

What do Republicans and Democrats think about climate change? It depends on where they live



As with most political issues, neither Republicans nor Democrats are completely against or in favor of action to tackle climate change. In new research [Matto Mildenberger](#), [Peter Howe](#), [Jennifer Marlon](#), and [Anthony Leiserowitz](#) investigate how support for climate action varies from state to state for both party's supporters. They find that the belief that global

warming is happening as well as support for particular climate mitigation policies varies widely across both states and congressional districts. Many Republicans, for example, believe that global warming is happening, but not that it is human-caused. Such contradictory beliefs, however, do not seem to affect Republicans' support for funding research on renewables or even the regulation of carbon pollution.

The US Republican party is one of the most important political actors organized against climate policy action anywhere in the world, yet we still lack a detailed understanding of how Republican climate opinions vary across the states and regions in ways that matter for US party politics. For instance, we don't have a systematic way to measure the climate opinions of Republican Party primary voters within Congressional districts. The same is true for US Democrats: we may know what the average Democrat thinks, but what about the average Democrat in Northern Ohio or Southern California?

The distribution of partisan climate change beliefs matters. Among Republicans, officials who once supported climate reforms have moderated their policy positions on the basis of perceived opposition from party voters. Others, such as former Rep. Bob Inglis of South Carolina, have lost their seats to primary challengers opposed to climate action. On the other side of the aisle, many Democrats have embraced climate policies; yet, a vocal group of Democrats routinely opposed climate reforms throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Are Republican elites who push "conservative climate solutions" systematically out of step with Republican voters? Are there still substantial pockets of climate policy support within the party that may support a reorientation of the party's climate policy goals? Are Democratic leaders who have championing climate reforms in step with their party's base?

We sought to answer these questions, and it's important to do so – up to now analyses of partisan climate opinions have been limited to national or, occasionally, state-level polls. In our new research, we build on our [prior work](#) to estimate climate change opinions among Democrats and Republicans at state and local scales. We have also published a set of [online interactive maps](#) that anyone can use to explore the data.

"Both the belief that global warming is happening as well as support for particular climate mitigation policies varies widely across both states and congressional districts"

What do Republicans and Democrats think about climate change? It depends on where they live
write [Matto Mildenberger](#), [Peter Howe](#), [Jennifer Marlon](#), and [Anthony Leiserowitz](#).

blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog

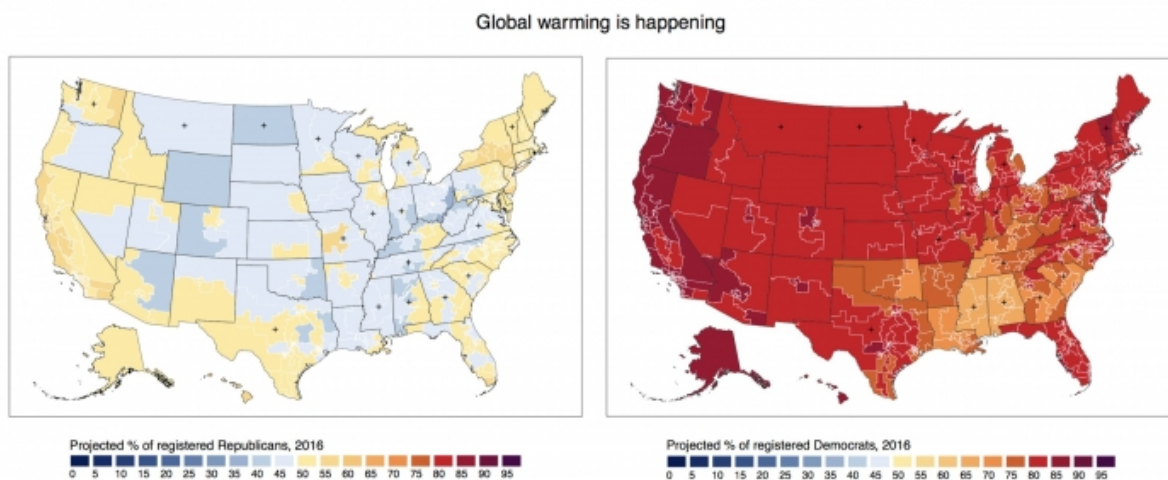


“energy” by [chriscrowder_4](#) is licensed under [CC BY NC ND 2.0](#)

Our work describes the distribution of opinions within the Democratic and Republican parties across all US states and congressional districts. Our maps illustrate, for example, that 69 percent of Democrats in Alabama believe that global warming is happening, but that is the lowest percentage of any state; in Oregon and California 88 percent of Democrats believe it is happening, and in Texas, it’s 82 percent.

