

Americans on Climate Change 2005

July 5, 2005

Overwhelming Majority of Americans Favors U.S. Joining With G-8 Members to Limit Greenhouse Gas Emissions

[Full Report](#)
[Questionnaire](#)

An overwhelming majority of Americans supports the United States agreeing to limit greenhouse gas emissions in concert with other members of the G-8 Summit. The new PIPA-Knowledge Networks poll asked, if, at the G-8 Summit, "the leaders of these other countries are willing to act to limit the greenhouse gases that cause climate change, President Bush should or should not be willing to act to limit such gases in the United States?" Eighty-six percent said that he should. Eighty-one percent of Republicans supported this as well as 89 percent of Democrats.

Virtually all respondents--94 percent--said the United States should limit its greenhouse gases at least as much as the other developed countries do on average. Nearly half--44 percent--think the United States should do more than average.

Steven Kull, director of PIPA, comments, "Going into the G-8 Summit, nearly all Americans feel that the U.S. should not be a laggard, but should be ready to do as much as most other developed countries to reduce emissions that cause climate change."

Consistent with this support for international cooperation on climate change, a large majority--73 percent--said the United States should, "participate in the Kyoto agreement to reduce global warming." Curiously, 43 percent still assume, incorrectly, that President Bush favors U.S. participation in the Kyoto Treaty and another 14 percent are not sure. Only 43 percent are aware that he opposes U.S. participation.

Rising Perception of Scientific Consensus

The perception of a scientific consensus about the reality of global warming has grown sharply over the last year. The percentage saying that "there is a consensus among the great majority of scientists that global warming exists and could do significant damage" has risen from 43 percent in June 2004 to 52 percent today. The percentage saying that "scientists are divided on the existence of global warming and its impact" has dropped from 50 percent to 39 percent. This is part of a long-range trend: in 1994 only 28 percent perceived a scientific consensus while 58 percent assumed that scientists were divided.

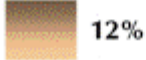
G8 Summit and Climate Change

President Bush and the leaders of the other major developed countries will be meeting in Scotland, July 6-8 at what is called the G-8 Summit. One of the major topics for discussion will be climate change or global warming. Do you think that if the leaders of these other countries are willing to act to limit the greenhouse gases that cause climate change, President Bush should or should not be willing to act to limit such gases in the US?

Should Be Willing



Should Not be Willing



RIPA/KN 6/2005

This trend is also reflected in greater awareness of global warming or climate change, which appears to have grown over the last year. Asked how much they have heard about "the problem of global warming or climate change due to the buildup of greenhouse gases," 72 percent said a great deal or some (22% and 50% respectively), up from 63 percent a year ago, when 15 percent said a great deal and 48 percent some. Those who said not very much or not at all dropped from 38 percent to 28 percent.

Perceptions of a scientific consensus on climate change continue to be partisan. Sixty-two percent of Democrats perceived a consensus, as compared to just 41 percent of Republicans.

But over the last year there have been sharp movements in both parties, especially Republicans. Among Republicans, the perception of a scientific consensus has risen 11 points (30% to 41%) and the perception of scientists as divided has dropped a remarkable 17 points (63% to 46%). Among Democrats, perceptions of a scientific consensus have risen 7 points (55% to 62%) while perceptions of a division have dropped 6 points (39% to 33%).

Need for Action

Three in four Americans embrace the idea that global warming is a problem that requires action. Only 21 percent opposed any steps with economic costs. However, those who said some action is necessary were divided between 42 percent who said the effect of global warming "will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost," and 34 percent who said the problem is "pressing" and "we should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs."

Not surprisingly, there is a strong relationship between the belief that there is a scientific consensus and the view that high-cost steps are needed. Among those who believe that scientists are divided, only 17 percent favored high-cost steps, as compared to 51 percent among those who perceive there is a consensus.

Perhaps most interesting, when the American public was asked to "suppose there were a survey of scientists that found that an overwhelming majority have concluded that global

warming is occurring and poses a significant threat," the percentage of the whole sample saying that they would then favor taking high-cost steps increased sharply, from 34 percent to 56 percent.

Climate Change Legislation

A very large majority of Americans express support for legislation to reduce greenhouse gases. Respondents were told about the targets in one of the key drafts of the McCain-Lieberman legislation (Climate Stewardship Act), which would require large companies to reduce their emissions to 2000 levels by 2010 and to 1990 levels by 2020. An overwhelming 83 percent said they favored the legislation, with just 13 percent opposed.

They were then asked if they would favor the bill "if in fact it appears that it would likely cost \$15 a month for an average household." Two out of three (68%) said they would, while 28 percent said they would not. Democrats were just slightly more willing to accept the \$15 cost (72%) than Republicans (67%).

Respondents were asked to consider a variety of possible strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

- 81 percent supported "tax incentives to utility companies to encourage them to sell environmentally clean energy, such as solar and wind power, to consumers."
- 81 percent supported "cash incentives like tax credits and rebates to individual households that upgrade to more energy efficient appliances like refrigerators and air conditioners."
- 70 percent favored "requiring that by 2010, half of all new cars produced are hybrid-electric or some other type that is very fuel efficient."
- 77 percent favored, "continuing the tax credit for purchasing a hybrid-electric car."

A majority expresses optimism that steps taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will actually benefit the U.S. economy. Asked to choose between two statements, 71 percent chose the position that "the U.S. economy will become more competitive because these efforts will result in more efficient energy use, saving money in the long run," while only 23 percent chose the position that "efforts in the United States to reduce the release of greenhouse gases will cost too much money and hurt the US economy."

The poll of 812 respondents was fielded June 22-26 with a margin of error of +/- 3.5-4.0% depending on the sample size for each question. The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided Internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp. Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation.