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FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Selected results from survey on public perceptions of climate change and options for government action

This survey was of 1,000 randomly selected American adults who were interviewed by phone June 1-7. The survey was financed by a grant to Stanford from the National Science Foundation.

The bullets below are simple descriptions of the survey results. Please visit the Woods Institute web page on *Climate, Energy and Public Opinion* to read survey questions and view results:
<http://woods.stanford.edu/research/surveys.html>

A [June 9 New York Times op-ed](#) and additional analysis of similar surveys by Professor Jon Krosnick can also be found on this web page. For more information, please contact Michael Murphy at (650) 721-1881 or mtmurphy@stanford.edu. For media interviews, contact Mark Shwartz at 831-915-0088

About Professor Krosnick

Professor Krosnick is an expert on the science of public polling and has been conducting national surveys on global warming for more than 15 years. He is a professor of communication, political science and psychology at Stanford and senior fellow (by courtesy) at the Woods Institute for the Environment.

Survey Synopsis

Climate Change Perceptions

- 74 percent thought that the earth's temperature probably had been heating up over the last 100 years.
- 75 percent of respondents said that human behavior was responsible for any warming that has occurred.

Should Government Take Action

- 86 percent of our respondents said they wanted the federal government to limit the amount of air pollution that businesses emit.
- 76 percent favored government limiting business's emissions of greenhouse gases.
- 72 percent of Americans think that most business leaders do not want the federal government to take steps to stop global warming. (Thus, a vote to eliminate greenhouse gas regulation is likely to be perceived by the nation as a vote for industry.)
- 14 percent said the United States should not take action to combat global warming unless other major industrial countries like China and India do so as well.

Government Policy Options

- 84 percent favored the federal government offering tax breaks to encourage utilities to make more electricity from water, wind and solar power.
- Huge majorities favored government requiring, or offering tax breaks to encourage, each of the following: manufacturing cars that use less gasoline (81 percent); manufacturing appliances that use less electricity (80 percent); and building homes and office buildings that require less energy to heat and cool (80 percent).
- 74 percent favor a cap and trade system to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases that companies put out and
- 18 percent of respondents said they thought that policies to reduce global warming would increase unemployment and only 20 percent said they thought such initiatives would hurt the nation's economy.
- Large majorities opposed taxes on electricity (78 percent) and gasoline (72 percent) to reduce consumption so people use less of it.

What about results of other polls from past year that have reported lower numbers?

Professor Krosnick is an expert in the science of public polling. In his analysis of certain polls that asked respondents' their personal beliefs about the existence and causes of warming, he found that for each poll, the wording of some questions violated one or both cardinal rules of good survey question design:

- 1) Ask about only one thing at a time, and
- 2) Choose language that makes it easy for respondents to understand and answer each question.

When surveys other than ours have asked simple and direct questions, they have produced results similar to ours. For example, in November, an ABC News/Washington Post survey found that 72 percent of respondents said the earth has been heating up, and a December poll by Ipsos/McClatchy found this proportion to be 70 percent.

([ABC/Washington Post poll](http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1096a7GlobalWarming.pdf) - <http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1096a7GlobalWarming.pdf>)

Has recent cooler than normal weather affected the public's beliefs?

Our surveys over the past three years has revealed a small recent decline in the proportion of people who believe global warming has been happening, from 84 percent in 2007 to 80 percent in 2008 to 74 percent today. Statistical analysis of our data revealed that this decline is attributable to perceptions of recent weather changes by the minority of Americans who have been skeptical about climate scientists.

Have recent media reports about the credibility of climate scientists affected the public's beliefs?

Our new survey did not find evidence to support this claim in multiple ways. First, we found no decline in Americans' trust in environmental scientists: 71 percent of respondents said they trust these scientists a moderate amount, a lot or completely, a figure that was 68 percent in 2008 and 70 percent in 2009. Only 9 percent said they knew about the East Anglia e-mail messages and believed they indicated that climate scientists should not be trusted, and only 13 percent of respondents said so about the I.P.C.C. reports' alleged flaws.

Some results require statistical analysis. Please contact Michael Murphy if you have any questions.