



To: Interested Parties

From: Andrew Baumann, Global Strategy Group

Date: September 1, 2020

Re: Recent Public Opinion Data Show that Climate Action is a Winning Political Issue

For years, pro-environment candidates have been hesitant to politically engage around climate, even though voters have generally been on their side when it comes to the need for climate action. This has largely been due to a conventional wisdom that the salience of the issue among supporters of climate action was not high enough to overcome loud and well-funded opposition from conservatives and their backers in the fossil fuel industry. We would argue that this conventional wisdom has always been too pessimistic. Regardless, it is clear that it is no longer operative.

Even before the coronavirus hit, the salience of climate as an issue had increased dramatically and it was clear that climate action was a winning political issue – and that climate denial was no longer a tenable position. This was demonstrated by the fact that early this year Donald Trump shifted his rhetoric from calling climate change a “hoax” to insisting that it is a “very serious subject,” while House Republicans also rushed to introduce their own climate “plans.”

Indeed, in poll after poll we have conducted this year, climate has proved to be a winning political issue for pro-climate candidates for two reasons. First, it is clearly a motivator for both younger and Latinx voters. Second, it has the power to move swing voters, particularly center-right white women. Moreover, the coronavirus crisis has only amplified the power of climate-focused messaging as the pandemic has laid bare what happens when our leaders don’t listen to the warnings of the scientists and experts who best understand the dangers of these kinds of threats.

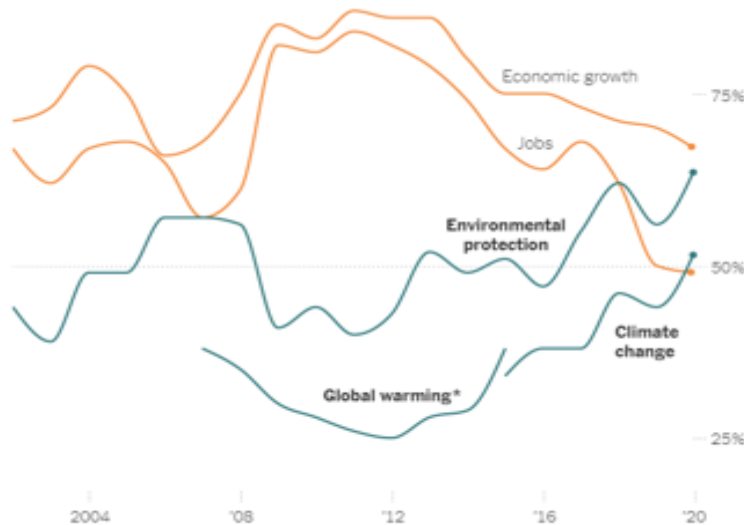
Finally, the political benefits of supporting climate action go well beyond the broad concept of combating climate change. Voters strongly support specific and highly ambitious climate policies – such as concrete limits on carbon pollution – and will punish at the ballot box candidates who obstruct such policies.

The salience of climate has increased dramatically, and climate denial is no longer an acceptable position – even with Republican voters

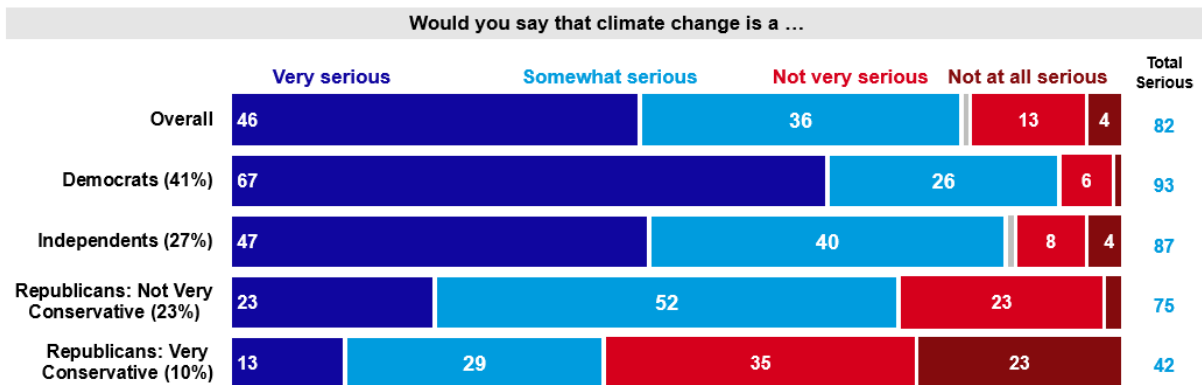
Few issues have seen as dramatic a shift in public opinion as climate change has over the last few years. Only marriage equality and the recent shift in views around racial justice outpace the rapid growth in the salience of climate change as an issue. The data below from Pew demonstrates this trend, as the percentage of Americans who say that global warming/climate change (they switched the language that they used for this question in 2015) should be a TOP priority for the president and Congress has moved from below 25% in 2012 to above 50% as of January. Meanwhile, the broader topic of “environmental protection” has also skyrocketed in the last few years to 64%, putting it on par with economic growth for only the second time in Pew’s polling.¹

