

Trends in America's Climate & Environmental Attitudes: 2011

Summary results from recent major polls:

Pew Research Center, Gallup, Rasmussen, Yale Project on Climate Change Communication



ecoAmerica
start with people

1900 L Street, NW • Suite 607 • Washington, DC 20036
ecoAmerica.org • 202.457.1900

Introduction

Each spring ecoAmerica gathers the results of major national polls on climate and the environment to present a more comprehensive picture of progress on “social solutions” to these challenges. *Are we building public awareness, understanding and support for climate action, or not?*

2010 was a not a propitious year for nature. The favored solution for climate change, cap-and-trade legislation, collapsed and the mid-term elections ushered in a wave of anti-environmental protection legislators at state and federal levels. *Over the last few years, global warming has become a crux issue in the partisan polarization of America.*

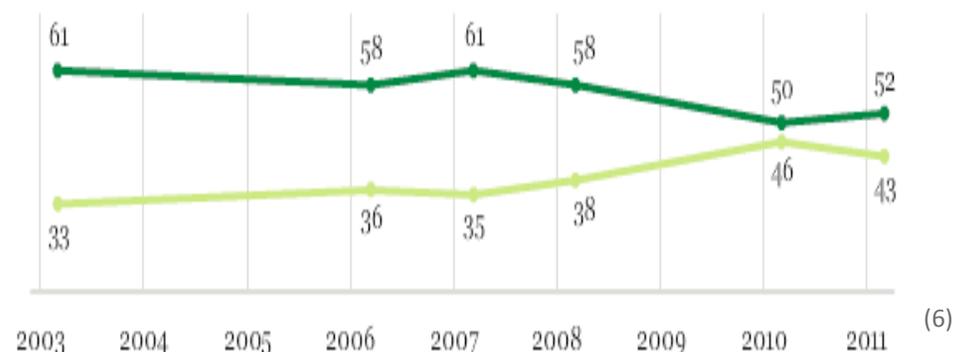
Political and economic forces are aligned against climate solutions for reasons that really have nothing to do with science or consequences. We now need to develop new solutions that don't have this toxic political baggage associated with them.

How has all this played out with the American public? Check out the summary comments at the right and the graphs on the following pages.

- Some of the major polling firms still refer to the term “global warming” while most environmental and news organizations have shifted to “climate change.” This disconnect may be impacting survey results.
- Nonetheless, over the past two years, American public opinion on climate and environmental issues has gone through what may be a historic, negative shift.
 - After 20+ years of environmental priority over economics, Americans may have ‘permanently’ shifted to greater concerns about the economy.
 - The partisan polarization about climate has reached cultural dimensions. Climate solutions as defined by progressives violate the values and senses of conservatives.
- Despite the debate and conflict, Americans support new energy and are concerned about pollution – these may be a path forward for climate solutions.
- With elite climate battles in hiatus, it will be interesting to see what evolves in 2011 and beyond.

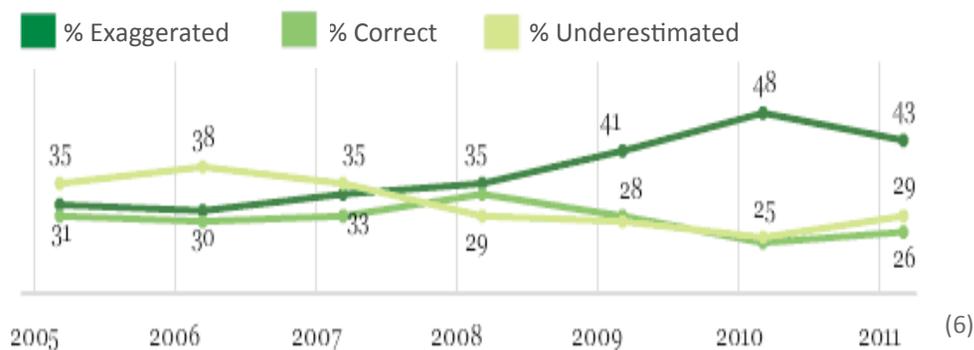
not our fault; exaggerated seriousness

Are temperature changes due to **man made** or **natural** causes?



