

AMERICAN OPINIONS ON GLOBAL WARMING

A Yale University / Gallup / ClearVision Institute Poll

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Anthony Leiserowitz
School of Forestry & Environmental Studies
Yale University
(203) 432-4865 (ofc)
anthony.leiserowitz@yale.edu

Executive Summary

Overall, a large majority of the American public is personally convinced that global warming is happening (71%). Surprisingly, however, only 48 percent believe that there is consensus among the scientific community, while 40 percent of Americans still believe there is a lot of disagreement among scientists over whether global warming is occurring. Thus, many Americans appear to have already made up their minds, without waiting for a perceived scientific consensus. Further, 69 percent of Americans now believe that global warming is caused mainly by human activities (57%), or caused equally by humans and natural changes (12%), while only 29 percent believe it is caused mostly by natural changes in the environment.

Americans are evenly split, however, on their level of worry about global warming, with 50 percent personally worried either a great deal (15%) or a fair amount (35%) vs. 50 percent worried only a little (28%) or not at all (22%). These levels of personal worry are due in part to the fact that many Americans believe global warming is a serious threat to other species, people and places far away, but not so serious of a threat to themselves, their own families, or local communities.

Over the past few years, American perceptions that global warming is currently or will soon have dangerous impacts on people around the world have increased significantly. This survey found that 48 percent of Americans now believe that global warming is already having dangerous impacts on people (30%) or will within the next ten years (18%): a 20 percentage point increase since the question was last asked in a nationally representative survey in June, 2004. Surprisingly, a large majority of Americans (62%) now believe that global warming is an urgent threat requiring immediate and drastic action.

For example, a large majority of Americans (68%) now favor, at least in principle, an international treaty that goes far beyond the Kyoto Protocol, to require the United States to cut its emissions of carbon dioxide 90% by the year 2050.

The U.S. Congress is currently debating an increase in the fuel economy standard for cars, trucks, and SUV's. This survey found that a very large majority of Americans (85%) support a fuel economy standard of 35 miles per gallon, *even if a new car thus cost up to \$500 more to buy*. Congress is also currently debating whether to mandate that electric utilities produce a certain percentage of their electricity from renewable energy sources. This survey found that 82 percent of Americans support legislation that requires utilities to produce at least 20% of their electricity from renewables, *even if it*

cost the average household an extra \$100 a year. Additionally, 89 percent of Americans would support a requirement that all new homes and commercial buildings meet higher energy efficiency standards.

However, this survey also found continued strong opposition to carbon taxes, such as higher taxes on electricity, with 71 percent of Americans strongly (49%) or somewhat opposed (22%), or higher taxes on gasoline, with 67 percent of Americans strongly (48%) or somewhat opposed (19%). Thus paradoxically, while Americans strongly support national and international action on global warming, and are willing to pay more for a car and on their yearly electric bill, they remain adamantly opposed to higher gasoline or electricity taxes.

Global warming is also emerging as an important issue in the presidential election. Survey respondents were asked: "If the presidential election were held today, how important would a candidate's position on global warming be in your decision about whom to vote for?" A surprising 40 percent of Americans said a candidate's position would be either extremely (16%) or very important (24%), with an additional 35 percent saying it would be somewhat important.

Finally, in the past, some commentators have suggested that many Americans feel either personally helpless to reduce global warming or to believe that the actions of a single country like the United States won't make any difference. This survey asked respondents if they could personally take actions to help reduce global warming and found that 82 percent of Americans strongly (55%) or somewhat agreed (27%). Likewise, when asked if the United States could take actions to help reduce global warming, 87 percent of Americans strongly (66%) or somewhat agreed (21%). Further, 69 percent of Americans said they strongly (49%) or somewhat disagreed (20%) that the action of a single person won't make any difference in reducing global warming. Finally, 76 percent said they strongly (59%) or somewhat disagreed (17%) that the actions of a single country like the United States won't make any difference in reducing global warming. These results demonstrate that most Americans maintain a "can-do" attitude about this issue and believe that they individually and collectively as a nation can make an important difference in reducing global warming.

Overall, these results demonstrate that most Americans now believe that global warming is occurring, is caused by human activities, and is an urgent threat requiring immediate action. Only half, however, personally worry about global warming, largely because many believe it will primarily impact people, other species, and places far away. Nonetheless, they strongly support a number of national and international policies to address this problem, but remain strongly opposed to carbon taxes. With the presidential primaries and general election near, presidential candidates should recognize that global warming has become an important issue for the electorate. Finally, Americans remain optimistic and confident that they individually and collectively as a nation can make a difference.

Methodology

This survey was conducted July 23-26, 2007, using telephone interviews with 1,011 adults, aged 18+. Respondents were drawn from Gallup's household panel, which was originally recruited through random selection methods. The CASRO response rate was 40%. The final sample was weighted to be representative of U.S. adults nationwide. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points.

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SURVEY RESULTS

Figure 1: Personally Convinced

“How convinced are you that global warming is happening -- would you say you are -- completely convinced, mostly convinced, not so convinced, or not at all convinced?”

