

Poll: Americans back climate change regulation, not taxes

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Now that President Obama has put climate change back on the table in his second inaugural address, a new national poll finds growing public support for regulating greenhouse gas emissions and requiring utilities to switch to lower-carbon fuel sources.

The percentage of Americans who think [climate change](#) is occurring has rebounded, according to the Duke University national online survey, and is at its highest level since 2006. The study also finds that while Americans support regulating [greenhouse gas emissions](#), they do not favor market-based approaches such as cap-and-trade or a carbon tax.

Sixty-four percent of Americans strongly or somewhat favor regulating [greenhouse gas](#) emissions from [power plants](#), factories and cars and requiring utilities to generate more power from "clean" low-carbon sources.

Only 29 percent strongly support or somewhat support a carbon tax. Returning revenue to taxpayers through a \$500 tax rebate only slightly increases support for a carbon tax, to 34 percent. The survey indicates that many Americans haven't formed an opinion about the cap-and-trade approach: although support is low, 36 percent are neither for nor against.

"The survey shows strikingly high numbers of Americans accept that the climate is changing, but support for market-based approaches such as a [carbon tax](#) and a system of tradable emissions are not popular among survey respondents," said Sarah Adair, co-author and associate in

research at Duke's Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions. "Support rises when asked about more familiar concepts of regulation, such as performance standards, but respondents appear to have little or no knowledge about the possible use of a cap-and-trade system to address climate change."

The Duke study examined [public attitudes](#) regarding climate change and the major policy options that President Obama might pursue in his second term. It was conducted by Frederick Mayer and Alex Pfaff of Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy and Adair of the Nicholas Institute.

"Whether in response to extreme weather events like mega-storm Sandy or the improved economy, public opinion has clearly rebounded from its low point of a couple years ago," said Mayer, associate professor of public policy and political science. "Although there appears to be little prospect for tax or cap-and-trade legislation in the current Congress, there is a clear opening for stronger regulation and investments in clean energy."

Other key findings of the poll:

- The percentage of Americans who agree there is solid evidence of a changing climate has steadily increased since 2010, based on an analysis of several national climate change polls. The Duke poll found 50 percent of Americans are convinced the climate is changing and another 34 percent say it is probably changing, an increase from other recent polls.
- 54 percent feel climate change is primarily the result of human activity.
- There are strong partisan differences in the perceived seriousness of the problem. About half of Democrats say it is "very serious"

while 35 percent of Independents and 17 percent of Republicans agree.

- Although Democrats are more willing than Republicans to support all policies, the preference for a regulatory or clean energy approach is shared across party lines.

The Internet survey was conducted Jan. 16-22, 2013, by Duke in partnership with KnowledgePanel and involved e-mails to randomly selected households throughout the United States. The margin of error for 1,089 respondents was 3 percentage points. Funding for the survey came from Duke's Climate Policy Working Group.

More information: To review the study, visit nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/climate-change-poll

Provided by Duke University

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