- Historically about 60% of Americans have believed that temperature changes on the planet are man-made. Over the past two years this has declined to just about half of the population.

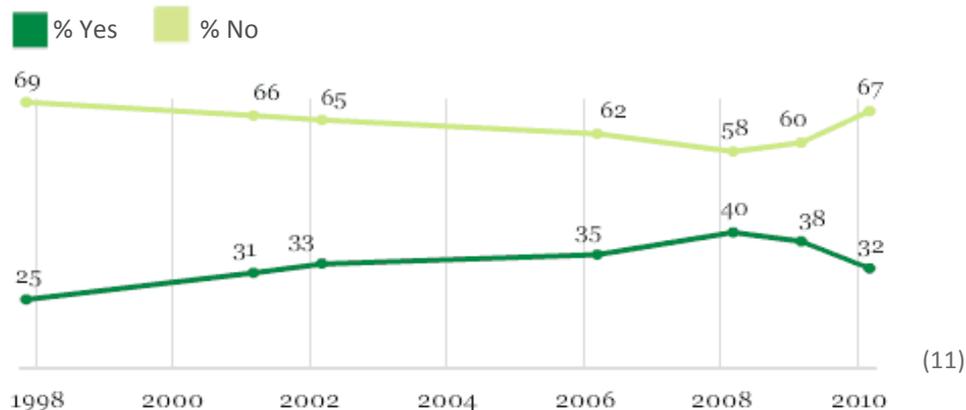
Thinking about what is said in the news, in your view is the seriousness of global warming generally exaggerated, generally correct, or is it generally underestimated?



- As recently as 2007, Americans were fairly divided on the seriousness of global warming, but over the past three years many have been convinced that the threat of global warming is exaggerated.

declining concern

Do you think that global warming will pose a serious threat to you and your way of life in your lifetime?



- After a decade long increase in concern that global warming was a serious threat, over the past two years concern has declined dramatically.

