



## UNDERSTANDING AMERICAN VOTER ATTITUDES TOWARD U.S.-CHINA CLIMATE COOPERATION

### ABOUT THE ASIA SOCIETY POLICY INSTITUTE

With a solution-oriented mandate, the Asia Society Policy Institute (ASPI) tackles major policy challenges confronting the Asia-Pacific in security, prosperity, sustainability, and the development of common norms and values for the region.

### ABOUT DATA FOR PROGRESS

Data for Progress is a progressive think tank and polling firm, which arms movements with data-driven tools to fight for a more equitable future. DFP provides polling, data-based messaging, and policy generation for the progressive movement, and advises campaigns and candidates with the tools they need to win. DFP polling is regularly cited by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and hundreds of other trusted news organizations.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- After four years of U.S. absence from the global climate stage, a majority of voters—including a plurality of Republican voters—agree the United States should take ambitious actions to address climate change and lead the world in tackling the climate crisis, even if China and other countries do not increase their own ambition.
- With the exception of nuclear disarmament, a majority of voters see climate change as the most important issue for the United States and China to cooperate on—more so than tackling COVID-19.
- At the same time, competing with China to become the world leader in the development of clean energy technologies drives up support among voters across the political spectrum for the United States ramping up its own clean energy industry. Similarly, voter support for the United States enhancing its climate ambition increases if China takes additional steps.
- Despite voters expressing apprehension toward partnering with China on innovation and trade in a number of sectors like automobiles and healthcare, voters are also very receptive to a potential partnership around clean energy development.
- However, voters want President Biden to also uphold his campaign promise to devise policies that will hold China “accountable” for its climate commitments. Voters support this more than any of Biden’s other proposals for global climate action.
- With this in mind, voters support the idea of the United States providing competitive financing for renewable energy projects to Belt and Road Initiative countries and instituting a carbon border tax as possible ways to increase pressure on China to do more both at home and abroad. For instance, an overwhelming majority of voters think China should aim to achieve carbon neutrality much sooner than 2060.
- Notably, a near majority of voters are also supportive of the U.S. military and Chinese military working together even more to assess climate risks and improve disaster preparedness around the world.
- Though President Biden may face some roadblocks from Republicans who are less supportive of U.S.-China climate cooperation than Democrats and independents, messaging around maintaining U.S. leadership over China on climate action and clean energy development clearly resonates with Republican voters.

*The Asia Society Policy Institute and the Asia Society take no institutional position on matters of public policy and other issues addressed in the reports and publications they sponsor. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained in this paper are the sole responsibility of its author and may not reflect the views of the organization and its board, staff, and supporters.*



## INTRODUCTION

The United States and China are the world's two largest contributors to climate change. Together, the United States and China are responsible for 40 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Under the Obama administration, the United States committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions under the Paris Agreement and established a new channel for bilateral cooperation with China to address climate change. However, the Trump administration pursued a vastly different strategy, withdrawing the United States from the Paris Agreement, pursuing a government-wide decline in climate action, and escalating tensions with China.

Now, President Biden, who campaigned heavily on prioritizing climate action, faces the task of restoring confidence in U.S. climate leadership and revitalizing the U.S. climate policy portfolio. Rebuilding U.S.-China cooperation on climate change is likely to be one key tenet of this approach, especially if it can help deliver additional ambition from China. However, Biden enters office at a historic low point in U.S.-China relations. Facing skepticism on the viability of forging a renewed relationship with China to defeat the climate crisis, Biden needs the support of both congressional lawmakers and voters to successfully enact his new global climate agenda.

As part of a nationwide survey fielded in December 2020, the Asia Society Policy Institute and Data for Progress sought to assess attitudes among likely voters about cooperation between the United States and China on climate change, including their views on the United States as a global climate leader, partnering with China to address climate change, and measures President Biden can take to encourage China to do more to combat the global climate crisis. With our survey weighting, we are able to adjust our survey of 1,040 respondents to be representative of the larger likely voter population. These adjustments based on age, gender, education, race and vote history ensure the data is representative of these characteristics of the population.

## VOTERS THINK THE UNITED STATES SHOULD ACT INDEPENDENTLY OF CHINA AND REGAIN ITS STATUS AS A GLOBAL CLIMATE LEADER

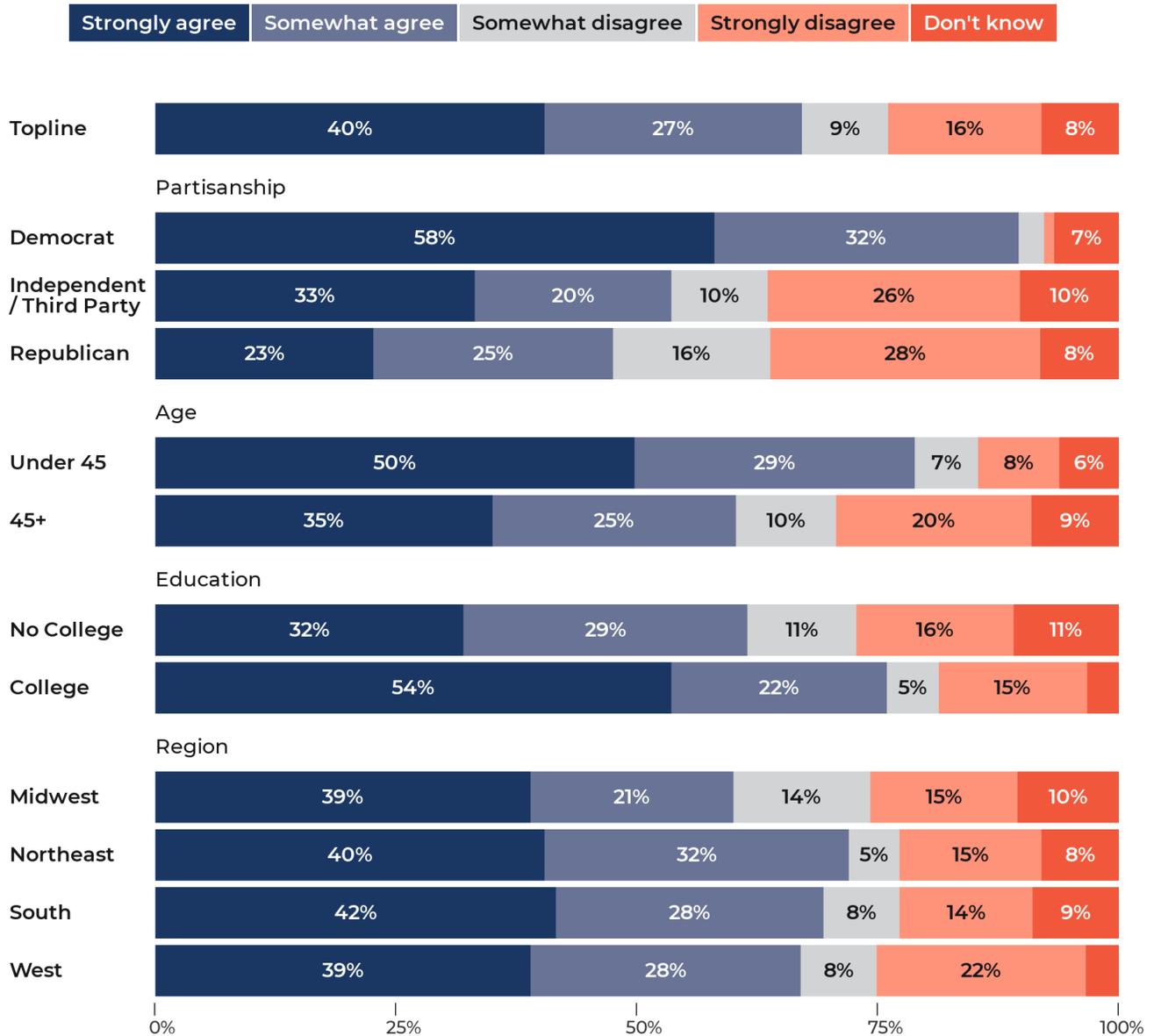
On the campaign trail, President Biden said he would reinstate the U.S. status as a global climate leader and take actions on climate change whether or not other nations follow suit. Voters overwhelmingly agree with this campaign tenet (Figure 1) by a 43 percentage-point margin (67 percent agree, 24 percent disagree). Consensus is strongly bipartisan: nearly all voters who self-identify as Democrats (90 percent), a majority of those who self-identify as independents (53 percent), and a near majority of voters who self-identify as Republicans (47 percent) agree the United States should step up and take actions to address climate change even if other countries do not follow suit.

There is also broad agreement across age groups, education levels, and geography. More than three-quarters (79 percent) of voters under 45 and a majority of voters over 45 (60 percent) support U.S. climate action independent of other countries, an indicator of both the importance of the climate crisis to young voters and the generational appeal of the issue. Both non-college-educated and college-educated voters also overwhelmingly support U.S. climate leadership, though college-educated voters are more supportive by a 15-point margin (61 percent and 76 percent, respectively). Support is also consistent across geographical regions, with a majority of voters from the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West all agreeing the United States should take climate actions even if other countries do not. That said, Midwestern voters express slightly less support (60 percent) than voters in the Northeast (72 percent), South (70 percent), and West (67 percent), likely a result of the more conservative makeup of the region.



## FIGURE 1 | A Majority of Voters Think America Should Take Action to Address Climate Change, Even if Other Countries Do Not

Do you agree or disagree that America should take action to address climate change, even if other countries do not?



