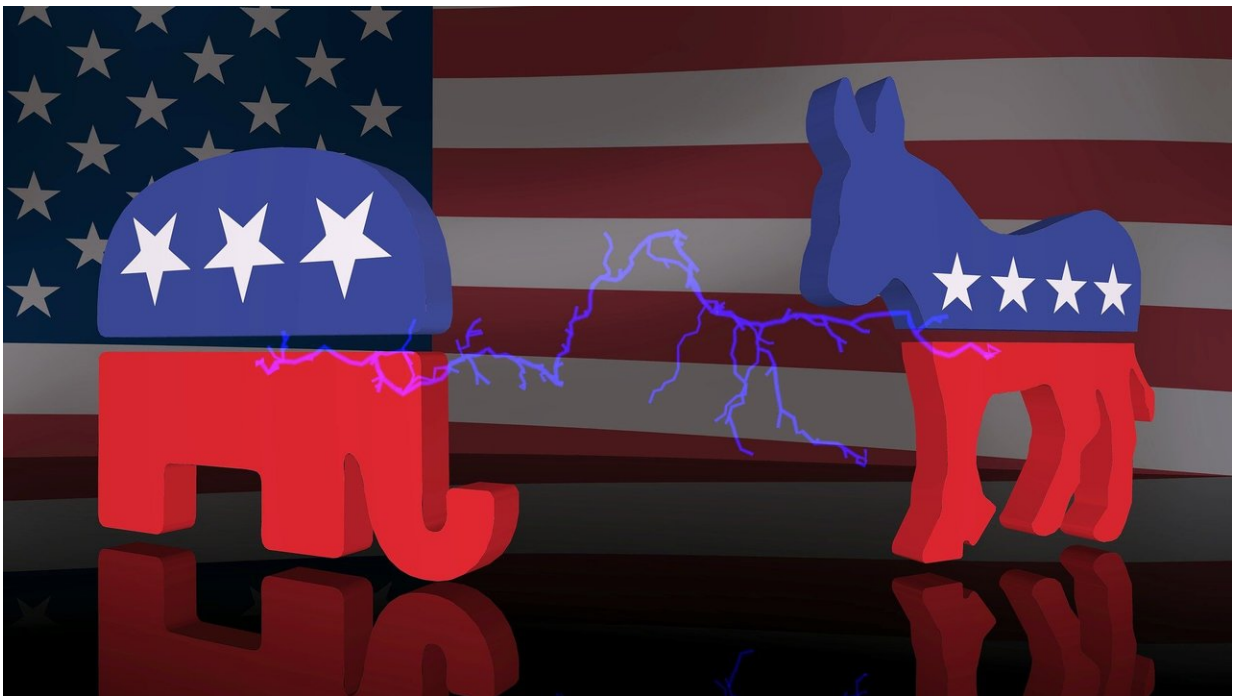


Survey: Electorate wants candidates, parties to act on climate change

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A majority of a sampling of Republicans and Democrats who intend to vote in Presidential primary elections believe there is evidence that the Earth is warming, recognize that humans caused much of the problem, and support a range of policies to address it. From there, however, their viewpoints differ widely—even from their candidates' positions.

In a [November wave of The American Social Survey](#) conducted by the Weidenbaum Center on the Economy, Government, and Public Policy at Washington University in St. Louis, [political scientists](#) polled likely voters in the 2020 Presidential primaries to find that—despite consensus among Democratic candidates and the Trump administration's actions to repeal environmental regulations—the two parties' electorates don't match their candidates' stances on climate change. Among their own party, Republicans clash about the severity of climate change as an issue, let alone how to try to resolve it.

While 57.2 percent of the Democrats polled considered it a crisis, only 11.1 percent of the Republicans felt the same way. Republicans showed they are deeply divided on the issue when it came to describing the level of climate change's role:

- 32.9 percent agreed it is a major problem, but not a crisis.
- 29.3 percent agreed it is a minor problem.
- 20.9 percent agreed (contrasted against 2.9 percent of Democrats) it is not a problem at all.

"The primary goers of the two parties are split on using carbon taxes to create disincentives for carbon emission, but, contrary to what may be the common perception, a small majority of Republican primary goers and a much larger majority of Democratic primary goers support more direct limits on the output of greenhouse gases. This differs from most economists, who argue that taxing carbon emissions is a simpler and more efficient way to address the problem," said Steven Smith, the Kate M. Gregg Distinguished Professor of Social Science in Arts & Sciences and director of the Weidenbaum Center on the Economy, Government and Public Policy.

Smith, William Lowry, professor of political science and environmental studies in Arts & Sciences, and Patrick Rickert, a graduate student in

political science, found in their Nov. 4-14 snapshot survey of 743 potential primary voters that nearly 90 percent of Democrats and 60 percent of Republicans believe there is evidence of Earth's [warming](#) average temperature.

How climate change is caused and possibly resolved likewise show some perspectives where a majority of the two parties agree, others where they diverge.

Some 82.7 percent of the Democrats and 40.8 percent of the Republicans sampled recognize evidence that global warming is caused by humans. However, 38.9 percent of the Republicans surveyed believe it comes from natural patterns, while 20.3 percent said that they didn't know the reason.

A majority among both parties showed support for stricter limits on greenhouse gases and on fuel efficiency for trucks and buses, but each was far less favorable about raising taxes on carbon-based fuels. The least popular proposal for addressing climate change among this survey: carbon-emission taxes.

"If candidates do want to propose [carbon taxes](#), they need to specify popular uses for the revenue such as funding renewable energy or they will get support from only a slim majority of Democrats and strong opposition from Republicans," Lowry said.

Naturally, the respondents who recognize global warming show a more supportive bent than overall primary voters when it came to the subject of pro-environment policies—Democrats in an overwhelming majority, and Republicans in smaller majorities on the non-tax potential responses.

"The primary immediate obstacles to enacting legislation are the divisions among Republican activists and the lack of commitment among

Republican elites that may be caused by those divisions," Smith said.

Climate denial remains a strong component among the electorate, if not the candidates.

Among the subset who disbelieve evidence the Earth is warming, nearly 40 percent of the Democrats holding that view and 55 percent of the Republicans endorsed the idea that advocates of global warming are deliberately misleading us for their own political reasons. Some 32 percent of the Democrats and 27.5 percent of the Republicans in this subset sided with the statement that scientific evidence is incomplete or misleading.

"Respondents who indicated their support for President Trump were less likely than Republicans overall to say the Earth was warming, with a slight majority indicating that it was not, and only a third willing to attribute such warming to human activity," Rickert said. "By contrast, the supporters of Democratic presidential candidates were much less doubtful, with fewer than 4 percent of intended Sen. Bernie Sanders and Sen. Elizabeth Warren voters saying the earth was not getting warmer, and around 90 percent responding that warming was due to human activity."

The survey further broke down how ideology, gender, age and education in regards to people believing the evidence for global warming: liberals and women far more frequently recognized it than conservatives and men. People with higher levels of education were also more likely to believe the evidence for global warming.

This survey shows that each party's platform could contain planks around climate change. Said Rickert: "Democratic officials should be bolstered by the unanimity in their electorate to address climate change as a major concern. Republican elites may cautiously begin to consider solutions, as

support to tackle [climate change](#) among their electoral base is divided, though with a majority believing in [global warming](#)."

More information: Attitudes about Climate Change among Likely Presidential Primary Voters: [wustl.app.box.com/s/vssjfrq7hs ...
wikqilt5q6muxv1wkypr](https://wustl.app.box.com/s/vssjfrq7hs...wikqilt5q6muxv1wkypr)

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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