

A close-up, slightly angled view of a globe focusing on North America. The map shows the United States, Canada, and Mexico, with various cities and geographical features labeled. The Atlantic Ocean is visible to the east. The text 'DATA FOR PROGRESS' is overlaid in white, with a small bar chart icon to the left of the word 'DATA'.

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VOTERS SEE GLARING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN THE USMCA

From: Data for Progress

To: Interested parties

Re: Voters see glaring environmental problems in the USMCA

On December 19, the House of Representatives will vote on the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA). Data for Progress has the most recent polling on this topic¹ as well as on trade issues more broadly. Trade agreements were a central component of the 2016 campaign, and have already moved to the forefront for 2020.

Executive summary

- A majority of voters believe that “trade agreements should address climate change.” An overwhelming 83 percent of Democrats believe trade agreements should address climate change, and independent voters agree by a margin of 12 points. About one in five Republicans also agree. The USMCA does not mention climate change.
- Voters overall strongly support including in trade agreements binding limits on pollution, a requirement to fulfill the Paris Climate Agreement, and the creation of an independent agency to enforce such environmental obligations. The USMCA does not include these environmental protections. About 80 percent of Democratic voters and a clear majority of Independent voters support the inclusion of these environmental protections in trade agreements. Surprisingly, a majority of Republican voters support including binding pollution limits in trade agreements, and a plurality support the creation of independent environmental enforcement agency.
- Voters clearly oppose using trade agreements to empower corporations, particularly oil and gas corporations. By a 48-26 percent margin, voters oppose including in trade agreements tax breaks for tar sands oil. The USMCA includes such a tax break. Democrats and Independents also oppose on net using trade agreements to offer private tribunals for oil and gas corporations in Mexico, or to guarantee opportunities for corporations to challenge proposed health and environmental policies. The USMCA includes both of these.
- While Republican voters have heard the most about the USMCA, no group of voters reports they know much about the USMCA. Fewer than one in seven voters has heard “a lot” about the USMCA. Support for USMCA is driven by Republican voters, 71 percent of whom support USMCA compared to about 26 percent of Democratic voters.
- When we break out the USMCA support by union status, we see that union members are among the least supportive of the USMCA. Controlling for other factors, voters who identify as ideologically conservative or very conservative supported the USMCA far more than other types of voters, while ideologically liberal or very liberal voters, women voters, and black voters are less supportive of the USMCA than others.

¹ On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue fielded a survey of US registered voter as part of its Registered Voter Omnibus. The sample included 1,062 US voters and was weighted to be representative of the population of voters by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US Census region, and 2016 Presidential vote choice.

- On the domestic front, voters strongly support extending tax credits for companies to develop new clean technology, including electric vehicles. Supporters of these tax credits are more likely to oppose USMCA than are opponents of these tax credits.

Who is paying attention to the USMCA?

At the outset of the survey, we asked voters to tell us how much they had heard about the USMCA. We asked:

How much have you heard about the US-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement, also known as USMCA?

<1> I have heard a lot about USMCA

<2> I have heard some things about USMCA

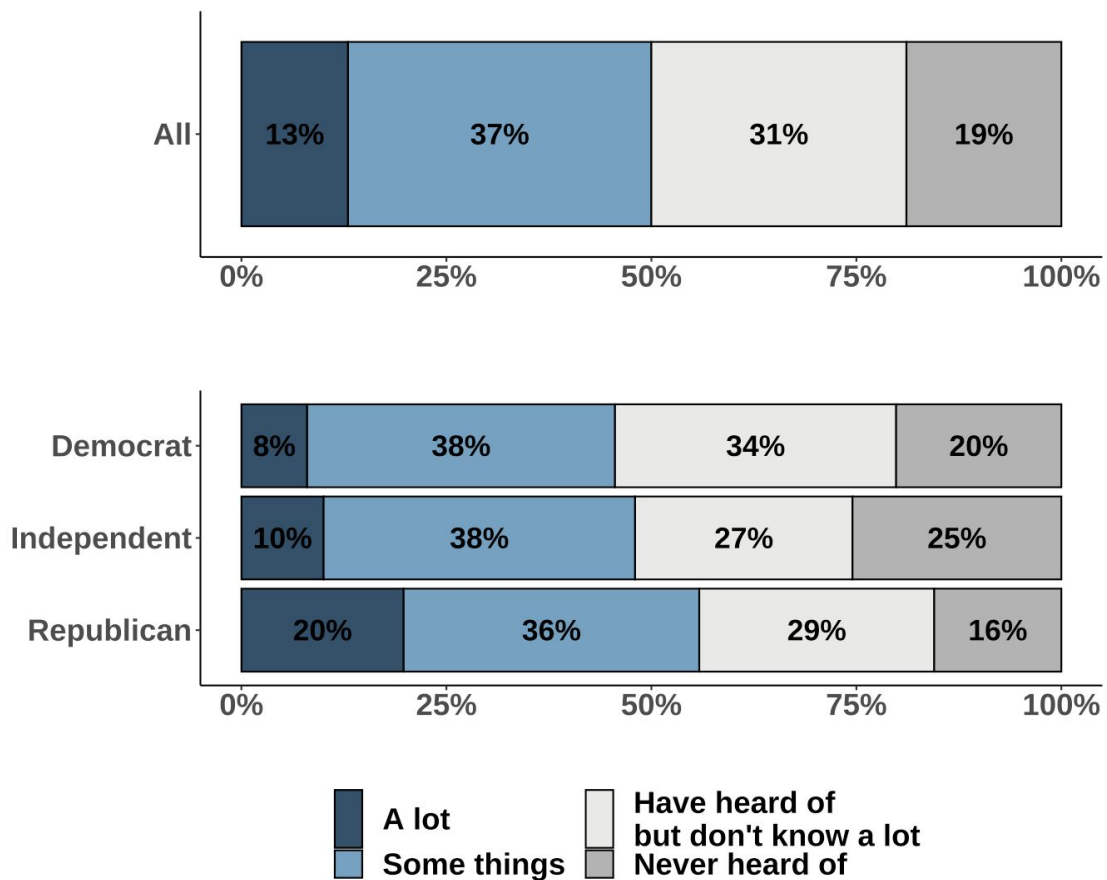
<3> I have heard of the term "USMCA," but I don't know a lot about it

<4> I have never heard of the USMCA

Despite being a supposed signature priority of the Trump administration, most voters have heard little to almost nothing about the USMCA. Only about 13 percent of voters reported they had heard “a lot” about the USMCA, with about 50 percent saying they either don’t know “a lot” or don’t know anything about the USMCA.

