



# GREENPEACE

## Silence on Climate

### Presidential Debate Moderators Rarely Ask About Climate Change

#### *Key Finding*

**Only about one percent of presidential debate moderator questions mention climate change.**

The year 2015 was the hottest on record.<sup>1</sup> Polar ice is melting faster than expected<sup>2</sup> and the oceans are rising faster than expected.<sup>3</sup> Three quarters of voters want to maintain or strengthen environmental standards.<sup>4</sup> Americans support the Obama Administration's Clean Power Plan, an effort to address climate change by reducing pollution from coal-fired power plants, by a 2-to-1 margin.<sup>5</sup> A solid majority of

<sup>1</sup> Justin Gillis. "2015 Was Hottest Year in Historical Record, Scientists Say," *The New York Times* (Jan. 20, 2016), <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/21/science/earth/2015-hottest-year-global-warming.html>

<sup>2</sup> James Hansen, Makiko Sato, Paul Hearty et al. "Ice melt, sea level rise and superstorms: evidence from paleoclimate data, climate modeling, and modern observations that 2 °C global warming could be dangerous," *Atmospheric Chemistry and Physics* (March 22, 2016), <http://www.atmos-chem-phys.net/16/3761/2016/acp-16-3761-2016.html>

<sup>3</sup> Robert M. DeConto and David Pollard, "Contribution of Antarctica to past and future sea-level rise," *Nature* (March 31, 2016), <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v531/n7596/full/nature17145.html>

<sup>4</sup> Natural Resources Defense Council, Press Release: New Bipartisan Poll: Americans Embrace Climate Action, Clean Energy & Health Protections (Jan. 22, 2015), <https://www.nrdc.org/media/2015/150122>

<sup>5</sup> Hart Research Associates poll c/o Climate Action Campaign and League of Conservation Voters (June 16, 2014),

Americans say addressing global warming is a priority.<sup>6</sup> The overwhelming consensus of climate scientists is that the world is facing extreme risks from catastrophic climate change, and must take far-reaching action to avert severe and irreversible damage to the planet.<sup>7</sup> The news media is replete with warnings over new aspects of the fast-unfolding disaster.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the presidential debate moderators rarely raise questions about climate change.

Of more than 1,000 questions asked during the 21 presidential debates so far, only 12 questions involved climate change.

According to the moderators, several of those 12 questions were directly prodded by social media or local mayors for whom climate change is a priority.

Only half of the 12 questions asked the candidates to explain their position on climate change. (Others dealt with the politics surrounding climate policy.)

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<http://www.lcv.org/issues/polling/public-support-for-clean.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Yale Project on Climate Change Communication and George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, *Public Support for Climate and Energy Policies in November 2013*, page 5, <http://environment.yale.edu/climate-communication-OFF/files/Climate-Policy-Report-November-2013.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)], <http://ar5-syr.ipcc.ch/>

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Michelle Innis, "Climate-Related Death of Coral Around World Alarms Scientists," *The New York Times* (April 9, 2016), <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/world/asia/climate-related-death-of-coral-around-world-alarms-scientists.html>

### *Methodology*

**Public Citizen compiled transcripts of the 21 Democratic and Republican 2016 presidential debates that had taken place through March 24, 2016. All Democratic debates were included in the analysis. Only the main Republican debates were included (the so-called “undercard” Republican debates consisting of comparatively low-polling candidates were not included).**

**Transcripts were searched for the following key words to seek mentions about climate change and related issues. The number of times each term can be found in the transcript follows each term:**

**climate - 92**

**climate change - 79**

**carbon - 15**

**global warming - 2**

**greenhouse - 0**

**green house - 0**

**Uses of the term “climate” that were not in reference to “climate change” referenced to unrelated issues (such as the “political climate”). There was no mention of carbon or global warming that did not also invoke the term “climate change” (so the inclusion of these terms did not add to the 12 moderator mentions).**

