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**WHERE IS THE TRANSATLANTIC DIVIDE IN  
PUBLIC OPINION ON CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES?  
EVIDENCE FOR 1989-2002**

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**THOMAS L. BREWER**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper is based on an analysis of the results of more than 40 public opinion surveys taken during the period from 1989 through 2002; special attention is given to surveys taken during 2000-02. The analysis concludes that approximately two-fifths of the public are seriously concerned about global warming. Another two-fifths are moderately concerned; shifts in the opinions of this moderately concerned group would likely alter the future course of government policies. The other one-fifth of the public does not consider global warming much of a problem, does not worry about it very much or not at all, and does not believe that carbon dioxide emissions are a cause of it. A substantial majority of the US public wants the government to do something about the problem of global warming, and they would like the US to participate in the Kyoto Protocol. Most respondents prefer mandatory rather than voluntary emission reductions by industry. A majority of the public supports US economic assistance to fund mitigation projects in developing countries. Gaps between the US public and US leaders are evident, with the public exhibiting more concern and more support for new policies. The level of US public concern is nearly as high as it is among European publics, where there is also opposition to current US policy.

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# WHERE IS THE TRANSATLANTIC DIVIDE IN PUBLIC OPINION ON CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES?

## EVIDENCE FOR 1989-2002

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#### 1. Introduction

This paper identifies key patterns and trends in US public opinion on climate change issues during the period 1989-2002; it focuses on the following questions:

- What patterns and trends in *levels of awareness, understanding and concern* about climate change issues are evident?
- What is the public's assessment of the *Kyoto Protocol* and the US administration's decision not to participate in it?
- What government *policy alternatives* are favoured or opposed?
- What variability is there across different *segments of the public* in their concerns and opinions?
- What are the similarities and differences between US public opinion and *US leaders'* opinions?
- What are the similarities and differences between the opinions of the US and *European publics*?

Answers to those questions are based on an examination of more than 40 polls conducted by major survey organisations during the period 1989-2002.<sup>1</sup> In addition to US surveys, there were two international surveys that make possible cross-national comparisons of US and European opinions. The sample sizes are typically about 1000 thus have sampling errors of +/- 3% at the 95% confidence level. The tables, footnotes, references section and the body of the paper provide additional information about sample sizes, time periods and other features of the surveys. Also see the Appendix for a complete list of surveys arranged by year and survey organisation or sponsoring organisation.

As one would expect, the surveys have been somewhat concentrated by sub-periods. The first was 1989-92. An unusually hot summer and Congressional hearings in 1988 brought global warming to public attention, as did the Rio summit in 1992, which produced the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The second was 1997-98, when the Kyoto Protocol was signed and debated. The third was 2000-02, when the issue entered the presidential election of 2000, and then in 2001-02 as the new US administration withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol process.

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<sup>1</sup> Given the focus of this paper on the specific questions noted at the outset, the paper does not report all of the results of all of the questions. Because the paper is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of opinions concerning climate change issues, it uses only the available data that are directly related to the questions posed. Of course, there are many other questions that could be addressed and additional data relevant to them that could be reported. In short, there is much data available to address other questions – for instance, questions about the effects on opinions of press reports, extreme weather events, and the results of scientific studies.

All survey data have limitations, of course. Their results often depend on nuances in the wording of questions, for instance, and they sometimes reflect only transient movements in volatile opinions that are reacting to immediate circumstances. It is also often difficult to predict behaviour, such as voting behaviour or consumer behaviour, on the basis of the stated preferences recorded in surveys. Yet, survey data can be used to discern patterns and trends over time, analyse the correlates of opinions, and assess their implications for government policies and business decisions. These opportunities are available, in particular, when there are surveys with the same questions repeated over time and also surveys by different organisations using different questions to tap opinions on related issues during the same time periods.

Because the analysis of the paper is based partly on recurrent surveys with repeated questions about many aspects of climate change issues over more than a decade, as well as questions with different wordings from different polling organisations about the same issue, it is possible to discern key patterns and trends with a high degree of confidence. This is particularly true for the period since 1997, when there have been several surveys with many questions about climate change issues.

