

Most Indians Say India Should Limit its Greenhouse Gases

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See Global Warming as Important Threat

Reject Indian Government Position That Developing Countries Are Not Obligated to Limit Emissions

A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of the Indian public finds that two out of three Indians believe that India should limit its emissions of the greenhouse gases that may be causing global warming—something which, as a developing country, it is not currently obliged to do under the Kyoto Protocol. More than 8 in 10 see climate change or global warming as an important threat, and a majority rejects the idea that developing countries like India should not be expected to limit their emissions.

These positions are in sharp contrast to the views of the Indian government, which rejects “any constraints on the emissions of GHGs [greenhouse gases] by India.” (See appendix below for more details.)

The nationwide poll of 1,452 Indians was fielded Nov. 20-30, 2005, by the Indian polling organization C-Voter.

Indian respondents were presented three options to express what they “think about India taking steps to limit emissions that may be causing global warming.” Only 25 percent endorse the view that India “should not take any steps that have economic costs.” Seventy-one percent endorse positions that India should take steps, but they are divided on the level of costs they are willing to accept. The largest percentage—41 percent of the whole sample—say India “should only take limited steps that have low economic costs.” Thirty percent say India “should take strong steps even if they have significant costs.”

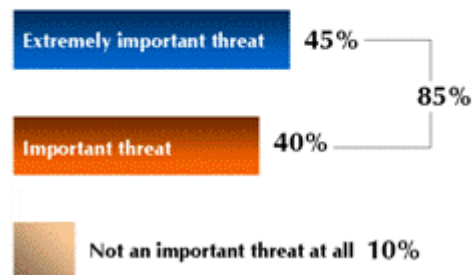
An extraordinary 85 percent of Indians see global warming as an important threat, with 45 percent saying it is extremely important. A mere 10 percent say it is not important at all.

Indians say they have heard a substantial amount about climate change. Asked, “How much have you heard about the idea that emissions from cars and factories are causing global warming or climate change?” only 27 percent say they have heard “not very much” (13%) or “nothing at all” (14%). A rather large 73 percent say they have heard “a great deal” (35%) or “some” (38%).

The Indian government’s unwillingness has played a central role in U.S. objections to Kyoto. In 1997—before the negotiations that produced the Kyoto Protocol—the U.S. Senate passed a resolution, 95-0, stating that the United States would not sign any agreement that did not include binding targets and timetables for developing countries, as well as for developed countries. In American political discourse, India has often served as the poster child for the image of developing countries as unwilling to take on any work of dealing with

Perception of Global Warming

Thinking about possible international threats to India in the next ten years, please tell me if you think the effects of global warming are an extremely important threat, an important threat, or not an important threat at all.



climate change.

Perhaps the most significant finding of the poll is that Indians largely reject the view, expressed by their government, that developing countries such as India do not have a responsibility to limit their greenhouse gas emissions. Respondents were presented two positions on this issue and asked which position was closer to theirs. Only 26 percent endorse the view that “Less developed countries like India should not be expected to limit their emissions.” Rather, a large majority—69 percent—endorses the view that “All countries have a responsibility to make some efforts to limit their emissions.”

To see how this attitude might stand up to further challenge, respondents were then presented another pair of arguments. In this case a larger minority of 45 percent endorse the view—espoused by the Indian government—that “India should not be expected to limit its emissions because it produces relatively low emissions per person.” Nonetheless, a plurality of 50 percent endorses the view that “India should limit its emissions because India’s total emissions are quite substantial and growing.”

The difference seems to be that when the argument is simply focused on India and its low emissions, nearly half of Indians find persuasive the argument that India should be treated differently. Still, it does not really tip the scale with the Indian public. And when Indians are asked to think about the larger context of all developing countries, the idea that developing countries in general should not be required to limit their emissions persuades only a small minority.

Presumably the response to the second argument is more reflective of how Indians’ thinking would develop if they were more involved in thinking through the broader implications of India claiming an exception based on being a developing country.

