

Half of Americans Say US Government Not Doing Enough on Climate Change

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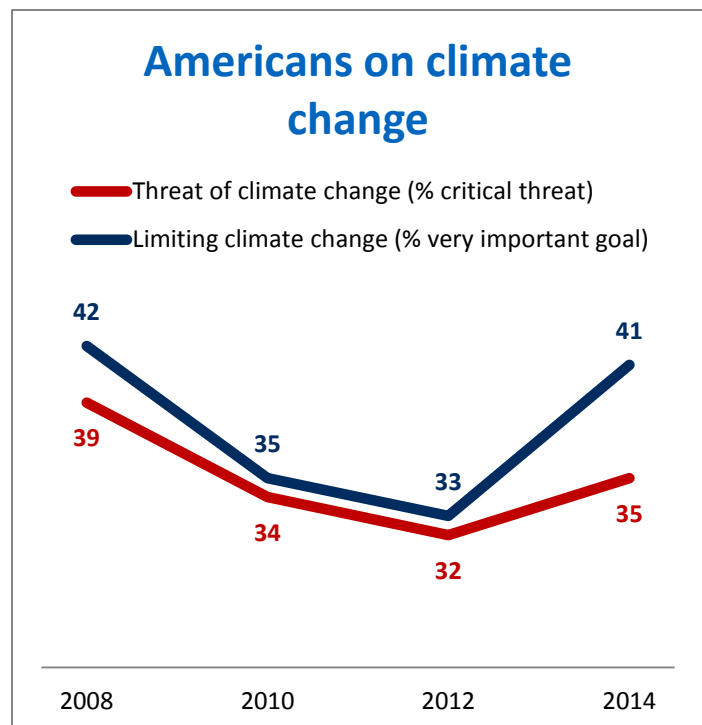
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New Chicago Council Survey results show that most Americans are not extremely concerned about climate change—most do not view it as a critical threat or see combating it as a very important goal. However, many Americans believe that the government is not doing enough to combat this issue. In fact, a majority say that the US should participate in a new international treaty to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The public, though, is far from united on this issue. Democrats tend to be most concerned about the threat of climate change, as well as more inclined to view it as an important US foreign policy goal.

Climate Change

Half of Americans (50%) say that the US government is not doing enough to deal with the problem of climate change—up five percentage points from 2012, when a plurality (45%) said the government was not doing enough. Three in ten (31%) say the government is doing about the right amount, while two in ten (19%) say it is doing too much.

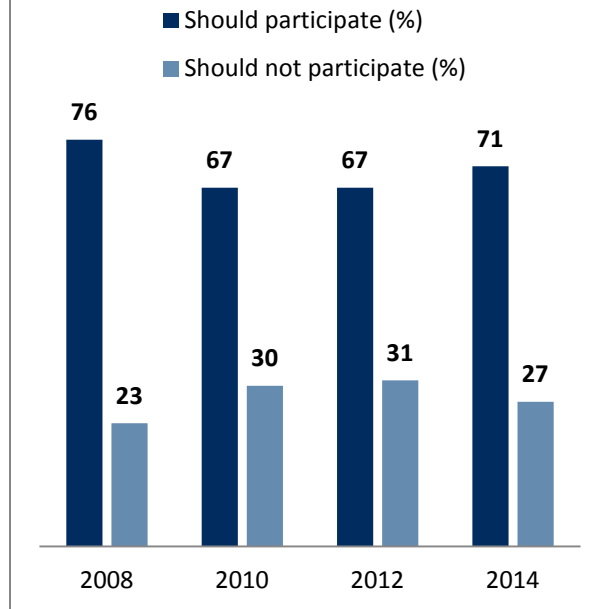
Despite this, the public overall does not see climate change as a critical threat to US vital interests. Four in ten (38%) say it is important, but not critical, while 35 percent say it is a critical threat. An additional 27 percent say it is not an important threat. This puts the threat of climate change 16th of the 20 threats asked about in the Chicago Council 2014 Survey.