¹ Pew Research Center, January 2020.

% of Americans who say the issue should be a “top priority” for the president and Congress



While Democratic voters continue to place the strongest emphasis on climate change, the increase in salience has been broad and voters across the political spectrum climate as an important issue. In a survey of Pennsylvania voters that GSG conducted for Climate Power 2020 last month, 82% of voters said that climate change was a serious problem, including 93% of registered Democrats, 87% of independents, and 76% of Republicans who are not very conservative. Only the 10% of voters who are very conservative Republicans disagreed. While there is, indeed, an intensity gap, the overall polarization is significantly lower than we have seen in previous years.²

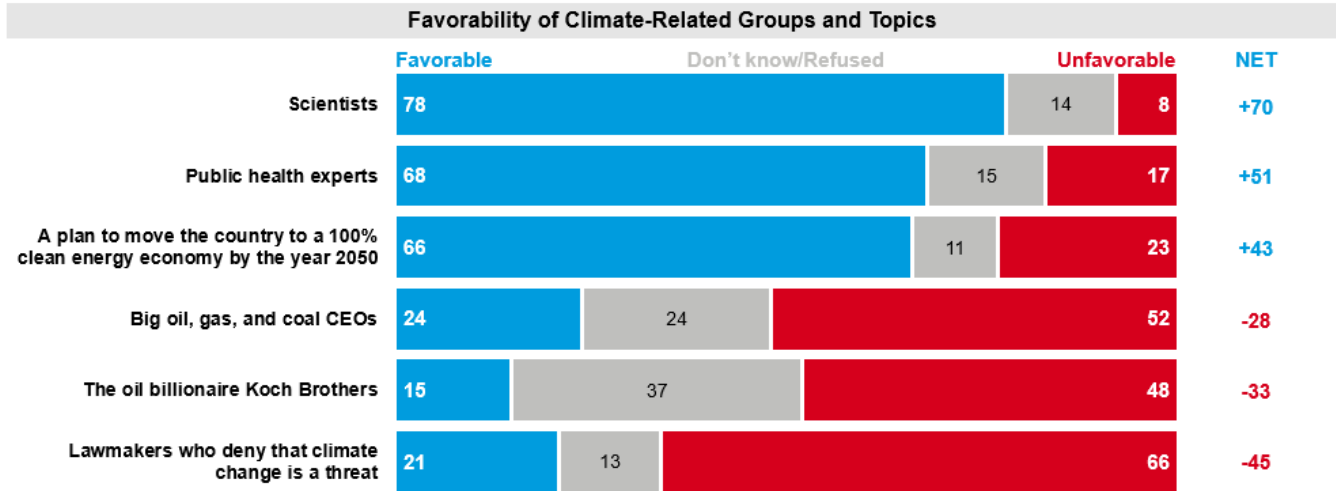


Focus groups that we conducted late last year with Republican men in Carbon County, Utah - a town that is named after the coal they mine from the ground – really drove home for us how much things have changed with voters across the political spectrum. We expected to be run out of town on a rail when we brought up climate change, but that did not happen. In fact, the response was quite the opposite, with the quote below from one of these Republican men representative of the view of the group:

*“Listen. Al Gore is an asshat, but climate change is real and anyone who says it’s not is a f**king idiot.”³*

² GSG Polling of registered voters in Pennsylvania, August 2020.
³ GSG Focus groups with Republican men in Carbon County, UT, December 2019.