Demographic Variations

Educational level is an important source of differences among groups in the sample. (Educational levels were defined as less, the same or greater than India’s national average level.) Those with higher-than-average educational levels are somewhat more ready to see India take steps to combat climate change than those with lower-than-average educational levels. Sixty-four percent of the less educated are willing to take steps involving economic costs, while this is true of 77 percent among the more educated. Sixty-three percent of the less educated think all countries have a responsibility to make some efforts (75% among the more educated), and a modest majority of the less educated—53 percent—say India’s low level of per-person emissions means it should not be expected to set limits, while a 53 percent majority of the more educated say India should be expected to set limits.

Income has similar impacts on the survey as education does. Those with higher income are somewhat more likely to accept higher costs and to reject arguments that India or developing countries in general are not responsible for reducing emissions. The sharpest difference is that among those with low incomes, 53 percent say India should not be required to limit emissions while 65 percent of those with high incomes say it should.

Between Hindus and Muslims, Hindus are more concerned about the threat of climate change than Muslims, with 47 percent of Hindus seeing the threat as extremely important as compared to 38 percent of Muslims. Seventy-two percent of Hindus say all countries are responsible to make some efforts against emissions, as compared to 57 percent of Muslims. Hindus also prefer the argument that India should limit its emissions because its total is substantial (51%) over the argument that India’s per capita emissions are low (43%). Among Muslims, the views are 53 percent arguing for an Indian exception with 46 percent against.

Comparing Indian and American Opinion

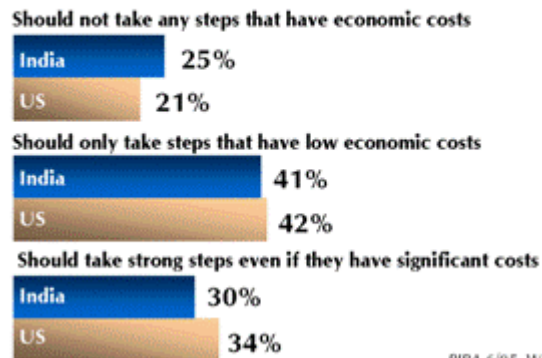
Because a question asked in this poll of Indians is similar to a question asked in a Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) poll of the United States, it is possible to compare Indian and American attitudes. In the United States, the government has also taken the position that constraints on emissions are economically unfeasible.

Interestingly, the public views are quite convergent. On the basic question of how to respond to global warming, Indian public opinion is astonishingly similar to U.S. public opinion. PIPA asked Americans a question with the same three response options (slightly longer, with arguments included) in June 2005. Indians' and Americans' thinking are only a few points apart, despite the huge disparities between the two countries in many dimensions.

Indians show a slightly higher level of concern about the threat of global warming. In a May 2005 German Marshall Fund poll, 79 percent said global warming represented an important threat, with 41 percent saying it is extremely important. Only 18 percent said it was "not an important threat." Among Indians, 85 percent said global warming is an important threat, with 45 percent saying it is extremely important. Just 10 percent said it is not important at all.

Levels of awareness were also strikingly similar despite the sharp differences in educational levels between Americans and Indians. In June 2005 PIPA also asked how much people had heard about global warming. Seventy-two percent said they had heard "a great deal" (22%) or "some" (50%) and only 28 percent said they have heard "not very much" (20%) or "nothing at all" (8%). Among Indians, 73 percent said they had heard "a great deal" (35%) or "some" (38%), while 27 percent said they had heard "not very much" (13%) or "nothing at all" (14%).

Comparing US and Indian Views on Limiting Emissions



PIPA 6/05, WPO 11/05

Appendix: Position of Indian Government

While the Indian government has ratified the Kyoto Protocol, it has been outspoken in its position that there is an "overriding priority of the right to development" which trumps any expectation that developing countries should seek to limit their emissions. It holds that "significant responsibility for [anthropogenic climate change] clearly does not lie with India or other developing countries." The Indian government points out that in 1994, India's per-capita emissions were only 23 percent of the global average and only 4 percent of those from the US in that year. It argues further that "Since ... emissions are directly linked to economic activity, India's economic growth will necessarily involve increase ... from the current extremely low levels. Any constraints on the emissions of GHGs [greenhouse gases] by India, whether direct, by way of emissions targets, or indirect, will reduce growth rates"—thereby conflicting with the "overriding priority of the right to development." ([National Environment Policy 2004](#), India's Ministry of Environment and Forests, pp. 30-31)