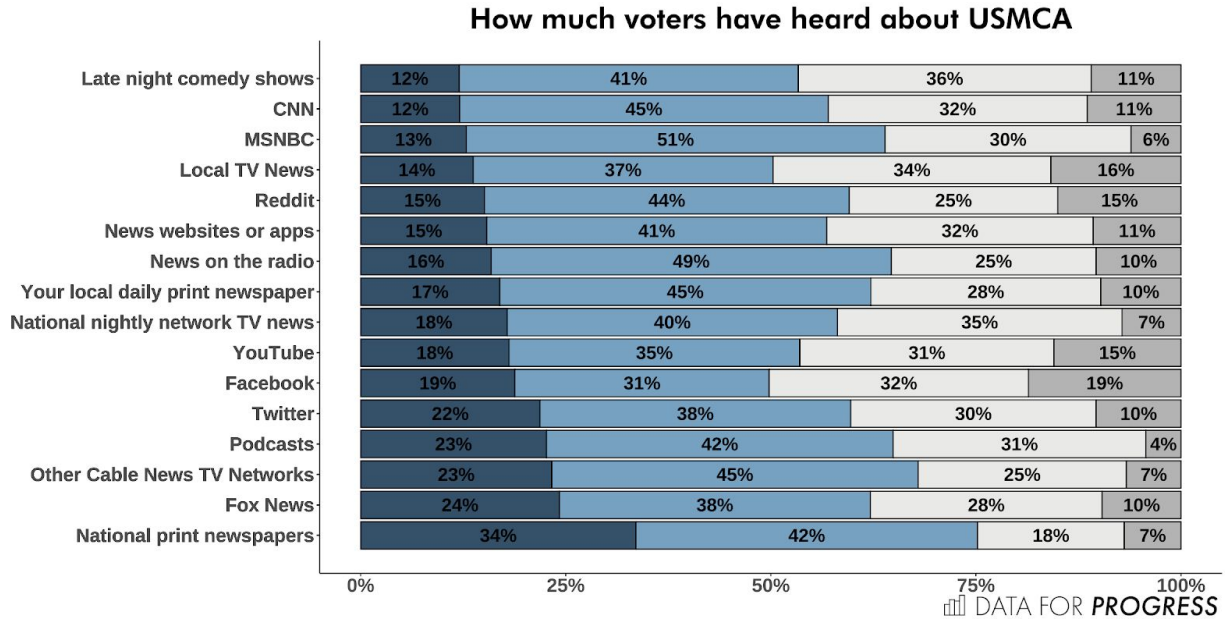
Overall, about half of voters report they have heard at least something about the USMCA. While about one in ten Democratic and independent voters report they have heard “a lot” about the USMCA, twice as many Republicans report having heard a lot about it. Roughly similar quantities of Democrats, independents, and Republicans report having heard “some things” about the USMCA, with Republicans being slightly less likely than Democrats or independents to say they’ve “never heard of” the USMCA.

How much voters have heard about USMCA



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It is not surprising that Republicans report they have heard more about the USMCA than have other types of voters. The mechanism for this is straightforward: Conservative news outlets talk about the USMCA because it is an important policy for the Trump administration. In our survey, we included an item asking voters to tell us about where they get their political news. Broken out by source of news, the top news sources for those who have heard “a lot” about the USMCA included print newspapers and Fox News.



In contrast, only about half as many voters who get their news from CNN or MSNBC report having heard a lot about the USMCA. This is surprising in some respects because of the importance of the policy to the president's agenda. However, in the following section, we will also show that large swaths of voters, particularly independents, have no opinion on the USMCA.

Who supports USMCA?

Next in the survey, we asked voters how they felt about USMCA, before hearing about any specific content in the deal. Specifically, we asked:

President Trump has renegotiated NAFTA, resulting in the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA -- a free trade agreement to replace NAFTA. Congress will soon vote whether or not to approve USMCA.

[rotated]

Supporters of USMCA say the trade deal is a better deal for workers than NAFTA and will support stability for corporations.

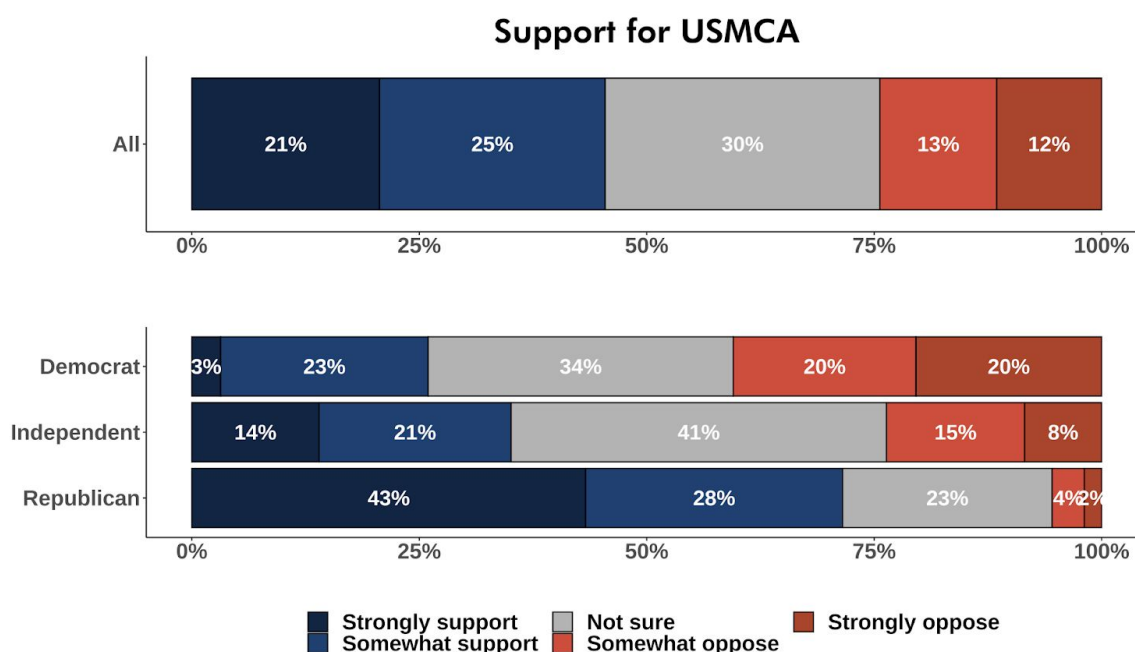
Opponents say the deal would continue NAFTA's track record of job outsourcing and pollution dumping, with added giveaways to big corporations that threaten our air, water, and climate.

Do you [support or oppose] the passage of the USMCA as it is currently written?

