

THE PIPA/KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS POLL

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Americans on Climate Change: 2005

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PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
STEVEN KULL

RESEARCH STAFF
CLAY RAMSAY
STEFAN SUBIAS
STEPHEN WEBER
EVAN LEWIS



**PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL
POLICY ATTITUDES (PIPA)**

A joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland



**Knowledge
NETWORKS**

A polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California

INTRODUCTION

As the leaders of the G8 countries meet in Gleneagles, Scotland, the issue of dealing with climate change returns once again to the political foreground. It is anticipated that the US will face criticism for not having made any commitment to limit its greenhouse gas emissions, either as part of an international agreement or as part of domestic legislation.

The US is the only country present at Gleneagles that is not a member of the Kyoto Treaty. With Russia's adherence in fall 2004, the treaty gained enough member countries to enter into force.

The Bush administration says that participation in the Kyoto Treaty would be too harmful to the US economy and questions whether the evidence for climate change is strong enough to warrant costly action. Efforts in Congress to legislate limits on greenhouse gas emissions, in particular the McCain-Lieberman bill, have failed.

At the same time the consensus in the scientific community confirming the reality and urgency of climate change has grown quite strong. Most recently, the national academies of science of eleven countries—including the US, all the G8 countries, and China, India and Brazil—released a joint statement declaring that “there is now strong evidence that significant global warming is occurring” and that “it is likely that most of the warming in recent decades can be attributed to human activities.” The statement urged the G8 countries to “identify cost-effective steps that can be taken now to contribute to substantial and long-term reductions in net global greenhouse gas emissions.”

The question arises: how does the American public feel about the controversy surrounding climate change? To better understand the public's views on climate change and on various options to address it, PIPA and Knowledge Networks conducted a nationwide poll of 821 Americans over June 22-26 (margin of error plus or minus 3.5%). The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks using its nationwide panel, which is randomly selected from the entire adult population and subsequently provided internet access, whether or not they previous had internet access. For more information about this methodology, go to www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

Funding for this research was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the Ford Foundation.

Key findings of the study were:

1. Reducing Emissions Together With G8 Countries

An overwhelming, bipartisan majority says that if the other G8 countries are willing to act to limit greenhouse gases, the US should be willing to do so as well. Nearly all think the US should limit its greenhouse gas emissions at least as much as the other developed countries do on average, and nearly half think the US should do more than average. Two-thirds assume that the US already is doing as much as the average of other developed countries, and a quarter assume it is doing more. A large majority favors US participation in the Kyoto Treaty and nearly half assume that Bush favors it as well.3

2. Changing Perceptions of Scientific Consensus

The perception of a scientific consensus about the reality of global warming has grown sharply over the last year, but it is still barely more than half. Awareness of global warming or climate change has also increased sharply.4

3. Taking Action on Global Warming

Three in four Americans embrace the idea that global warming is a problem that requires action. However, this majority divides on the question of whether the problem is pressing and should include steps with significant costs. Those who believe that there is a scientific consensus about the reality of climate change are far more likely to favor taking high-cost steps. When asked to assume that there is such a consensus, the percentage willing to take high-cost steps jumps from one third to a majority.....5

4. Climate Change Legislation

A very large majority of Americans express support for legislation to require the reduction of greenhouse gases. Eight in ten support the targets of a draft of the McCain-Lieberman legislation (Climate Stewardship Act) that calls for large companies to reduce their emissions to 2000 levels by 2010 and to 1990 levels by 2020. Two-thirds say they favor such legislation, even if it costs \$15 a month for an average household.6

5. Strategies for Reducing Emissions

Very large majorities support strategies that provide tax incentives to utility companies that sell environmentally clean energy and to individuals who purchase energy-efficient appliances. Very large majorities support requiring half of all new automobiles to be hybrid-electric or similarly high-mileage by 2010 and renewing the tax incentives for hybrids. A majority expresses optimism that steps taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will actually benefit the US economy.....8

