



## The Lack of “Crisis” Over Climate Change

Why have we seen a surge of public action on same-sex marriage but so little action on climate change?

Opposition to climate change legislation is based on political ideology—too much government. Opposition to same-sex marriage is based on religious values—it’s against Scripture.

You would think that religious values would be a far bigger obstacle than political ideology. Yet we’ve seen a much larger shift in public opinion on same-sex marriage than on climate change.

Why? Because personal experience trumps both religion and ideology.

The purpose of the new, 841-page National Climate Assessment is to create a sense of crisis. It’s full of alarming descriptions of catastrophic weather events happening around the country. You have to have a crisis in order to get Washington to act. That’s what’s missing in the case of climate change. Most Americans think climate change is a problem but not a crisis. For a while, resistance to same-sex marriage was a crisis. But then, a surprising thing happened: the crisis driving the anti-same-sex marriage movement disappeared.

Americans do believe climate change is real. Two-thirds of the public accepts evidence that the earth is warming, and a majority (57%, according to Gallup) thinks it is caused more by human activity than by natural changes in the environment. What’s missing, however, is the

widespread personal experience of a crisis. That’s crucial if government is to act.

By comparison, we have seen an extraordinary amount of public action in recent years on the issue of same-sex marriage. Did the country experience a marriage crisis? It did, but not in the way you would expect.

The U.S. government is set up to fail. The Founding Fathers, who had just fought a revolution against a king, wanted the federal government to be as weak as possible. Their first template, under the Articles of Confederation in 1777, was so weak it was unworkable. It was replaced by the Constitution, with its

elaborate checks and balances. The idea was to make decisive government action difficult.

But the government does work when there is a crisis—when an overwhelming sense of urgency overwhelms blockages and lubricates the system. Then things get done—sometimes with amazing efficiency.

That’s where public opinion comes in. It plays a crucial role never envisioned by the Constitution. Public opinion makes government work, but there has to be an overwhelming sense of urgency.

Politicians know that—which is why they are always hyping issues. They try to declare a drug crisis or an education crisis. Or they try to rally the country to fight a “war” on something—a war on drugs, a war on poverty, a war on terror.

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What distinguishes a real crisis from a phony crisis? Public urgency. If the public urgency is not authentic, opponents won't have much trouble blocking government action. That's what's happening now with climate change.

The climate report claims, "Americans are noticing changes all around them." Are they? In a January *Wall Street Journal*-NBC News poll, "addressing the issue of climate change" was rated the least important of 15 priorities tested. Only 27% of the public called it a top priority—far below jobs, the deficit, the minimum wage, government surveillance and immigration.

With no sense of impending crisis, action on climate change is easily blocked by conservatives who oppose it for ideological reasons. "With this report," Senator Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) told *Politico*, "the president is attempting to once again distract Americans from his unchecked regulatory agenda that is costing our nation millions of job opportunities and our ability to be energy independent."

Opposition to same-sex marriage briefly became a crisis. After a court in Hawaii moved to potentially legalize same-sex marriage in 1993, there was a wave of panicky resistance around the country. It led to passage of the Defense of Marriage Act, signed by President Bill Clinton in 1996 (and overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2013).

Eventually, Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage in 2004. Eleven states passed ballot measures to ban same-sex marriage in the November 2004 election. By mid-2012, measures banning same-sex marriage had been put to a vote in 32 states. They passed everywhere they were on the ballot.

Then, suddenly, everything changed. In the 2012 election, measures to legalize same-sex marriage passed in all four states where they were on the ballot. Public resistance was collapsing. Opposition to same-sex marriage dropped from 55% in 2003 to 34% in 2014, according to the *Washington Post*-ABC News Poll.

What happened? Same answer as on climate change: personal experience. As same-sex

marriage became a reality, people discovered that it posed no threat to traditional marriage—or to their religious values.

Then there was the "Dick Cheney factor." More Americans, like the former vice president, reported that they had a gay relative, friend or co-worker. (In Cheney's case, one of his daughters.) In 1985, according to Gallup, 24% of Americans said they knew an openly gay person. By 2013, that number had risen to 75%.