## **2. Levels of Awareness, Understanding and Concern**

A review of the results of eight separate surveys sponsored by seven different organisations during 1997-2001 found that “only a very small minority - less than a quarter of the public – doubts the reality of global warming” (Program on International Policy Attitudes, 2002). In 2001, nearly two-thirds of the public agreed when asked “Are the emissions of gases like CO<sub>2</sub> causing global temperature increases?” (Gallup, 2002a); approximately one-half of the Republicans and three-fourths of the Democrats responded “yes” to the question (CNN, 2001). The proportion of the public that recognises that most scientists believe that global warming is occurring was 61% in 2001, up from 48% in 1997 (Gallup, 2001a). People’s self-perception of the level of their understanding of the problem has also increased – from the 53% in 1992 who thought they understood it “fairly well” or “very well” to 69% in 2001 and 69% again in 2002 (Gallup, 2001a; 2002b).

In 2001 and 2002, 54 and 53%, respectively, reported that they thought the “effects” of global warming had “already begun” – up slightly from 48% in 1997 (Gallup, 2002b; 2002c). Similarly, in response to the question, “Do you think global warming will pose a serious threat to you or your way of life in your lifetime?,” 31% said “yes” in 2001 and 33% in 2002 – an increase from 25% in 1997 (Gallup, 2002c).

According to a Harris/Yankelovich poll in 2001, 43% said global warming was a “very serious problem” (Time, 2001). A Zogby survey of likely voters in 2002 asked “Do you believe that global warming is a serious problem today, is not yet a serious problem but will be in the future, or is not a problem at all?” In response, 41% said that global warming is a serious problem now (Reuters, 2002).

According to a standard Gallup Poll question concerning people’s worries, about one-third of the public has been worried about global warming “a great deal”, and slightly less than a third have been worried about it “a fair amount” (Gallup, 2002b). In a Gallup survey in March 2001, 33% reported worrying “a great deal” about global warming (Gallup, 2001a).<sup>2</sup> The time

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<sup>2</sup> This survey was taken two weeks before the Harris/Yankelovich poll noted above – in which 43% said global warming was a “very serious problem”. This 10-point difference probably reflects a difference in the wording of the response categories (“worry a great deal” versus “very serious problem”) and/or possibly the context of the question in the interview.

series data indicate that the level of US public worry about global warming was the lowest in 1997 – perhaps reflecting a belief that the Kyoto Protocol, which was receiving much attention at the time, would ameliorate the problem. More recently, in 2000, 72% of the public reported that they were worried “a great deal” or a “fair amount” – perhaps in response to the IPCC’s Third Assessment and associated news reports at that time. There was subsequently a slight decline in concern, with 65% in 2001 and 58% in 2002 reporting that they were worried “a great deal” or a “fair amount” (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup>

*Table 1. Trend data for level of worry about global warming*

Question: “How much do you personally worry about ... the greenhouse effect or global warming?”

	Month/Year									
	<u>5/89</u>	<u>4/90</u>	<u>4/91</u>		<u>10/97</u>	<u>3/98</u>	<u>4/99</u>	<u>4/00</u>	<u>3/01</u>	<u>3/02</u>
“Great deal”	35%	30%	35%	.....	24%	28%	34%	40%	33%	29%
“Fair amount”	28	27	27	.....	26	31	34	32	30	29
“Only a little”	18	20	22	.....	29	23	18	15	22	23
“Not at all”	12	16	12	.....	17	16	12	12	13	17

Source: Gallup (2002a).

The level of public concern about global warming can be further understood in the context of concerns about other environmental problems. Concerns about water pollution were at the top of the environmental worry lists in 2001 and 2002, when 82-88% reported worrying about pollution of drinking water and pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Nearly as high were concerns about air pollution, with 82% reporting in 2002 that they worried “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about it (Gallup, 2002b).

The extent to which greenhouse emissions may be included in the respondents’ notion of air pollution is not known. However, there is data about the specific air pollution problems of global warming and ozone depletion. In each of seven polls between 1989 and 2001, between 6 and 13% more of the respondents worried “a great deal” or “a fair amount” about ozone depletion than global warming. But it has been observed that “as global warming is a function of other environmental problems – air pollution, deforestation, and damage to the ozone layer – the public’s knowledge about and awareness of these may contribute, more than the figures [about levels of worry] would suggest, to greater public support for efforts to curb global warming” (Gallup, 2001b).