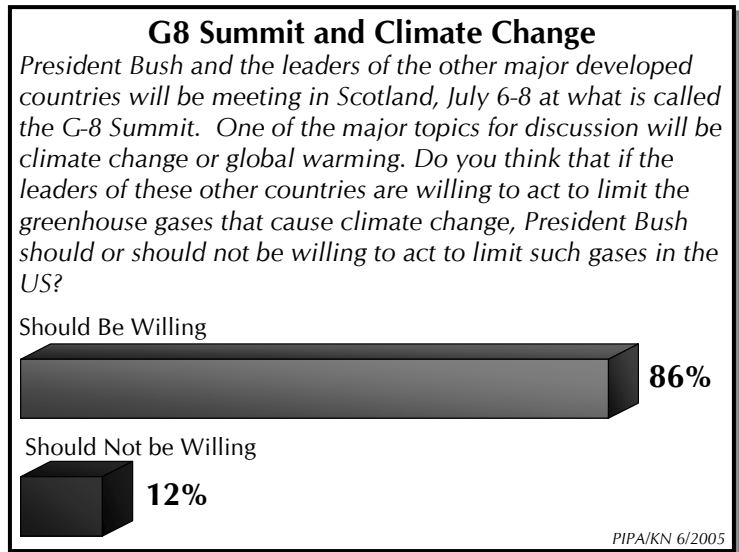
Methodology9

FINDINGS

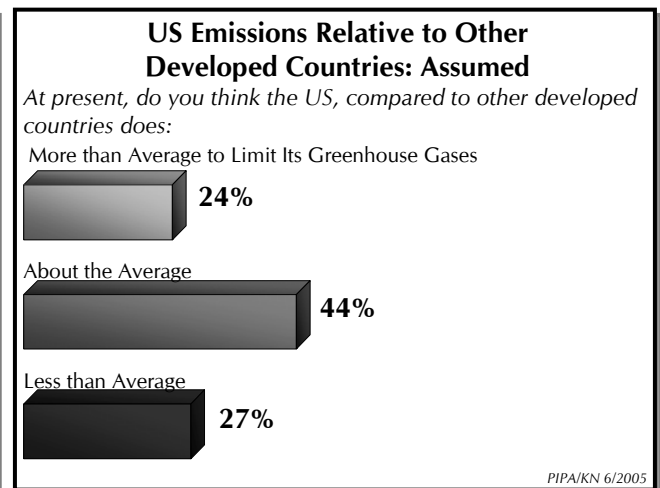
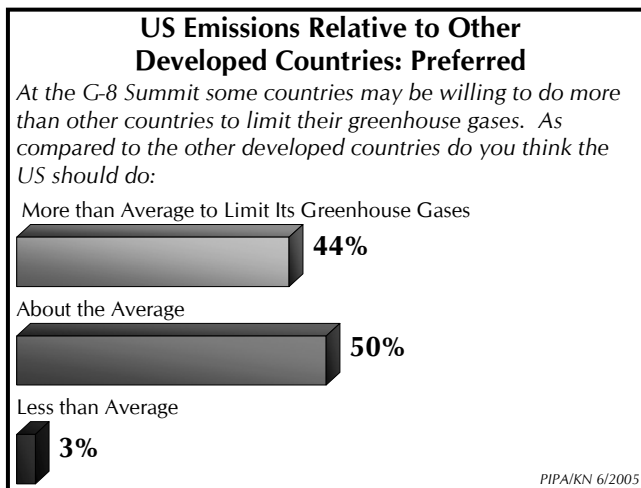
1. Reducing Emissions Together With G8 Countries

An overwhelming, bipartisan majority says that if the other G8 countries are willing to act to limit greenhouse gases, the US should be willing to do so as well. Nearly all think the US should limit its greenhouse gas emissions at least as much as the other developed countries do on average, and nearly half think the US should do more than average. Two-thirds assume that the US already is doing as much as the average of other developed countries, and a quarter assume it is doing more. A large majority favors US participation in the Kyoto Treaty and nearly half assume that Bush favors it as well.

An overwhelming majority of Americans support the US agreeing to limit greenhouse gas emissions in concert with other members of the G8 Summit. Asked, if, at the G8 Summit, “the leaders of these other countries are willing to act to limit the greenhouse gases that cause climate change, President Bush should or should not be willing to act to limit such gases in the US?” 86% said that he should. This large majority was quite bipartisan. Eighty-one percent of Republicans supported it as well as 89% of Democrats.