Personal experience trumps religion and ideology. On the issue of same-sex marriage, personal experience caused the "crisis" over same-sex marriage—which was very real in 2004—to disappear.

In the case of climate change, the absence of personal experience means the crisis has never materialized, so it's become an issue of what you believe. The Koch brothers have spent an estimated \$61 million on a campaign to convince Americans that climate change is a hoax. With some success, apparently.

It's rather like Galileo in 1633 being forced by the Holy Inquisition to renounce his "heretical" view that the Earth revolves around the sun. Galileo did. After which, the great scientist remarked, "Eppur si muove"—"And yet it moves."

In the end, it really doesn't matter what people believe. Facts are facts. ■



## More Latinos, Fewer Catholics

In 2010, two-thirds of Latinos identified as Roman Catholics. Three years later, the percentage of Catholics dropped to 55%.

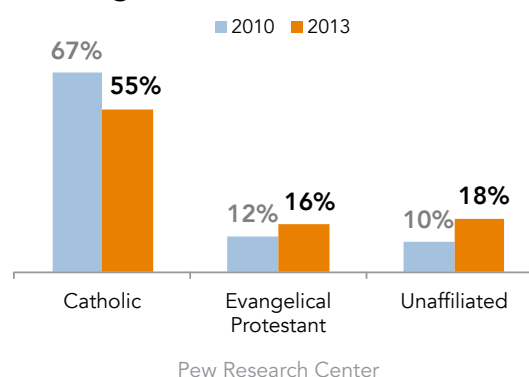
Losing their religion? Not exactly. Evangelical Protestant churches support a major missionary effort in Latin America as well as among Latinos in the United States. Over the last three years, the percentage of evangelical Protestants among U.S. Latinos has risen from 12% to 16%.

But Protestants are not the only religious category that's growing. The percentage of Latinos who say they are "unaffiliated" with any organized religion has jumped from 10% to 18%. In 2013, nearly one third of Latinos under 30 said they were unaffiliated.

These changes make a difference politically. Latino Catholics are 58% Democrats. Among the unaffiliated, the Democratic percentage rises to 64%. Among evangelical Protestants, it drops to 48%. Republicans do best among evangelical Latinos (30%), worst among the unaffiliated (16%).

So as Latino Catholics decline, is Democratic support rising or falling among Latinos? The answer is, both. It depends on their religion.

**Religious Affiliation of Latinos**



## Don't Count on the Kids

Voters under 30 voted 60% for President Obama in 2012. Can they be counted on to vote Democratic for Congress this year? The answer is no. Just ask them.

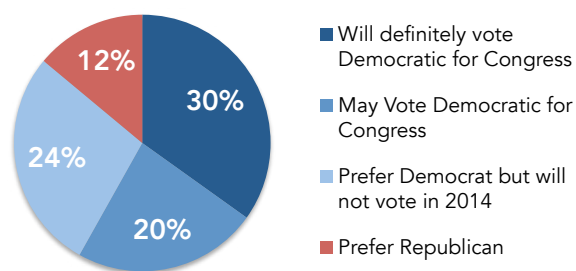
The Youth Engagement Fund and Project New America did just that in a poll of Millennials (ages 18 to 31). Asked whether they will definitely vote for President in 2016, 55% said yes. Will they definitely vote for Congress this year? Only 28% said yes. About half as many.

Even 2012 millennial Obama voters can't be counted on.

Only half of 2012 Obama voters say there's even a chance they will vote Democratic in 2014. Another quarter prefers a Democrat but say they won't vote. Very few say they would prefer a Republican for Congress. But the idea of turning out to save the Democratic Senate and protect the Obama legacy doesn't seem to move most Millennials.

What's missing is the element of personality that you get in a presidential race. Young people were excited about Obama in 2012 (and turned off by Mitt Romney). They are unlikely to muster the same excitement about voting for Kay Hagan or Mark Pryor.

