

A [poll](#) released last month probed American attitudes toward climate change. The poll was released after the Obama Administration issued its proposed rules for existing power plants to loud cries of protest from industry. The poll was conducted by Stanford University and Resources for the Future, a highly regarded think tank. At the time, the press reported the poll as finding Americans unconvinced that limiting emissions would hurt the economy. But the finding was actually much stronger. Nearly half of Americans (46%) believe that taking action to reduce greenhouse gases would *help* the economy, with another quarter (23%) seeing no impact on the economy.

There were some other significant findings as well. Three-quarters of Americans understand that the world has gotten warmer over the past century. There is some confusion over the causes, however, with a third understanding that the change is caused by humans and about half mistakenly thinking that natural causes also played a role. There is clearly room for better education here.

The public also supports federal action to reduce carbon emissions. Roughly 90% see a federal role in addressing climate change, with half thinking the government should do “a great deal” or “quite a bit”, while another quarter think the government should do a moderate amount. Only 10% think the government should do nothing. In particular, there is support for reducing emissions from power plants, the subject of the new regulations. Over three-quarters think the government should take steps to reduce emissions from power plants. Half of Americans think this should be done by regulation, another quarter endorse tax incentives.

The poll doesn’t show the kind of broad public support for climate action that might be needed for new legislation. But legislative inertia favors EPA on this issue, while its opponents need to muster support for legislative action. As House Republicans are seeking to prevent EPA action, the poll should give some sense of political comfort to the agency’s supporters.