Virtually all respondents—94%—said the US should limit its greenhouse gases at least as much as the other developed countries do on average. Nearly half—44%—thought the US should do more than average. Democrats were more willing to do more than average (53%) than Republicans (33%).



Sixty-eight percent assumed that the US already is doing as much (44%) or more (24%) than the average of other developed countries to limit its greenhouse gases. Only 27% assessed the US as doing less than average. Democrats were much more likely to assume that the US does less than average (40%) than

were Republicans (16%), and Republicans were more likely to assume that the US is doing more than average (38% compared to 14%).

Kyoto Treaty

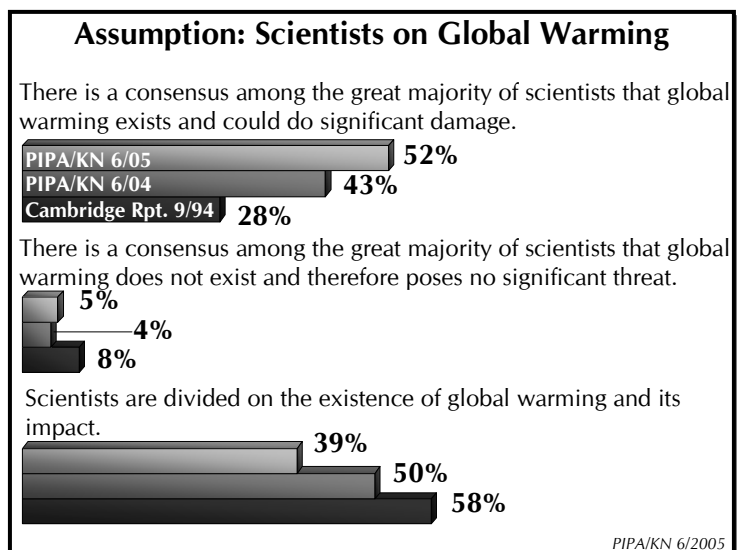
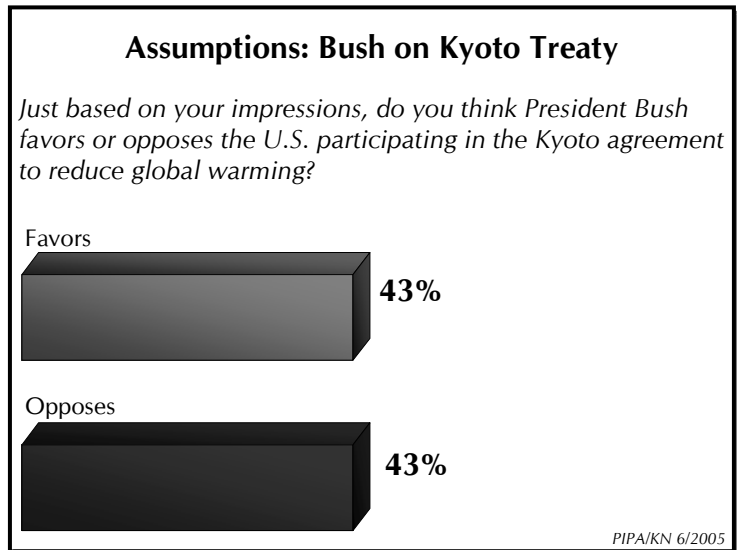
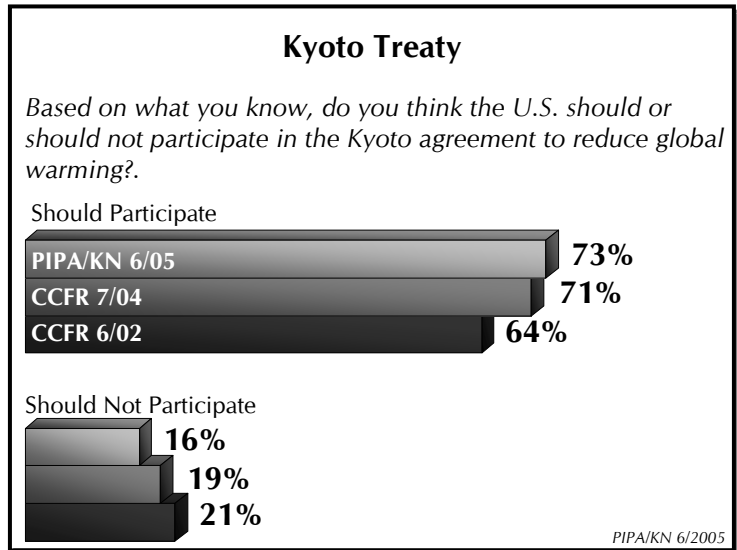
Consistent with this support for international cooperation on climate change, a large majority—73%—said the US should “participate in the Kyoto agreement to reduce global warming.” This is consistent with the 71% who answered this same question in the July 2004 CCFR poll. Democrats were more supportive (80%), but a majority of Republicans (63%) were supportive as well.