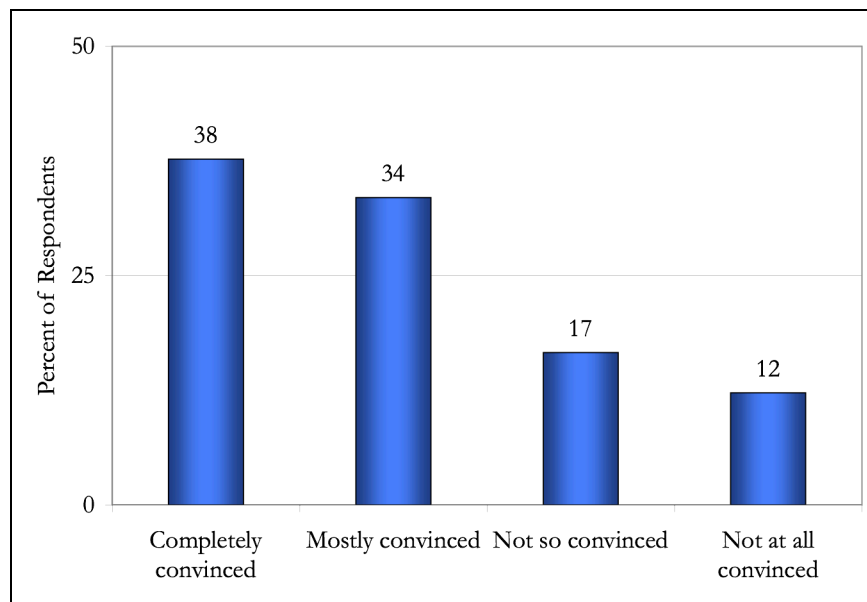


Figure 2: Scientific Consensus

“Which comes closer to your own view -- most scientists think global warming is happening, (or) most scientists think global warming is not happening, or there is a lot of disagreement among scientists about whether or not global warming is happening, or do you not know enough to say?”

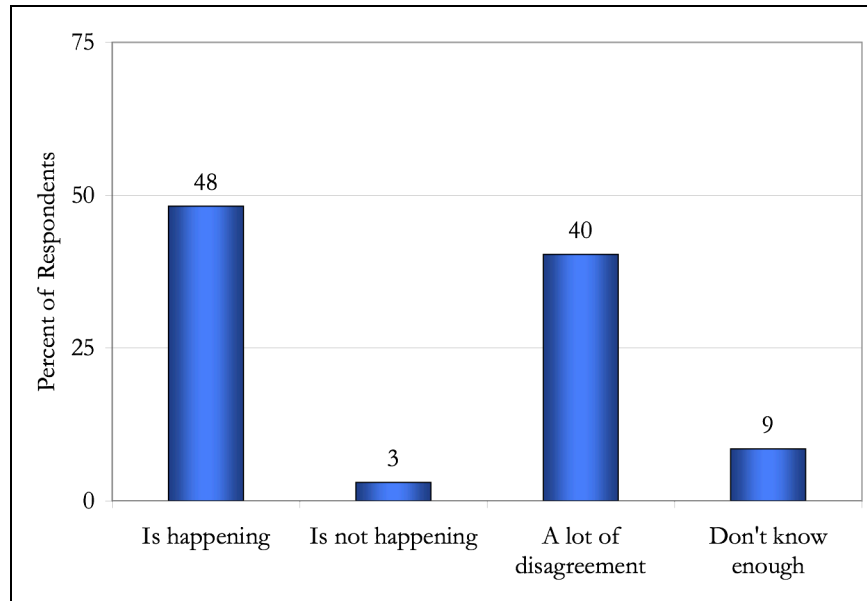


Figure 3: Cause of Global Warming

“If global warming is happening, do you think it is -- caused mostly by human activities, (or) caused mostly by natural changes in the environment?”

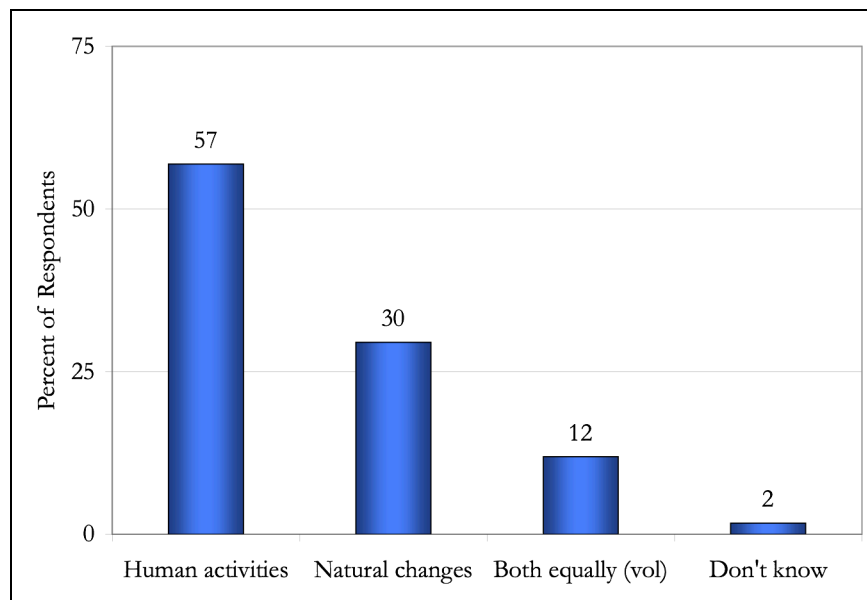


Figure 4: Worry

“How much do you personally worry about global warming – a great deal, a fair amount, only a little, or not at all?”