In this item, voters were randomly assigned whether to see the “Supporters...” sentence before the “Opponents...” sentence, or vice versa. As typical in research of this kind, we also rotated whether voters were asked if they “support or oppose” the USMCA, or if they “oppose or support” it, with the list of responses ordered appropriately.

Before hearing about the specific content of the deal, 46 percent of voters support the USMCA, with 25 percent opposing it and 30 percent of voters reporting they are unsure how they feel.

While 40 percent of Democratic voters oppose the USMCA and just 26 percent support it, 34 percent are unsure how they feel. Independent voters drive uncertainty on the USMCA. Forty-one percent of independent voters report they are unsure how they feel. Among those who have an opinion, USMCA is favored, 35 percent to 23 percent. In contrast, fewer than one in four Republican voters report they are unsure how they feel, with a clear majority (71 percent) of Republicans reporting they support the deal.



President Trump has renegotiated NAFTA, resulting in the US-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement, or USMCA -- a free trade agreement to replace NAFTA. Congress will soon vote on whether or not to approve USMCA. Do you [support or oppose] the passage of the USMCA as it is currently written?

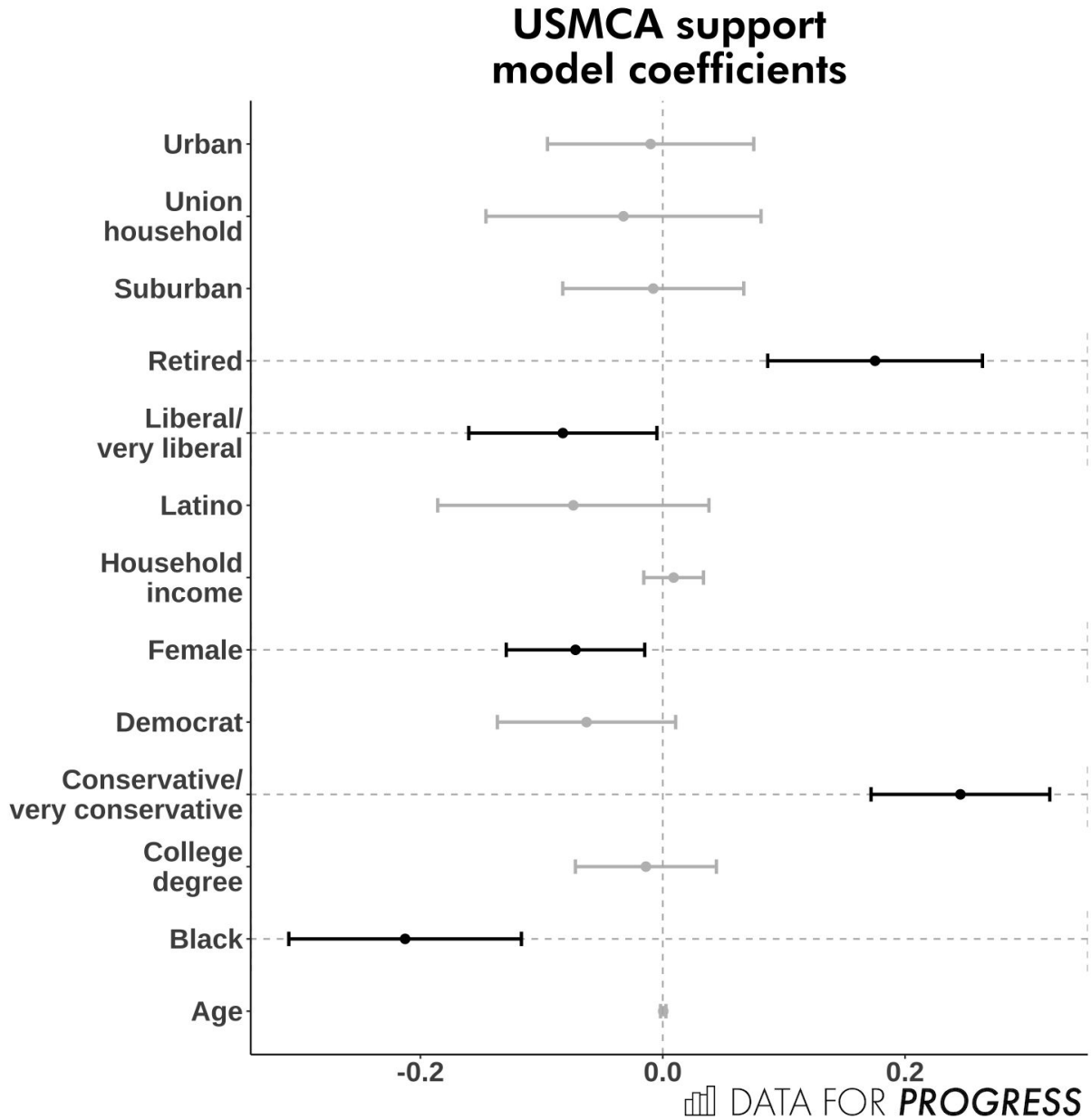
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Notably, controlling for other factors, support for the USMCA is higher among retired voters, men voters, and white voters than it is among other types of voters. To disentangle the complexity of this question, we added demographic and political factors into an ordinary least