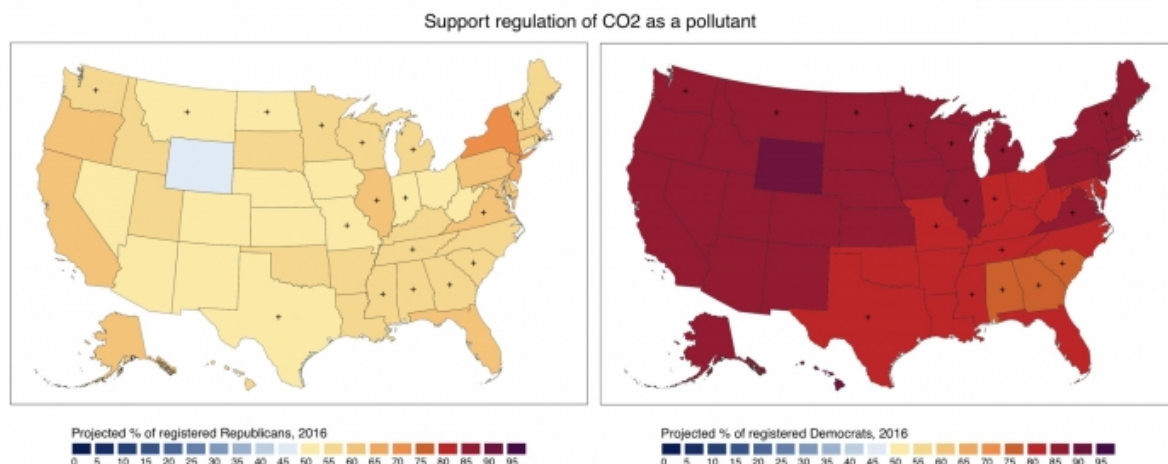
Republicans are less convinced overall, but there is substantial spatial variability in their beliefs as well – for example, 62 percent of New York Republicans believe global warming is happening, while only 48 percent of Republicans in Nebraska and Kansas agree. And at the congressional district level, Republican views of climate change are even more varied, as Figure 1 below illustrates:

Figure 1 – Estimated percentage of Republicans (left) and Democrats (right) by congressional district who believe that global warming is happening



The distribution of Republican climate and energy opinions is particularly important in the context of primary elections. We categorized Congressional districts between the 241 that were held by Republican legislators and the 194 held by Democrats (as of the beginning of the 115th Congress). We then counted the number of districts in which a plurality of registered Republicans hold a pro-climate opinion. While a plurality of Republicans in nearly every Republican-held state and congressional district think that global warming is happening, there are few districts where a plurality of Republican voters think that it is human-caused or that it will harm people in the US. By contrast, Republican voters still support many climate mitigation policies. We find a plurality of support for funding research on renewables in every Republican-held district. We also find strong Republican support for regulating carbon pollution. For example, there is a plurality of support in 111 districts for renewable portfolio standards.

Figure 2 – Estimated percentage of Republicans (left) and Democrats (right) by state that support the regulation of carbon dioxide (CO₂) as a pollutant



Overall our analysis finds that Republican and Democratic opinions on climate change vary in ways that should be taken into account by policymakers. Both the belief that global warming is happening as well as support for particular climate mitigation policies varies widely across both states and congressional districts. There are some states and congressional districts where a majority of registered Republicans think that human-caused global warming is happening or support climate reforms. Republicans hold differing climate policy preferences, including widespread support for renewable energy funding and carbon pollution regulation. Similar levels of variation exist among Democrats for many climate attitudes, though there is less disagreement over some policy support questions. However, since the partisan average is considerably higher among Democrats, this variation may have less meaningful implications for climate policymaking: a majority of Democrats in every district and every state believe that global warming is happening and support climate and energy policies.

- Please visit the [online interactive maps](#) to explore these partisan climate change opinions across the nation.
- This article is based on the paper, *'The Spatial Distribution of Republican and Democratic Climate Opinions at State and Local Scales'* in *Climatic Change*. The paper is available [here](#) to those with a subscription to *Climatic Change*. If you would like to request a copy, please send an email to climatechange@yale.edu, with the Subject Line: Request Political Maps Paper.

[Please read our comments policy before commenting](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP– American Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/2I7uw9q>

About the authors



Matto Mildenberger – *University of California Santa Barbara*

Matto Mildenberger is an assistant professor of political science at the University of California Santa Barbara. His research focuses on climate policy inaction in the face of dramatic economic and social costs associated with the climate crisis. A current book project explores variation in the timing and content of carbon pricing policies across advanced economies, with particular attention to the role of carbon polluters in shaping climate policy outcomes. He also studies the dynamics of public climate and energy opinions.

**Peter Howe – Utah State University**

Peter Howe is an assistant professor of human-environment geography at Utah State University. His research focuses on the intersection of human perception and cognition with vulnerability and adaptation to climate change and natural hazards. His research also explores how spatial relationships influence risk perceptions and decision making, using methods including survey research, spatial analysis, geovisualization, and multilevel modeling.

**Jennifer Marlon – Yale University**

Jennifer Marlon is a Research Scientist at Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (YPCCC). Her research uses surveys, experiments, modeling, and other methods to study people's perceptions of and responses to environmental change, particularly relating to climate and extreme weather events. Other recent projects include a study of coastal Connecticut residents' hurricane attitudes and a study of heat wave risk perceptions.

**Anthony Leiserowitz – Yale University**

Anthony Leiserowitz is a Senior Research Scientist at the Yale University School of Forestry & Environmental Studies and Director of the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. His research focuses on public opinion and public engagement with the issues of climate change and the environment, including work on the psychological, cultural, and political factors that influence environmental beliefs, attitudes, policy support, and behavior. This research spans global, national, and local scales, including studies in the United States, China, and India.