Curiously, nearly half (43%) assume incorrectly that President Bush favors US participation in the Kyoto Treaty and another 14% are not sure. Only 43% are aware that he opposes US participation. This perception has been largely consistent since PIPA first asked this question in November 2002. Interestingly, Democrats are more correct in their perception of Bush’s position (54% assume he opposes it) than are Republicans (36% assume he opposes it).

2. Changing Perceptions of Scientific Consensus

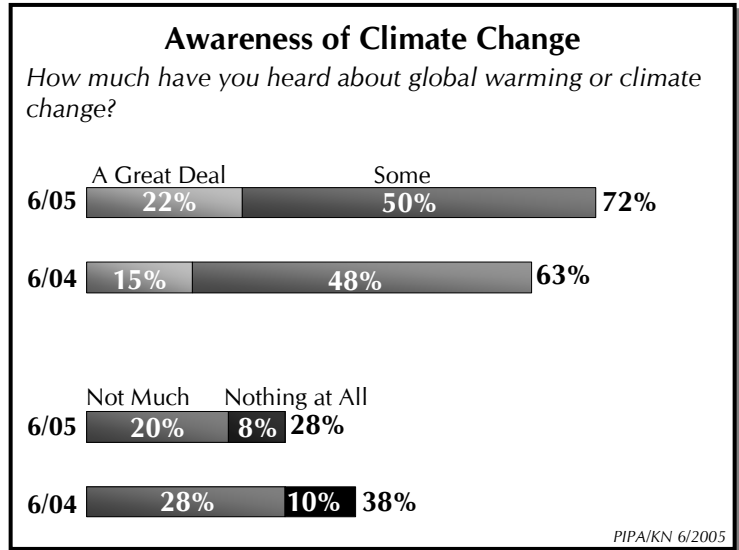
The perception of a scientific consensus about the reality of global warming has grown sharply over the last year, but it is still barely more than half. Awareness of global warming or climate change has also increased sharply.

The percentage saying that “there is a consensus among the great majority of scientists that global warming exists and could do significant damage” has risen from 43% in June 2004 to 52% today. The percentage saying that “scientists are divided on the existence of global warming and its impact” has dropped from 50% to 39%. This is part of a long-



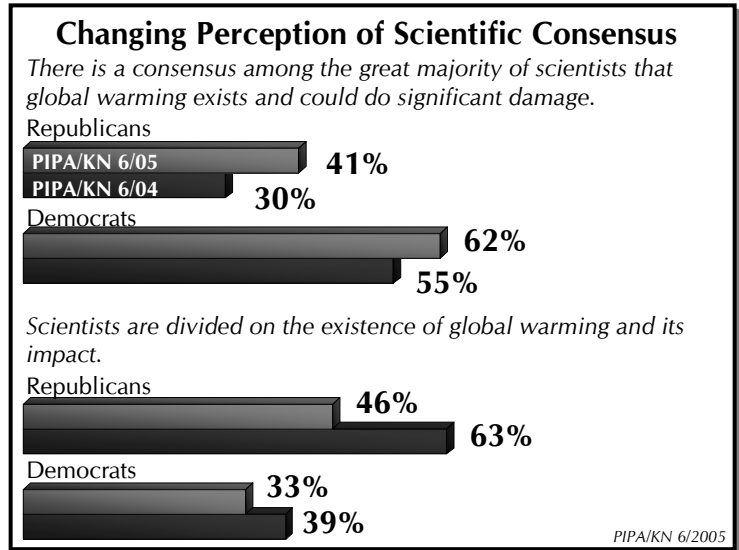
range trend: in 1994 only 28% of the public perceived a scientific consensus, while 58% assumed that scientists were divided.

