

November 1, 2012

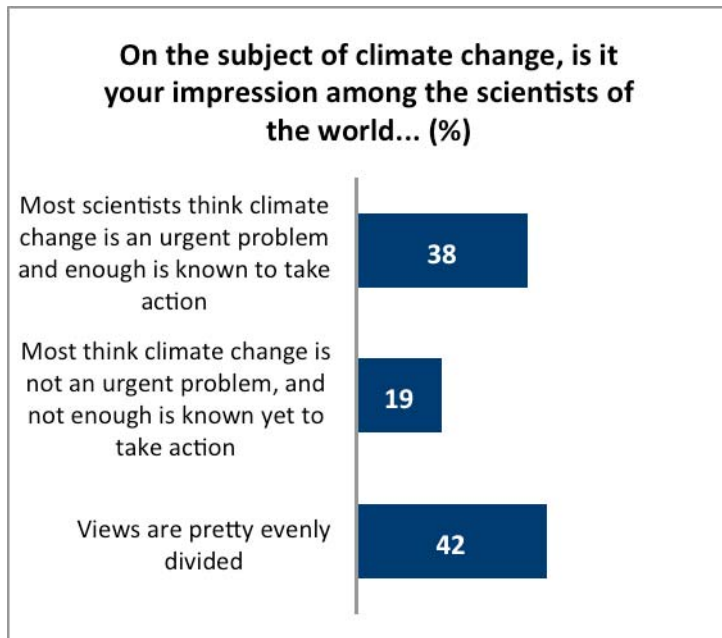
CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

## Plurality of Americans Think U.S. Government Neglecting Action on Climate Change

*Last summer brought record levels of heat across the nation, and several polls conducted during the season suggest an increase in the percentage of Americans who believe the temperature swings are linked to global warming. While climate change was barely touched upon during the election debates, the 2012 Chicago Council Survey finds that nearly half of Americans think the government is not doing enough to limit climate change.*

### Many Americans Not Convinced of Scientific Consensus on Climate Change

Several targeted surveys among the scientific community have concluded that a majority of scientists link climate change to human behavior.<sup>1</sup> Yet the 2012 *Chicago Council Survey* finds no agreement among Americans about the scientific evidence. While twice as many Americans (38%) believe most scientists think climate change “is an urgent problem and enough is known to take action” than think it “is not an urgent problem and not enough is known yet to take action” (19%), more think views among scientists are “pretty evenly divided” (42%).



### Majority of Americans Not Content with the Status Quo

When asked whether the U.S. government is doing too much, too little, or the right amount on climate change, only a third (35%) believe it is doing the right amount. More (45%) say the government is not doing enough, while two in ten say it is doing too much (18%).

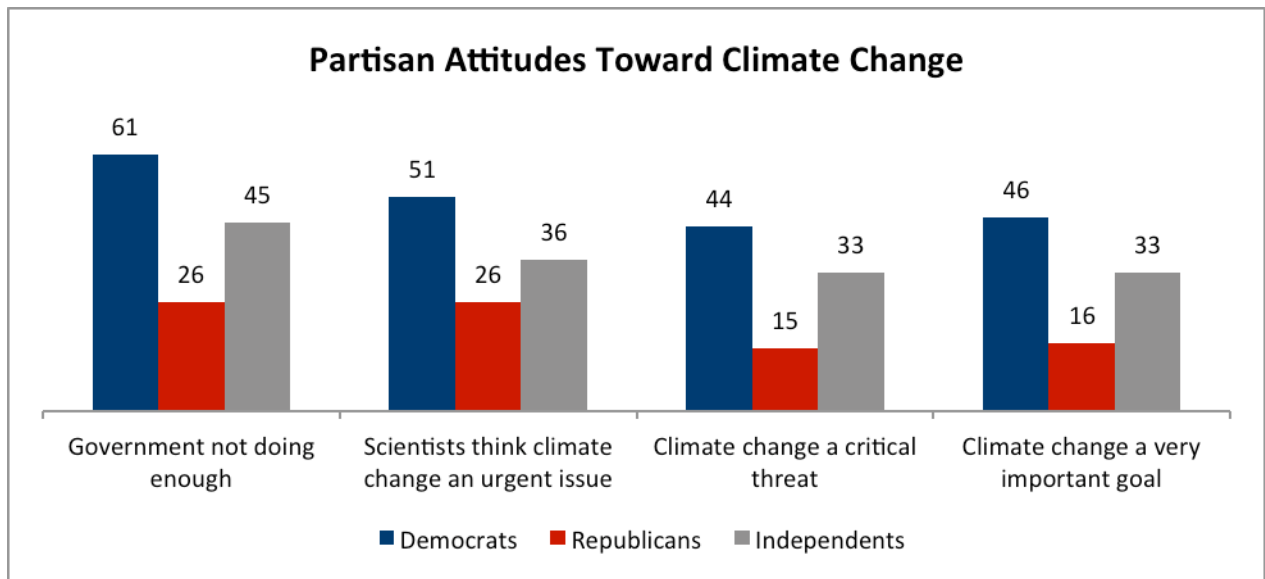
<sup>1</sup> For example, see <http://news.sciencemag.org/scienceinsider/2010/06/scientists-convinced-of-climate.html>.