Four in ten Americans (41%) say limiting climate change is a very important goal for the United States; a similar proportion (40%) says it is a somewhat important goal. Only 18 percent say this goal is not important, but this proportion is much higher (71%) among those who believe that government is doing too much to combat climate change. Overall, as a goal for US policy, limiting climate change has become more important since 2012, when only one in three (33%) labeled it a very important goal.

Americans are in favor of international action to combat climate change. Seven in ten Americans (71%) support the US participating in a new international treaty to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Support is even higher among those who say that the government is not doing enough to deal with climate change—92 percent of this group believes that the US should participate. Conversely, 80 percent of people who say the government is doing too much oppose US participation in the treaty.

International treaty to address climate change

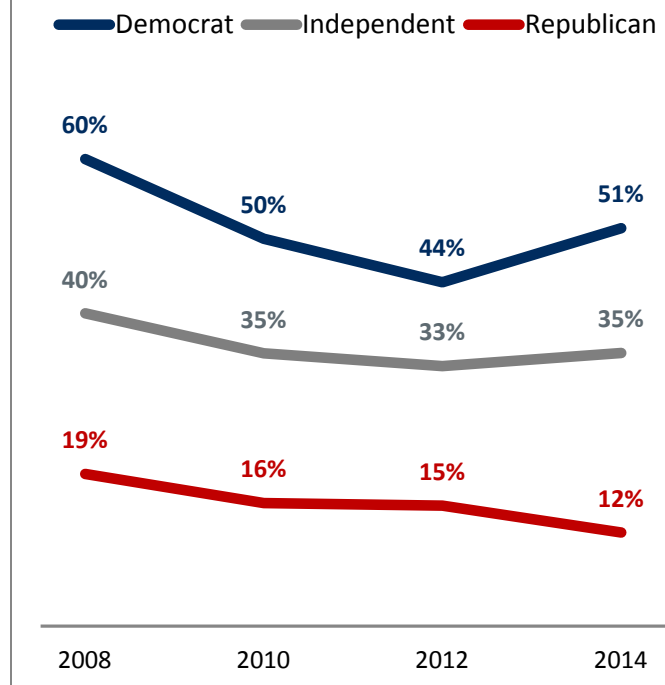


Partisan Divides on Climate

Climate change is a highly partisan issue. Democrats are far more likely to see climate change as a critical threat to US vital interests. They are also more likely to identify limiting climate change as a very important goal for the US and more likely to say that the government is not doing enough to deal with it.

Half of Democrats (51%) say climate change is a critical threat, while only one in ten Republicans (12%) say the same. Independents fall in between the two parties, with 35 percent labeling it a critical threat. This is consistent with past Council Surveys—Democrats have always been at least 30 percent more likely to see climate change as a critical threat. Half of Republicans (49%) believe that climate change is not an important threat; only one in ten Democrats (11%) and a quarter of Independents (26%) say so.

Climate Change: Critical Threat



Similarly, more than half of Democrats (54%) say that limiting climate change is a very important goal for the US, while only two in ten Republicans (22%) agree. Again, Independents lie between the two parties, with four in ten (40%) saying limiting climate change is a very important goal. Though they differ on how important combating climate change is, Democrats (66%) and Independents (51%) are far more likely to say the government is not doing enough to combat the problem (vs. 35% of Republicans).

