



CLIMATE CHANGE

Voters See Global Warming as a Top Foreign Policy Priority

By Brian Katulis, Peter Juul, and John Halpin October 30, 2019

The world is experiencing the effects of climate change: record heat this summer; warming and rising oceans; shrinking ice sheets and glaciers; and a growing number of extreme weather events.¹ Despite these trends, the Trump administration has rolled back environmental protections and many of the steps taken by its predecessors to address the climate crisis. It announced that it would withdraw from the Paris climate agreement, scrapped a plan to require the energy sector to cut carbon emissions, rolled back automobile fuel efficiency improvements, opened public lands for mining and drilling, and more.²

Views of American voters

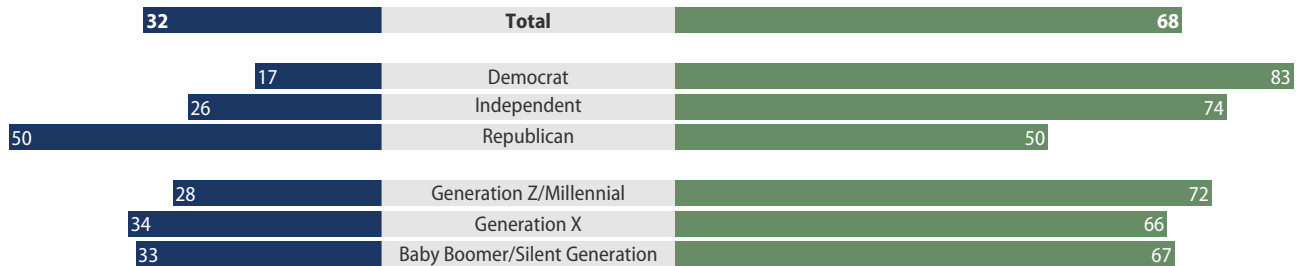
Majorities believe in a future with renewables over fossil fuels

Share of respondents, by political affiliation and generation

Q. "Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right."

Instead of letting other countries use climate change and environmental regulations to weaken our economy, the United States should continue to take advantage of its abundant fossil fuels to fuel our economy and create good-paying jobs.

Regardless of what other countries do, America should invest more in clean and renewable energy sources that will help fight climate change and create good-paying new jobs in solar, wind, and other new industries.



Source: Center for American Progress and GBAO, "Foreign Policy Research – Phase III" (Washington: 2019), available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/07/29142002/FP-condensed.pdf>.

- **A rise in climate change as a security priority.** Combating climate change has emerged as a top foreign policy issue for many American voters. Overall, 6 in 10 (61 percent) Americans believe that fighting climate change is a very important policy priority.
- **Deep partisan and generational divides on climate change.** Partisan divides between Democrats and Republicans on climate change exist across demographic lines, but generational divides emerge among Republicans: Slightly more than half—51 percent—of Millennial and Generation Z Republicans see climate change as at least a very important issue. By comparison, almost 4 in 10 (38 percent) Generation X Republicans and one-third, or 32 percent, of Baby Boomer and Silent Generation Republicans share this view.
- **Overall support for global cooperation on issues such as climate change.** Almost all (93 percent) American voters support working together with allies to address shared global challenges such as climate change as well as terrorism and cyberwarfare. Ninety percent of voters also believe that the United States cannot address these problems on its own and must work closely with allies to do so.
 - This support remains strong across partisan lines, with virtually all Democrats (96 percent), more than 9 in 10 Republicans (92 percent), and almost as many independents (87 percent) saying the United States is safer and stronger working with allies to combat global challenges including climate change.
 - Likewise, support for working closely with international allies to confront problems that include climate change remains strong across partisan lines, with roughly 9 in 10 Democrats (94 percent), independents (89 percent), and Republicans (86 percent) agreeing with this statement.
- **Strong support for more investment in clean energy.** Two-thirds—68 percent—of Americans support investing more in clean and renewable energy sources that will help fight climate change and create good-paying new jobs in solar, wind, and other new industries, regardless of what other countries do. Meanwhile, one-third—32 percent—support taking advantage of America’s fossil fuel resources.

Key points

- President Donald Trump has taken the United States backward on climate change, withdrawing from the Paris climate agreement, pushing increased use of fossil fuels, and cutting funding for critical clean energy research and development efforts—the opposite of what Americans want the United States to do.
- The Trump administration wants to invest heavily in the energy industries of the past—such as coal—ceding global leadership on clean energy technologies to China and other nations. But Americans want the United States to invest in the technologies and industries of the future.

- President Trump insists that the United States must shirk its own responsibilities as long as other countries might fail to meet theirs. That's out of step with a majority of Americans, who want the United States to invest more in clean energy regardless of what other nations do.

The progressive policy alternative

- **Invest in clean energy at home.** Americans strongly favor investing in clean energy technologies such as wind and solar at home over continued exploitation of the nation's fossil fuel resources. The United States should invest more in research and development of new clean energy sources and support their widespread adoption when they're tested and ready for market.
- **Rejoin the Paris climate agreement.** President Trump can't formally withdraw from the Paris agreement until November 2020. But the United States could rejoin the Paris agreement in as few as 30 days. The United States should do so, redouble national efforts to meet its Paris commitments, and return to leading the global fight against climate change.
- **Work with China where possible on climate.** Although the United States and China remain global competitors, climate change is an issue where they can and should find common ground to drive global action on climate.

American voters by and large reject the Trump administration's case against action on climate change. No matter what other countries do, they say the United States should invest more in clean energy at home and work with allies to fight climate change.

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This information is based on a national poll of 1,200 registered voters conducted July 10 to 14, 2019, by the Center for American Progress and GBAO. It is also informed by a series of focus groups, qualitative interviews, and a national poll of 2,000 registered voters conducted February 25 to March 3, 2019. Polling results are on file with the authors.

Endnotes

1 NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory Earth Science Communications Team, "The Effects of Climate Change," October 17, 2019, available at <https://climate.nasa.gov/effects/>.

2 For further reading on this topic, see John Podesta, Christy Goldfuss, Trevor Higgins, Bidisha Bhattacharyya, and Alan Yu, "A 100 Percent Clean Future" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2019), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2019/10/10/475605/100-percent-clean-future/>.