This trend is also reflected in increased awareness. Asked how much they have heard about “the problem of global warming or climate change due to the buildup of greenhouse gases,” 72% said a great deal or some (22% and 50% respectively), up from 63% a year ago (15% a great deal, 48% some). Those who said they have heard “not very much” or “not at all” dropped from 38% to 28%.



Perceptions of scientific consensus are highly partisan. Sixty-two percent of Democrats perceived a consensus, as compared to just 41% of Republicans.

But over the last year there have been sharp movements in both parties, especially Republicans. Among Republicans, the perception of a scientific consensus has risen 11 points (30% to 41%) and the perception of scientists as divided has dropped a remarkable 17 points (63% to 46%). Among Democrats, perceptions of a scientific consensus have risen 7 points (55% to 62%) while perceptions of a division have dropped 6 points (39% to 33%).



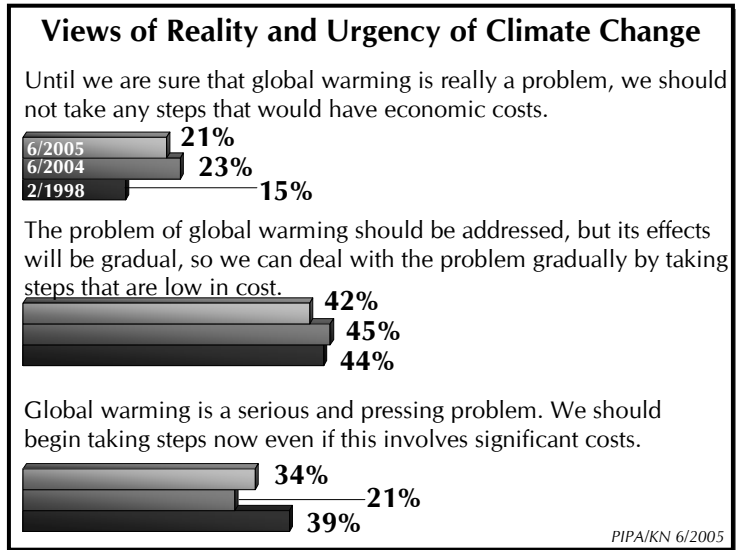
3. Taking Action on Global Warming

Three in four Americans embrace the idea that global warming is a problem that requires action. However, this majority divides on the question of whether the problem is pressing and should include steps with significant costs. Those who believe that there is a scientific consensus about the reality of climate change are far more likely to favor taking high-cost steps. When asked to assume that there is such a consensus, the percentage willing to take high-cost steps jumps from one third to a majority.

Three in four Americans embrace the idea that global warming is a problem that requires action. However, those who said some action is necessary were divided between 42% who said the effect of global warming “will be gradual, so we can deal with the problem gradually by taking steps that are low in cost,” and 34% who said the problem is “pressing” and “we should begin taking steps now even if this involves significant costs.”