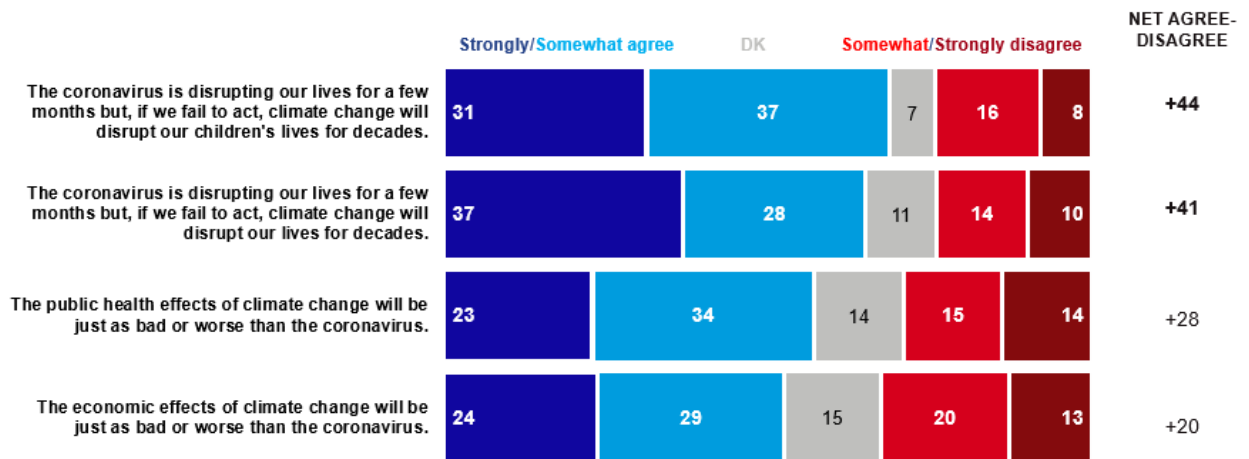
It is very clear that climate denial is no longer an acceptable position, even among the Republican base, and polling that we recently completed across the House battleground confirms that. While voters overwhelmingly support a plan to move the country to a 100% clean energy economy, they reserve their greatest enmity for lawmakers who deny that climate change is a threat. This include an incredible net rating of -54 among independents and even -7 among Republicans.⁴



The coronavirus crisis has boosted voters' desire to listen to experts, which makes them more receptive to climate messaging

At the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, we were unsure how it would impact voters' attitudes toward other issues, such as climate change. But our research has confirmed that voters expect their leaders to be able to focus both on the virus and its impact AND on other issues that they deem important – including climate change.

Below is a list of statements. For each, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with that statement.



In fact, in a recent survey of persuadable voters that we conducted for CAP Action and LCV, an overwhelming majority of voters agreed that while coronavirus is disrupting our lives for a few months right

⁴ GSG Survey for LCV Victory Fund, EDF Action, NRDC Action, and HMP, May 2020.

now, if we fail to act, climate change will disrupt our lives for decades. Sizeable majorities also agreed that the public health and economic impacts of climate change will be just as bad, or worse, than coronavirus.⁵

In this same research, we tested several potential climate critiques against Donald Trump, and the strongest linked his refusal to listen to the experts on coronavirus with his continued refusal to listen to the many experts that are saying climate change is a threat, and that this messaging was very effective in moving voters against Trump (more on that below). Our recommended messaging coming out of that research was as follows:

Our politicians have a duty to listen to our nation’s most respected leaders and experts – and a basic responsibility to leave a better world for our children. Yet Trump puts our kids’ future at risk and dishonors the experts by insisting that he knows better.

First, Trump ignored the Centers for Disease Control’s and other public health experts’ warnings about the threat of coronavirus and even overturned their proposed plans to fight it.

Now, he is denying reality and dismissing scientists, NASA, and our military leaders when they say climate change is a threat – repeatedly calling climate change a “hoax” and even changing the rules to allow polluters to release unlimited amounts of the carbon pollution that is disrupting our climate and putting future generations at risk.

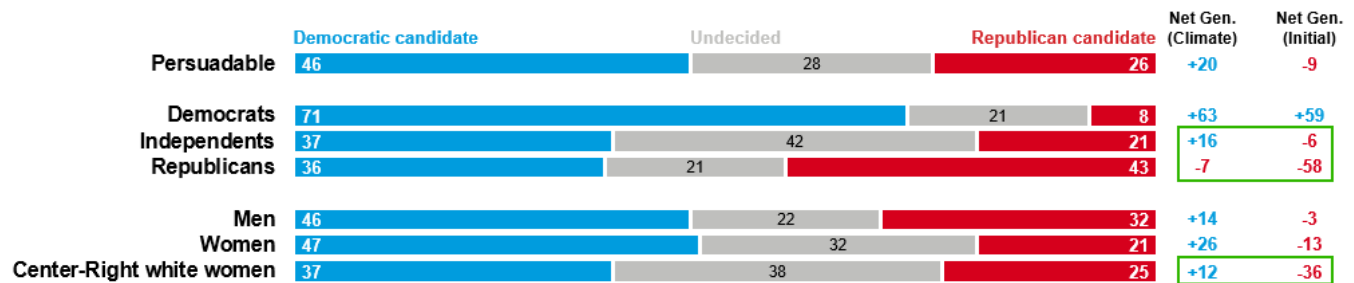
Climate change can help win swing voters AND motivate younger voters, while climate obstruction holds real political dangers

