

Most Americans want the government to combat climate change, some willing to pay a high amount

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Sixty-one percent of Americans think climate change is a problem that the government needs to address, including 43 percent of Republicans and 80 percent of Democrats, according to a new survey from the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Those numbers are even higher when only those who believe in climate change are asked. Seven in 10 Republicans and nearly all Democrats who believe climate change is happening think the government needs to take action. When asked about key climate [policy](#) decisions, the largest shares of Americans say they oppose the repeal of the Clean Power Plan and the withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement.

While many Americans favor policies that would help the country lower emissions, questions on how much they would personally be willing to pay to confront climate change (in the form of a monthly fee on their electric bill) reveal great disparity. While half are unwilling to pay even one dollar, 18 percent are willing to pay at least \$100 per month.

"These results put the polarized climate debate in sharp relief, but also point to the possibility of a path forward," said Michael Greenstone, director of EPIC and the Milton Friedman Professor in Economics, the College, and the Harris School at the University of Chicago. "Although half of households said they were unwilling to pay anything for a carbon

policy in their monthly electricity bills, on average Americans would pay about \$30 per month, as a meaningful share of households report that they are willing to pay a substantial amount. What is particularly striking is that it's projected to cost less than \$30 per person to pay for climate damages from the electricity sector. So, while the raw economics appears to be less and less of a problem, the open question is whether it is feasible to devise a robust climate policy that accommodates these very divergent viewpoints."

The survey also reveals new insights into how Americans view hydraulic fracturing. The number of people who say they favor fracking more than doubles when presented with evidence that it will save them money, while fewer change their opinion on fracking when presented with environmental or health arguments. Specifically, Americans' support for fracking jumps from 17 percent to 41 percent when presented with evidence that it will save them \$250 annually on their personal natural gas bill. Meanwhile, the 41 percent who initially said they opposed fracking increased to 51 percent and 58 percent, respectively, when presented with health and environmental arguments against it.

"Public opinion around many energy issues tends to be fluid, with people often defaulting to partisan starting points. But this survey shows an opportunity for consensus building through discussion and debate," said Trevor Tompson, director of The AP-NORC Center. "Majorities of both Democrats and Republicans agree that climate change is happening, and there are signs that consensus could happen on other issues, too."

Additional findings from the survey include:

- Seventy-two percent of Americans believe climate change is happening, including 85 percent of Democrats and 61 percent of Republicans. Nineteen percent remain unsure.
- Political party and belief in climate change are the main

determinants of whether people are willing to pay a modest fee to combat climate change, as opposed to education, income, or geographic location. Democrats are consistently willing to pay more than Republicans.

- Fifty-seven percent support actions taken by some mayors and governors to honor the goals of the Paris [climate](#) agreement despite U.S. withdrawal, and 55 percent think their state and local government should do more to address [climate change](#). A third say they should stick to the status quo.
- Climate change and [energy policy](#) are very or extremely important to 48 percent and 54 percent of Americans, respectively, while at least two-thirds say health care, the economy, and terrorism are important policy priorities.
- Thirty-five percent oppose the direction of energy policy in the United States, while 45 percent lack an opinion and only 17 percent support the direction. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to favor the direction of energy policy, but they are most likely to lack an opinion.
- Roughly equal shares of Americans favor, oppose, and neither favor nor oppose the construction of the Keystone and Dakota Access pipelines.
- Forty percent of Americans oppose the repeal of the Clean Power Plan, which the Trump administration is reviewing. Thirty-seven percent lack an opinion, while just 20 percent favor its repeal.
- More Americans lack an opinion on the use of fracking in the United States than support it: 37 percent neither favor nor oppose fracking, 17 percent favor it, and 41 percent oppose it.
- An equal number of Americans either support or lack an opinion on the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, while the largest number opposes withdrawal: 42 percent oppose it, 28 percent support it, and 28 percent neither support nor oppose withdrawal. Half of those who support withdrawal say the agreement was too

costly for the United States.

Provided by University of Chicago

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