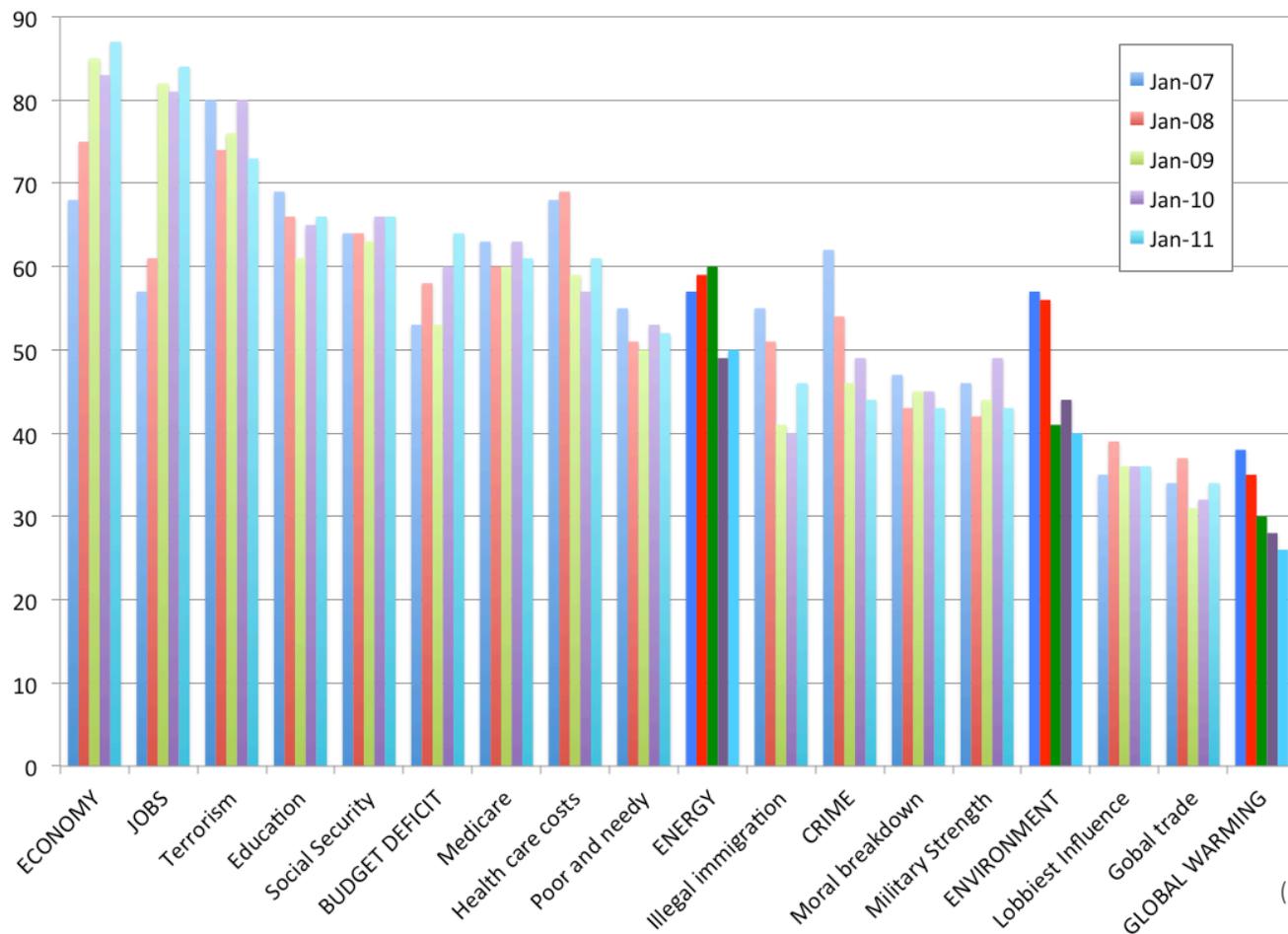
How much do you personally worry about global warming?



- Personal worry about global warming is now at its lowest level in a decade.

the lowest of American public priorities

Percent of Americans considering each as a “top priority” (mutually independent)



