

Proponents of rigorous regulation of greenhouse gas emissions finally have the international stage today as all attention shifts to Copenhagen. And the EPA has chosen this opening day to announce [the finalization of its finding](#) that greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare and therefore must be regulated under the Clean Air Act. Moreover [56 of the world's newspapers](#) — led by The Guardian — issued a joint editorial today urging international action to control greenhouse gas emissions. One important question for me is whether all this attention will reverse some of the damage done by ClimateGate.

I've been puzzling for a week or so about the effect that ClimateGate is likely to have on both domestic and international efforts to limit greenhouse gas emissions. ClimateGate [is the name given](#) to the hacked emails from University of East Anglia scientists from the Climatic Research Unit (CRU). The CRU collects much of the temperature data on which the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change relied in its 2007 report concluding that global warming is "unequivocal." The blogosphere has been abuzz since the emails were released over whether they're substantively damaging or merely a major PR problem. [RealClimate](#), for example, says that the emails contain no great smoking gun:

Most interesting is what is *not* contained in the emails. There is no evidence of any worldwide conspiracy, no mention of George Soros nefariously funding climate research, ... no admission that global warming is a hoax, no evidence of the falsifying of data, and no 'marching orders' from our socialist/communist/vegetarian overlords.

By contrast, some [climate skeptics](#) call Climategate "the final nail in the coffin of 'Anthropogenic Global Warming.'" And other observers, [including credible climate researchers](#), raise concerns about whether climate data are appropriately transparent.

Most observers agree that the emails do not undermine the scientific case for global warming - indeed in addition to the temperature data collected by the British scientists many independent pieces of evidence [confirm](#) the trend and CRU is [not the only organization](#) that analyzes temperature data.. But the real damage from ClimateGate is likely to be a different problem: undermining public belief in the need to control greenhouse gas emissions. One of the most disturbing signs of this problem is a poll [released last week](#) showing that 59 percent of Americans polled "say it's at least somewhat likely that some scientists have falsified research data to support their own theories and beliefs about global warming." Fully 35 percent think such falsification is "very likely." Only 46 percent of those polled believe that global warming is a major problem. And

Americans are not alone in their climate skepticism. Close to half of Britons [polled last week](#) do not believe there's a connection between human activity and climate change, though 52 percent do.

These polling data raise two questions for me. First, can the Copenhagen focus reverse public opinion? And if not, will the public's skepticism hinder both domestic and international action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? I'd be interested in reader reaction to these questions.