### 3. The Kyoto Protocol

A survey sponsored by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States in the summer of 2002 asked two questions about the Kyoto

<sup>3</sup> The challenges of encapsulating such data into highlights, headlines or sound bites were evident in two reports in early 2001, where headlines created rather different impressions about the state of US public opinion at the time. One in January carried the title and headline, “Scientists Deliver Serious Warning About Effects of Global Warming: 4 in 10 Americans worry ‘a great deal’ about this environmental problem” (Gallup, 2001b). Another in April reported that “Americans Consider Global Warming Real, but Not Alarming: Only 31% feel it poses serious risk in their lifetime” (Gallup, 2001a).

Protocol (CCFR/GMF, 2002a).<sup>4</sup> First: “Based on what you know, do you think the U.S. should or should not participate in the following treaties and agreements? ... The Kyoto Protocol to reduce global warming....” Nearly two-thirds (64%) said the US should participate, while 21% said the US should not participate. The remaining 15% did not know or offered other opinions (CCFR, 2002b, p. 3). A separate sub-sample was asked a related by differently worded question after an information preface:

An international treaty calls on the U.S. and other industrialised nations to cut back on their emissions from power plants and cars in order to reduce global warming, also known as the greenhouse effect. Some people say this would hurt the U.S. economy and is based on uncertain science. Others say this is needed to protect the environment and could create new business opportunities. What’s your view – do you think the United States should or should not join this treaty requiring less emissions from U.S. power plants and cars?

Slightly over two-thirds (70%) replied that the US should join, while 25% thought the US should not join. The remaining 5% of the respondents were not sure or offered other replies (CCFR/GMF, 2002b, p. 5).

By comparison, in two separate polls in April and July of 2001 by Princeton Survey Research Associates, about one-half of the public indicated that it disapproved of the US administration’s rejection of the Kyoto Protocol; the percentages were respectively 47 and 51 in the polls.<sup>5</sup> The wording of the question was as follows: “As you may know, George W. Bush has decided that the US should withdraw its support from the global warming agreement adopted in Kyoto, Japan in 1997. Do you approve or disapprove of this decision?” Since both of these polls were thus asking about people’s opinions about an action by a recently elected administration, there may have been a tendency to respond partly in terms of more generalised support or opposition to the administration, particularly in light of the close and contested election outcome. In any case, the same surveys found 25 and 32% indicating approval of the rejection of the Protocol; the 25% indicating approval of the administration’s rejection of the Protocol corresponds to the same proportion indicating that the US should not join, as found in the survey by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States.<sup>6</sup> See Table 2 for comparisons of the data from these surveys.

In sum, in response to an independent stand-alone policy question, about two-thirds of the US public would like the United States to participate in the Kyoto Protocol, while only about one-fourth is opposed. However, the former proportion is about one-half if the question is posed in terms of opposition or support for the current administration’s rejection of the Protocol. The proportion supporting participation in the Protocol was greater in every poll than the proportion opposing it - no matter how asked – with the difference averaging 32 percentage points.

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<sup>4</sup> These questions were asked of sub-samples of the total sample of 3262 in order to avoid reactive effects in the responses to multiple questions about the same issue. The sub-sample size for the first question was 1113, with a +/- 3% confidence interval at the 95% level. A separate sub-sample for the second question was 700, with a +/- 4% confidence interval at the 95% level.

<sup>5</sup> The 2001 Princeton Survey Research Associates/Pew Research Center data are reported at [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com), retrieved on 19 April 2002.

<sup>6</sup> The wording and logic of the question may have caused confusion for some respondents since the question was phrased in terms of approving or disapproving of the administration’s *rejection of the Protocol* – in contrast to approving or disapproving of the Protocol; this phrasing could therefore also account for differences in the Princeton SRA and CCFR/GMF results. In addition, the Princeton SRA data are based on half samples of approximately 500 respondents and thus have sampling errors of +/- 5% at the 95% confidence level.

*Table 2. Comparisons of results of CCFR/GMF and Princeton SRA surveys of opinions on Kyoto Protocol*

	CCFR/GMF		Princeton SRA	
Date (month/year)	6/02	6/02	4/01	7/01
Question (see notes below)	a	b	c	c
Support US participation/Disapprove US rejection	64%	70%	47%	51%
Oppose US participation/Approve US rejection	21%	25%	25%	32%
Difference <sup>d</sup>	+43%	+45%	+22%	+19%

<sup>a</sup> “Based on what you know, do you think the U.S. should or should not participate in the following treaties and agreements? ... The Kyoto Protocol to reduce global warming....”