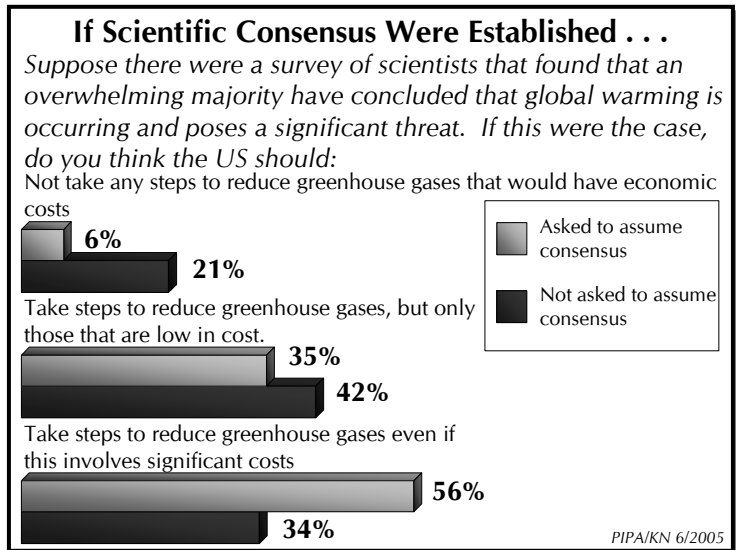
Only 21% opposed any steps with economic costs. But the percentage saying that the US should not take steps that have economic costs continues to be higher than it was during the Clinton administration, reflecting perhaps the influence of the Bush administration's view that efforts should be limited to voluntary efforts and further study.

Party differences on this question are quite strong. Thirty-six percent of Republicans oppose all steps with costs, as compared to 12% of Democrats (independents 17%). Only 21% of Republicans are willing to take high cost steps as compared to a plurality of 45% of Democrats (independents 36%).



Not surprisingly, there is a strong relationship between the belief that there is a scientific consensus and the view that high-cost steps are needed. Among those who believe that scientists are divided, only 17% favored high-cost steps, as compared to 51% among those who perceive there is a consensus. Also, those who have heard a great deal about climate change are far more likely to favor high-cost steps (46%) than those who have heard "not much" (31%) or nothing (13%).

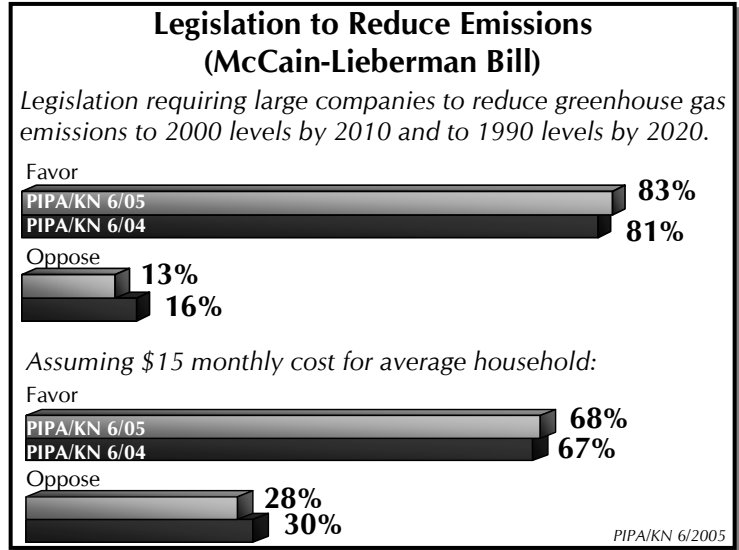
Perhaps most interesting, when asked to "Suppose there were a survey of scientists that found that an overwhelming majority have concluded that global warming is occurring and poses a significant threat," the percentage of the whole sample saying that they would then favor taking high-cost steps increased sharply from 34% to 56%.



4. Climate Change Legislation

A very large majority of Americans express support for legislation to require the reduction of greenhouse gases. Eight in ten support the targets of a draft of the McCain-Lieberman legislation (Climate Stewardship Act) that calls for large companies to reduce their emissions to 2000 levels by 2010 and to 1990 levels by 2020. Two-thirds say they favor such legislation, even if it costs \$15 a month for an average household.

Respondents were told about the targets in one of the key drafts of the McCain-Lieberman legislation (Climate Stewardship Act) which would require large companies to reduce their emissions to 2000 levels by 2010 and to 1990 levels by 2020. An overwhelming 83% said they favored the legislation, with just 13% opposed. This was essentially unchanged from a year ago when 81% favored this. Support for such legislation is very bipartisan: 88% of Democrats and 80% of Republicans favored it.



Americans also appear to be ready to accept significant costs in support of the legislation. First, respondents were told that “According to an estimate done by MIT, cutting greenhouse gas emissions as much as this draft of the new bill would require will increase various costs to the average American household by about \$15 a month.” They were then asked how they felt about this estimate. The response was neutral overall, with a plurality of 38% assuming that it is “approximately correct” and nearly as many saying that it seems on the high side (28%) as saying it seems on the low side (27%).