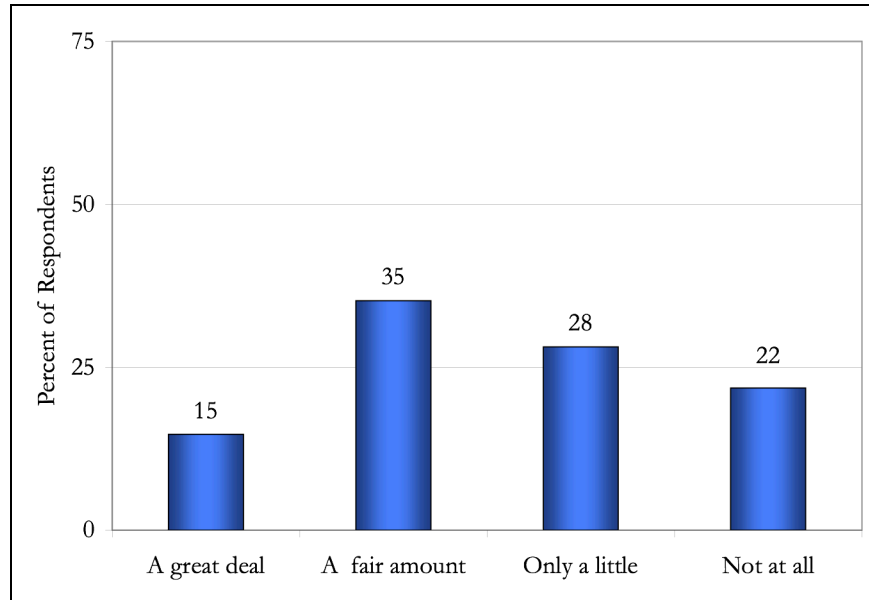


Figure 5: Seriousness and Geography of Impacts

“How serious of a threat is global warming to -- [ITEMS READ IN ORDER] -- very serious, somewhat serious, not very serious, or not at all serious?”

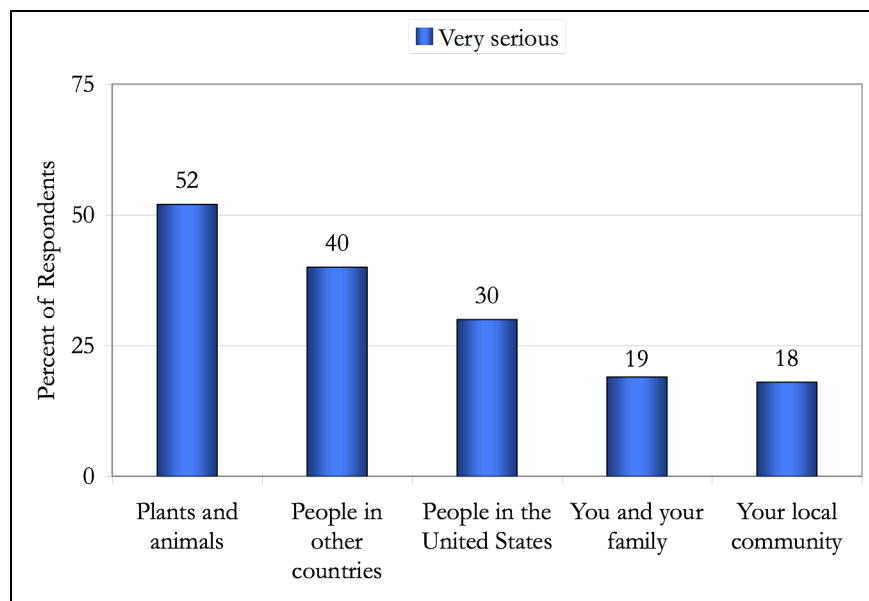
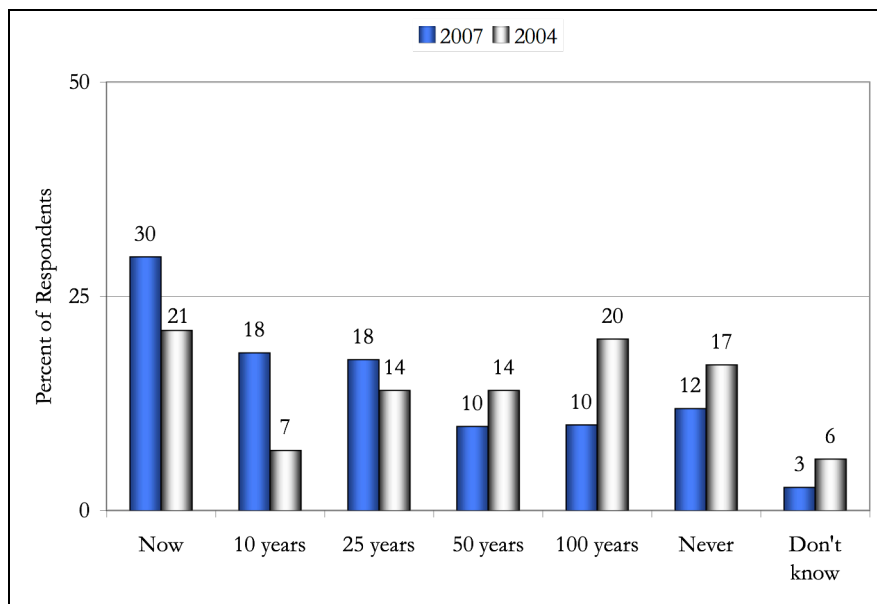
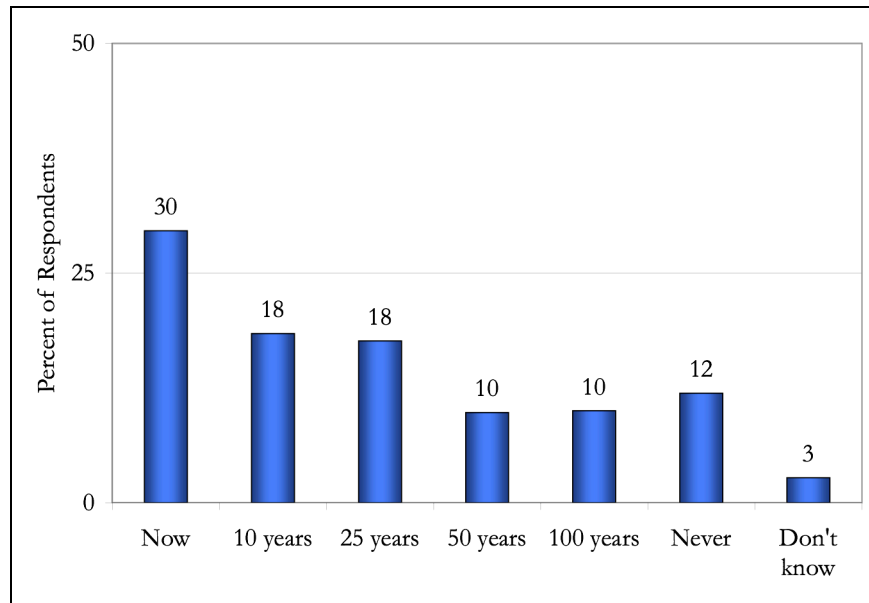


