Last February, on the eve of the State of the Union, President Joe Biden embarked on a victory lap for his landmark climate laws. At the time, the White House was focused on explaining to the American people how the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act would boost jobs and lift the economy. Biden did so without uttering the word "climate." I wrote then about this decision to [stay quiet on the climate impacts](#) of his legislation, asking "Can you build political support for climate action without actually connecting it to climate change?"

It's too soon for a definitive answer to that big question. But we are learning how the president's message is landing with voters ahead of the critical 2024 election. "Not well" is the answer, according to the [most recent survey](#) conducted by Yale's Program on Climate Change Communication. One top finding of this [Fall 2023 survey](#) is that more than 40% of registered voters have heard nothing about the Inflation Reduction Act. The survey also finds that fewer than half of registered voters think the IRA will help the country or their family.

It's crucial that we diagnose this disconnect now so that voters who care about climate change are activated in the 2024 election.

The Pitch

It ain't for lack of trying! President Biden's 'Infrastructure Week' victory lap has become 'Infrastructure Year.' Biden seems to be endlessly touring the country to speak at ribbon cuttings. In early December, the president stopped in Las Vegas to say he's "putting high-speed rail on the fast track" by showcasing $8.2 billion in new federal funding for 10 major passenger rail projects across the country. A week before that he was in Colorado talking about how the IRA has helped catapult the U.S. wind industry. And he's promised it's just the start of an "Infrastructure Decade" thanks to the laws' huge subsidies and push for domestic manufacturing.

But his stump speech still skips references to "climate." In Vegas, Biden spoke at length about green infrastructure without using the word, according to prepared remarks. When he did mention "what it's going to mean for the environment," he quickly segued back to jobs: "I'm a big environmentalist. That's why I'm always talking about the environment. When I think 'environment', I think 'jobs.'" The White House's communications strategy ahead of 2024: say "jobs" when they also mean "environment."

Contrast that with how Vice President Kamala Harris spoke about the Biden administration's successes at the UN climate conference in Dubai:

> *"President Biden and I feel a deep sense of responsibility in this moment. We invested roughly a trillion dollars over the next 10 years to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, boost climate resilience, and support adaptation, and build a clean energy economy. The largest investment in climate not only in the history of our country but in the history of the world."*

It's hard to know whether explicitly describing Biden's legislative successes as climate change solutions, like she does there, would improve the response from voters. But it's easy to tell that something's not working here.

The Polling

The IRA is not any more recognizable than it was last year. Yale's polling from a year ago showed that about one in three registered voters (33%) had heard "nothing at all" about the Inflation Reduction Act. And now, after Biden and administration officials have put in all

those miles for all those ribbon-cutting appearances? Four in ten registered voters (41%) have heard "nothing at all" about the IRA, according to the Fall 2023 survey. This year's survey finds that a majority of registered voters (58%) have heard at least "a little" about the IRA but only 36% have heard either "a lot" (12%) or "some" (24%) about it. As for the political breakdown: Liberal Democrats (43%) and conservative Republicans (42%) are the most likely to have heard "a lot" or "some" about the IRA (thanks polarization!) while fewer moderate/conservative Democrats (31%) or liberal/moderate Republicans (23%) have been educated about the law.

There is some good news when it comes to how Americans perceive the benefits of the IRA. Last year, only 26% of registered voters said they thought the IRA would "benefit their family." Now? About 33% of registered voters do—an increase of 7 percentage points. The increases are across the board: 58% of liberal Democrats (+11 points), 48% of moderate/conservative Democrats (+14 points), 19% of liberal/moderate Republicans (+10 points), and 9% of conservative Republicans (+6 points). But when every group is below 50% support, other than Liberal Democrats, that's a problem.

This survey reaffirms that American voters care about global warming and want clean energy solutions. The survey finds 64% of registered voters think developing sources of clean energy should be a high or very high priority for the president and Congress. After respondents were shown a brief description of the IRA, a large majority of registered voters (71%) said they support it (with 35% expressing "strongly support" and 35% "somewhat support"). About seven in ten liberal/moderate Republicans (71%) support the IRA, which Yale says is an increase of 14 percentage points since they last asked this question. There are a lot of voters who—once they learn about the IRA—are on board.

In other words, voters *generally* support climate policies like the Inflation Reduction Act. And they *specifically* support the IRA when they read a description of it. But too many have still not heard about what the law does, and how it will help them and their family.

The Problem

I think the big problem is simply that the salesman is a broadly unpopular president, and he is selling his climate (shhhhh) laws under the "Bidenomics" label. Whether fair or not, that's a hard problem to fix.

There have been attempts at deputizing other messengers. At the start of 2023, the White House described a communications strategy that included collaborating with social media influencers to talk up the benefits of the IRA on TikTok. Anecdotally, I've seen almost no

influencer content praising the Inflation Reduction Act on my feeds. What I have seen is [plenty of questionable solicitations selling solar panels](#) that invoke flimsy or even false information about the federal climate laws in their sales pitch. Like one where a man on a roof says, "It's the easiest money you will ever make… A huge number of ZIP codes have now been improved for the US government's Inflation Reduction Act. If you qualify for this, they will send you an incentive check for $8,500." (They will not). Solar scams that invoke the law don't help build recognition for the IRA. Meta, the parent company of Instagram and Facebook, should be pressured to take down solar scams. (But that's another topic for another day.) What's likely to be more effective than influencers is deploying local officeholders as surrogates to talk about bridges, trains, and manufacturing jobs. I expect we'll see much more of that in coming months from the likes of Governor Gavin Newsom.

The other problem is that it's going to take more than ribbon cuttings to show that these new laws are working. To be clear: [the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act are working as designed](#), but that design is a complex tax incentive structure for creating new supply chains and clean energy industries with fewer immediate benefits to American consumers. It's hard to prove the case after just two years.

Another reason for the disconnect might be that many Americans have tuned out news coverage that would have otherwise introduced them to the Inflation Reduction Act. It's possible these voters will start to tune in next year as primary contests start to happen. Could the very real prospect of a second Trump presidency kill voter complacency?

Here is where the Affordable Care Act may be a guide. Obamacare was unpopular for many years after passing in 2010. The moment that the law's fortunes changed — when its favorable rating finally climbed and its unfavorables sank substantially — was 2017. That's when Republicans and then-President Donald Trump finally came close to dismantling Obamacare. The fear of losing the law gave it new life. Obamacare and Bidenomics do very different things. And frankly the Inflation Reduction Act will be [nearly impossible to repeal](#). It's more likely it could be severely undermined. In any case, the same loss aversion that rescued Obamacare could boost popularity for Biden's climate laws. The only catch is that Americans have to know enough about them to fear losing them.

Which brings us back to the messaging. The driving force in American politics is now negative partisanship: we vote against a candidate we loathe rather than vote for a candidate we love. So, the more Trump rants against clean energy and other popular climate policies — like his [recent, unhinged tirade](#) in Iowa against EVs, John Kerry and "Green New Deal stuff"— the better Bidenomics may look to liberal and moderate voters. That's little comfort. It simply underlines the one thing we can say with 100 percent

confidence. We're about to vote in the most consequential presidential election in the history of the climate crisis.