- Global warming ranks last when compared to other public policy issues.
- Only 26% consider global warming a top priority, and number is declining
- Concern about the environment shifted to new levels in 2009 and remains at historic low levels.

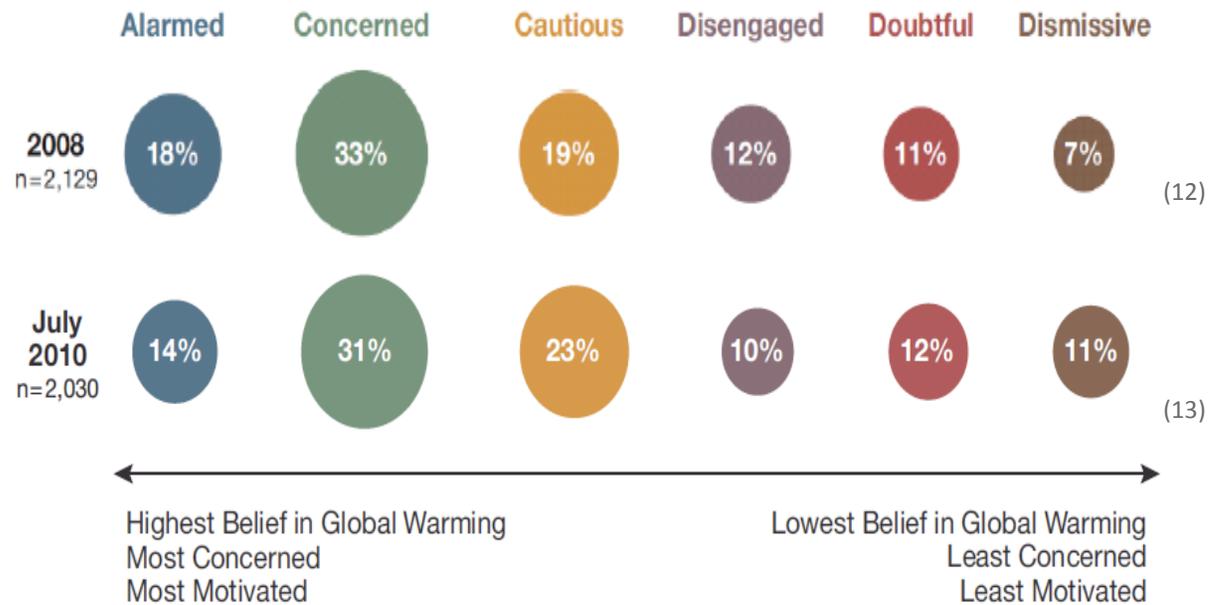
and the lowest of environmental concerns