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



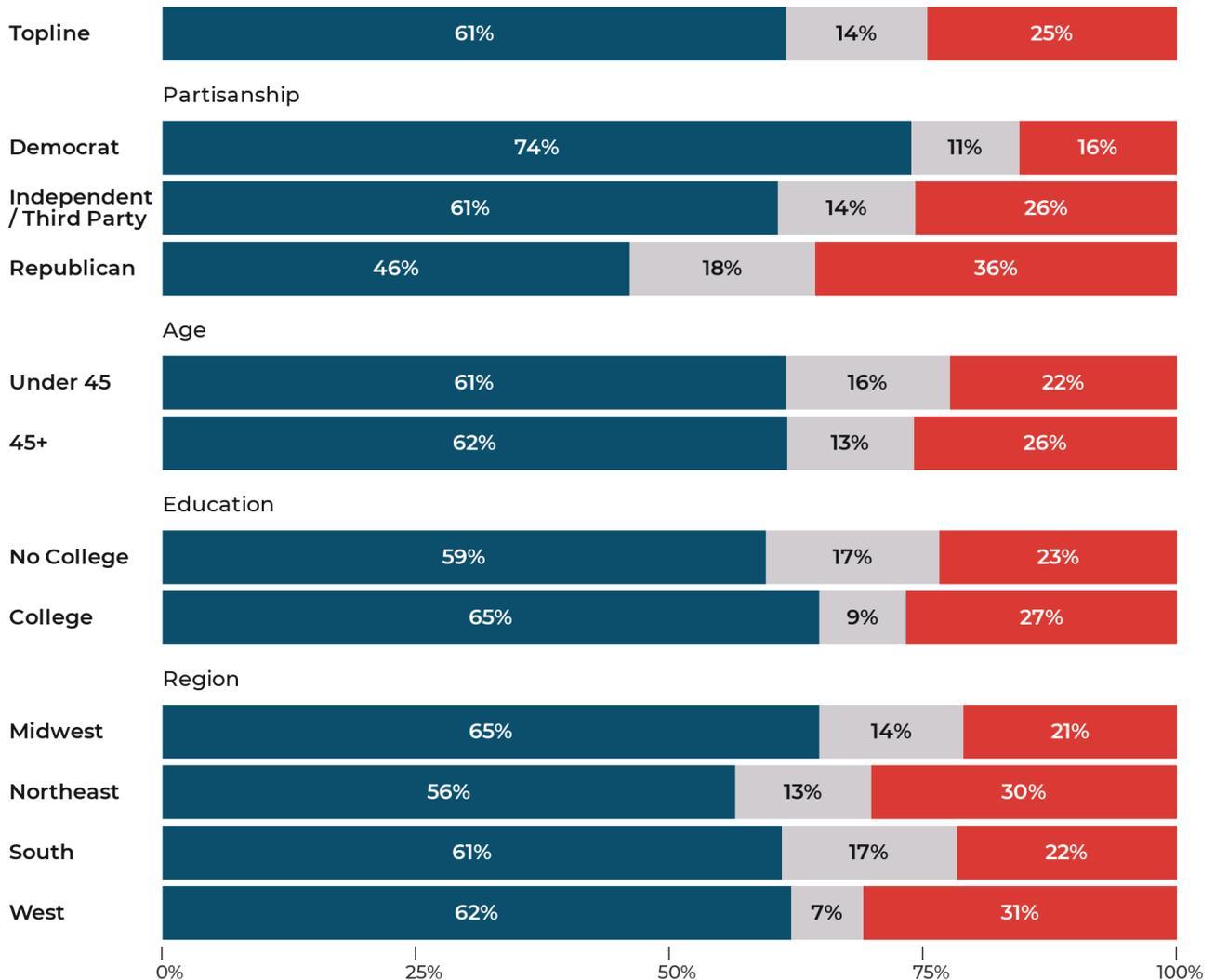
## FIGURE 2 | A Majority of Voters Think America Should Lead the World on Climate Even if China Does Not Take Ambitious Actions

Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

**America should take ambitious actions to address climate change, even if other countries like China do not. America should lead the world on this issue and other countries will follow our lead.**

Don't know

**If China does not take actions to address climate change, America should not either. China contributes more than a quarter of the world's emissions and it's not fair for other countries like America to act while they sit still.**



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



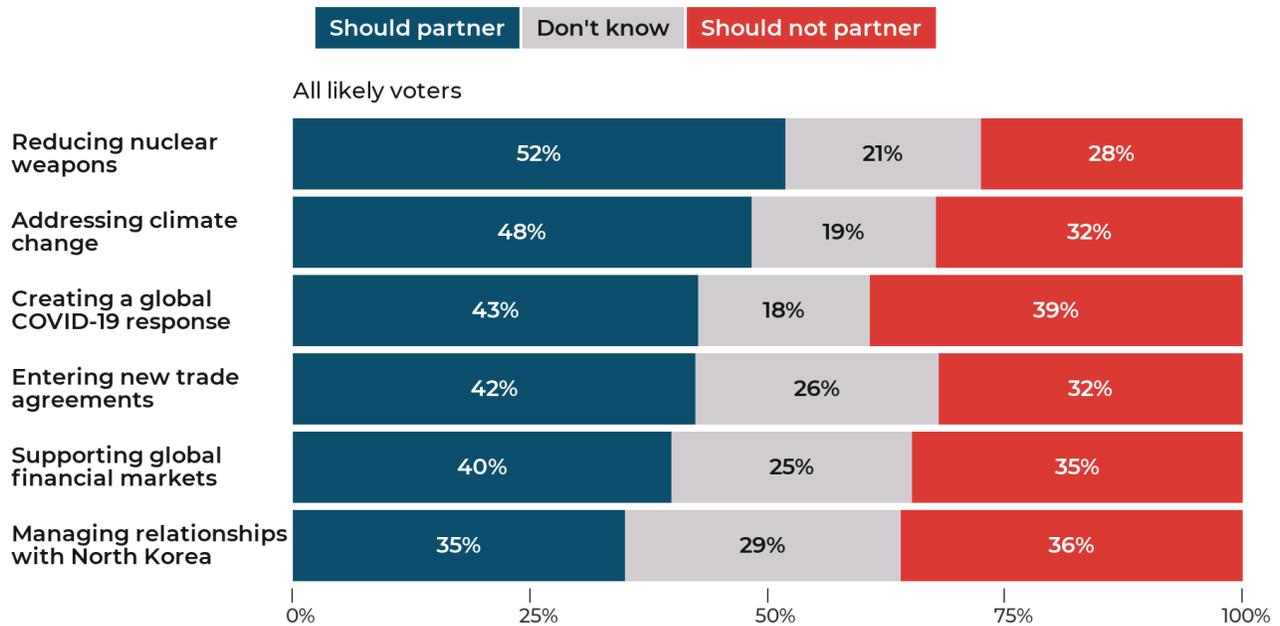
Support for the United States leading the global charge to address climate change remains steady, even when voters are presented with an alternative proposal that suggests the United States should not take on this leadership role if China does not also take similar actions (Figure 2). A majority of voters (61 percent) think the United States should take the lead on global climate action regardless of China’s actions, while only a quarter (25 percent) think the United States should wait until China takes further actions. Support for this stance is strongly bipartisan: a clear majority of Democrats (74 percent) and independents (61 percent), as well as a near majority of Republicans (46 percent), think the United States should lead global climate cooperation.

A majority of voters under 45 (61 percent) and voters over 45 (62 percent) support the United States taking

ambitious climate actions regardless of China’s actions. There is also consensus among both non-college-educated and college-educated voters, both of whom support U.S. climate leadership independent of China (59 percent and 65 percent, respectively). Additionally, support is consistent across regions, with a majority of voters in the Midwest (65 percent), Northeast (56 percent), South (61 percent), and West (62 percent) all supporting this U.S. approach to climate action. The high levels of support for ambitious U.S. climate action from Midwestern voters can likely be attributed to these voters wanting America—not China—to be the global leader on this issue. On the other hand, voters in the Northeast—including those in some of America’s largest left-leaning cities—may have a more nuanced understanding of China’s contributions to global emissions and would like to see China play a larger role in combating the global climate crisis.

**FIGURE 3 | Voters Think America Should Partner with China on Climate Change More than on a Global COVID-19 Response**

Do you think America should or should **not** partner with China on the following:



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



## VOTERS SUPPORT THE UNITED STATES PARTNERING WITH CHINA TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND TO DEVELOP CLEAN ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES

Voters place a climate-centered partnership at the top of their lists for potential collaboration with China across a number of economic and national security issue areas (Figure 3). A near majority of voters (48 percent) think the United States should partner with China on addressing climate change, second only to reducing the number of nuclear weapons (52 percent). Despite a wariness of partnering with China on innovation and trade in certain sectors, voters do express some support for partnering with China on a global COVID-19 response (43 percent), entering new trade agreements (42 percent), and supporting global financial markets (40 percent), though voters are split on support for a partnership to manage North Korea (35 percent should partner, 36 percent should not partner). However, support for partnerships on all of these issues falls short of that for addressing climate change.

Voters overwhelmingly support the United States working with China to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, even when presented with a stance against this partnership (Figure 4). A majority of voters (56 percent) think climate change is a global problem and the United States should form a partnership with China to address it, while just over a quarter of voters (29 percent) do not want the United States to work with China

to address climate change and think China is an adversary and competitor on this issue. Though support is strongest among Democrats (71 percent) and independents (59 percent), more than a third of Republicans (35 percent) also express their support, which indicates there is potential for bipartisan consensus on this issue.