Figure 6: Timing of Impacts

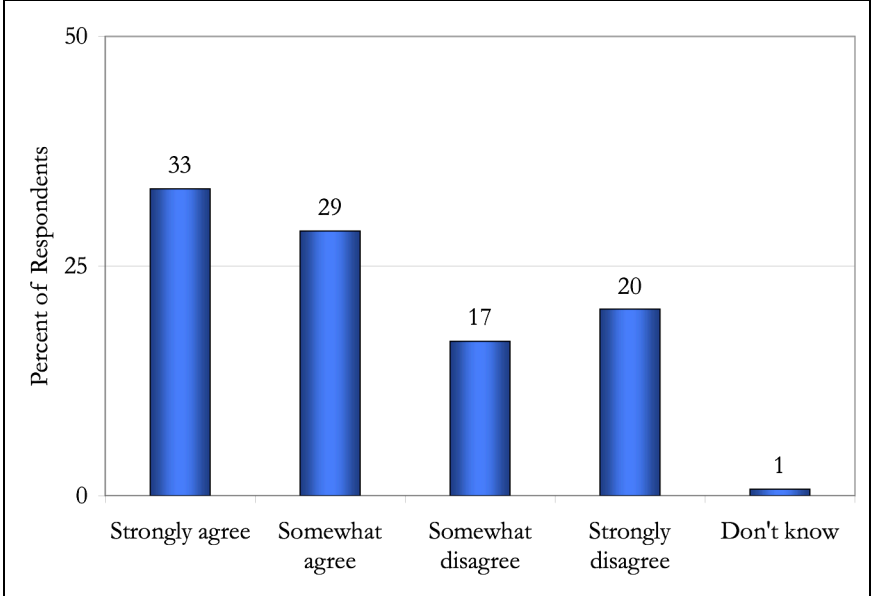
“When do you think global warming will start to have dangerous impacts on people around the world -- is it having dangerous impacts now, will it have dangerous impacts in 10 years, in 25 years, in 50 years, in 100 years, or will it never have dangerous impacts?”



Note: 2004 data from a national survey conducted by A. Leiserowitz and Knowledge Networks, June 15-27 ($n = 425$).

Figure 7: Urgency of Action

“Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement? Life on earth will continue without major disruptions only if we take immediate and drastic action to reduce global warming.”



Policy Preferences

“As you may know, global warming is said to be partly caused by the emission of carbon dioxide from the burning of gasoline, oil, coal, and natural gas in cars, homes, and electric power plants. Do you favor or oppose each of the following as a way for the federal or state governments to reduce both carbon dioxide emissions and global warming? How about...