	Great deal/ Fair amount	Not much/ Not at all
Contamination of soil and water by toxic waste	79%	20%
Pollution of rivers, lakes, and reservoirs	79%	22%
Pollution of drinking water	77%	23%
Maintenance of the nation's supply of fresh water for household needs	75%	24%
Air pollution	72%	28%
Extinction of plant and animal species	64%	36%
The loss of tropical rain forests	63%	35%
Urban sprawl and loss of open spaces	57%	42%
Global warming	51%	48%

(9)

- Global warming also ranks last when compared to other environmental issues.

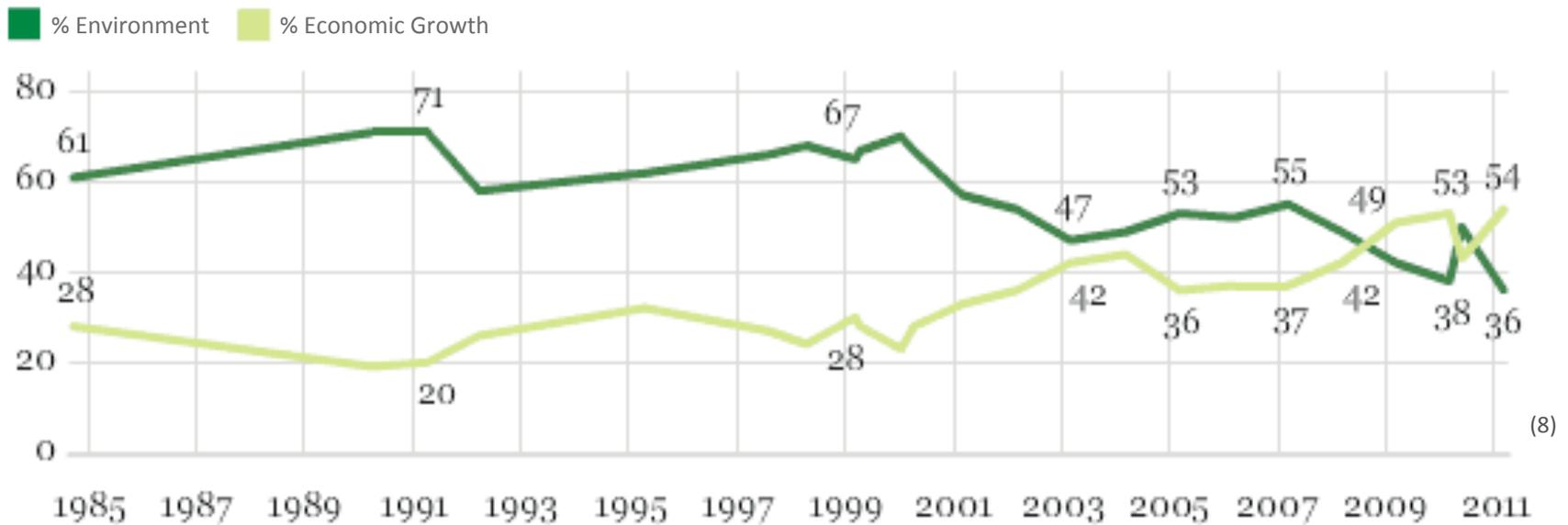
an “across the board” shift



- Alarmed and Concerned Americans declined while Doubtful and Dismissive Americans increased by a similar amount.

economic growth taking priority

With which one of these statements about the environment and the economy do you most agree: protection of the **environment** should be given priority, even at the risk of curbing economic growth (or) **economic growth** should be given priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent?



the political divide

Is the solid evidence the earth is warming?	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%
Yes	38	79	56
Because of human activity	16	53	32
Because of natural patterns	18	18	17
Don't know (Vol.)	3	8	7
No	53	14	31
Mixed/Don't know (Vol.)	9	6	12
Is it a problem requiring immediate government action?			
Yes	24	68	44
No	39	19	31

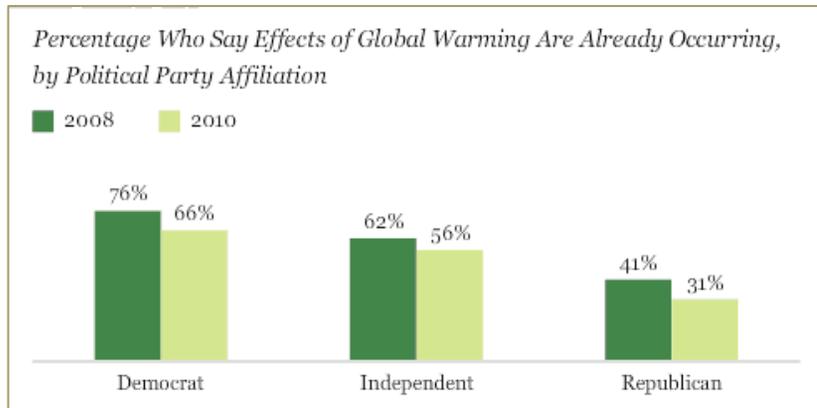
(2)

<i>More important priority...</i>	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%
Keep energy prices low	52	28	32
Protect the environment	41	68	59
Don't know	8	4	8

(1)

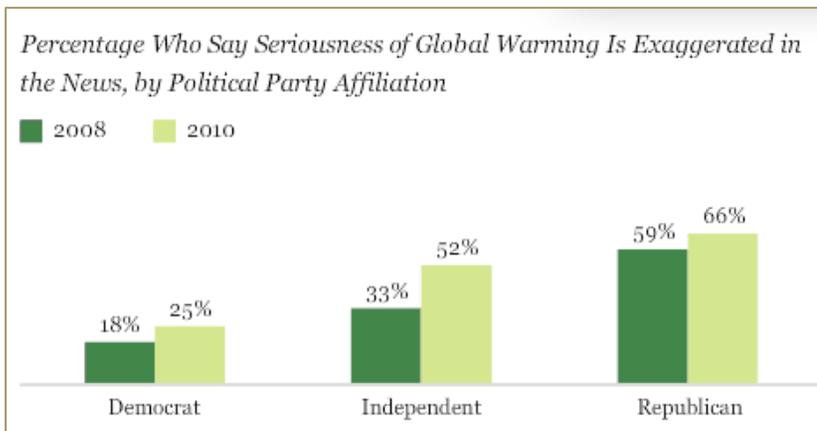
- The differences in beliefs on global warming between are striking – two to three times greater concern among Democrats than among Republicans
- This translates into a similar shift on environment vs. energy priorities.

trends by political affiliation



(7)

- Concern by all major political affiliations, including Democrats, is eroding.