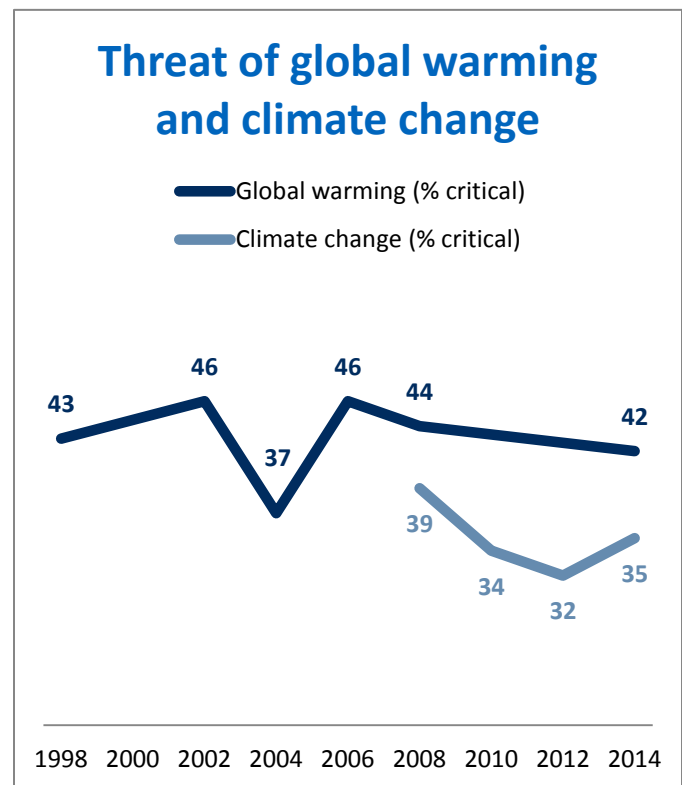
However, these partisan divisions over the importance of climate change do not mean that there are no areas of overlap: majorities of Republicans (54%), Democrats (86%), and Independents (70%) support the US participating in a new international treaty to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Americans who consider themselves a part of, or a supporter of, the Tea Party movement¹ are also less likely to see climate issues as important, and are less likely to support action to address climate change. Only two in ten (19%) say climate change is a critical threat (vs. 38% of non-Tea Partiers), and only a quarter (27%) say limiting climate change is a very important goal for the US (vs. 42% of non-Tea Partiers). Half of Tea Partiers (49%) say the government is doing *too much* to deal with the problem of climate change, while a majority of non-Tea Partiers (53%) say the government is *not doing enough*. And a majority of Tea Party members and affiliates (56%) oppose participating in a new international treaty reducing greenhouse gas emissions (vs. 23% of non-Tea Partiers).

“Climate Change” v. “Global Warming”

Some prior experimental work has demonstrated that using either “climate change” or “global warming” does not affect public perceptions of the problem’s seriousness². In the 2008 Chicago Council Survey, however, this experiment did reveal a difference. Then, 44 percent of Americans labeled “global warming” a critical threat, while 39 percent said the same about “climate change.”

We therefore re-ran this experiment in the 2014 Chicago Council Survey, randomly assigning respondents to be asked about either “global warming” or “climate change.” We again found that Americans are somewhat more concerned about “global warming” than they are about “climate change:” four in ten (42%) label global warming a critical threat, compared to 35 percent who say the same about climate change.



¹ Among those who consider themselves a part of or identify with the Tea Party movement (12% overall), 49 percent identify as Republicans, 18 percent as Democrats, and 31 percent as Independents.

² Villar, A., & Krosnick, J. A. (2011). “Global warming vs. climate change, taxes vs. prices: Does word choice matter?” *Climatic Change*, 105, 1-12.

Republicans show more concern about global warming than climate change, with 25 percent saying it is a critical threat---more than double the percentage for climate change (12%). Democrats and Independents, in contrast, do not appear to differentiate between the two: they are just as likely to say that global warming is a critical threat as they are to say the same about climate change.

Despite higher levels of concern, the public feels about the same about limiting global warming as they do about limiting climate change. About four in ten (42%) say that this goal is very important for the US while 36 percent say it is somewhat important.

About the 2014 Chicago Council Survey

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2014 Chicago Council Survey and previous Chicago Council Surveys of the American public on foreign policy. The 2014 Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using their large-scale, nationwide research panel between May 6 to May 29, 2014 among a national sample of 2,108 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error for the overall sample is ± 2.1 percentage points; for the experiment on climate change and global warming, the margin of error is ± 4.2 percentage points.

For more results from the 2014 Chicago Council Survey, please see *Foreign Policy in the Age of Retrenchment*, which can be found at www.thechicagocouncil.org.

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