

Slight Rise in US Public Concerns about Climate

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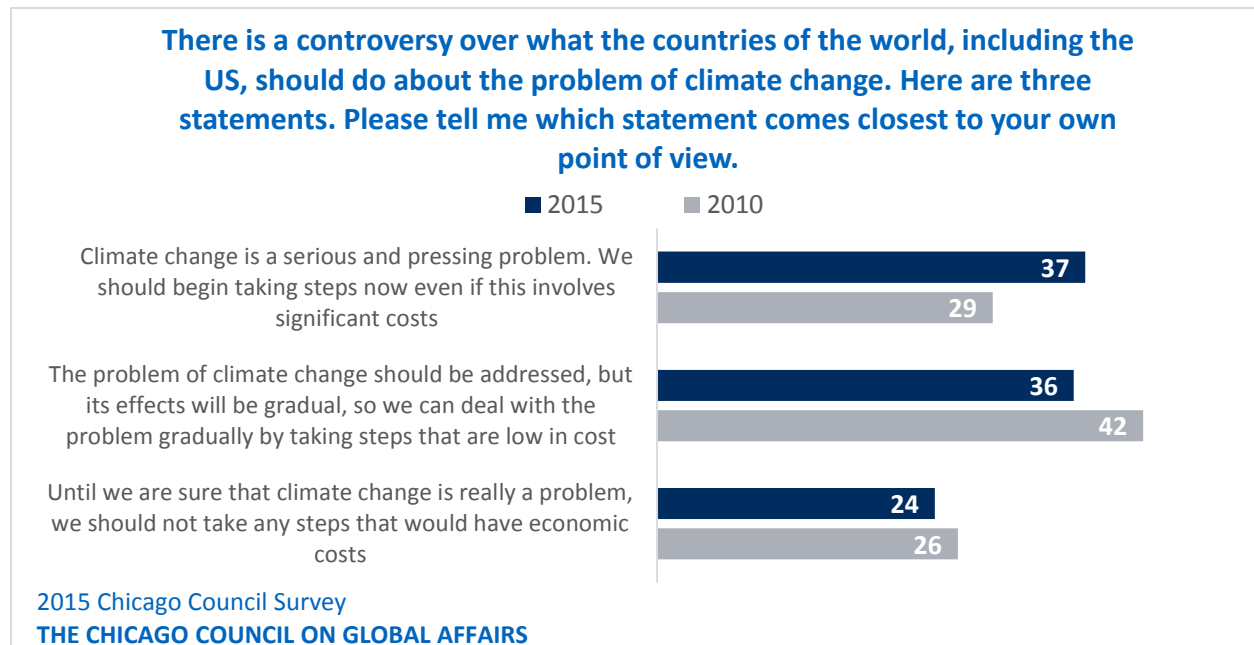
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Key Points

- Roughly four in ten Americans (37%, up eight percentage points from 2010) say that climate change is a serious and pressing problem, and that we should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs.
- For the first time, a majority of Democrats (56%) say that climate change requires immediate action, and Democrats are three times more likely than Republicans to say that climate change is a critical threat.
- Majorities across the political spectrum supported a “new international treaty to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.”

Concerns about Climate Change Increasing

On November 30, world leaders will meet in Paris to negotiate an international climate change agreement. While Democrats and Republicans are at opposite ends of the spectrum in prioritizing