Figure 8: Policy Summary Chart

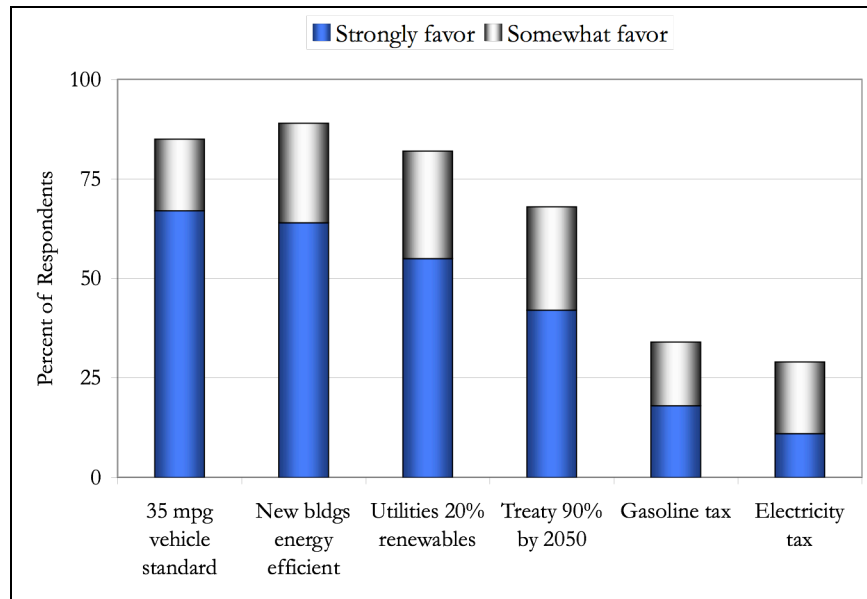


Figure 9: International Treaty

Agreeing to an international treaty that requires the United States to cut its emissions of carbon dioxide 90% by the year 2050.”

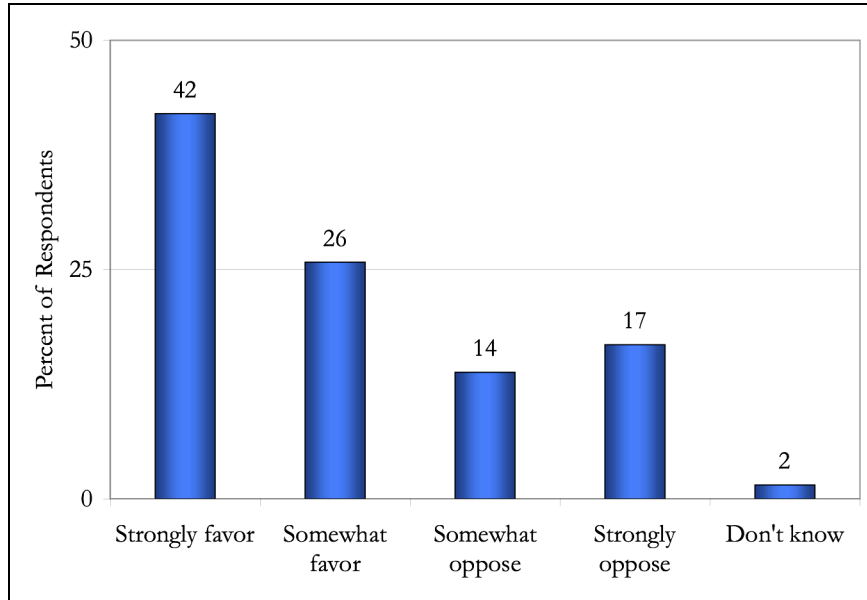


Figure 10: Fuel Efficiency Standards

“Requiring automakers to increase the fuel efficiency of cars, trucks, and SUVs to 35 miles per gallon, even if it meant a new car would cost up to \$500 more to buy.”

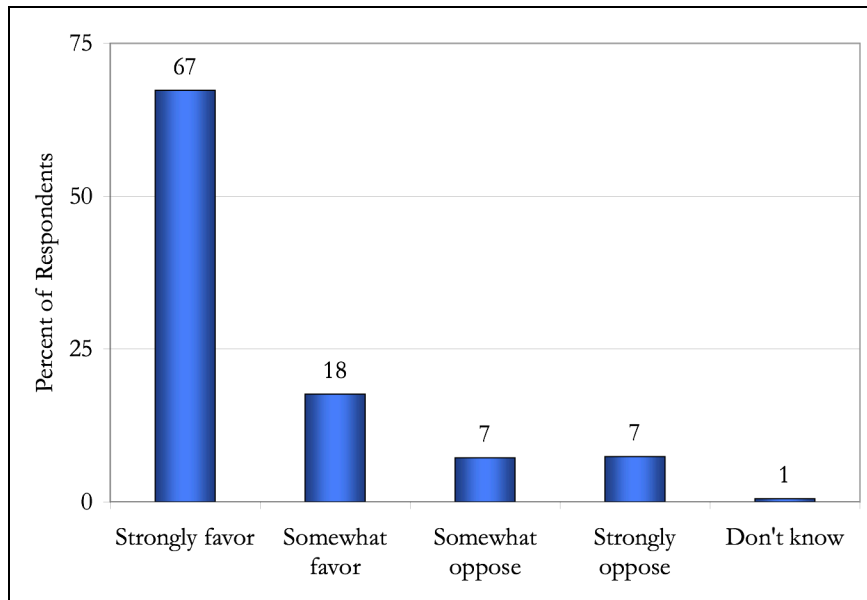


Figure 11: Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards

“Requiring electric utilities to produce at least 20% of their electricity from wind, solar, or other renewable energy sources, even if it cost the average household an extra \$100 a year.”