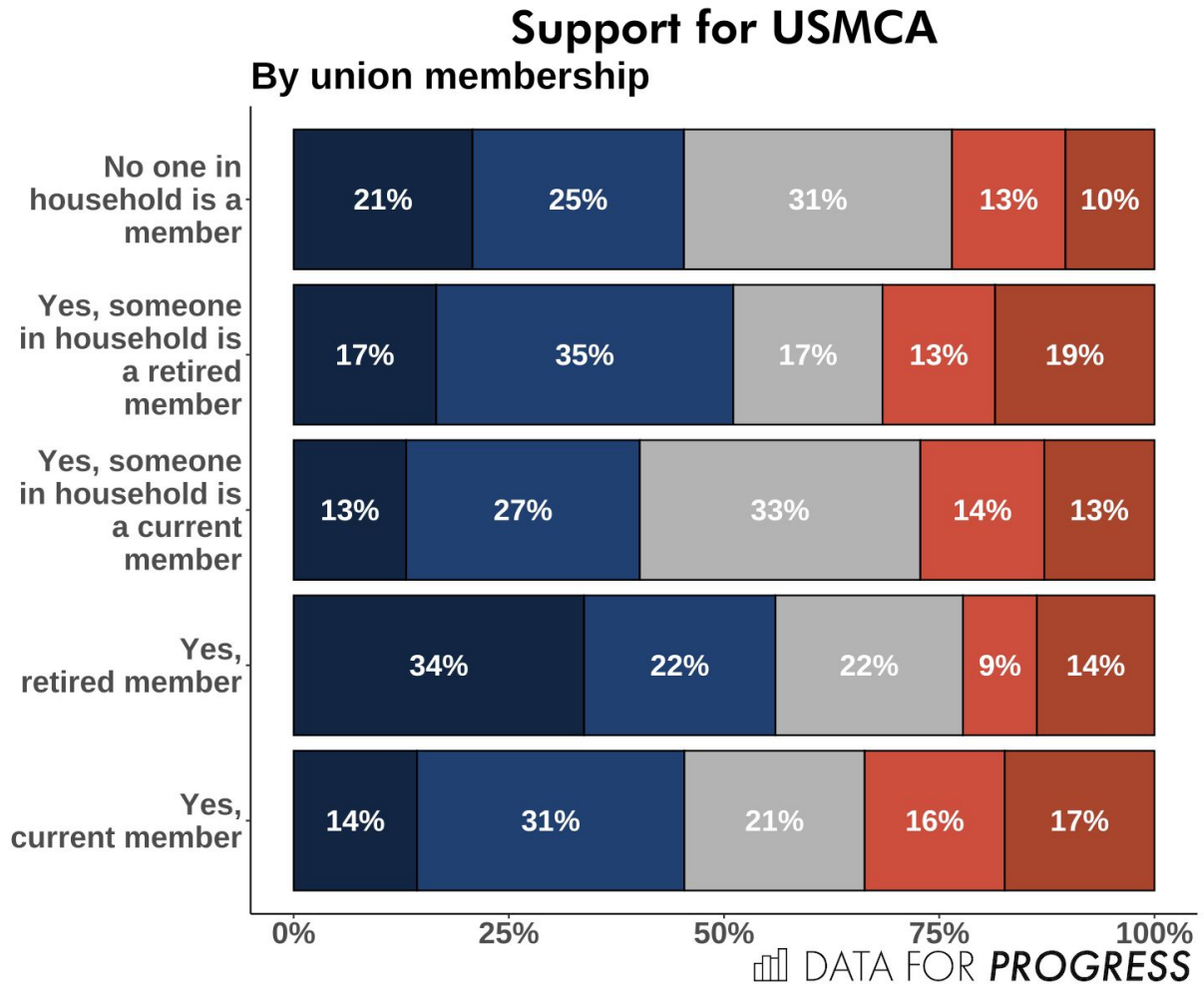
squares model where support for the USMCA was the dependent variable, with higher values representing higher support for the USMCA.

Controlling for other factors, voters who identify as ideologically conservative or very conservative were significantly higher than other types of voters to support the USMCA. Additionally, retired voters were more likely to support the USMCA. On the other hand, voters who identified as ideologically liberal or very liberal, women voters, and black voters are less supportive of the USMCA than others, controlling for other factors.

While there has been some suspicion that the USMCA may be a way for Republicans to appeal to blue-collar workers and union workers, our data do not suggest that this has been successful. Here we included a variable for whether a voter lived in a union household—defined as a household where at least one member is a current or former union member.



Additionally, when we break out union status by USMCA support, we see that union members are among the least supportive of the USMCA. Among current union members, the percent of those who “strongly oppose” the USMCA is higher than nonunion households, and the percent who “strongly support” is lower than in nonunion households. The net margin of support for current union members is also lower than the net margin of support for nonunion households.



Voters support addressing climate in trade agreements

After asking voters about the USMCA itself, we sought to understand how voters feel about what should be included in trade deals. We were also interested in climate change, which is conspicuously absent from current trade negotiations. The USMCA, for instance, [does not once mention](#) climate change. [Environmental groups have criticized](#) the Trump administration for failing to include strong climate and environmental standards and/or an effective environmental enforcement mechanism in the USMCA.

We asked voters:

Some have suggested that modern trade agreements should address climate change.

[rotate]:

Supporters say that trade agreements need to address climate change so that corporations can't simply shift climate pollution and jobs from one country to another.

Opponents say that climate change and trade are unrelated and should be addressed separately so trade agreements can focus on other things.

Do you believe climate change should be addressed in modern trade agreements?

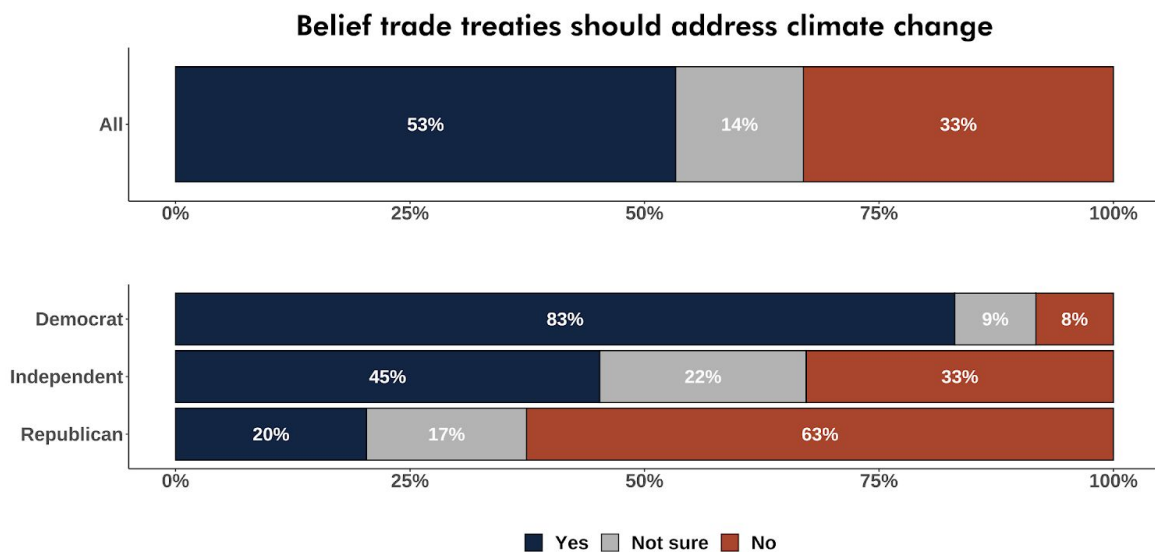
<1> Yes, trade agreements should address climate change

<2> No, trade agreements should not address climate change

<3 fixed> Not sure

Here we pulled out from discussing the USMCA specifically, since additional amendments are unlikely. As with other items, we rotated whether voters saw the “supporters” statement or the “opponents” statement first.

There is much greater certainty on this question than on the question of overall support for the USMCA specifically: Voters believe trade agreements should address climate change, 53 percent to 33 percent. There was much less uncertainty on this than on USMCA itself, with just 14 percent of voters being unsure how they felt on this broader topic.



