



“Ohio or Bust”

If you tuned in to the Republican National Convention, you probably heard Republican nominee Mitt Romney take a stab at President Obama’s 2008 remarks about slowing the pace of global warming. Romney allowed his line to speak for itself, and delegates and the audience erupted in laughter. Yes, global warming was used as a [laugh line at the RNC](#).

Setting aside the obvious insult to the majority of Americans and [97% of scientists](#) around the world who believe we need to act now to slow and reverse the trend of record high temperatures and melting ice sheets (to name just a few first order effects of global warming), was this a smart campaign strategy? If Romney was trying to win over undecided voters, did he strike the right tone? Or might the global warming laugh line take second place to the now infamous “47% comment” in tipping undecided voters away from Romney?

According to recent polling data, approximately 7% of likely voters remain undecided about whom they will vote for President. And a new national survey released by the [Yale Project on Climate Change Communication](#) finds that undecided voters are far more similar to likely Obama voters than likely Romney voters when it comes to their climate change beliefs and policy preferences. Let’s look at the numbers.

### **Most Undecided Voters Believe Global Warming is Happening**

Most undecided voters (80%) believe that global warming is happening, while only 3% say it is not happening. This compares favorably to likely Obama voters (86% and 4%, respectively). Undecideds are markedly different than likely Romney voters, fewer than half of whom believe global warming is happening (45%), and 33% of whom say global warming is *not* happening.

### **Most Undecided Voters Believe that Humans are the Primary Cause of Global Warming**

Approximately 65% of undecided voters and likely Obama voters say that if global warming is happening, it is mostly human caused. By contrast, only 27 percent of likely Romney voters say that if it is happening, global warming is mostly human caused. A whopping 50 percent of likely Romney voters say global warming is caused by natural changes in the environment and not by humans.

Of course, Romney himself has [previously stated](#) that he believes global warming is happening and is caused by humans—a fact he seems all too eager to ignore during this campaign as he caters to a far-right base.

### **Scientific Consensus on Global Warming is a Grey Area for Undecided Voters**

Undecided voters shift slightly away from likely Obama voters when it comes to their understanding of scientific consensus on global warming. Two out of three likely Obama voters believe that most scientists think global warming is happening, yet less than half (46%) of undecided voters say that most scientists agree on global warming. Nearly as many (42%) think there is still considerable disagreement among scientists. Moreover, 40% of undecided voters say they could “easily change their mind” about global warming, according to the [polling data](#).

Of likely Romney voters, only 22% believe there is scientific consensus that global warming is happening, whereas a solid majority (57%) of likely Romney voters believe “there is a lot of disagreement among scientists.”

Clearly, more work needs to be done in this area to broadly disseminate scientific information on climate change in formats easily digestible by non-scientists, tie more frequent extreme weather events to slower-moving climate change, and expose professional misinformation campaigns that aim to create uncertainty as to climate change. (For more on the disconnect between American beliefs and the overwhelming scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change, see my prior [blog post here](#)).

### **Undecided Voters Want to See Progress on Climate Change Policy and Renewable Energy**

Finally, most undecided voters and likely Obama voters say that President Obama and Congress should be “doing more” about global warming. By contrast, only 35% of likely Romney voters think the President or Congress should be doing more.

All likely voters (including likely Romney voters) agree on one point: the U.S. should use

more renewable energy sources in the future. But, while over half of undecided and likely Obama voters say that the U.S. should use fewer fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas, only 38% of likely Romney voters agree.

### **Campaign (or Global) Tipping Point**

In the end, it's not clear that the global warming laugh line will be a tipping point in the campaign, given the host of other issues and candidate blunders before us. But it is telling on one point: Romney was willing to belittle a critical environmental and human problem for the sake of a laugh or an easy jab at Obama. Of course, his promise to "help you and your family" rather than address climate change simply doesn't ring true. It's not an either/or decision. Without accepting the enormous challenge we face as a nation and international community in addressing climate change, we cannot chart a healthy, economically-productive course forward.