There is also broad support for a U.S.-China partnership on climate change among voters of different age groups, education level, races, and regions. A majority of voters under 45 (63 percent) and voters over 45 (52 percent) support the United States working with China on climate change. Again, younger voters are more supportive of climate action than older voters, though both age groups agree on the importance of the issue. By a 40-point margin (66 percent to 26 percent), college-educated voters support a U.S.-China climate partnership. A near majority of non-college-educated voters (50 percent) also support this partnership, though by 16 points less than college-educated voters. A majority of Black voters (59 percent) and white voters (56 percent) support this U.S.-China climate partnership; while Latino voters offer slightly less support (43 percent), there is certainly room to grow support for a U.S.-China climate partnership among Latino voters. Minimal variations in opinions occur across different regions: a majority of voters in the Midwest (56 percent), South (53 percent), and West (57 percent) support this partnership, with Northeastern voters expressing the most support (64 percent). Again, these slight differences in regional support can likely be attributed to the different ideological makeups of these geographical areas.



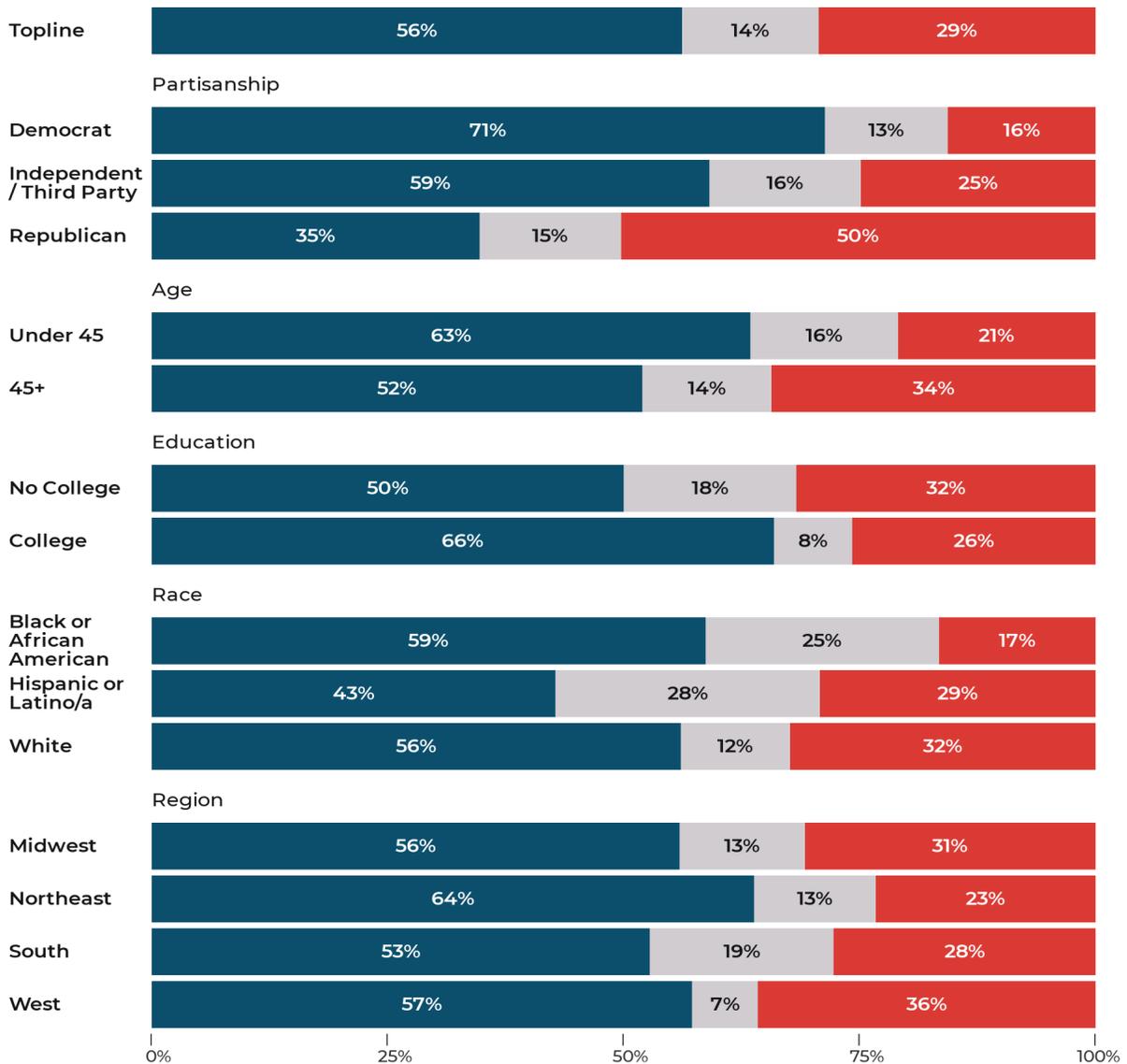
## FIGURE 4 | A Majority of Voters Think America Should Work with China to Address Climate Change

Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

**America should work with China to combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We need to put aside our differences to come up with solutions to solve this global problem.**

Don't know

**America should not work with China to combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They are our adversary, and we should not help them get ahead by working together with them on this issue.**



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



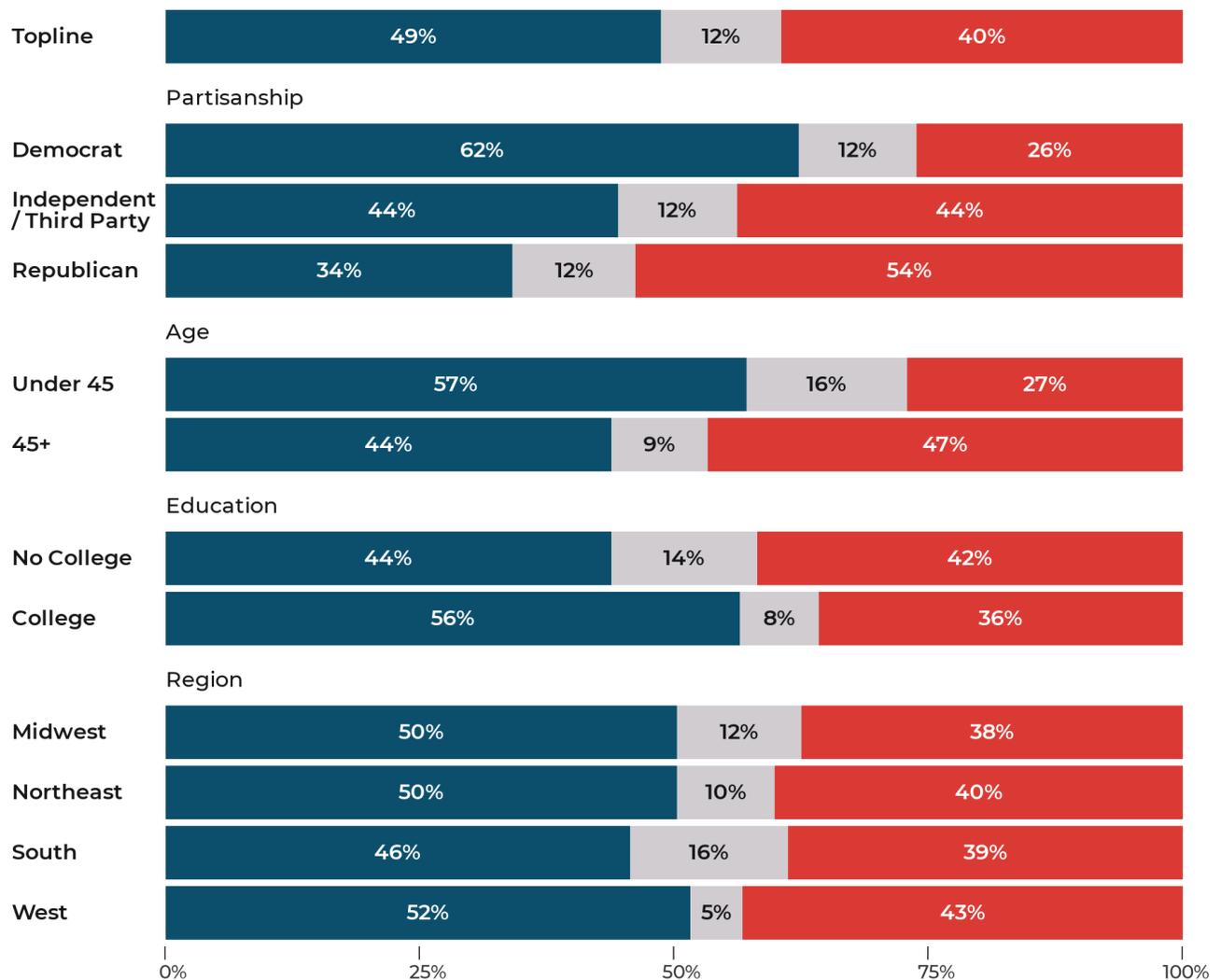
## FIGURE 5 | Voters Strongly Support Climate Change and Coronavirus as the Top Issues Biden Discusses with Xi Jinping at Their First Meeting

Do you think climate change should be alongside the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as the top issues that President Biden discusses with Chinese leader Xi Jinping during their first meeting together?

Yes, climate change should be alongside coronavirus as the top issues Biden discusses with Xi Jinping during their first meeting.

Don't know

No, climate change should not be alongside coronavirus as the top issues Biden discusses with Xi Jinping during their first meeting.