## Appendix I: Tally of Moderator Mentions of Climate Change

Date of Debate	Party of Debate	Moderator	Quote
9/16/2015	Republican	Jake Tapper (CNN)	We received a lot of questions from social media about <b>climate change</b> . Senator Rubio, Ronald Reagan's secretary of state, George Shultz, reminds us that when Reagan was president he faced a similar situation to the one that we're facing now. There were dire warnings from the mass consensus of the scientific community about the ozone layer shrinking. Shultz says Ronald Reagan urged skeptics in industry to come up with a plan. He said, do it as an insurance policy in case the scientists are right. The scientists were right. Reagan and his approach worked. Secretary Shultz asks, why not take out an insurance policy and approach <b>climate change</b> the Reagan way? [...] Governor Christie, you have said that <b>climate change</b> is real, and that humans help contribute to it. Without getting into the issue of China versus the United States, which I understand you've talked about before, what do you make of skeptics of <b>climate change</b> such as Senator Rubio? [...]
10/13/2015	Democratic	Anderson Cooper (CNN)	And we want to - and we're going to talk more about <b>climate change</b> and environmental issues coming up. Some of the candidates have tried marijuana, as have pretty much - probably everybody in this room. [...] We've got - we - a lot of questions we've got about <b>climate change</b> , and we're gonna go to Don Lemon. Don? [Don pivots to voter Anna Bettis] As a young person, I'm very concerned about <b>climate change</b> and how it will affect my future. As a presidential candidate, what will you do to address <b>climate change</b> ? [Cooper's follow up question]: Senator Sanders, are you tougher on - on <b>climate change</b> than Secretary Clinton?
10/28/15	Republican	Becky Quick (CNBC)	Governor Christie, you've said something that many in your party do not believe, which is that <b>climate change</b> is undeniable, that human activity contributes to it, and you said, quote: "The question is, what do we do to deal with it?". So what do we do?
11/10/15	Republican	Maria Bartiromo (Fox Business)	Senator Paul, you were one of 15 republicans to vote for an amendment which states that human activity contributed to <b>climate change</b> . President Obama has announced an aggressive plan to cut carbon emissions. Is it possible to continue this boom, and move toward energy self-sufficiency, while at the same time pursuing a meaningful <b>climate change</b> program?
11/14/15	Democratic	John Dickerson	Senator Sanders, you said you want to rid the planet of ISIS. In the previous debate you said the greatest threat to

		(CBS)	national security was <b>climate change</b> . Do you still believe that?
1/17/16	Democratic	Lester Holt (NBC)	<p>Many Democratic voters are passionate about the need to do something to combat the threat of <b>climate change</b>, including the theme of scientists from YouTube’s Minute Earth channel, here’s their take.</p> <p>Scientists: Fighting human-caused <b>climate change</b> means giving up our global addiction to fossil fuels and (UNINTEL) the bulk of the world’s energy supply to alternative sources. Some countries have acted decisively to make this transition. But here at home, we still get a whopping 82% of our energy from coal, oil, and natural gas. [...] In the U.S., political gridlock, pressure from industry lobbyists, and insufficient R&amp;D have made an already tough battle against <b>climate change</b> even tougher.</p> <p>Holt: Senator Sanders, Americans love their SUVs, which spiked in sales last year as gas prices plummeted. How do you convince Americans that the problem of <b>climate change</b> is so urgent that they need to change their behavior?</p>
1/28/16	Republican	Bret Baier (Fox News)	<p>Senator Rubio, on the issue of climate change, in 2008, you wanted Florida to get ahead of other states and establish a cap- and-trade system, a program for carbon emissions, which many Republicans thought at the time would hurt the Florida economy. Now, you're a skeptic of climate change science. And in fact, you warn that federal efforts to fight climate change will cost U.S. jobs and hurt the U.S. economy.</p>
2/4/16	Democratic	Chuck Todd (MSNBC)	<p>So there are three big lifts that you’ve talked about: immigration, gun reform, climate change. What do you do first? Because you know the first one is the one you have the best shot at getting done.</p>
3/6/16	Democratic	Anderson Cooper (CNN)	<p>The issue of <b>climate change</b> has been a major talking point for both of you. I wanted to bring in Sarah Bellaire, she’s a student at the University of Michigan at Dearborn who says she’s currently undecided.</p> <p>Ms. Bellaire has a question on fracking, which, for viewers, is a process of oil and gas drilling that’s led to a significant increase in American energy production and jobs, but also raises serious environmental concerns.</p> <p>Sarah, your question is for Secretary Clinton, but you’ll both be able to weigh in. Sarah?</p> <p>QUESTION: Fracking can lead to environmental pollution including, but not limited to, the contamination of water supply. Do you support fracking?</p>
3/6/16	Democratic	Anderson Cooper (CNN)	<p>Secretary Clinton’s gonna be able to respond. But, Senator Sanders, you’ve been very tough lately. Last week, you said this about Secretary Clinton. Quote, “just as I believe you can’t take on Wall Street while taking</p>