Perhaps the biggest change in our research around climate change over the last few years is the ability of climate messaging to move votes. In the same survey among presidential persuadable voters (who tilt toward the center-right because Democrats are more locked into voting for Biden), when we asked the standard generic ballot, Democrats trailed by 9 points. But when we rephrased the questions as a choice between:

- A Democrat who supports taking strong government action to combat climate change
- A Republican who opposes taking strong government action to combat climate change

Democrats led by 20 points – a net 29-point shift. Among center-right white women, framing the choice around climate action moved the vote by a remarkable net 48 points.

If the election for Congress were held today between a Democratic candidate who supports taking strong government action to combat climate change and a Republican candidate who opposes taking strong government action to combat climate change, for whom would you vote? (Among Persuadables, March 2020)



⁵ GSG survey for CAP Action and LCV, March 2020.

Moreover, when we tested climate critiques against Donald Trump, there were successful at moving the presidential vote among these center-right persuadable voters by a net 15 points while boosting the percent of non-Republican Hispanic and Younger voters who were extremely motivated to vote by 9 and 12 points respectively.⁶

	Persuadable				Hispanic			Younger		
	Initial	Final	Δ		Initial	Final	Δ	Initial	Final	Δ
Biden vs. Trump	-9	+6	+15	Biden vs. Trump	+63	+69	+6	+61	+64	+3
Trump Job Approval	-1	-20	-19	Motivation to Vote <small>% extremely motivated</small>	75%	84%	+9	67%	79%	+12

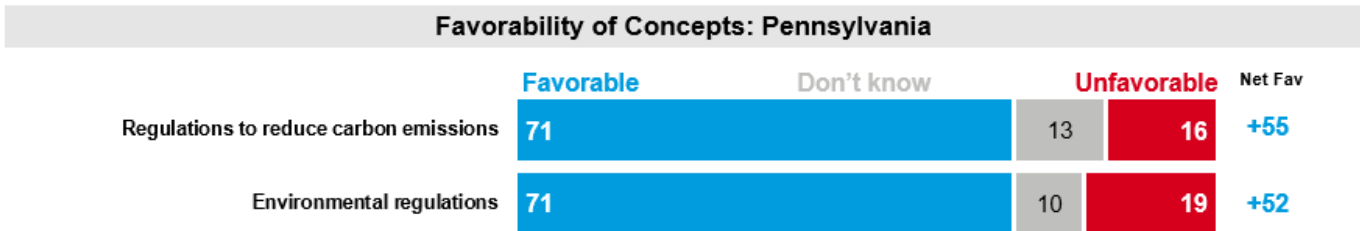
Voters across the political spectrum support limits on carbon emissions, along with other policies to combat climate change

In a national survey that we recently completed for Climate Power 2020, we found that 71% of registered voters supported “The U.S. government taking BOLD (emphasis added) action to combat climate change,” and this even included a majority of Republican voters.⁷

“The U.S. Government taking BOLD (emphasis added) action to combat climate change”			
% Support	% Oppose	Net Support	
71	19	+52	OVERALL
89	4	+85	Democrats
66	13	+53	Independents
50	38	+12	Republicans

Voters don’t only support the broad concept of taking action to combat climate change; they also support specific policies to make that happen. While conventional wisdom holds that “regulations” are a dirty word, that is not necessarily the case – and it is certainly NOT the case when it comes to environmental regulations. The truth is, voters support regulations that limit things that they don’t like, and there are few things that they like less than pollution. As a result, voters support policies to limit the carbon pollution that causes climate change, as well as mechanisms to hit those limits.