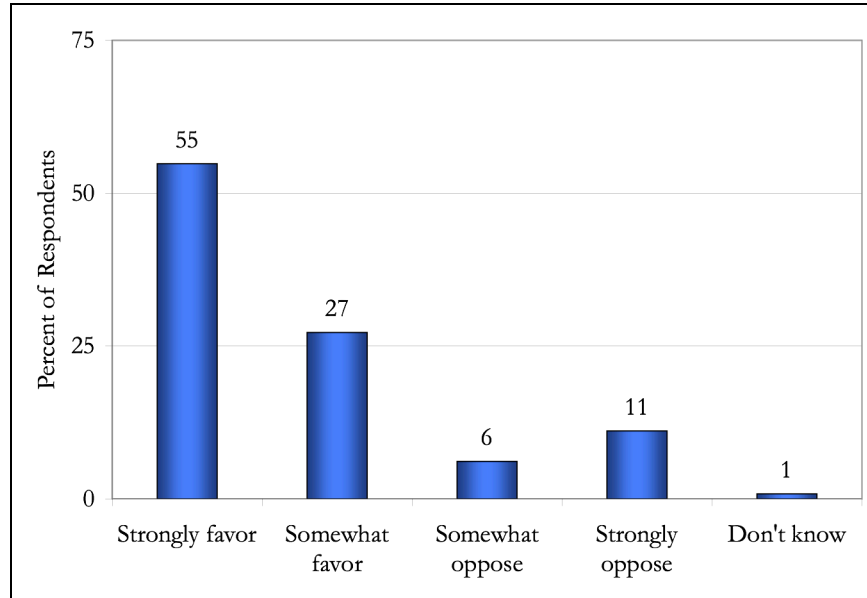


Figure 12: Building Codes

“Requiring that any newly constructed home, residential, or commercial building meet higher energy efficiency standards.”

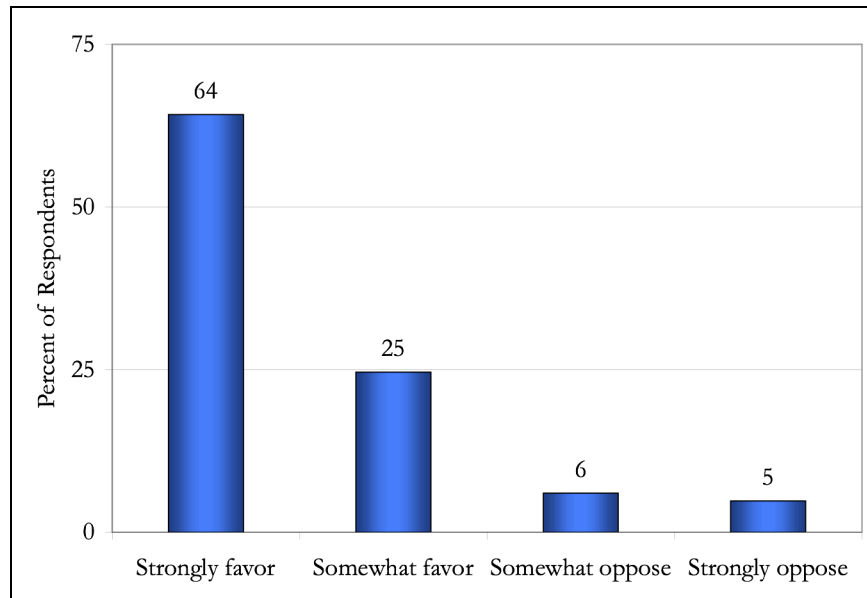


Figure 13: Electricity Taxes

“Increasing taxes on electricity so people use less of it.”

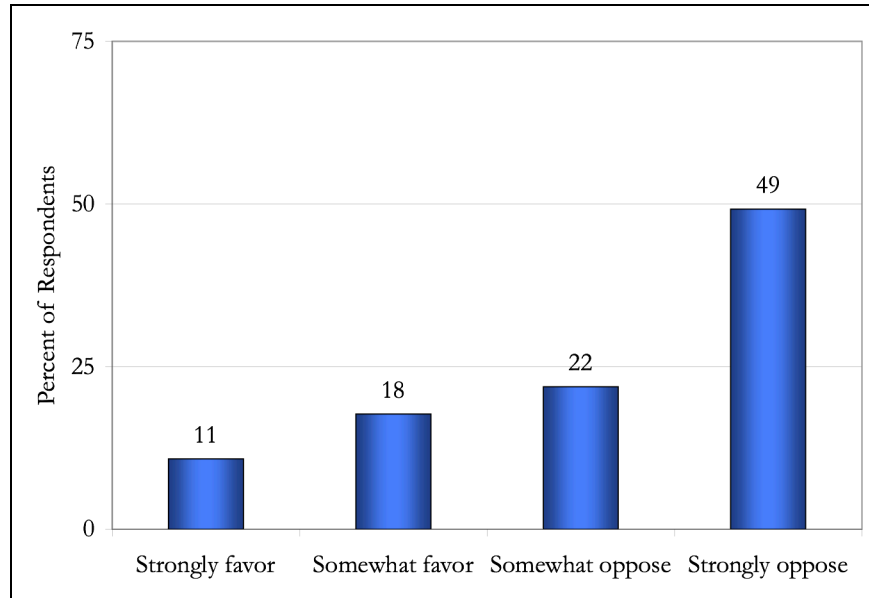


Figure 14: Gas Tax

“Increasing taxes on gasoline so people either drive less or buy cars that use less gas.”