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



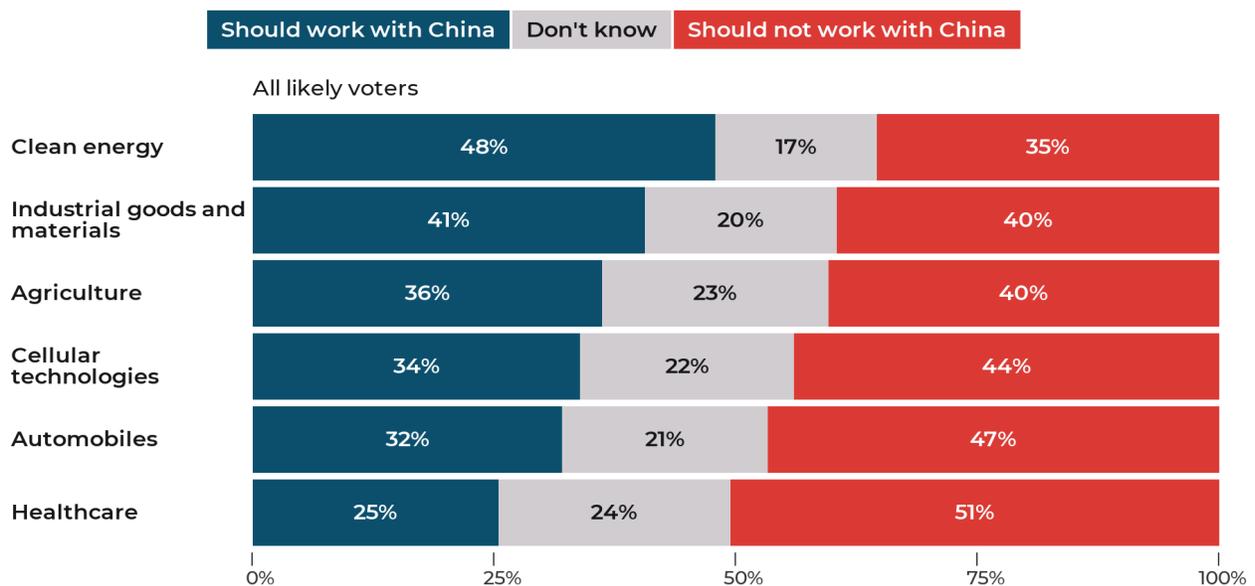
Voters also understand the critical importance of the United States beginning to rebuild its relationship with China on climate as soon as possible, given the severity and urgency of the crisis (Figure 5). A near majority of all voters (49 percent) think climate change should be alongside COVID-19 as the top issues Biden discusses with President Xi Jinping during their first significant encounter. Democrats are most supportive of the emphasis on climate change at this meeting: by a 36-point margin, they think climate change and coronavirus should be the top issues Biden and President Xi discuss at their first encounter. However, independents are nearly split, and a majority of Republicans do not think climate change should be in the top two issues of discussion. That said, this result does not indicate that independents and Republicans are explicitly against climate change being a topic of discussion in this first meeting.

Among voters of different age groups, a majority of voters under 45 (57 percent) think climate change and

coronavirus should be the top two issues, while voters over 45 slightly prefer Biden to not prioritize climate change at their first meeting. Again, it is evident that younger voters place a greater emphasis than older voters on prioritizing climate action. While college-educated voters support Biden making climate change and coronavirus his top two issues during this meeting by a 20-point margin (56 percent to 36 percent), non-college voters support this prioritization by only a 2-point margin (44 percent to 42 percent). There is consistent support across the country, as a plurality of voters from the Midwest (50 percent), Northeast (50 percent), and South (46 percent) want Biden to put this emphasis on climate change at his first meeting with President Xi, though Western voters are most supportive (52 percent) of this approach. Likely, those who are not as supportive of Biden making climate change and coronavirus his top two issues to discuss with President Xi may want Biden to heavily prioritize talks on trade or national security. However, that is not to say that climate is not one of the major issues they agree should be discussed.

## FIGURE 6 | Voters Think America Should Partner with China on Clean Energy Development More Than Any Other Sector

Do you think America should or should **not** work with China on innovation and trade in the following sectors:



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



Voters think the United States should work with China on innovation and trade in clean energy while expressing serious apprehension toward partnerships in a number of other sectors, including agriculture, cellular technologies, automobiles, and healthcare (Figure 6). Voters support a partnership with China on clean energy by a 16-point margin compared with automobiles and a 23-point margin

compared with healthcare, two sectors of significant contention given recent trade disputes and the global COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, a plurality of voters (41 percent) think the United States should work with China in the industrial goods and materials sector, another area where new innovations can significantly contribute to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions, especially in manufacturing.

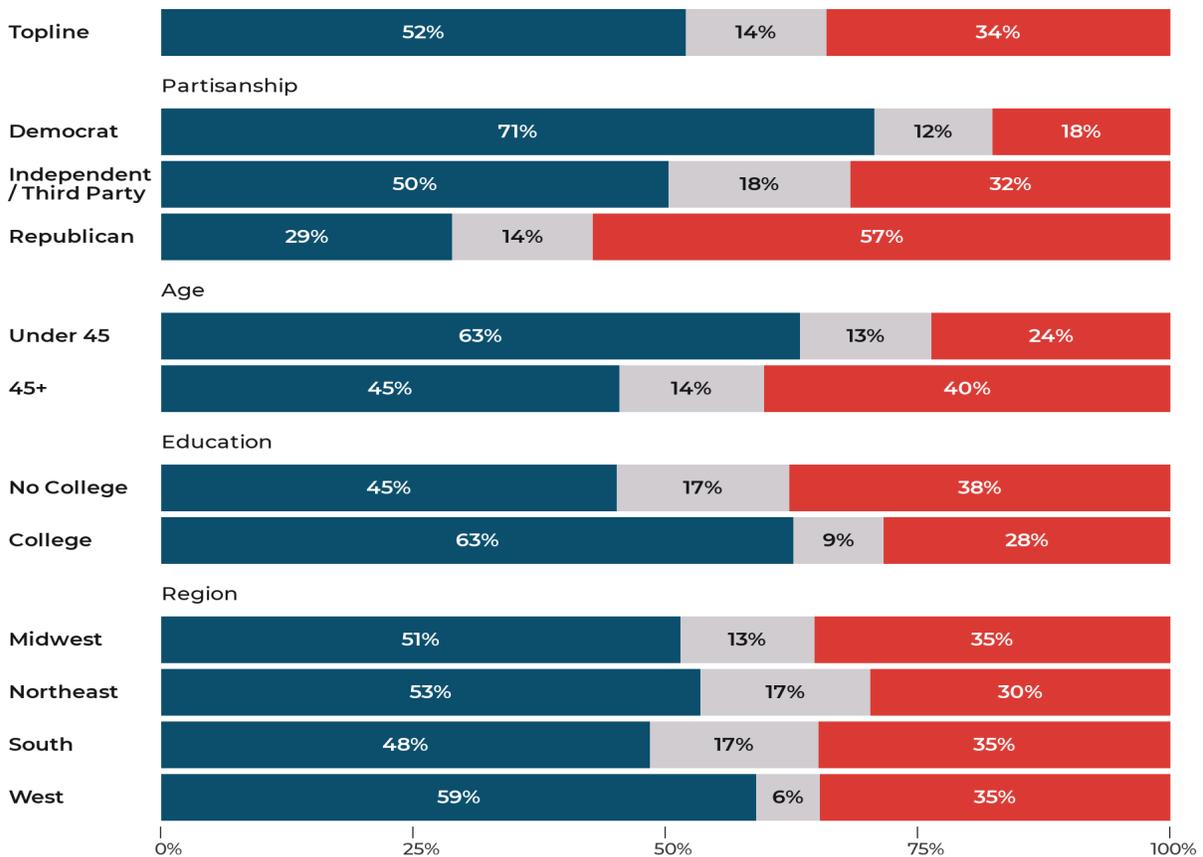
## FIGURE 7 | A Majority of Voters Think Partnering with China on Clean Energy Development Would Be Beneficial to America

Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

**America should partner with China to increase the production of clean energy technologies because it will help solve a global problem and will create healthy competition between our two countries that will make America's economy stronger.**

**Don't know**

**America should not partner with China to increase the production of clean energy technologies because we should only focus on increasing domestic energy production, which includes clean energy and other energy sources like oil and gas.**



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



Voters also express high levels of support for a partnership with China to increase the development of clean energy technologies, even when they are shown a proposal in favor of only focusing efforts on domestic energy development (Figure 7). A majority of voters (52 percent) think the United States should partner with China to increase the development of clean energy technologies and that it would be beneficial to the economy, while 34 percent favor the United States focusing its efforts on domestic energy development of both fossil fuels and clean energy. Though a majority of Democrats (71 percent) and a plurality of independents (50 percent) support a clean energy development partnership with China, a majority of Republicans (57 percent) prefer that the United States focus on domestic energy development, which is unsurprising considering the GOP's historical support of the fossil fuel industry.

Younger voters are significantly more supportive than older voters of this clean energy partnership. Voters under 45 support a U.S.-China collaboration on clean energy development by a 39-point margin, while voters over 45 support this partnership by only a 5-point margin, another indication of the prioritization that younger voters place on climate as a key political issue. Similarly, college-educated voters express significantly more support (63 percent) than non-college-educated voters (45 percent) toward this partnership. Among different regions, Western voters offer the most support (59 percent), while voters in the South—home to much of the nation's oil and gas industry—express the lowest level of support. Additionally, a majority of voters in the Midwest and Northeast, both of which have seen significant growth in clean energy over the past decade, also support this clean energy development partnership.