Some have suggested that modern trade agreements should address climate change. Do you believe climate change should be addressed in modern trade agreements?

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An overwhelming majority of Democrats (83 percent) believe trade agreements should address climate change. Notably, independents also clearly favor agreements that address climate

change, 45 percent to 33 percent. One in five Republicans agree, too, although, by a margin of 43 points, Republican voters do not support addressing climate change in trade agreements.

Next, we asked voters about a series of policies that could theoretically change their support for a trade agreement. The purpose of these items was to see what sort of policies could move voters toward or away from a trade agreements. Our battery of items asked:

Next you will see some policies that could be included or excluded from trade agreements. For each of the following, please say whether you would be [more or less supportive] of a trade agreement if it included that policy.

-[Guarantee for corporations to challenge policies]: A guarantee for corporations to have multiple opportunities to challenge proposed health and environmental policies before they are finalized

-[Private tribunals for oil and gas corporations]: A private legal system for oil and gas corporations to sue Mexico in private tribunals over environmental policies that may inhibit offshore drilling or fracking

-[Tax breaks for tar sands oil]: Tax breaks for oil corporations to export more tar sands oil through cross-border pipelines like Keystone XL

-[Independent environmental enforcement agency]: Creating a new, independent enforcement agency to investigate potential violations of a trade agreement's environmental standards and to recommend sanctions for environmental violations

-[Binding limits on pollution]: Binding limits on air, water, and land pollution to prevent corporations from outsourcing their production and dumping toxic pollution in countries with weaker environmental standards

-[Fulfill Paris Climate Agreement commitments]: Binding standards requiring each country to fulfill its commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement to ensure that corporations do not shift jobs and pollution to countries with weaker climate standards

<1> Much more supportive

<2> Somewhat more supportive

<3> Somewhat less supportive

<4> Much less supportive

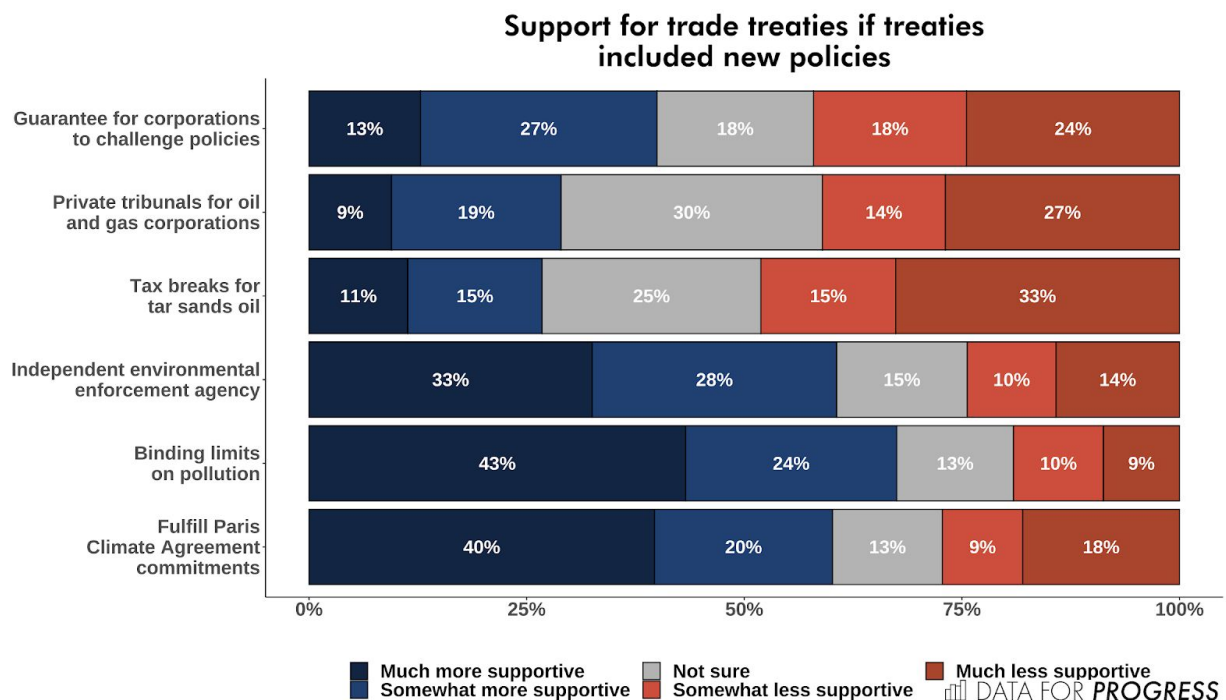
<5> Not sure

By large margins on several of these policies, voters would be more supportive of trade agreements that did more to respond to the threats of climate change and toxic pollution. Sixty-seven percent of voters would be more supportive of a trade agreement that included "binding limits on air, water, and land pollution," versus just 19 percent opposing such limits. And 61 percent would also be more supportive of an agreement that included "Creating a new, independent enforcement agency to investigate potential violations of a trade agreement's environmental standards and to recommend sanctions for environmental violations," versus just 24 percent opposing. Voters also overwhelmingly support including in trade agreements

“binding standards requiring each country to fulfill its commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement,” with 60 percent of voters supporting and 27 percent of voters opposing those standards. (The USMCA includes none of the items mentioned in this paragraph.)