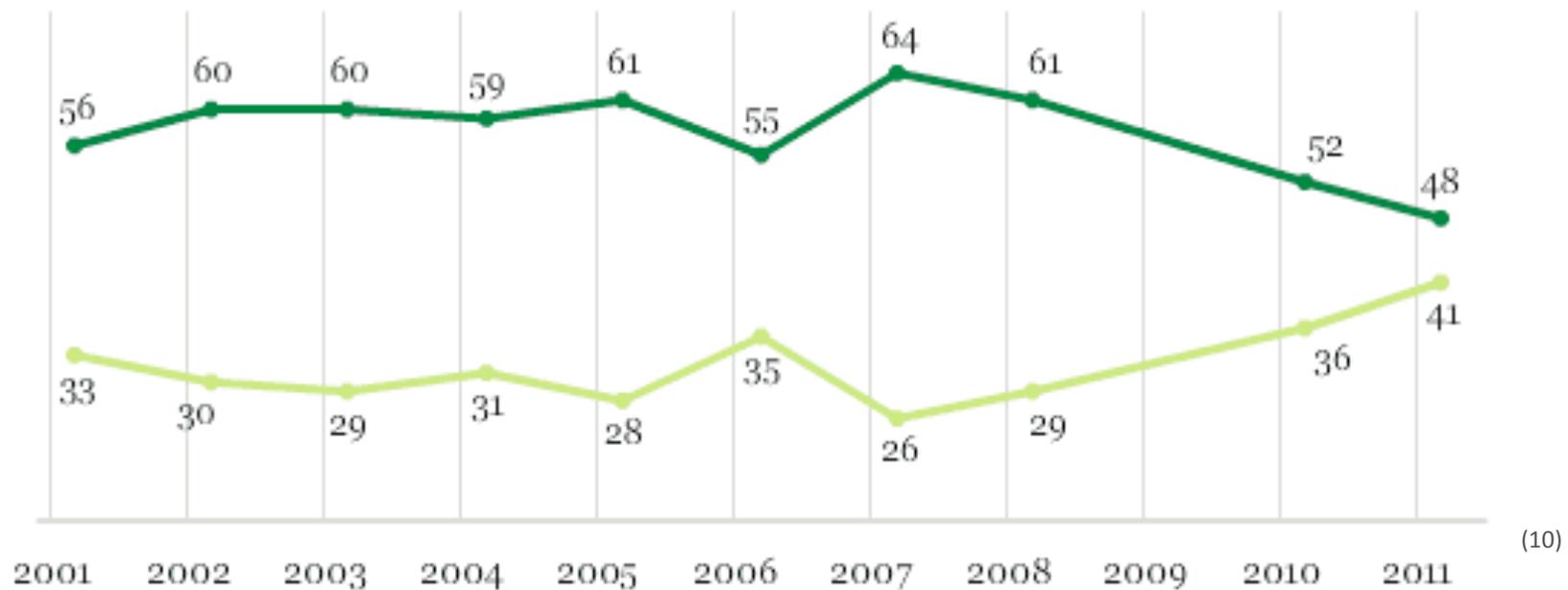


(7)

record low support for conservation

Which approach to solving the nation's energy problems should the U.S. follow right now...

■ % Emphasize more conservation by consumers of existing energy supplies ■ % Emphasize production of more oil, gas and coal supplies



on energy it's “all of the above”

Public Favors Alternative Energy, Traditional Energy, and Limits on Greenhouse Gases

<i>Include each in comprehensive energy legislation...</i>	Favor %	Oppose %
Require utilities to produce more energy from renewable sources	87	9
Tougher efficiency standards	78	17
Expand exploration for coal, gas, oil	68	26
Limits on CO ² and other greenhouse gas emissions	66	29
Incentives for more nuclear power	50	42

(1)

- Even though Americans' concern about global warming is declining, a huge majority still favor more renewable energy and tougher efficiency standards.
- A significant majority also favor limits on pollution.
- They also want more fossil fuels, indicating Americans don't seem to make a strong enough connection between fossil fuels and pollution.

disasters and public opinion?