Beyond rejoining the Paris Agreement, President Biden has also emphasized that he is eager for the United States

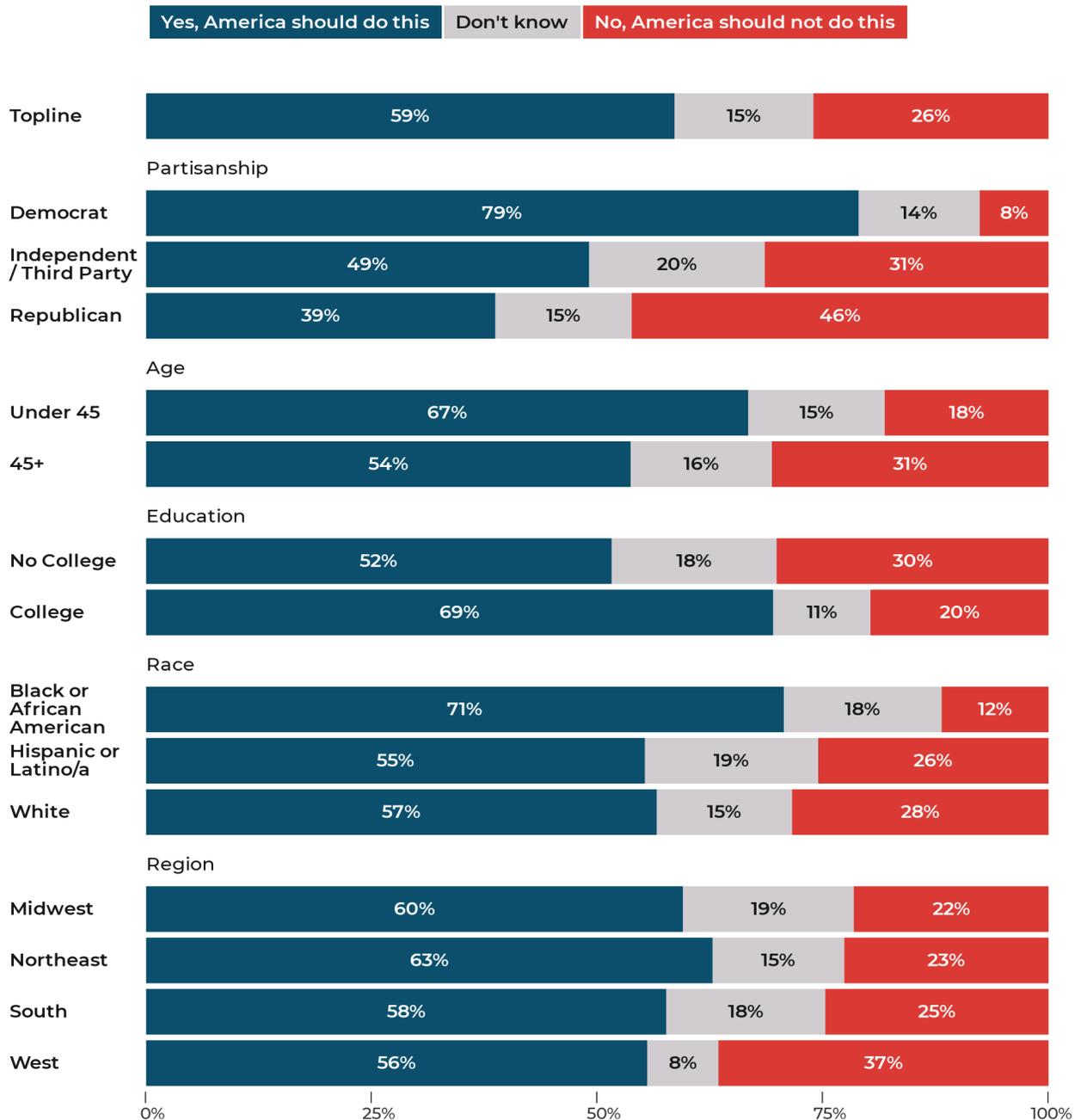
to work with other nations to increase global climate ambition. Given the twin crises of the worldwide economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, voters support Biden working with China and other countries to create a green global stimulus by a 33-point margin (59 percent support, 26 percent oppose). An overwhelming majority of Democrats (79 percent) and a near majority of independents (49 percent) support the United States participating in a global green stimulus effort. Though a near majority of Republicans (46 percent) do not think the United States should participate in worldwide green stimulus efforts, well over a third (39 percent) think America should, indicating that Republicans are open to this premise, especially given the economic devastation the coronavirus has caused worldwide. That said, the initial Republican opposition may likely be attributed to concerns about increasing the national debt.

Voters across different age groups, education levels, races, and geographical regions all agree the United States should participate in global green stimulus talks with China and other nations (Figure 8). More than two-thirds of voters under 45 (67 percent) and a majority of voters over 45 (54 percent) support U.S. collaboration on a global green stimulus. College-educated voters support global green stimulus talks by an overwhelming 49-point margin (69 percent support, 20 percent oppose), while non-college-educated voters support it by a 22-point margin (52 percent support, 30 percent oppose). Black voters are the most supportive of green stimulus talks with China (71 percent support, 12 percent oppose), followed by white voters (57 percent support, 28 percent oppose) and Latino voters (55 percent support, 26 percent oppose). Additionally, a majority of voters in the Midwest (60 percent), Northeast (63 percent), South (58 percent), and West (56 percent) think the United States should work with China and other countries on a green global stimulus.



## FIGURE 8 | A Majority of Voters Think America Should Work with China and Other Countries to Create a Global Green Stimulus

Do you think that America should work with other countries, including China, to create a "green" global financial stimulus that addresses both the economic crisis from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and global warming?

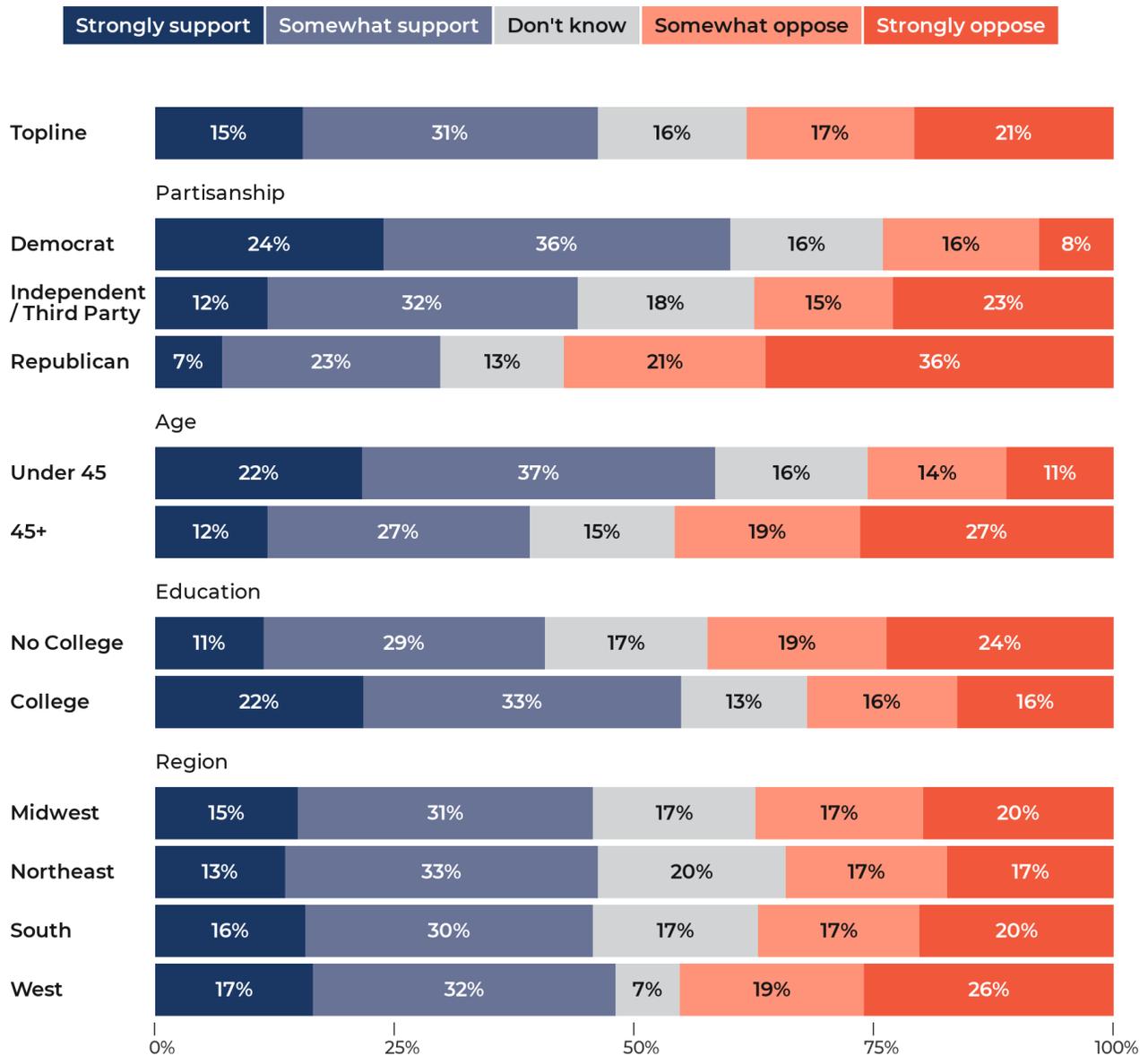


Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



## FIGURE 9 | Voters Support the American and Chinese Militaries Working Together to Assess Climate Risks

Do you support or oppose the American military working with the Chinese military to assess climate risks and improve preparedness for natural disasters in areas of shared geographical interest?