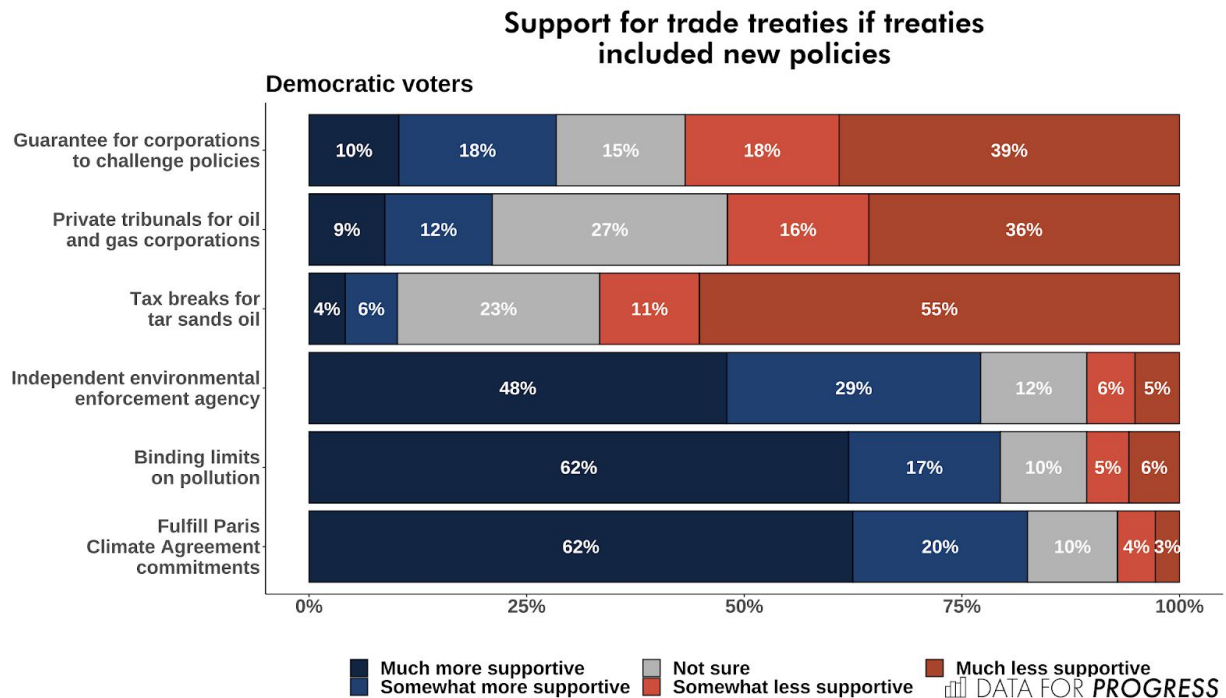
On the other hand, voters clearly oppose using trade agreements to empower corporations, particularly oil and gas corporations. By a margin of 22 points, voters oppose including in trade agreements “tax breaks for oil corporations to export more tar sands oil through cross-border pipelines like Keystone XL.” (The USMCA contains such a tax break for oil corporations.)

Additionally, voters oppose including in trade agreements ways for corporations to challenge health and environmental policies. By a margin of 13 points, voters oppose including in trade agreements “A private legal system for oil and gas corporations to sue Mexico in private tribunals over environmental policies that may inhibit offshore drilling or fracking.” (The USMCA includes this benefit.) By a margin of 2 points, a plurality of voters oppose “a guarantee for corporations to have multiple opportunities to challenge proposed health and environmental policies before they are finalized.” (The USMCA includes this guarantee for corporations.)



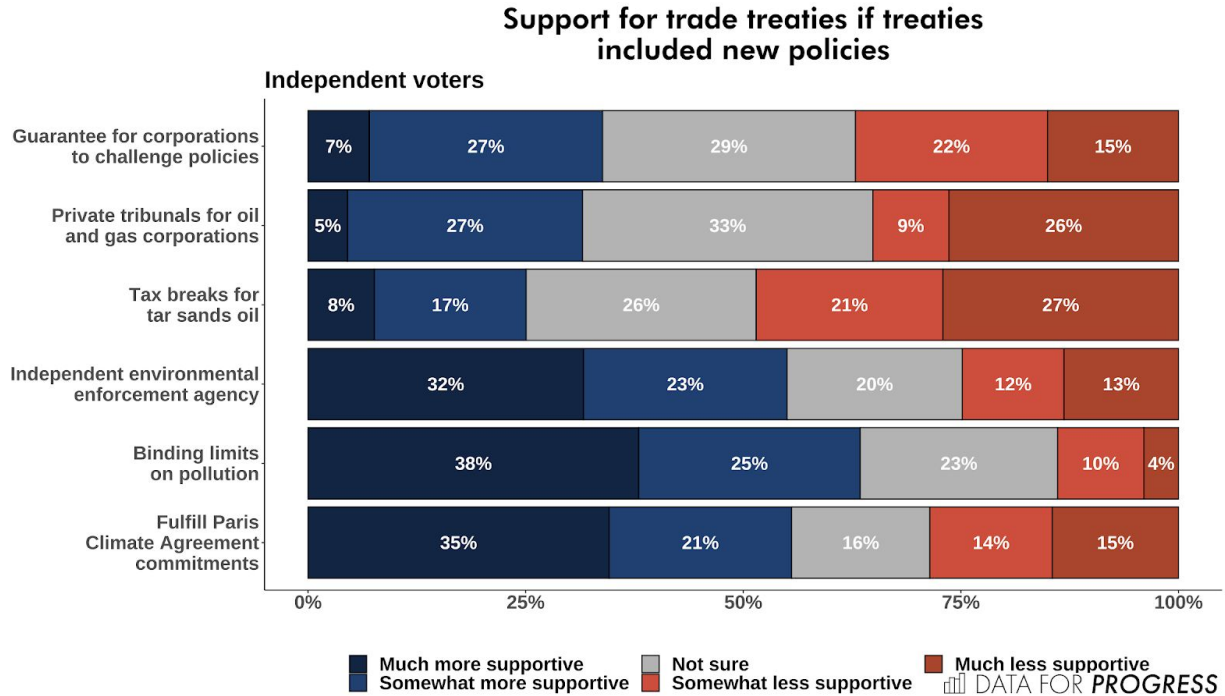
Perhaps not surprisingly, these differences in policy support are stronger for partisans. For example, Democrats clearly support environmental measures in trade agreements, with about 80 percent supporting binding limits on pollution, a binding requirement to fulfill Paris Climate Agreement commitments, and an independent enforcement agency to prevent shirking on environmental obligations. Meanwhile, clear majorities of Democratic voters oppose including in trade agreements tax breaks for tar sands oil, a private legal system for oil and gas corporations

in Mexico, or a guarantee for corporations to be able to challenge proposed health and environmental policies.



Generally, independent voters are closer to Democratic voters in their preferences than they are to Republican voters. By a 3-point margin, independent voters narrowly oppose a measure using trade agreements to guarantee that corporations can challenge new policies. By a 13-point margin, they also oppose a measure including in trade agreements tax breaks for tar sands oil. By a 2-point margin, independent voters also would be less supportive of agreements that included private enforcement tribunals for oil and gas corporations in Mexico.