			<p>their money, I don't believe you can take on <b>climate change</b> effectively while taking money from those who would profit off the destruction of the planet.”</p> <p>Are you suggesting that she's in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry?</p>
3/9/16	Democratic	Karen Tumulty (Washington Post / Univision)	<p>I'm going to call time here because I want to move on to a subject that more than two dozen Florida mayors have asked to raise with you. They have asked us to share with you their concern over the effects of rising sea levels and <b>climate change</b> in their communities.</p>
3/10/16	Republican	Jake Tapper (CNN)	<p>Mayor Regalado told me, quote, “<b>Climate change</b> means rising ocean levels, which in south Florida means flooding downtown and in our neighborhoods. It's an every day reality in our city. Will you, as president acknowledge the reality of the scientific consensus about <b>climate change</b> and as president, will you pledge to do something about it?” Unquote. [...] Senator Rubio, the Miami mayor has endorsed you. Will you honor his request for a pledge and acknowledge the reality of the scientific consensus of <b>climate change</b> and pledge to do something about it? [...] So just to clarify, Senator Rubio, Mayor Regalado when he talks about the reality of the scientific consensus about <b>climate change</b>, the Republican mayor of Miami, he's saying the scientific consensus is that man does contribute to <b>climate change</b>. [...] Governor Kasich, what would you say to the mayor of Miami?</p>

## Appendix II: Presidential Debates Analyzed in this Report

- Aug. 6, 2015, Republican Debate Source: Time, <http://ti.me/1S6DVI1>.
- Sept 16, 2015, Republican Debate Source: CNN, <http://cnn.it/1T6pqsG>.
- Oct 13, 2015, Democratic Debate. Source: CNN, <http://cnn.it/1LHIWLS>.
- Oct 28, 2015, Republican Debate. Source: Time, <http://ti.me/1RzHaNN>.
- Nov 10, 2015, Republican Debate. Source: The New York Times, <http://nyti.ms/1o6Xh7L>.
- Nov 14, 2015, Democratic Debate. Source: Time, <http://ti.me/22wiwmh>.
- Dec 15, 2015, Republican Debate. Source: The Washington Post, <http://wapo.st/1Rl47B6>.
- Dec 19, 2015, Democratic Debate. Source: Time, <http://ti.me/1o6XDez>.
- Jan 14, 2016, Republican Debate. Source: Time, <http://nyti.ms/1RqiRRn>.
- Jan 17, 2016, Democratic Debate. Source: Time, <http://ti.me/1Mmkdvh>.
- Jan 25, 2016, Democratic Debate. Source: CNN, <http://cnn.it/1UGNhQN>.
- Jan 28, 2016, Republican Debate. Source: The Washington Post, <http://wapo.st/1VFu01E>.
- Feb 4, 2016, Democratic Debate. Source: Time, <http://ti.me/1Rl4U4Y>.
- Feb 6, 2016, Republican Debate. Source: Time, <http://ti.me/1Rl51xo>.
- Feb 11, 2016, Democratic Debate. Source Time : <http://ti.me/1pyUXY2>.
- Feb 13, 2016, Republican Debate. Source: The Washington Post, <http://wapo.st/248eSxl>.
- Feb 25, 2016, Republican Debate. Source: The Washington Post, <http://wapo.st/1MCGm3i>.
- March 3, 2016, Republican Debate. Source: The Washington Post, <http://wapo.st/22wjwH1>.
- March 6, 2016, Democratic Debate. Source: The New York Times, <http://nyti.ms/1MmkP42>.
- March 9, 2016, Democratic Debate. Source: Time, <http://ti.me/1q2yCmu>.
- March 10, 2016, Republican Debate. Source: Time, <http://ti.me/22FZLtt>.