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



While U.S.-China tensions have remained high, the People's Liberation Army and the U.S. Army have conducted an annual Disaster Management Exchange to share knowledge and techniques about responding to natural disasters (Figure 9). A near majority of all voters (46 percent) would support the U.S. military building on this existing relationship and working with the Chinese military to assess climate risks and increase preparedness for natural disasters in shared geographical areas of interest. A majority of Democrats (60 percent) and a plurality of independents (44 percent) support this military cooperation, though a majority of Republicans (57 percent) oppose it, likely due to the party's stances on national security.

Similarly, support for this military cooperation falls along generational lines: a majority of voters under 45 (59 percent) support this military cooperation, while a near majority of voters over 45 (46 percent) oppose it, a sign of the generational divide on the intersection of national security and climate policy. While college-educated voters support this military collaboration by a 23-point margin (55 percent support, 32 percent oppose), non-college-educated voters are nearly split (40 percent support, 43 percent oppose), possibly due to wariness of the United States engaging with China on national security issues. On the other hand, there is no significant difference in support among voters from different regions: a plurality of voters from the Midwest (46 percent), Northeast (46 percent), South (46 percent), and West (49 percent) support this military cooperation. Emphasizing the existing U.S.-China cooperation on disaster preparedness may garner

more support to expand and emphasize the climate aspects of this knowledge exchange.

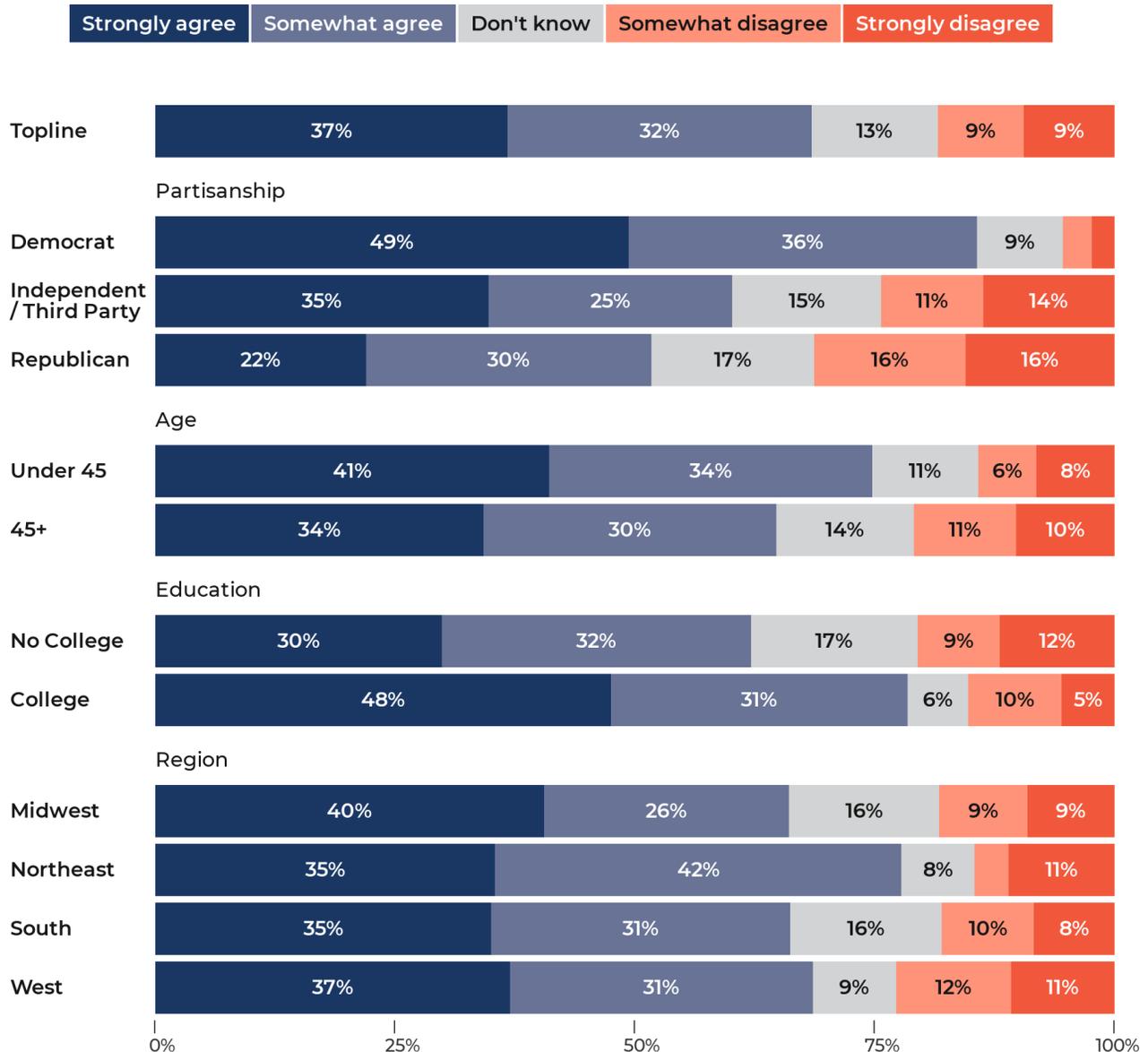
Competing with China to become the world's leader in clean energy development drives up support among voters across the political spectrum for ramping up U.S. development of clean energy technologies (Figure 10). An overwhelming majority of voters (69 percent) think if China takes more actions to address climate change and increases production of clean energy technologies, the United States should do the same. Support for this competitive approach to U.S. clean energy production is strongly bipartisan: a majority of Democrats (85 percent), independents (60 percent), and Republicans (52 percent) all think the United States should remain competitive with China and scale up production of clean energy technologies if China does so too.

There is also overwhelming agreement for the United States taking this stance among voters both under 45 (75 percent agree) and over 45 (65 percent). Additionally, both a majority of college-educated voters (79 percent) and non-college-educated voters (62 percent) agree the United States should ramp up clean energy production if China does so as well. Support is also consistent across different regions: a majority of voters in the Midwest (66 percent), South (66 percent), and West (68 percent) want the United States to be competitive with China's clean energy production, and Northeastern voters are the most supportive of this competition (77 percent), an indicator of strong support for both addressing climate change and ensuring the United States is a global leader in clean energy production.



## FIGURE 10 | A Majority of Voters Think America Should Ramp Up Climate Action if China Does So Too

If China decides to take more actions to address climate change and transition to clean energy, like ramping up production of solar panels and electric vehicles, do you agree or disagree that America should also take more actions to address climate change and transition to clean energy?



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



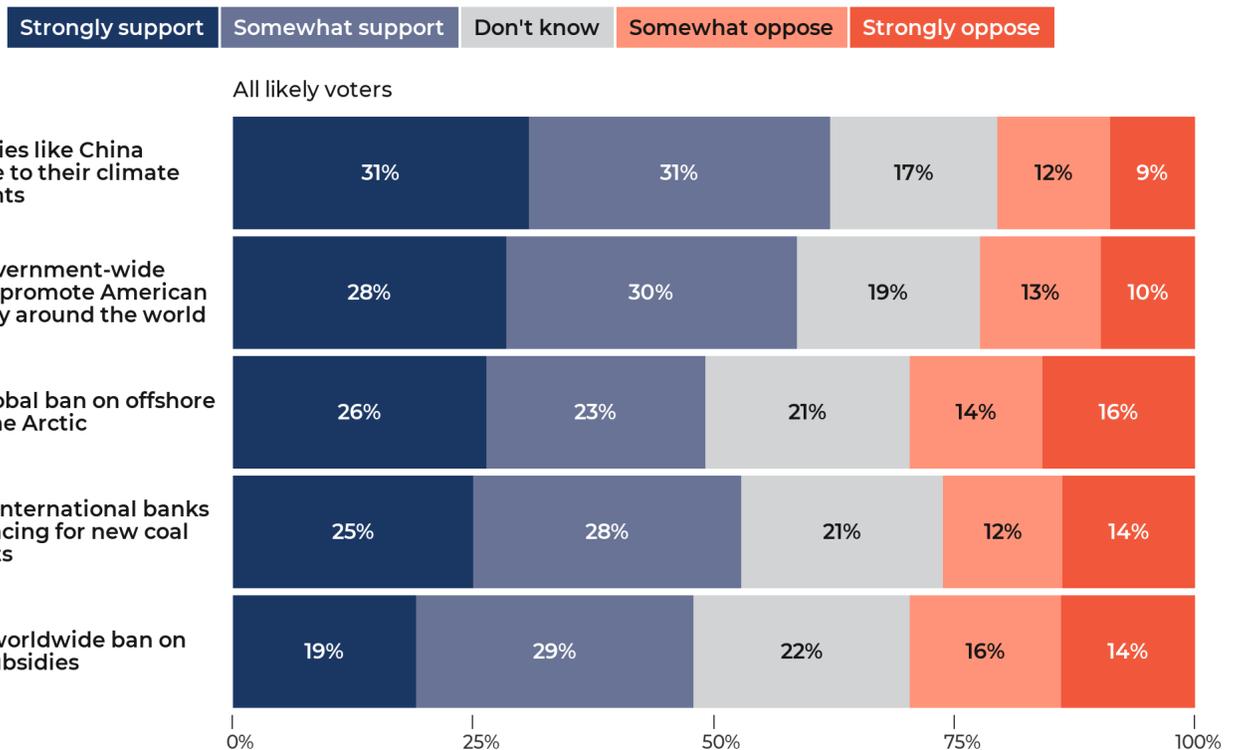
## VOTERS WANT PRESIDENT BIDEN TO WORK WITH CHINA TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE BUT ALSO HOLD CHINA ACCOUNTABLE FOR ITS ACTIONS

President Biden outlined a number of proposals in his campaign platform to collaborate with other countries—including China—to address climate change while ensuring they follow through on their agreements. Though all of these proposals are widely popular among voters, Biden’s pledge to hold China accountable for

its climate commitments enjoys the most support from voters at 62 percent (Figure 11). A majority of voters also support Biden’s plans to create a government-wide initiative to promote American clean energy around the world (58 percent) and encourage global financial institutions to end financing for new coal-fired power plants (53 percent). Additionally, a near majority of voters support the United States pursuing a global ban on Arctic drilling (49 percent) and demanding a worldwide ban on fossil fuel subsidies (48 percent).