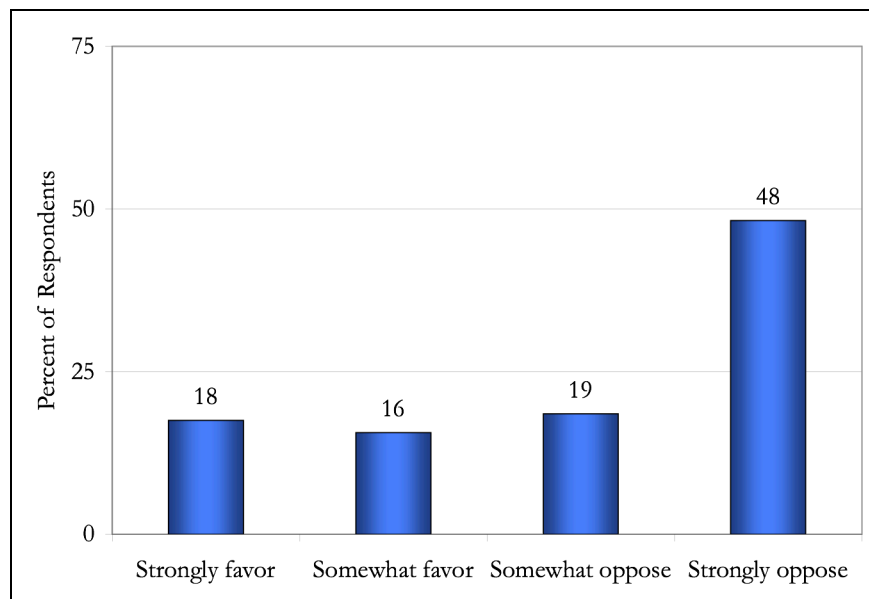


Figure 15: Influence on Vote for President

“If the presidential election were held today, how important would a candidate’s position on global warming be in your decision about whom to vote for -- extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not that important?”

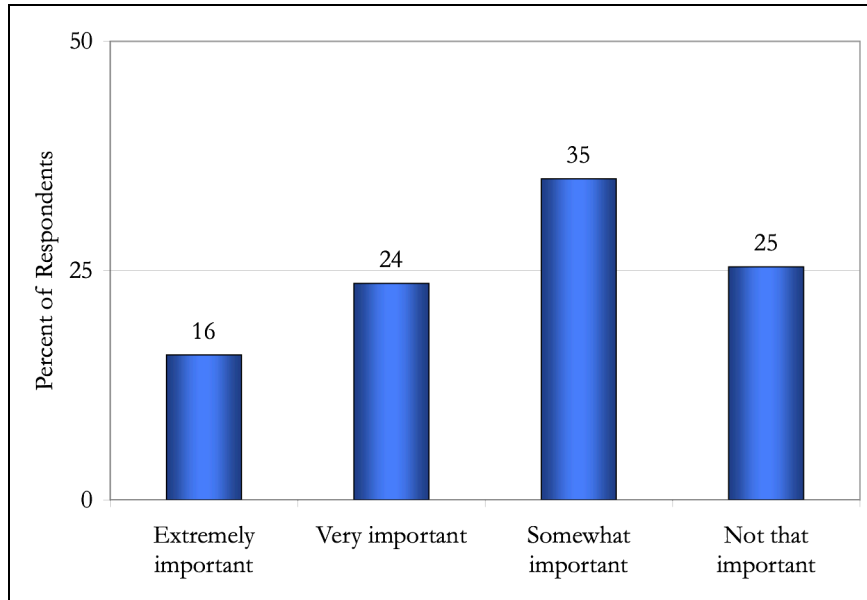


Figure 16: Personal Capability

“Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements...”

“You can take actions that will help reduce global warming.”

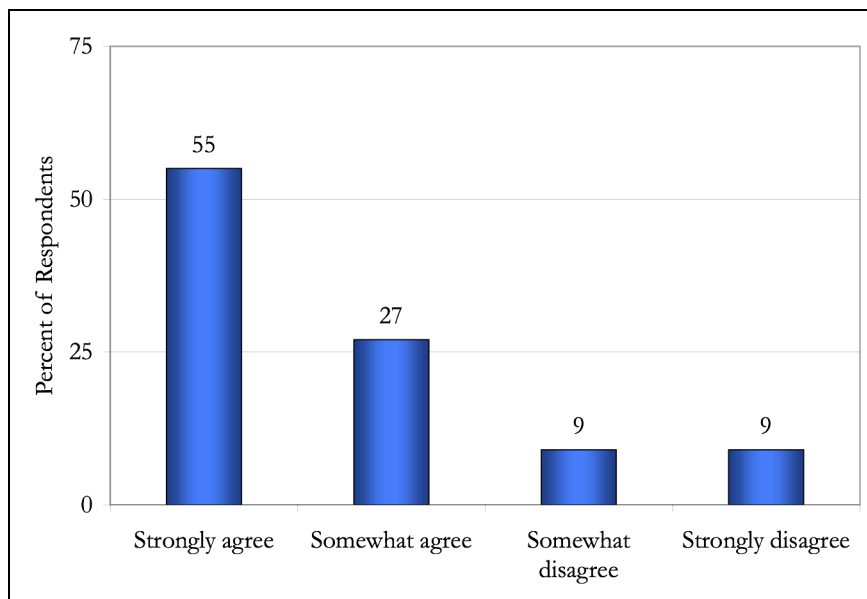


Figure 17: Capability of the United States

“Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements...”

“The United States can take actions that will help reduce global warming.”