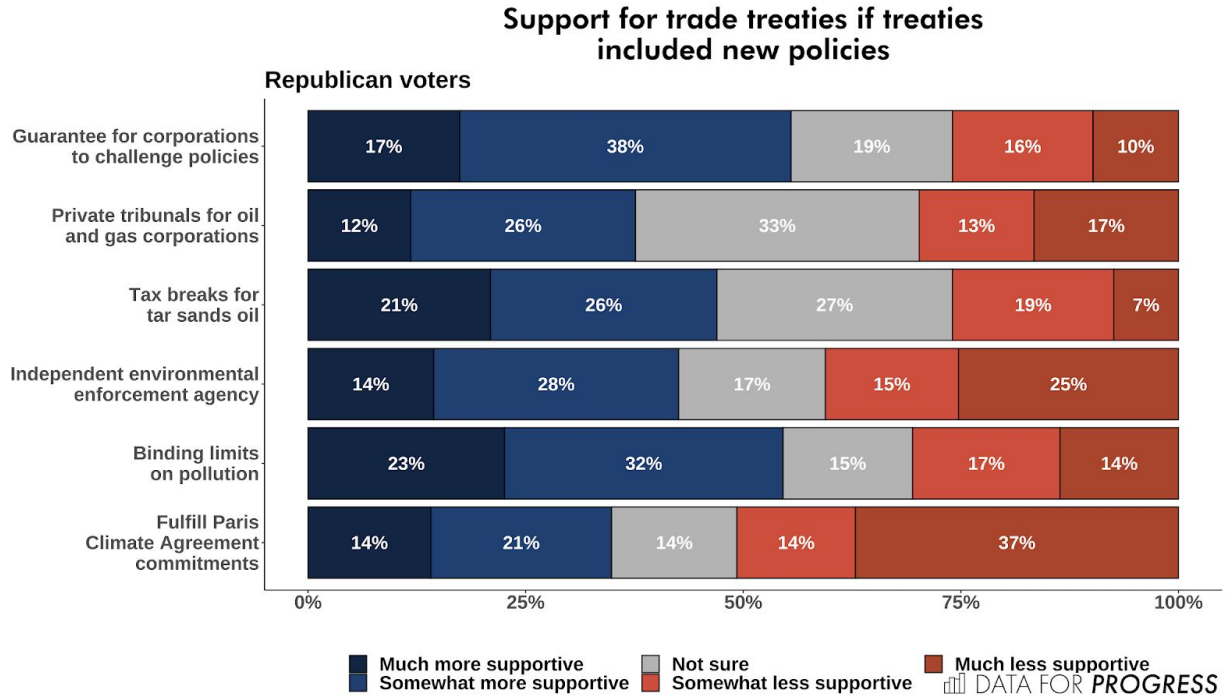
As with Democrats, a clear majority of independents would be more supportive of trade agreements that include binding limits on pollution, a requirement to fulfill Paris Agreement commitments, and the creation of an independent agency to monitor countries' adherence to a trade agreement's environmental standards. While independent voters report slightly higher levels of uncertainty on some of these, the difference between independent voters and partisan voters is not surprising: While Democratic and Republican voters can use a "partisan cue" to inform their preferences, independent voters (by definition) rarely have these cues available to them. Even accounting for this, it is clear that independent voters would be more supportive of trade agreements that included stronger environmental standards and enforcement, and would oppose using trade agreements to expand or entrench bonuses for corporations.



Republican voters are not as opposed to including strong environmental standards in trade agreements as one might expect. Indeed, a majority of Republicans (55 percent) support trade agreements that include limits on pollution to prevent corporations from outsourcing production to countries with lower standards. And by a 2-point margin, Republican voters narrowly support the creation of a new, independent agency to enforce a trade agreement’s environmental standards. More than one in three Republicans say that they would be more supportive of a trade agreement that requires fulfillment of the Paris Agreement.

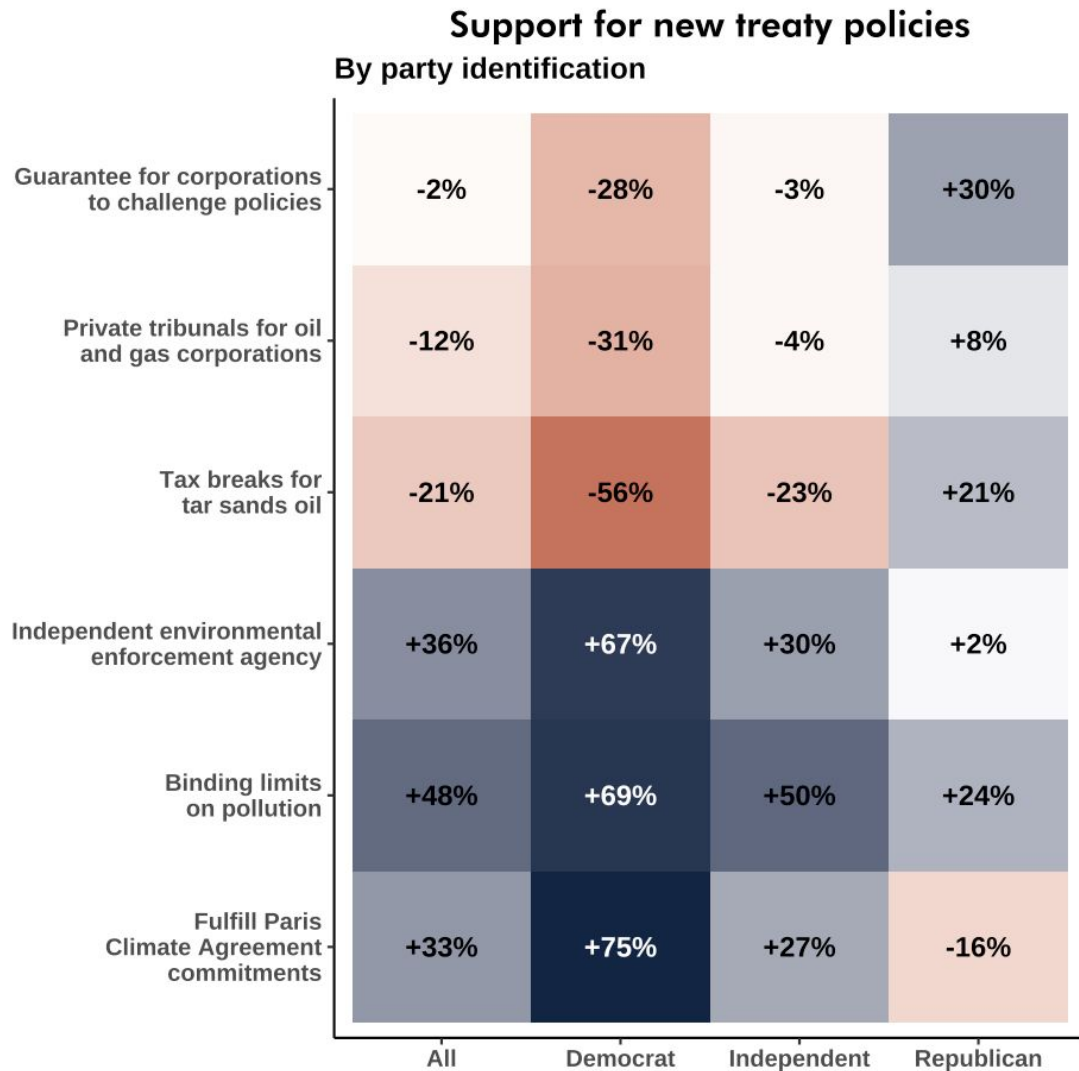
That said, Republicans hold more-conservative views on how trade agreements should help corporations. Fifty-five percent of Republican voters support using trade agreements to guarantee corporations the opportunity to challenge proposed health and environmental policies, compared to just 26 percent who oppose it. About half of Republican voters (47 percent) support including in trade agreements tax breaks for tar sands oil, compared to 26 percent who oppose it.