### FIGURE 11 | Voters Support President Biden’s Proposals to Address Climate Change Abroad

President Biden has proposed the following ways for America to both collaborate with other countries on addressing climate change and hold them accountable to their climate commitments. For each policy, please indicate whether you support or oppose it:



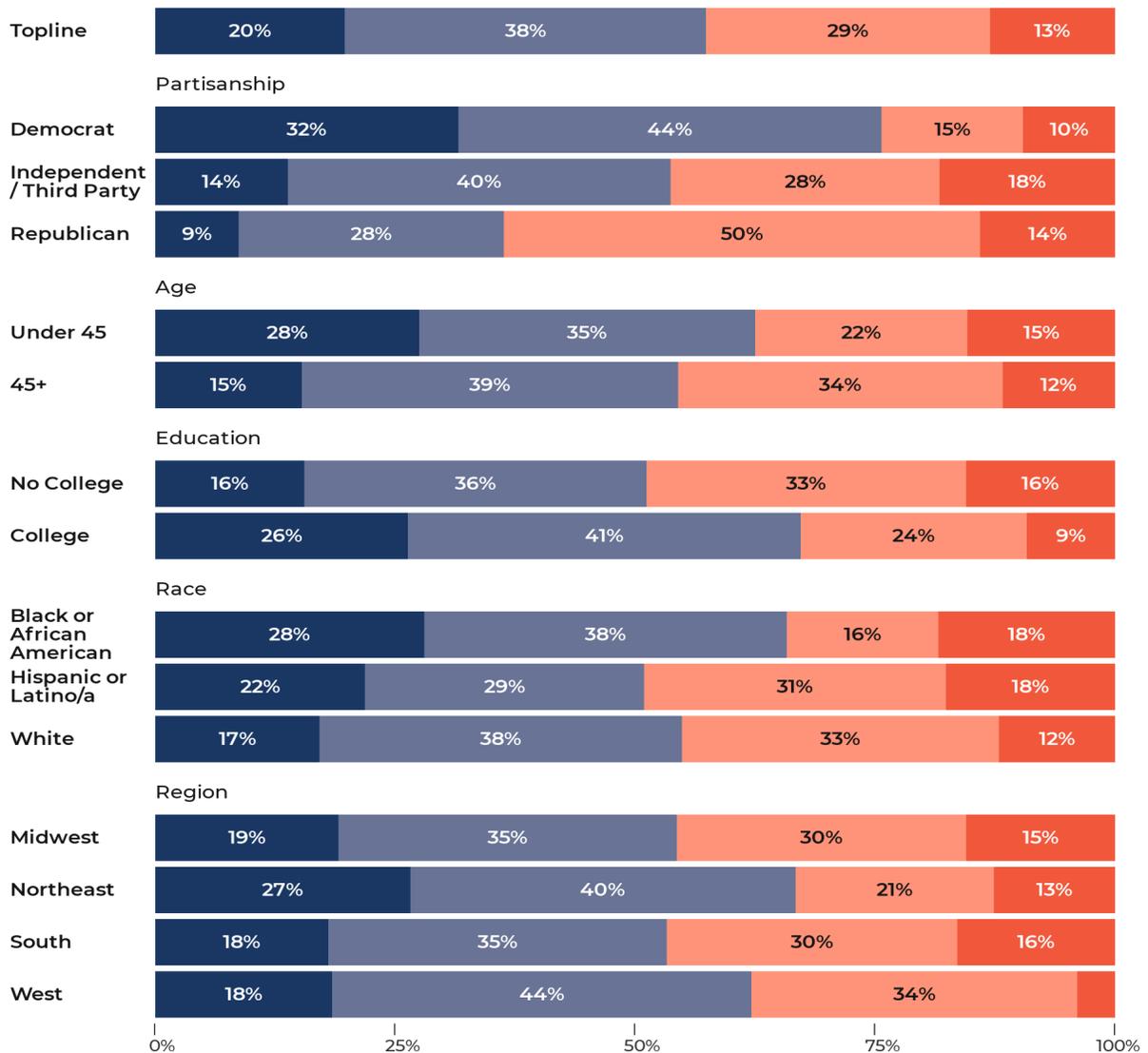
Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



## FIGURE 12 | Voters Support Biden Working with China While Taking a Tough Stance on Other Issues

Regarding President Biden's strategy to manage America's relationship with China on the issue of climate change, which approach comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?

- President Biden should ensure America partners with China to address climate change and works closely together with them on this and other important global issues.
- President Biden should work with China to address climate change but should hold them accountable for holding up their end of the bargain and should take tough stances on other issues like trade and national security.
- President Biden should not ensure America partners with China to address climate change because China does not play by the rules and will make America foot the bill for climate change while they continue to strengthen their economy.
- Don't know



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



While voters support the United States working with China to address climate change and reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, voters remain apprehensive about China’s actions (Figure 12).

That said, a plurality of voters (38 percent) prefer President Biden to take the approach he promised on the campaign trail of working with China on key issues like climate change while holding China “accountable” for its continued construction of coal-fired power stations domestically and its support for carbon-intensive infrastructure overseas through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). While Biden’s exact plans for doing so are unclear, this approach is favored by a plurality of both Democrats (44 percent) and independents (40 percent); a near majority of Republicans (50 percent) do not want Biden to work with China to address climate change because they think the United States would play a lopsided role in this potential partnership.

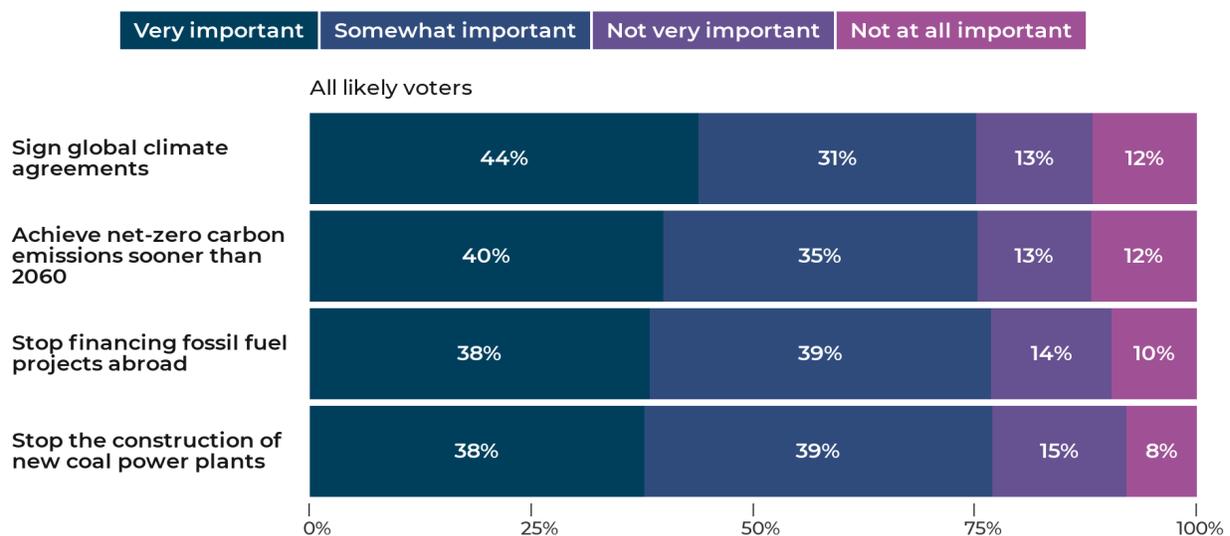
Though a plurality of voters both under 45 (35 percent) and over 45 (39 percent) support Biden taking this

collaborative yet tough approach, younger voters also significantly prefer Biden to work closely with China on climate and other issues (28 percent support). On the other hand, older voters would also prefer Biden to take a more hardline approach to this relationship (34 percent support not partnering with China on climate change). Similarly, while both a plurality of non-college-educated voters (36 percent) and college-educated voters (41 percent) want Biden to work with China on climate while holding it accountable and taking a tough stance on other issues, a third (33 percent) of non-college-educated voters say they do not want Biden to work with China on climate at all. Conversely, more than a quarter of college-educated voters (26 percent) support Biden working more closely with China on climate and other issues.

While 38 percent of both Black and white voters prefer Biden to collaborate with China on climate while holding it accountable, a slight plurality (31 percent) of Latino voters prefer Biden to not work with China on climate. Though Latino voters express slightly more apprehension toward this collaboration, they are nearly split, as 29

## FIGURE 13 | A Majority of Voters Think it is Important for China to Take More Aggressive Actions to Address Climate Change

How important do you think it is that China takes the following actions to address climate change:



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters

percent do want Biden to take a collaborative yet tough stance with China. Additionally, Black voters are much more open than white voters to Biden working closely with China on climate and other issues (28 percent and 17 percent support, respectively). Across different regions, Western and Northeastern voters are most supportive of Biden taking the collaborative yet tough approach (44 percent and 40 percent, respectively), while Southern and Midwestern voters follow closely behind at 35 percent each for this stance. Western voters, though most open to Biden holding China accountable while collaborating on climate, also express the highest levels of support for Biden not taking any collaborative action. Meanwhile, voters in the Northeast—again, characterized by major left-leaning U.S. cities—show strong levels of support for leadership approaches that prioritize collaboration rather than isolation.