They were then asked if they would favor the bill “If in fact it appears that it would likely cost \$15 a month for an average household.” Two out of three (68%) said they would, while 28% said they would not. Democrats were just slightly more willing to accept the \$15 cost (72%) than Republicans (67%).

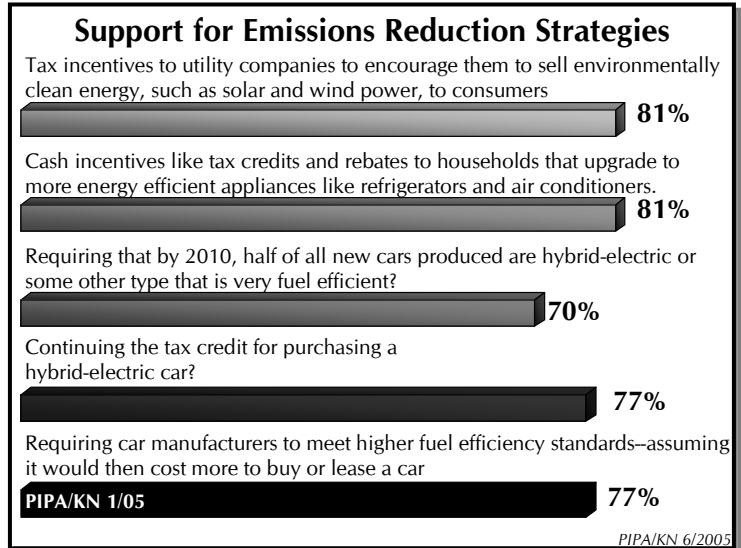
The **McCain-Lieberman version of the Climate Stewardship Act** that was tested in this poll would require the EPA to regulate emissions in sectors of the economy accounting for 85% of greenhouse gas emissions. The bill would cap emissions at 2000 levels by 2010. Though a variety of sectors are discussed in the bill, it would ultimately only apply to large emitters--emitting more than 10,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide per year. The bill does not apply to residential or agricultural sectors. The implementing legislation would include the use of flexible mechanisms, such as the banking of emission allowances through early compliance, using tradable allowances for companies unable to meet scheduled reductions, and providing loans to companies who plan to scale back their emissions to 1990 levels.

The MIT analysis used for determining the \$15-per-month household cost suggested to this study’s respondents is based on an earlier version of the McCain-Lieberman legislation. This version included a two-phase process that would cap emissions in Phase I at 2000 levels by 2010, and require further emission reductions in Phase II to 1990 levels by 2020. Cost estimates were based on worst-case cost scenarios for the implementation of Phase I and the average case cost scenario for the implementation of Phase II. These estimates are significantly higher than MIT’s cost estimates, expected to be no more than \$20 per year, for the legislation in its current form. The full MIT analysis¹ is available online at http://web.mit.edu/globalchange/www/MITJSPGC_Rpt97.pdf

5. Strategies for Reducing Emissions

Very large majorities support strategies that provide tax incentives to utility companies that sell environmentally clean energy and to individuals who purchase energy-efficient appliances. Very large majorities support requiring half of all new automobiles to be hybrid-electric or similarly high-mileage by 2010 and renewing the tax incentives for hybrids. A majority expresses optimism that steps taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will actually benefit the US economy