**Among 2012 Obama Voters...**

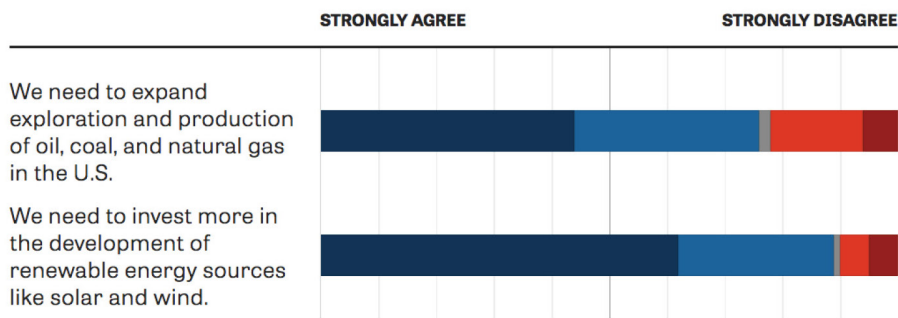


Youth Engagement Fund and Project New America

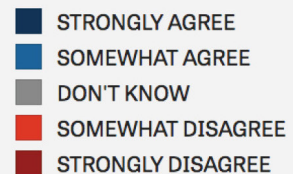
# The State of the Center

Third Way's inaugural *State of the Center* survey takes a deep look at the values that animate the center of the electorate. The results shed significant light on the unique perspectives of moderate voters, who wrestle with and often reject the either/or ideological choices so prevalent in modern politics. Rather, they frequently recognize that both sides have a piece of the truth, which colors their views on government, politics, and specific policy issues. In short, moderates aren't mushy — they're multifaceted.

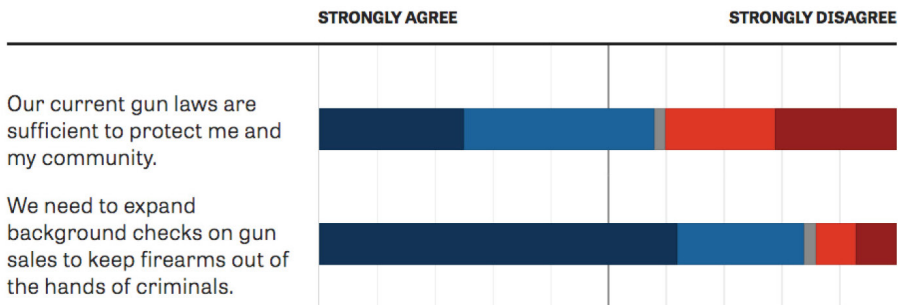
## MODERATES ON ENERGY



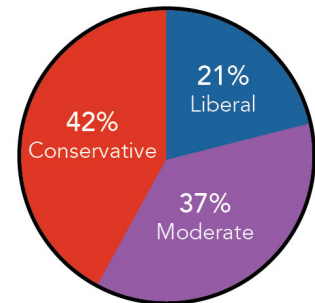
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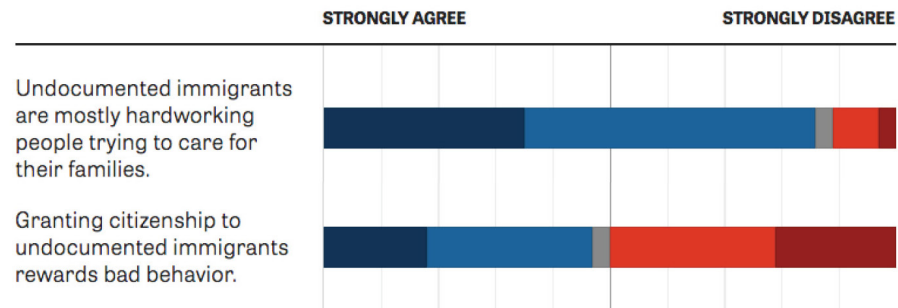
## ... ON GUNS



## IDEOLOGICAL BREAKDOWN: ALL VOTERS



## ... ON IMMIGRATION



## IDEOLOGICAL BREAKDOWN: MILLENNIALS