<sup>b</sup> “An international treaty calls on the U.S. and other industrialised nations to cut back on their emissions from power plants and cars in order to reduce global warming, also known as the greenhouse effect. Some people say this would hurt the U.S. economy and is based on uncertain science. Others say this is needed to protect the environment and could create new business opportunities. What’s your view – do you think the United States should or should not join this treaty requiring less emissions from U.S. power plants and cars?”

<sup>c</sup> “As you may know, George W. Bush has decided that the U.S. should withdraw its support from the global warming agreement adopted in Kyoto, Japan in 1997. Do you approve or disapprove of this decision?”

...

<sup>d</sup> Differences between support-oppose and disapprove-approve computed by the author.

Sources: CCFR/GMF (CCFR, 2002b); and for the Princeton SRA polls, Gallup (2002c).

**Correlates.** A Harris Poll in August 2001 found that education levels were related to awareness and policy positions. Among those with high school or less education, half had “seen, heard or read of recent international agreements in Kyoto and Bonn to limit emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to reduce global warming”; a higher proportion of those with college degrees than those with less education reported that they had been aware of these reports. There were also differences across parties; among those who said they were aware of the agreements, 54% of the self-identified Republicans approved of them, compared with 74% of the Independents, and 86% of the Democrats (Harris, 2001).

#### 4. Mandatory vs. Voluntary Emissions Reductions

In a Gallup survey in March 2001, a month after the administration announced it would not support mandatory domestic restrictions on carbon dioxide emissions, 48% disapproved of the decision and 41% approved (Gallup, 2002d). Thus, as with the Kyoto Protocol decision, more opposed than favored the administration’s position.

In a July 2002 poll, 76% of the respondents preferred that the “government set standards that require industries to reduce” greenhouse gas emissions; 16% preferred a “voluntary approach to global warming” (Reuters, 2002; Union of Concerned Scientists, 2002a; 2002b). In the same survey, 21% agreed with the statement that “President Bush’s voluntary approach to reducing global warming pollution is enough,” and that “Americans will simply adapt to the inevitable changes.” A majority of the Republicans (58 to 67%, depending on the precise question) who were interviewed in July 2002, preferred mandatory reductions, while 23 to 33% preferred a voluntary approach and supported the administration’s policy (Reuters, 2002; Union of Concerned Scientists, 2002). The self-identified Republicans and the respondents

who voted for Mr. Bush in the 2000 election conformed to the overall majority support for mandatory emissions reductions.

In another poll, in the spring of 2001, when asked whether they would be “willing to support tough government actions to help reduce global warming even if each of the following happened as a result,” the percentages of respondents saying “yes” were as follows: 47%, if “your utility bill went up;” 38%, if “unemployment increased;” 54% if “a mild increase in inflation” resulted (Harris/Yankelovich poll reported in *Time*, 2001).

Similar sentiments have been expressed about gasoline prices, though there seems to have been some decline in support for vehicle emission controls over the past decade; such a trend could be associated with the increased popularity of relatively fuel-inefficient SUVs. In 1990, 59% said “yes” they would be “willing to pay an extra 25 [cents] per gallon of gas to reduce pollution and global warming;” in 2001, 48% said they would be willing to do so (Time, 2001). These results bracket a similar finding of another question that was not explicitly about global warming, but is nevertheless germane – “Should the government require improvements in fuel efficiency for cars and trucks even if this means higher prices and smaller vehicles?” – to which 55% of the respondents replied “yes” (Harris/Yankelovich poll reported in *Time*, 2001).

## **5. Alternative Energy Sources**

A survey in 2001 found that fully three-fourths of those polled “generally favoured” both specific regulations as well as government subsidies for alternative energy sources; 75% favored “setting higher emissions standards for automobiles” and 79% favoured “spending more government money on developing solar and wind power” (Gallup, 2002c). More generally, when given a choice of alternatives “to meet America’s energy needs,” 19% favored “tax breaks to energy companies and utilities to build more coal-fired and nuclear power plants and increase drilling for oil and natural gas,” and 73% wanted to “expand the use of renewable energy sources like wind and solar power, strengthen energy efficiency standards for air conditioners, and build cars, minivans and SUVs that get better gas mileage” (Reuters, 2002; Union of Concerned Scientists, 2002a; 2002b).