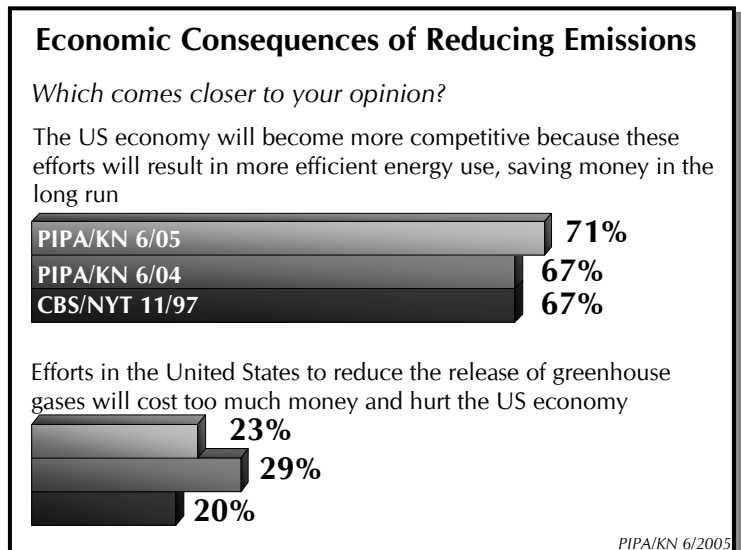
Respondents were asked to consider a variety of possible strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Very large majorities supported offering tax incentives to corporations and individuals. Eighty-one percent supported providing “tax incentives to utility companies to encourage them to sell environmentally clean energy, such as solar and wind power, to consumers.” Eighty-one percent also favored giving “cash incentives like tax credits and rebates to individual households that upgrade to more energy-efficient appliances like refrigerators and air conditioners.”



Support for hybrid cars was quite high. Seventy percent favored “requiring that by 2010, half of all new cars produced are hybrid-electric or some other type that is very fuel efficient.” Seventy-seven percent favored “continuing the tax credit for purchasing a hybrid-electric car.”

In a January 2005 PIPA-KN poll, very large majorities also supported major efforts to reduce automobile emissions. When asked to assume “that it would cost more to buy or lease a car,” 77% percent nonetheless favored “the government requiring car manufacturers to meet higher fuel efficiency standards than they do now.”

Consistent with the plurality position in favor of taking low-cost steps, a majority expresses optimism that steps taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will actually benefit the US economy. Asked to choose between two statements, only 23% chose the position that “efforts in the United States to reduce the release of greenhouse gases will cost too much money and hurt the US economy,” while 71% chose the position that “the US economy will become more competitive because these efforts will result in more efficient energy use, saving money in the long run.” This is very similar to the responses when PIPA/KN asked this



question a year ago and when CBS News/New York Times asked this same question in November 1997.

Democrats were considerable more optimistic that the economy would be more competitive (83%), but a majority of Republicans felt that way too (60%).

METHODOLOGY

The poll was fielded by Knowledge Networks, a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California, with a randomly selected sample of its large-scale nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access). The distribution of the sample in the web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the US population on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc.

The panel is recruited using stratified random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD provides a non-zero probability of selection for every US household having a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance, which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. In return, panel members participate in surveys three to four times a month. Survey responses are confidential, with identifying information never revealed without respondent approval. When a survey is fielded to a panel member, he or she receives an e-mail indicating that the survey is available for completion. Surveys are self-administered.

For more information about the methodology, please go to:

www.knowledgenetworks.com/ganp.

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The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) is a joint program of the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland and the Center on Policy Attitudes. PIPA undertakes research on American attitudes in both the public and in the policymaking community toward a variety of international and foreign policy issues. It seeks to disseminate its findings to members of government, the press, and the public as well as academia.

Knowledge Networks is a polling, social science, and market research firm based in Menlo Park, California. Knowledge Networks uses a large-scale nationwide research panel which is randomly selected from the national population of households having telephones and is subsequently provided internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus is not limited to those who already have internet access).

The Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), at the University of Maryland's School for Public Policy, pursues policy-oriented scholarship on major issues facing the United States in the global arena. Using its research, forums, and publications, CISSM links the University and the policy community to improve communication between scholars and practitioners.

The Center on Policy Attitudes (COPA) is an independent non-profit organization of social science researchers devoted to increasing understanding of public and elite attitudes shaping contemporary public policy. Using innovative research methods, COPA seeks not only to examine overt policy opinions or positions, but to reveal the underlying values, assumptions, and feelings that sustain opinions.

Steven Kull, Clay Ramsay, Evan Lewis, and Stephen Weber designed the questionnaires and wrote the analysis.

Knowledge Network's Stefan Subias adapted the questionnaires and managed the fielding of the polls.

Melanie Ciolek, Shiela Lee, and Batsuuri Haltar contributed to the production of the report.

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