

Researchers examine impact of 'green politics' on recent national elections

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A political candidate's electoral victory or defeat is influenced by his or her stance on climate change policy, according to new Stanford University studies of the most recent presidential and congressional elections.

"These studies are a coordinated effort looking at whether candidates' statements on [climate change](#) translated into real votes," said Jon Krosnick, professor of communication and of [political science](#) at Stanford, who led two new studies – one of the 2008 presidential election and one of the 2010 congressional elections. "All this suggests that votes can be gained by taking 'green' positions on climate change and votes will be lost by taking 'not-green' positions."

The findings are consistent with Krosnick's previous research on voters' preferences in a hypothetical election. Taken together, the studies make a strong case that for [candidates](#) of any party, saying climate change is real and supporting policies aimed at tackling the issue is a good way to woo [voters](#), said Krosnick, a senior fellow, by courtesy, at the Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment.

"Recently, we've seen many politicians choose to say nothing about climate change or to take aggressive skeptical stances," Krosnick said. "If the public is perceived as being increasingly skeptical about climate change, these strategies would be understandable, but our surveys have suggested something different."

Voters preferred "greener" President

In the presidential election study, Krosnick and his colleagues asked voters for their opinions about climate and politics before and after the 2008 election. The research team conducted online surveys to reach a nationwide sample of voters.

Before the election, the researchers asked voters whether they supported or opposed government policies to reduce future greenhouse gas emissions. The survey also asked what voters thought of Barack Obama's and John McCain's positions on climate change. After the election, the voters reported if and for whom they had voted.

Not surprisingly, more people who said their own views on climate change were closer to Obama's position than to McCain's voted for Obama. This tendency was especially true among voters who cared a lot about climate change and persisted regardless of the voter's ideology, party affiliation, preferred size of government and opinion about President Bush's job performance.

Congress and climate

Krosnick's new study on the 2010 congressional election examined what the candidates' websites had said about climate change during their campaigns, and whether the candidates won or lost their election.

The researchers found that more than 80 percent of the Republican candidates' websites did not address climate change at all. Of the remaining 20 percent, half acknowledged climate change as a problem and supported policies to reduce future greenhouse gas emissions and half were skeptical, expressing "not-green" views. In contrast, more than half of the democratic candidates took a "green" stance, and the rest

expressed no views.

"Democrats who took 'green' positions on climate change won much more often than did Democrats who remained silent," Krosnick said. "Republicans who took 'not-green' positions won less often than Republicans who remained silent."

The researchers' analysis took into account the incumbency of some candidates and the partisan leanings of the voters, Krosnick said. He did note a few limitations, including the fact that the study only looked at text on candidates' websites, not videos or audio content, and that the analysis didn't include statements made in other political forums such as speeches and debates.

The combined results of the multiple studies make a "compelling package," Krosnick said. "Our studies show no decline in public belief in the existence and threat of climate change, and that politicians might benefit from taking a 'green' stance."

More information: Krosnick will present his findings via a live webcast at Resources for the Future in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 17 from 12:45 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. EDT. For details, visit www.rff.org/Events/Pages/American-National-Elections.aspx

Provided by Stanford University

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