Notably, even Republican voters are split on the question of private tribunals in trade agreements. Just 38 percent of Republicans say they would be more supportive of agreements that included such tribunals for oil and gas corporations in Mexico, and 30 percent would oppose it. This leaves one-third of Republicans who are unsure how they feel about such tribunals—the same share who are unsure about them as among independent voters.



On net, voters oppose using trade agreements to give tax breaks, private tribunals, and other protections to oil and gas corporations. Voters overall strongly support trade agreement requirements to limit pollution and fulfill the Paris Agreement, and the creation of an independent agency to enforce such environmental obligations in trade agreements. On net, independents match this overall trend, and even Republicans, on net, support binding limits on pollution and a new environmental enforcement agency.

The following chart breaks down the net level of support for new trade deal provisions by party identification and among all voters. In the chart, each cell represents the percent of voters who report that they would be “Much more supportive” or “Somewhat more supportive” of a deal if it included the provision in that row, minus the percent of voters who report they would be “Much less supportive” or “Somewhat less supportive” of a deal that included that provision. Darker blue shading indicates higher net support, and darker red shading indicates higher net opposition. For example, the bottom-left cell shows that, among all voters, about 67 percent of voters support binding limits on pollution minus 19 percent who oppose limits on pollution, for a net support of 48 points on that policy.



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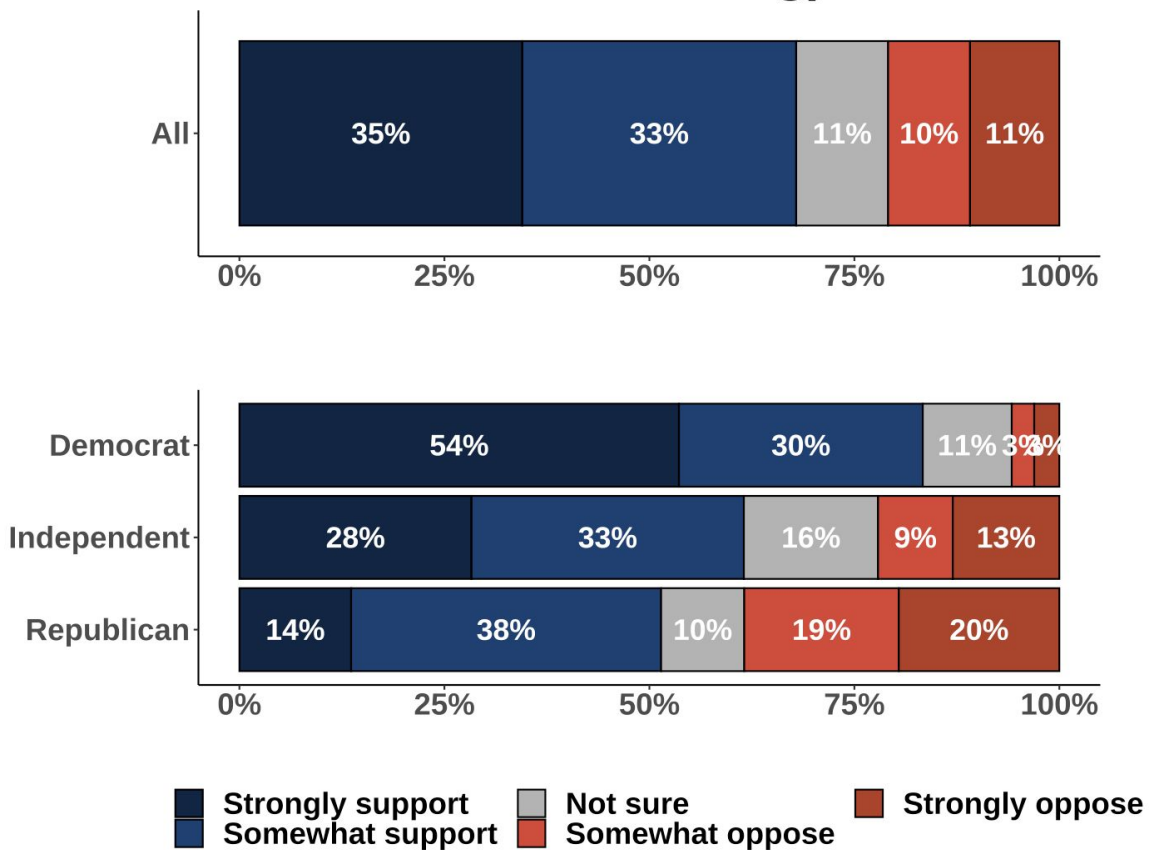
Support for domestic clean-energy incentives

Finally, we asked voters about tax incentives for US producers to invest in clean energy. This item did not explicitly relate to USMCA or trade deals, and came later in the survey. We asked voters:

Currently, the US tax system includes incentives and subsidies for companies to develop new clean energy technology, including electric vehicles. Would you [support or oppose] extending these tax incentives to develop clean energy technology?

Majorities of voters, including outright majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans support extending these tax cuts. This is not surprising: Party identification and ideology are typically strong predictors of policy support, and a policy that includes tax cuts is appealing to conservatives while a policy including clean energy technology is appealing to liberals. A clear majority of 61 percent of Independents support extending these tax incentives.

Support for extending tax incentives for clean energy



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These preferences correlate with support for USMCA. Among those who support extending tax credits for clean energy, just 42 percent support USMCA, while 69 percent of those who oppose extending tax credits for clean energy support USMCA. Opposition to USMCA is more than twice as high among supporters of extending clean energy tax credits (30 percent of whom oppose USMCA) as those who oppose extending the tax credits (13 percent of whom oppose USMCA). Voters who value clean energy are more likely to oppose USMCA as currently written.

Conclusion:

A clear majority of voters are ready to rejoin the Paris Agreement, and believe that stricter environmental standards should be part of the global-trade regime. On nearly every issue tested, independents side with the Democratic position. Voters support treaties that use the international system to the benefit of the United States as well as to combat climate change and corporate malfeasance. Voters of all parties also support extending tax credits for clean energy.