For instance, in our survey of Pennsylvania last month, registered voters in the state had overwhelmingly favorable views of environmental regulations and “regulations to reduce carbon emissions.”⁸ And in a survey we conducted last year, North Carolina registered voters viewed “a cap and trade plan to reduce carbon emissions” by a 53% to 20% margin.⁹



⁶ GSG survey for CAP Action and LCV, March 2020.
⁷ GSG survey for Climate Power 2020, June-July 2020.
⁸ GSG Polling of registered voters in Pennsylvania, August 2020.
⁹ GSG survey for EDF Action, September 2019.

In fact, over the past several years, both GSG and other pollsters have tested several proposals, both nationwide and in state and districts across the country, to limit carbon emissions either through straight limits or through carbon pricing phrased as an explicit carbon tax, a cap and trade, or cap and dividend policy. As the table below shows, all of these policies have been supported by majorities with margins of at least 24 points.

Location	Policy	Net Support	Date	Pollster
PA	Plan to move the US to 100% clean electricity by 2035	+58	2020	GSG
PA	Plan to move the US to 100% clean energy economy by 2050	+53	2020	GSG
NC	Regulations to eliminate carbon emissions in NC by 2040	+52	2019	GSG
USA	Charge for carbon emissions and give people quarterly check	+51	2019	Luntz
CO	Rules to guarantee CO reduces carbon emissions by 90% by 2050	+46	2019	GSG
BG	Move the U.S. to a 100% clean energy economy by the year 2050	+43	2020	GSG
CO	Rules to guarantee CO reduces carbon emissions by 90% by 2050	+42	2020	GSG
USA	Tax emission of carbon ... revenue used for renewable energy R&D	+41	2018	NORC
MN	Regulations to limit the total carbon emissions in Minnesota	+40	2018	GSG
BG	Require companies to pay carbon tax, use revenue for MC tax cut	+40	2016	GSG
PA	Regulations to eliminate carbon emissions in PA by 2040	+38	2019	GSG
NM	Regulations to eliminate carbon emissions in NM by 2050	+35	2019	GQR
USA	Require fossil fuel companies to pay a carbon tax	+32	2019	Yale
USA	Tax emission of carbon ... revenue used for tax rebates	+24	2018	NORC

Academic Case Study: Cap and Trade Did Not Cost Democrats Votes in 2010

Over the last decade, it became conventional wisdom among both Democratic lawmakers and consultants that the 2009 vote for the Waxman-Markey Cap and Trade bill harmed Democrats in the 2010 election. But academic studies by multiple respected political scientists in the wake of the 2010 election have found that this is just not true. Brendan Nyham of Dartmouth (along with several collaborators) found that while Democrats who voted for the Affordable Care Act lost, on average, 8.5 points in vote share as a result of that vote, by contrast, support for cap and trade did not have a statistically significant relationship with vote share.” That result was echoed by Seth Masket from N.C. State (and colleagues), who concluded that the vote for ACA “cost at least thirteen House Democrats their jobs. [And] we find a smaller, but still statistically significant, effect for supporting TARP. The stimulus has a mixed effect, harming Democrats in more conservative districts but possibly helping them in more liberal ones. We found no overall effect for [voting for] cap-and-trade.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Nyhan et al paper: <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/health-care-vote-effects.pdf>; US News and World Report, 4/12/11

Voters strongly support investing in clean energy as part of our efforts to rebuild the economy – even in the face of attacks from anti-environment politicians

In our May survey of persuadable voters, a pro-environment message arguing in favor of investing in clean energy as part of an economic recovery plan beat an anti-environment message arguing against it by 14 points with persuadable voters – even though this group leans Republican by 11 points – thus overperforming partisanship by a net 25 points. Moreover, AFTER voters heard these messages, an incredible 86% of persuadable voters agreed that “we should make significant investments in clean energy as part of our efforts to rebuild our economy.”¹¹

	Persuadable Voters	
<u>Democrats who say</u> that, instead of giving more bailouts to big oil companies and their CEOs as the Republicans want to do, we should be focusing on policies that will provide the best bang for our buck in putting people back to work now AND invest in the jobs and industries that will help us in the future. Investing in clean energy will create millions of good-paying jobs for all kinds of workers while protecting our kids' health.	57% Agree with Democrats	30% Identify/lean Democrat
<u>Republicans who say</u> we should be focusing on policies that will help American workers and business - including the American oil and gas industry - recover from the economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis, not using the crisis as an excuse to push through a wish-list of liberal and socialist policies like the Green New Deal that will drive up the cost of energy for American families and businesses while costing taxpayers trillions of dollars.	43% Agree with Republicans	41% Identify/lean Republican

¹¹ GSG survey for CAP Action and LCV, May 2020.