Have the recent events in Japan made you a lot more concerned, a little more concerned, or not more concerned about a nuclear disaster occurring in the United States?

	A lot more concerned	A little more concerned	Not more concerned
Mar 15, 2011	39%	31%	27%

(5)

38% of Likely U.S. Voters favor the building of more nuclear plants here, marking the lowest level of support in nearly three years. 42% oppose the building of new U.S. plants. 20% are not sure.

(4)

There was a drop-off in support for offshore oil drilling last year following the massive oil leak in the Gulf of Mexico, but, with gas prices soaring at the pump, support has rebounded to a new high of 67%.

(4)

- 70% of Americans say they are more concerned about a nuclear disaster
- Similarly, the 2010 oil spill caused an immediate drop in support for offshore drilling.
- After a massive marketing effort by BP and other oil companies, support for offshore drilling has rebounded to record levels.
- The nuclear industry might not have the same pull or luck.

references

- (1) Pew Research Center, June 2010: Public Remain of Two Minds on Energy Policy
<http://people-press.org/2010/06/14/public-remains-of-two-minds-on-energy-policy/>
- (2) Pew Research Center, October 2010: Wide Partisan Divide Over Global Warming
<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1780/poll-global-warming-scientists-energy-policies-offshore-drilling-tea-party>
- (3) Pew Research Center, January 2011: Economy, Jobs Top Public Policy Agenda
<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1865/poll-public-top-policy-priorities-2011-health-care-reform-repeal-expand>
- (4) Rasmussen, March 2011: 35% Say U.S. Should Phase Out Nuclear Power Over Next 50 Years
http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/environment_energy/35_say_u_s_should_phase_out_nuclear_power_over_next_50_years
- (5) Gallup, March 2011: Disaster in Japan Raises Nuclear Concerns in U.S.
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/146660/disaster-japan-raises-nuclear-concerns.aspx>
- (6) Gallup, March 2011: Concerns About Global Warming Stable at Lower Levels
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/146606/Concerns-Global-Warming-Stable-Lower-Levels.aspx>
- (7) Gallup, March 2010: Conservatives' Doubts About Global Warming Grow
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/126563/conservatives-doubts-global-warming-grow.aspx>
- (8) Gallup, March 2011: Americans Increasingly Prioritize Economy Over Environment
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/146681/Americans-Increasingly-Prioritize-Economy-Environment.aspx>
- (9) Gallup, March 2011: Water Issues Worry Americans Most, Global Warming Least
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/146810/Water-Issues-Worry-Americans-Global-Warming-Least.aspx>
- (10) Gallup, March 2011: Expanding Energy Output Trumps Green Concerns
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/146651/Expanding-Energy-Output-Trumps-Green-Concerns.aspx>
- (11) Gallup, March 2011: Americans' Global Warming Concerns Continue to Drop
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/126560/Americans-Global-Warming-Concerns-Continue-Drop.aspx>
- (12) Leiserowitz, A. & Smith, N. (2010) *Knowledge of Climate Change Across \Global Warming's Six Americas*. Yale University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication.
www.climatechangecommunication.org/images/files/Six_Americas_June_2010%281%29.pdf
- (13) Leiserowitz, A. & Smith, N. (2010) *Knowledge of Climate Change Across \Global Warming's Six Americas, June 2010*. Yale University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication.
<http://environment.yale.edu/climate/files/SixAmericasJune2010.pdf>

ecoAmerica is a non-profit that uses consumer research and strategic partnerships to create large-scale engagement programs that build awareness, understanding and action for climate and environmental solutions among mainstream Americans.



ecoAmerica
start with people

1900 L Street, NW • Suite 607 • Washington, DC 20036
ecoAmerica.org • 202.457.1900