## **6. International Technology Transfer and Economic Assistance**

A poll by the University of Maryland’s Program on International Policy Attitudes in 1995 found that 90% said “yes” to the question, “If the less-developed countries are willing to limit their [greenhouse gas] emissions, do you think the developed countries should provide the technology and training necessary to help them make their industries less polluting?” (Program on International Policy Attitudes, 2002). In 1998, the same organisation found that 79% supported “environmental aid to poor countries to help them preserve their environment and to reduce pollution, especially pollution that may contribute to global warming;” 38% wanted to increase it, and 41% wanted to maintain it at the same level (Program on International Policy Attitudes, 2002).

## **7. Comparisons of US Public with US Leaders**

A survey sponsored by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund of the United States in the summer of 2002 makes it possible to compare US public opinion with a sample of 397 US leaders’ opinions (Kennedy and Bouton, 2002).<sup>7</sup> On the

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<sup>7</sup> The total sample of 397 leaders included: 65 members of congress or their staffs, 34 officials in the administration, 38 business executives, 59 in the media, 32 labor leaders, 75 educators, 50 religious leaders, 23



basis of interviews with these leaders, plus interviews with the general public, there appears to be a gap between the opinions of the former and the latter. In particular, whereas 48%<sup>8</sup> of the *public* thought that global warming represents a “threat to country’s critical interests over the next ten years,” only 28% of the *leaders* thought so.

More generally, whereas 66% of the public in 2002 thought that “improving the global environment” should be a “very important” goal of foreign policy, only 43% of the leaders thought so. A less large but still sizable gap between the public and the leaders was also evident in the 1998 survey. However, if the data are interpreted more in relative terms and less in absolute terms, the gap does not seem so large (see Table 3). In any case, the question of the nature and magnitude of a public-leader gap on these issues is one that ought to receive further attention in future surveys.

*Table 3. Importance of improving the global environment as a foreign policy goal*

Question: “I am going to read a list of possible foreign policy goals that the United States might have. For each one please say whether you think that it should be a very important foreign policy goal of the United States, a somewhat important foreign policy goal, or not an important goal at all.”

Respondents who replied “very important”				
2002				
	Percent <sup>a</sup>	Rank <sup>b</sup>	Avg., all issues <sup>c</sup>	Range, all issues <sup>c</sup>
Public	66%	na	na	na
Leaders	43%	11/20	44%	21% - 89%
1998				
	Percent <sup>a</sup>	Rank <sup>b</sup>	Avg., all issues	Range, all issues
Public	43%	8/13	52%	24% - 84%
Leaders	27%	7/13	34%	16% - 67%

<sup>a</sup> Percent of respondents who indicated this was “very important”.

<sup>b</sup> Rank of percent indicating “very important” relative to other issues. There were questions about 13 issues in 1998 and 20 issues in 2002.

*Sources:* 1998 data are from CCFR (1999, p. 55); 2002 data are from CCFR/GMF (2002b, ch. 8; 2002d, p. 42).

## 8. Comparisons of US and European Publics

Because the 2002 Chicago Council on Foreign Relations/German Marshall Fund survey was undertaken in parallel with surveys in six countries in Europe, it is possible to make several cross-national comparative observations on key issues. Taken as a group, a population-

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special interest group representatives, and 21 staff members of private foreign policy organisations. Because of the inherent difficulties of defining the universe of “leaders” and sampling them proportionately in sub-groups, precise comparisons with the results of random samples of the adult population are problematic. Additional details about the definitions of the sub-populations and the directories used to draw the sub-samples are available in CCFR/GMF (2000d, Technical Appendix, following p. 57).

<sup>8</sup> There is a small difference between the 48% reported in this context and the 46% reported elsewhere in the reports from the study; the precise figure depends on the sub-sample.

weighted average of 49% of the public in the six European countries thought that global warming was “an extremely important threat” (the highest response category); this was similar to the 46% of the US public that thought it was a “critical” threat (also the highest response category in the US version of the survey).<sup>9</sup> Although only 24% of the Polish respondents expressed this view, the publics in the other five European countries expressing such a high level of concern varied from 42% to 64% (CCFR/GMF, 2002c, 33). In short, the US and European publics appear to have similarly high levels of concern about global warming, and greater levels than the concerns of the US leaders.