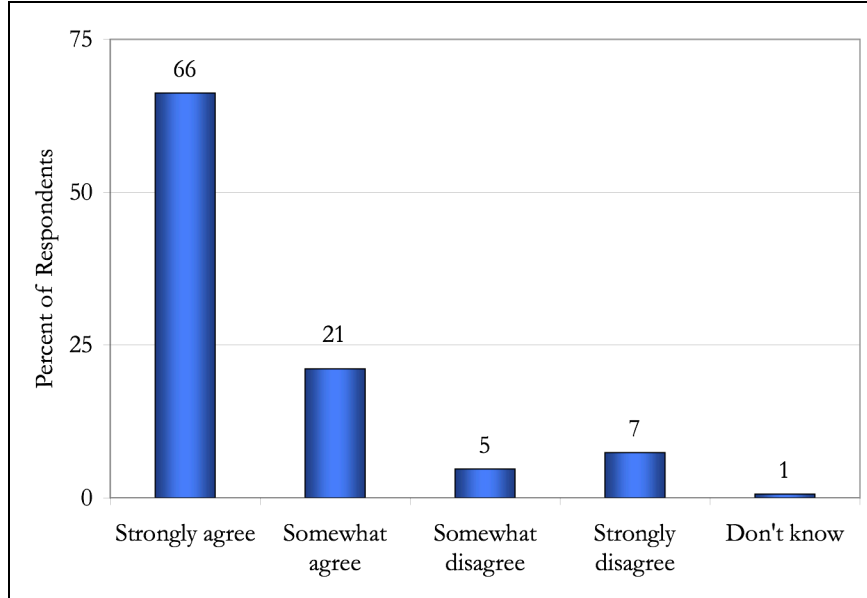


Figure 18: Efficacy of Individual Action

“The actions of a single person won’t make any difference in reducing global warming.”

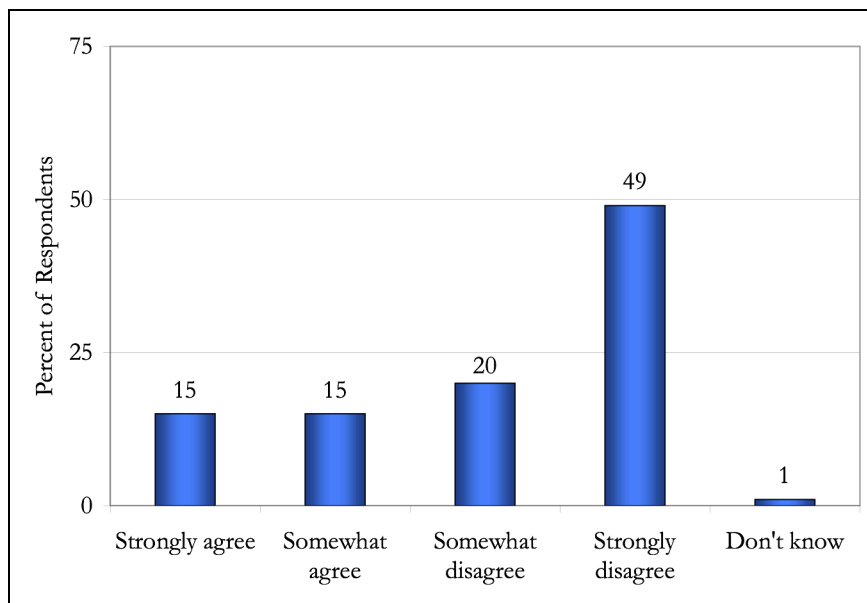
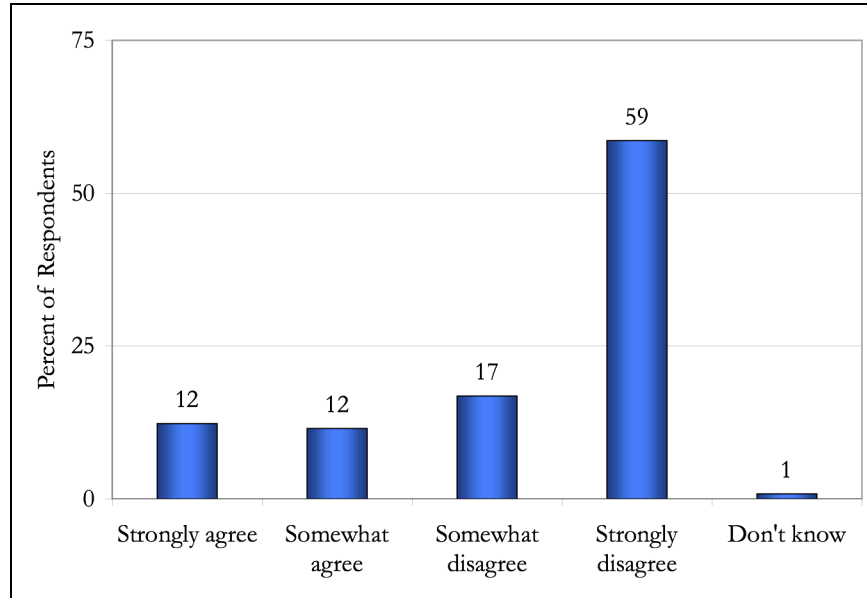


Figure 19: Efficacy of US Action

“The actions of a single country like the United States won’t make any difference in reducing global warming.”



Methodology

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