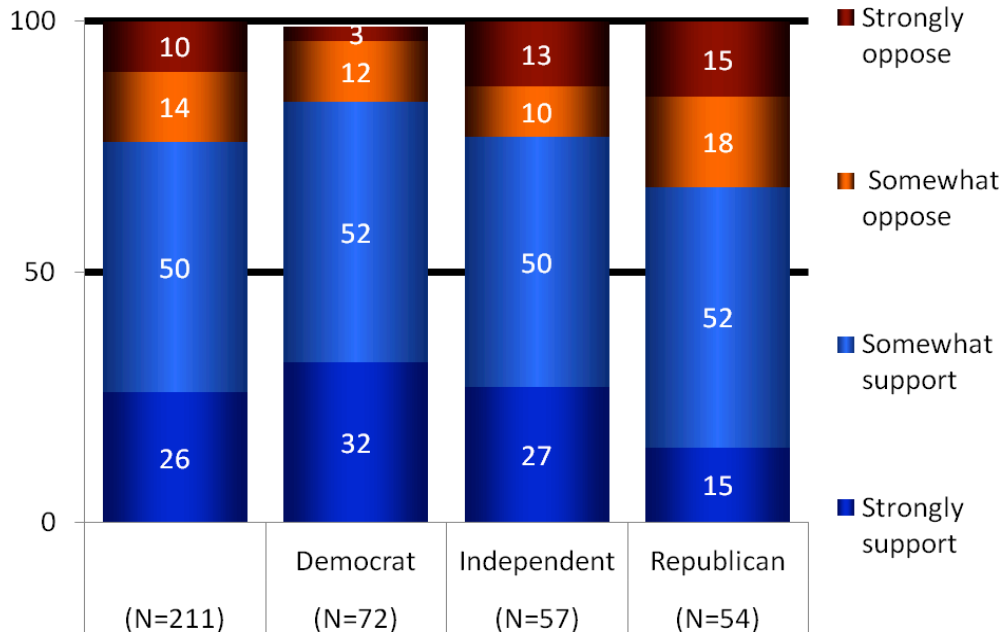


"How important will a candidate's views on global warming be in determining your vote for president this year?"

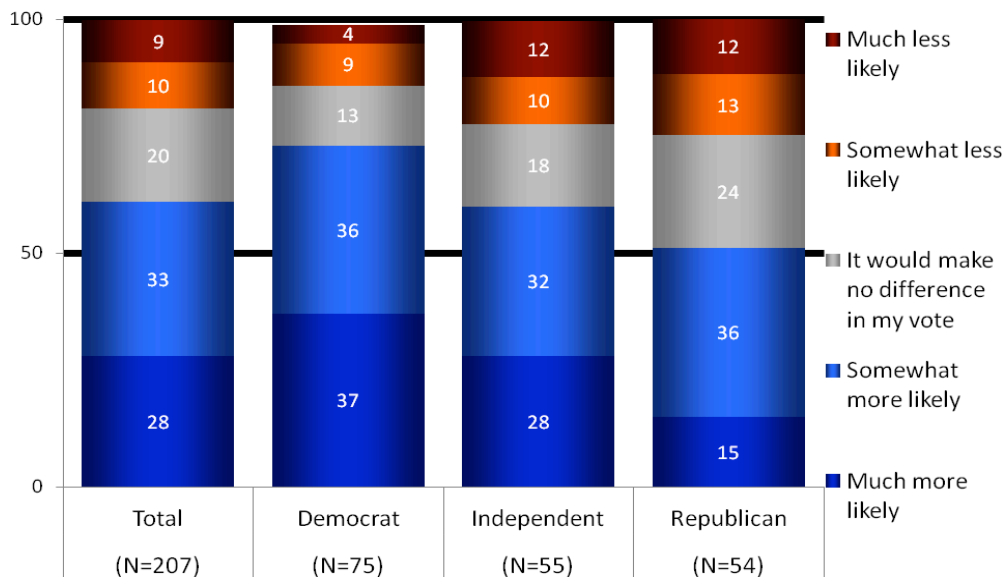
$p < .001$

Support for Climate and Clean Energy Policies among Swing State Voters

Regulating Carbon Dioxide as a Pollutant

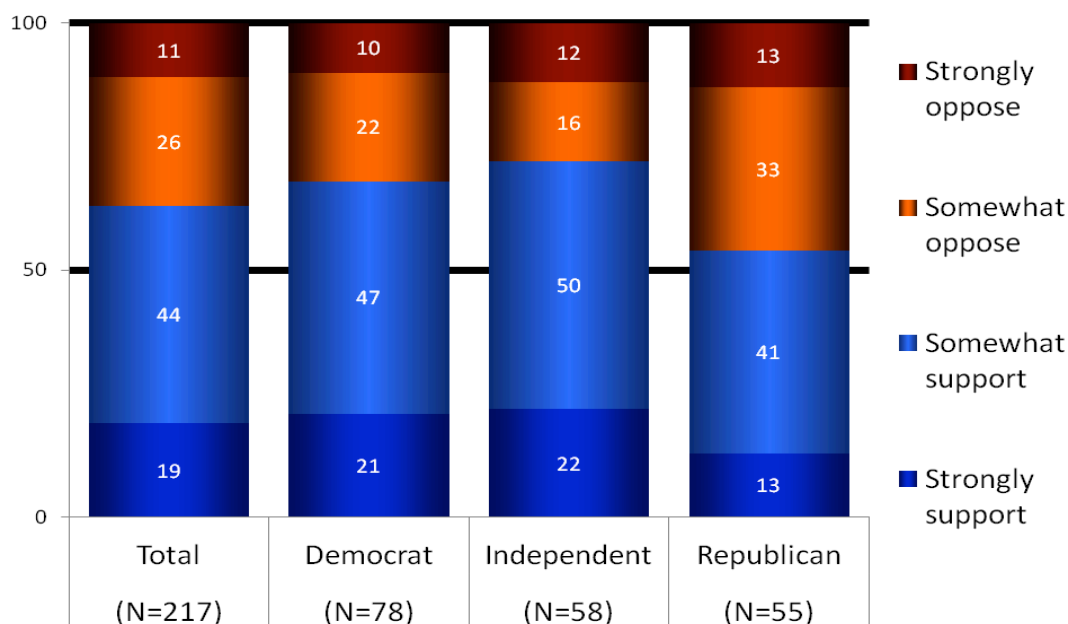


Vote for a Candidate Who Supports Legislation to Reduce the Federal Income Tax, but Increase Taxes on Fossil Fuels



$p < .10$

Holding the Fossil Fuel Industry Responsible for All Hidden Costs



$p < .05$

Sources

Unless otherwise noted, the data cited in this brief come from a nationally representative survey of 795 registered voters conducted 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:

Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C., & Hmielowski, J.D. (2012) *Climate change in the American Mind: Public support for climate & energy policies in March 2012*. Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication. <http://environment.yale.edu/climate/files/Policy-Support-March-2012.pdf>

Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C., & Hmielowski, J. D. (2012) *Climate change in the American Mind: Americans' global warming beliefs and attitudes in March 2012*. Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication. <http://environment.yale.edu/climate/files/Climate-Beliefs-March-2012.pdf>

The Stanford study: Krosnick, J., MacInnis, B., & Villar, A. (2011). *The Impact of Candidates' Statements about Climate Change on Electoral Success in 2010: Experimental Evidence*. Available at: http://woods.stanford.edu/docs/surveys/Stanford_Climate_Politics2011.pdf