Further, the US administration’s handling of global warming received the lowest marks of the fourteen issues that were identified in one series of questions in the same surveys: 77% of the Europeans gave the US administration “poor” or “fair” ratings (13% said “good” or “excellent”). At the same time, 65% of the US respondents rated the administration as “poor” or “fair” in its handling of this issue (25% gave it a rating of “good” or “excellent”). As for individual European countries, the most negative was Britain, where 86% said the US administration was doing only a “poor” or “fair” job (CCFR/GMF, 2002c, 25). See Table 4 for additional details.

An earlier multi-country survey – this one in August 2001 – found disapproval rates of the US rejection of the Kyoto Protocol to be 83% in Britain, 85% in France, 87% in Germany and 80% in Italy (International Herald Tribune, 2001).

*Table 4a. Opinions of the US administration’s handling of global warming: Comparisons of US and European publics*

Question: “How do you rate the George W. Bush administration’s handling of the following problems? Would you say the American administration’s handling of ... global warming ... has been excellent, good, fair, or poor?”

Rating	Percentages	
	US	Europe <sup>a</sup>
1. Excellent	6	2
2. Good	19	11
<i>Subtotal (1+2)<sup>b</sup></i>	25	13
3. Fair	32	27
4. Poor	33	50
<i>Subtotal (3+4)<sup>b</sup></i>	65	77
DK/Other	10	10

<sup>a</sup> Weighted averages based on populations of six countries (see Table 4b).

<sup>b</sup> Subtotals computed by the author.

Source: CCFR/GMF (2002c, p. 25).

<sup>9</sup> The figure for Europe is a weighted average (based on the population sizes) of surveys in Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland. There were 1000 interviews in each country (1001 in France) conducted by telephone (except face-to-face in Poland) during 5-6 July 2002. The US survey was conducted during 1-30 June 2002. There was not a comparable survey of leaders in any of the European countries.

Table 4b. Opinions of the US administration's handling of global warming: Results for six individual European countries

	Percentages					
	UK	Fr.	Ger.	Neth.	Italy	Poland
Excellent	1	1	1	1	3	4
Good	6	5	12	7	13	25
Fair	21	22	30	31	35	21
Poor	65	63	52	54	39	17
DK/Other	7	9	5	8	10	33

Sample sizes: 1000 in each country, except 1001 in France.

Source: CCFR/GMF (2002c, p. 25).

## 9. Conclusions

About two-fifths of the US public is *seriously concerned* about global warming; they consider it a very serious problem and believe that it is already having an effect. At the opposite end of the continuum, there is an *unconcerned* one-fifth – that is, people who do not consider global warming much of a problem and do not worry about it very much or not at all; many of them do not believe that carbon dioxide emissions are a cause of global warming. Between these two groups, there is a *moderately concerned* group consisting of about two-fifths of the population. These are people who think global warming is a problem, but who regard it more as a future threat rather than an imminent threat. The future of government policies will depend partly on whether, when and how much the opinions of this moderately concerned group in the middle shift over time.

As for possible solutions, there is substantial support for a variety of government actions to address global warming issues:

- About two-thirds of the public think the US should participate in the Kyoto Protocol.
- There is more support for mandatory emissions limits than for voluntary programs.
- Approximately half the public say they would approve of government actions to mitigate global warming, even if such measures meant higher electricity or gasoline or other prices.
- Substantial majorities favor government subsidies for research and development of alternative energy sources.
- There has been a majority in favor of US international economic assistance to fund mitigation projects in developing countries.

In an international comparative perspective, majorities of the publics in the US and Europe share a concern about the problem of global warming. They agree in their support for the Kyoto Protocol, and they both disapprove of the US administration's handling of the problem of global warming. The levels of concern, support and disapproval, respectively, on these questions tend to be higher in Europe than in the United States.

On the basis of the survey evidence available to date, US leaders appear to be less concerned than the public in the US (or in Europe) about the problem of global warming, and the leaders are less supportive of the Kyoto Protocol as a policy alternative for dealing with the problem.

Whether such public/leader gaps also exist on other policy alternatives and whether these and other gaps will persist over time can of course only be determined by further research based on additional surveys.

In the future, as climate change issues become increasingly embedded into other issues - such as energy R&D policy, auto emissions policy, and international trade and investment policy – the questions in surveys should reflect the complexity and pervasiveness of climate change issues faced by governments, corporations and NGOs, and thus by the public. There should also be more attention given in future surveys to the apparent gap between public concerns and preferences and those of leaders. Such expansions of the scope of future surveys could advance our understanding of public opinion along several key dimensions.

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