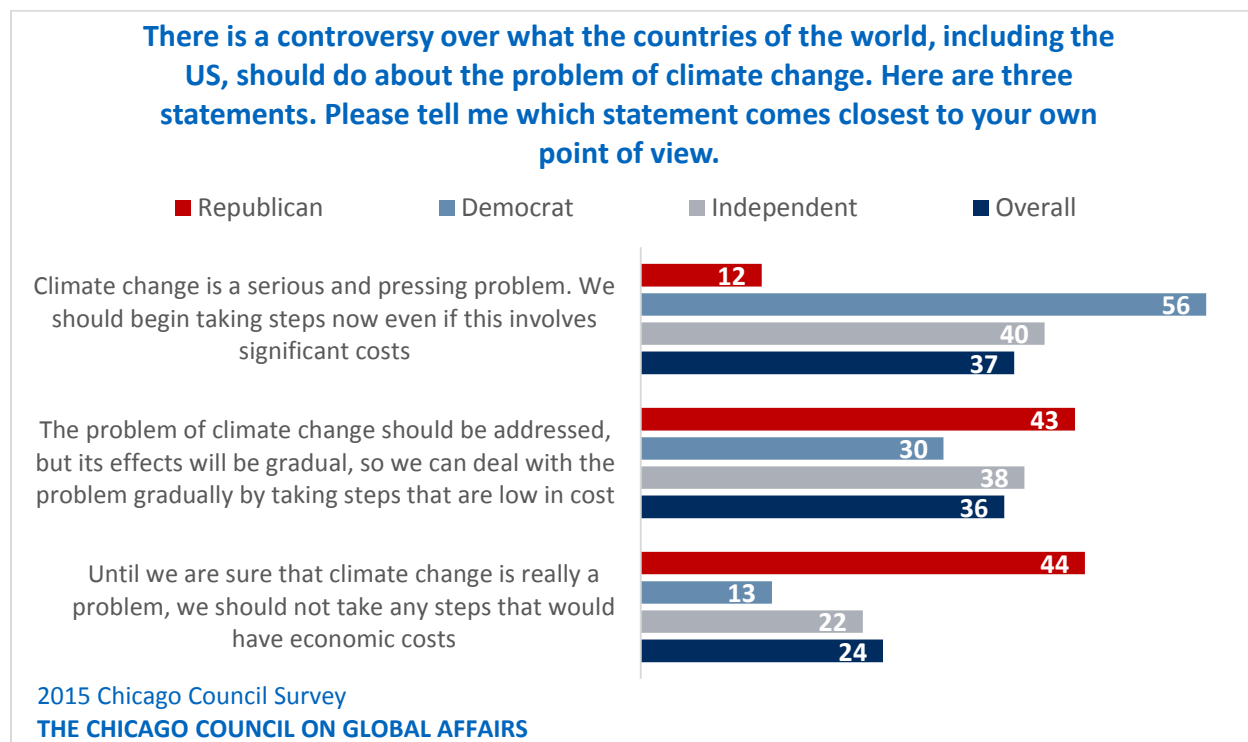


climate change, Chicago Council Surveys going back to 2002 have shown longstanding public support for an international treaty to address the problem.

The 2015 Chicago Council Survey shows that while still a minority, an increasing percentage of Americans support taking immediate action on climate change. Nearly four in ten Americans (37%), an increase of eight percentage points since 2010, say that climate change is a serious and pressing problem, and that we should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs. A similar proportion (36%, down from 42% in 2010) says that the problem of climate change should be addressed, but that its effects will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost. One in four (24%) continue to say that until we are sure that climate change is really a problem, we should not take any steps that would have economic costs.

Partisan Divides on Threat of Climate Change

Of all the issues addressed in the Chicago Council Survey, none is more divisive among the public than the issue of climate change. Almost five times as many Democrats (56%) as Republicans (12%) believe that climate change is a serious and pressing problem requiring action now. Most Republicans remain split over whether the problem of climate change should be dealt with gradually (43%), or whether climate change is really a problem (44%)—a position few Democrats share (13%).

