

Private sector action may be linchpin to conservative support on climate change

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Private sector initiatives may be the key to spurring climate action across the political spectrum, particularly among moderates and conservatives.

That finding is based on new research by Kaitlin Raimi, an assistant professor at the University of Michigan's Ford School of Public Policy, and her colleagues that has been published in *Energy Research & Social Science*.

Researchers from U-M, Pennsylvania State University, Vanderbilt University and the American Academy for the Advancement of Science tested how people across the [political spectrum](#) will change their level of support for carbon reduction based on whether climate change mitigation actions were taken by private sector or government entities.

Understanding how communication can alter perspectives is especially important in the United States, where major legislation requires a supportive president as well as 60 votes to overcome a filibuster or 51 votes to replace the rule—and the votes of five Supreme Court justices to overcome legal challenges, the authors write.

"The deep polarization of the U.S. electorate, combined with the effects of the Electoral College ... suggest that simple majority support may be insufficient to adopt major new climate change mitigation measures," they write. "Climate science acceptance and mitigation support from moderates and conservatives may be necessary."

The researchers found conservatives and moderates are more supportive of private sector action than public sector action, while liberals are more supportive of government regulations than private sector action or a carbon tax.

Reading about private sector actions to mitigate climate change increased support for reducing carbon emissions across the political spectrum. Support for reduced carbon emissions increased more for conservative and moderate readers, as they perceived private approaches to be feasible and effective.

However, the researchers also found reading about private sector action reduced concern about climate change among conservatives and moderates, thus decreasing their support for government policies to mitigate climate change. These effects worked to cancel each other out.

"Boosting public support for climate change mitigation is an important piece of the U.S., and ultimately global, response to climate change," Raimi said. "Researchers, policymakers and advocates may find discussions of [private sector](#) approaches helpful for bridging the political divide to get moderates and conservatives on board with other climate actions.

"However, we should also be cautious about tempering concern about [climate change](#)."

More information: Ash Gillis et al. Convincing conservatives: Private sector action can bolster support for climate change mitigation in the United States, *Energy Research & Social Science* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.erss.2021.101947](#)

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