



Attention, lawmakers — regulation is more popular than you think

BY SIDNEY A. SHAPIRO, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 03/02/21 01:01 PM EST
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Amid the Sturm und Drang (storm and stress) of politics these days, one fact stands out — a [large majority of Americans](#) want more regulatory protection in a wide variety of areas, according to a recent poll of likely voters.

The results are consistent with previous polls that indicate that Americans understand the importance of government regulation in protecting them from financial and health risks beyond their control. They also indicate majority support for [efforts](#) by the Biden administration to renew government regulation — as well as a stark repudiation of former President Trump's extreme [anti regulatory agenda](#).

The poll, conducted in January by Data for Progress and the Center for Progressive Reform, found that a majority of likely voters favor more regulation of drinking water pollution (74 percent); consumer product safety (71percent); privacy data (70 percent); air pollution (68 percent) and workplace safety (67 percent). These results even held for two of today's most heavily politicized areas of public policy: climate change (56 percent) and financial institutions (54 percent).

It is also remarkable that broad public support for regulations has held steady over the years, even despite years of campaigns by conservative policymakers to turn public opinion against regulations, culminating in the Trump administration, which made attacking regulations a signature issue. Polls by the Pew Research Center that show majority support for government action on [climate change](#), [privacy protection](#) and [racial equality](#), among other areas.

The CPR-DFP polling results even suggest that the anti regulatory campaign has not been completely successful among self-identified Republican voters. Though their support for regulations in these policy areas is more muted than that of self-described Democratic voters and independents, it is still fairly robust in absolute terms. (The results in a [Pew poll](#) are a little more ambiguous about the extent of bipartisan support for regulations, but this appears to be due to how the questions were framed.)

Contrary to conventional wisdom, these results suggest that a robust approach to regulation could form the basis for bipartisan compromise,

provided that political officials message it correctly. Even more significantly, voters recognize the importance of regulations even if they involve trade offs. The CPR-DFP poll found that strong majorities favor prioritizing the planet's future (73 percent) and clean drinking water (80 percent) over economic growth. As in the CPR-DFP poll, [the Pew Research Center has found](#) that a majority of voters (59 percent) believe environmental regulation is worth doing despite the fact that regulation has costs as well as benefits.

Strong regulations are not an impediment to economic growth or job creation — indeed, they are essential for the kind of sound and inclusive economy that the public expects. But these results nonetheless confirm that voters see public health and environmental protections as so important they would be willing to trade some economic growth to achieve them.

In contrast, nothing in these polls suggests popular support for the Trump administration's [four-year effort](#) to roll back as many regulations as possible. Instead, polls spotlight how dysfunctions in our political system have prevented or stymied public support for regulatory protections and action on climate change.

The [history of our country shows](#) that government regulation is necessary to protect the public from threats that markets cannot and will not mitigate, like the looming disaster of climate change. As the polling shows, the public understands this lesson even as regulatory critics ignore it.

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And there's a lesson here for the Biden-Harris administration, too. During the transition, it laid out a bold and inspiring agenda to tackle our country's most pressing challenges — from the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) to socially destabilizing [economic inequality](#), from [climate change](#) to [racial injustice](#). Realistically, making good on this agenda will require effective use of regulation.

The Biden-Harris administration should not be timid in pursuing its agenda — no matter how loud the bad faith protests from regulatory critics might be — because it has the public on its side.

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