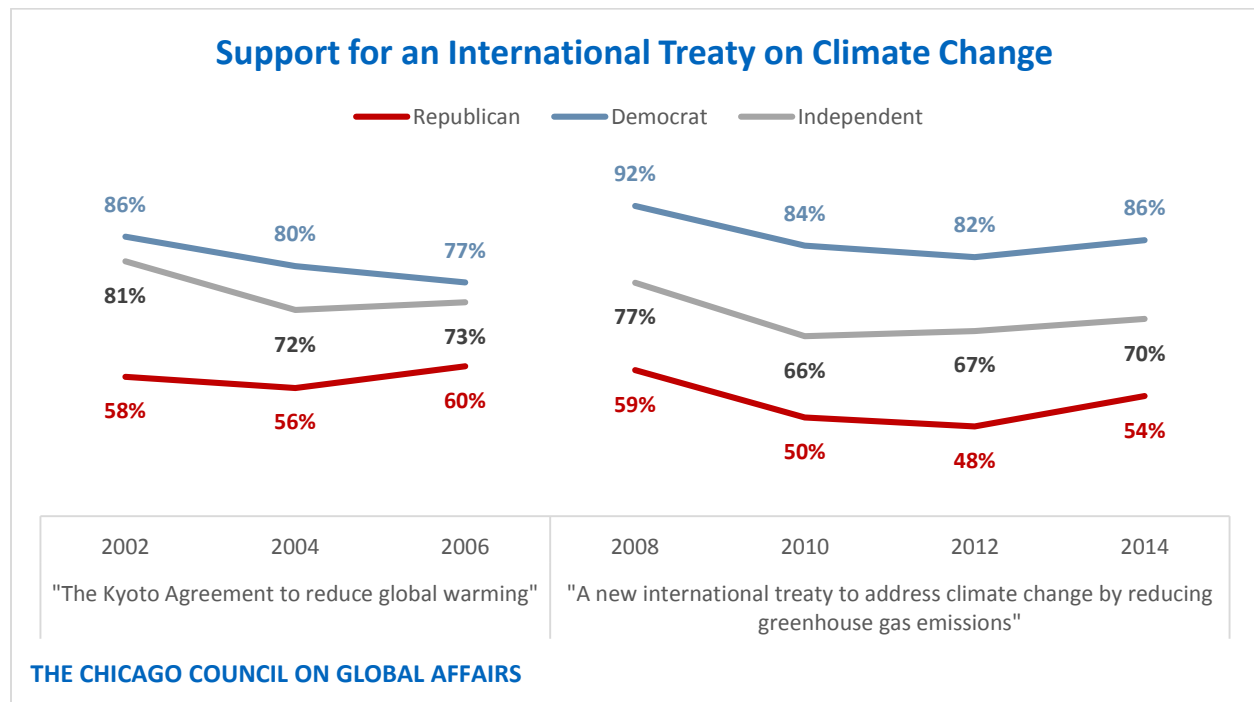


Both Democrats and Independents have become more likely to support immediate action on climate change over the past five years. In 2010, only a plurality (49%) of Democrats favored immediate action on climate change; today, a majority (56%) believe we should. Independents have seen an even bigger shift: today, four in ten (40%) support taking steps on climate change now, up from only two in ten (23%) in 2010.

Similarly, when asked about a series of possible threats to US interests and US foreign policy goals, a majority of Democrats (58%) see climate change as a critical threat, while four in ten Independents (38%) and just two in ten Republicans (17%) agree. Similarly, a majority of Democrats (58%) say that limiting climate change is a very important goal, while one in three Independents (36%) and two in ten Republicans (17%) agree.

Consistent Bipartisan Support for International Climate Treaty

Regardless of opposing views on the threat of climate change, there is bipartisan support for an international climate agreement, as there has been for over a decade. Even though less than half of Americans say climate change is a very serious problem, a Pew survey finds that a large majority (69%) say they support limiting greenhouse gas emissions as part of an international agreement.¹ This result matches a long trend of Chicago Council Survey data showing majority support for a “new international treaty to address climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions” from 2008-2014 and before that, from 2002-2006, for the “Kyoto Agreement to reduce global warming.”²



Bipartisan Agreement that Changes Are Needed, But No Consensus on Specific Approaches

In addition to bipartisan majority support for an agreement, a recent Pew survey also finds that majorities across the political spectrum acknowledge (or are resigned to the idea) that they will have to make major changes in the way they live to reduce the effects of climate change (55% of

¹ Bruce Stokes, Richard Wike, Jill Carle. “Global Concern about Climate Change, Broad Support for Limiting Emissions.” Pew Research Center. November 5, 2015.

² Dina Smeltz, Craig Kafura, Liz Deadrick. “Half of Americans Say US Government Not Doing Enough on Climate Change.” The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. September 23, 2014.

Republicans, 63% of Independents, and 79% of Democrats).³ Only minorities believe that technology can solve the problem without requiring major changes.

Yet Republicans and Democrats have very different solutions in mind in order to address global warming and maintain US competitiveness. Seven in ten Democrats (70%) say that investing in renewable energy is very important for US competitiveness, as do half of Independents (51%). But only four in ten Republicans (38%) agree. Conversely, a majority of Republicans (55%) say that investing in oil and gas extraction is very important for US competitiveness, compared to minorities of Democrats (35%) and Independents (38%) who agree.

³ Bruce Stokes, Richard Wike, Jill Carle. "Global Concern about Climate Change, Broad Support for Limiting Emissions." Pew Research Center. November 5, 2015.

About the Chicago Council Survey

The analysis in this report is based on data from the 2015 Chicago Council Survey of the American public on foreign policy. The 2015 Chicago Council Survey was conducted by GfK Custom Research using the KnowledgePanel, a nationwide online research panel recruited through an address-based sampling frame. The survey was fielded between May 25 to June 17, 2015 among a national sample of 2,034 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia.

The margin of error ranges from ± 2.2 to ± 3.1 percentage points depending on the specific question, with higher margins of error for partisan subgroups (see below table).

Partisan Subgroup	% of Party	% of Overall Sample	Margin of Error
Republicans	--	27%	± 4.6
<i>Strong Republicans</i>	46%	12%	± 6.7
<i>Weak Republicans</i>	54%	14%	± 6.3
Independents	--	34%	± 4.1
<i>Republican-leaning Independents</i>	20%	7%	± 9.1
<i>Pure Independents</i>	58%	20%	± 5.4
<i>Democratic-leaning Independents</i>	22%	7%	± 8.7
Democrats	--	36%	± 3.9
<i>Weak Democrats</i>	49%	18%	± 5.6
<i>Strong Democrats</i>	51%	19%	± 5.5

The 2015 Chicago Council Survey is made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Korea Foundation, the United States-Japan Foundation, and the personal support of Lester Crown and the Crown family.

For more results from the 2015 Chicago Council Survey, visit www.thechicagocouncil.org.