### **Informed Americans More Likely to See Need for Greater Action**

Perceptions of the scientific community’s beliefs are related to preferences for government action. Those who believe that most scientists think climate change is urgent and enough is known to take action are far more likely than others to say that the government is not doing enough on the issue (67% versus 45% overall). In addition, they are more likely to say that limiting climate change is a “very important” foreign policy goal (52% compared to 33% overall) and that climate change is a critical threat to the United States (50%, compared to 32% overall).

### **Sharp Partisan Differences on Perceptions of Climate Change as a Critical Threat**

Climate change is one of only a few issues in the 2012 *Chicago Council Survey* that elicits sharp differences across partisan groups. Analysis shows that Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to believe that the government is not doing enough to limit climate change; that scientists think climate change is an urgent issue and enough is known to take action; that climate change is a critical threat to the United States; and that limiting climate change should be a very important goal for U.S. foreign policy.



### **In Context of Other Foreign Policy Goals, Climate Change Ranks Lower**

Compared to combating other international threats, including terrorism and nuclear proliferation, only a third of Americans (33%) say that limiting climate change should be a “very important” foreign policy goal of the United States. This is on par with strengthening the United Nations and lags behind other potential threats asked about. In 2008 somewhat more Americans (42%) rated limiting climate change as a very important goal, but it was still relatively low compared to addressing other threats. Similarly, only one in three (32%) think that limiting climate change is a critical threat to the vital interests of the United States, rated lowest among nine threats listed.

### ***A Note on Methods***

This report is based on the results of The Chicago Council's 2012 biennial survey of public opinion conducted from May 25 to June 8, 2012. The survey probes American attitudes on a wide range of U.S. foreign policy issues. GFK Custom Research conducted the survey for The Chicago Council using a randomly selected sample of 1,877 adults age eighteen and older from their large-scale, nationwide research panel. The panel is recruited using stratified random digit dialing (RDD) telephone sampling. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.8 percentage points. Some questions from the 2002 survey, denoted with an asterisk, are from telephone interviews.

The *2012 Chicago Council Survey* was made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the United States-Japan Foundation. The full report on the *2012 Chicago Council Survey*, "Foreign Policy in the New Millennium," is available at [www.thechicagocouncil.org](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org).

For more information about the *2012 Chicago Council Survey*, please contact Dina Smeltz, senior fellow, Public Opinion and Global Affairs ([dsmeltz@thechicagocouncil.org](mailto:dsmeltz@thechicagocouncil.org); 312-821-6860) or Craig Kafura, senior program officer, Studies ([ckafura@thechicagocouncil.org](mailto:ckafura@thechicagocouncil.org); 312-821-7560). Research assistance for this brief was provided by Magdalena Lasota-Morales.