



Results from Nationally Representative Survey on Climate Liability Lawsuits, Messages, and Issue Support

February 2019

Introduction and Context

As the Center for Climate Integrity (CCI) continues to build campaigns and infrastructure to support climate litigation as a pathway to redress costs for climate impacts and adaptation projects, it's important to gauge how citizens outside the environmental advocacy space view these legal efforts and respond to the campaign's key messages.

This survey expands on smaller online surveys (two national and two state-specific) completed in 2017. With 16,798 registered voters responding, this survey is nationally representative and can be downscaled to the county and city levels, forthcoming this spring (notes on methodology included after results).

The results — which echo on-the-ground evidence from pilot campaigns in California and Florida — confirm: American voters support holding climate polluters responsible for the costs of climate adaptation. And when respondents receive the two pillars of climate liability messaging, industry climate deception and examples of real climate change costs, both the strength of support and the proportion of those saying “they should pay” increase.

Top Line Findings

Large majorities of voters support holding climate polluters responsible for climate costs.

Even before reading about industry deception, 7 in 10 respondents said that oil and gas companies should be responsible for some portion of costs to protect communities from climate change. Similarly, 71% of respondents said they “strongly” or “somewhat” support suing climate polluters to help pay for damages related to climate change.

Reminding respondents of industry deception increases the amount of responsibility respondents attribute to oil and gas companies around climate impacts and their support to hold polluters legally responsible for costs. A baseline 68% of respondents said they hold oil and gas companies “very” or “somewhat” responsible for climate impacts such as sea level rise, concentrated downpours, and extreme heat. The total figure jumps to 83% — and “very” responsible jumps from 23 to 42% — after reading about industry deception. More importantly, the proportion of respondents who identified oil and gas companies as the entity *most*

responsible for paying for climate adaptation surges from 22 to 45% after reading about industry deception and legal efforts around liability.

There is bipartisan support to make climate polluters help taxpayers with climate costs.

Consistent with existing research about climate change opinions and policy preferences, these data show correlations between political ideology and opinions about willingness to hold climate polluters responsible. That said, after reading about deception and ongoing legal efforts, majorities of Independents (64%) and Republicans (62%) said climate polluters should pay some of the costs of climate adaptation. Fifty-nine percent of Republicans and 68% of Independents said they support lawsuits to hold climate polluters responsible. Four in 10 Independents named oil and gas industry as *most* responsible for climate adaptation costs; 37% of Republicans said the same.

Respondents report they agree with the industry’s primary pushback message — that we are all responsible for climate change through daily activities such as driving, heating our homes, etc. — but at the same time say climate polluters should be helping with costs. There is some cognitive dissonance going on that undoubtedly needs to be explored more and through other methodological approaches. But it’s important to note that the notion that respondents see themselves as contributing to the larger problem does not dampen support for holding climate polluters responsible. If anything, learning about deception and ongoing legal efforts lowers the intensity of individuals’ agreement. Initially, 43% of respondents said they “strongly” agree that every person is responsible for climate change through daily actions, for instance; that figure drops to 35% after learning about industry deception and ongoing liability efforts.

Methodological Notes

16,798 registered voters in the United States completed the survey via online panel from January 22 to 28, 2019. The sample was weighted based on the U.S. Census Bureau’s Voting and Registration Supplement to the Current Population Survey for registered voters in the United States based on age, gender, race, educational attainment, census region, and Hispanic ethnicity.

Figures may or may not sum to 100% and this is due to the effects of rounding and weighting. The sample has not been normalized, nor have poststratification weights been applied. The standard deviation of the weights was 0.231115. The maximum weight was 2.7508007. The minimum weight was 0.3651548. Ninety-five percent of weights were between 0.5329689 and 1.5201713. Each reported N-size is the weighted N-size. Each stratum’s N-size may or may not add up to the total N-size for any one specific question, and this is due to the effects of rounding and weighting.

The 95% credibility interval for this survey is +/- 0.8%, which includes the square root of the design effect (DEFT): 1.0263581.