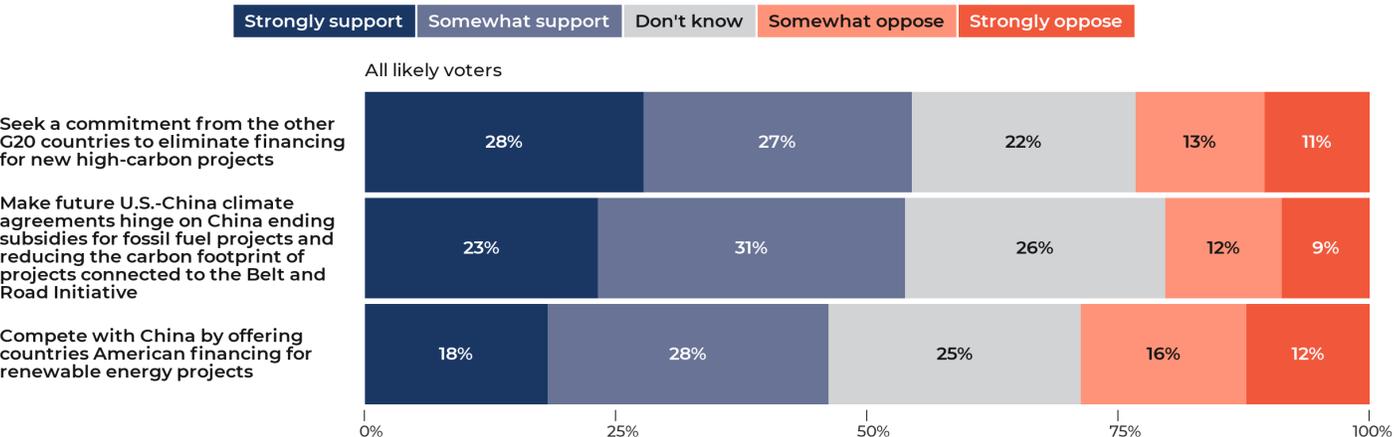
While China has already taken a number of landmark climate actions, voters agree it is crucial for China to take even more aggressive actions (Figure 13). Regarding what China has already done, three-quarters (75 percent) of all voters agree it is important that China has signed global climate agreements. An overwhelming majority of voters

(75 percent) think that China should achieve “carbon neutrality” or net-zero carbon emissions sooner than 2060, the deadline China committed to in September 2020. A strong majority of voters (77 percent) also think it is important for China to stop financing fossil fuel projects abroad through the BRI and stop the construction of new coal-fired power plants at home.

Given that voters prefer President Biden taking the approach of collaborating with China on clean energy and climate change while holding it accountable, voters support a number of proposals Biden put forth during his campaign to pressure China into reducing emissions from the BRI (Figure 14). By a 31-point margin (55 percent support, 24 percent oppose), voters support Biden seeking a commitment from other G20 countries to eliminate export financing for new high-carbon projects. Voters express similar levels of support for hinging future U.S.-China trade agreements on China’s commitment to ending fossil fuel subsidies and reducing the carbon footprint of BRI projects (54 percent support, 21 percent oppose). Additionally, a near majority of voters (46 percent) support the idea of the United States competing with China by offering countries competitive financing for renewable energy projects.

### FIGURE 14 | Voters Support Biden’s Focus on China’s Support for Carbon-Intensive Infrastructure through the Belt and Road Initiative

Through its Belt and Road Initiative, China has financed hundreds of major infrastructure projects throughout Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. While China has set limits on coal consumption at home, it is financing new coal power plants and other fossil fuel projects around the world. President Biden has proposed several ways to hold China accountable for outsourcing its pollution. Please indicate whether you support or oppose each proposal:

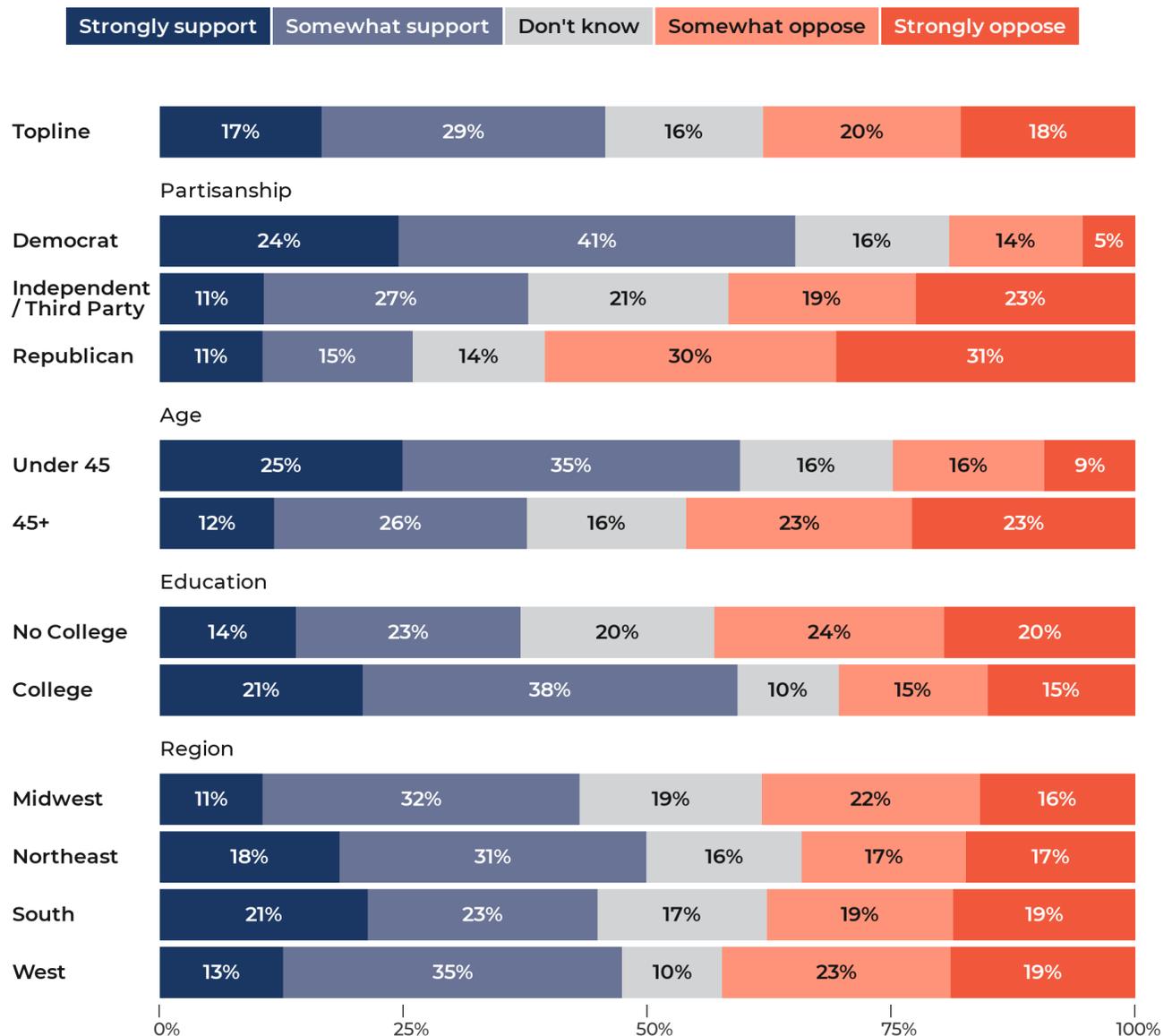


Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



## FIGURE 15 | Voters Support America Providing Development Financing for Global Clean Energy Investments

Some lawmakers have proposed that America should provide alternative sources of development financing for other countries to make clean energy investments for developing countries that make commitments to address climate change. Supporters say that these investments will support American innovation and incentivize exports that make us more competitive with China. They also say that this proposal will strengthen our national security and improve our relationships around the world. Opponents say that America should not take on the debts of other countries when the national debt is already so high, and that we should spend our money focusing on solving problems at home and building up our military to ensure national security. Do you support or oppose this proposal?



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



President Biden's proposals to provide alternative sources of financing for countries to make clean energy investments and "green debt relief" for developing countries that make climate commitments are key opportunities to steer countries away from the allure of China's financing for high-carbon projects through the BRI, and they are broadly popular among voters (Figure 15). A near majority of all voters (46 percent) support Biden's proposal for competitive development financing, even when they are shown an alternative proposal that centers on U.S. austerity. However, this clean energy finance proposal does not enjoy as strong bipartisan support compared with the other proposals Biden has put forth to combat the BRI. While an overwhelming majority of Democrats (65 percent) support clean energy financing and green debt relief, a plurality of independents (42 percent) and a majority of Republicans (61 percent) oppose these proposals, likely due to concerns about raising the national debt and sacrificing funding for domestic investments raised by opponents of this proposal.

Additionally, support for these global green energy investments falls along generational and educational lines. While a majority of voters under 45 (60 percent) support the United States providing clean energy development financing and green debt relief, a plurality of voters over 45 (46 percent) oppose it. Similarly, a majority of college-educated voters (59 percent) support these proposals, while a plurality of non-college-educated voters (44 percent) oppose them. However, support is consistent across different regions, with a near majority of Midwestern voters (43 percent), Northeastern voters (49 percent), Southern voters (44 percent), and Western voters

(48 percent) supporting the United States providing clean energy financing and green debt relief to other nations.

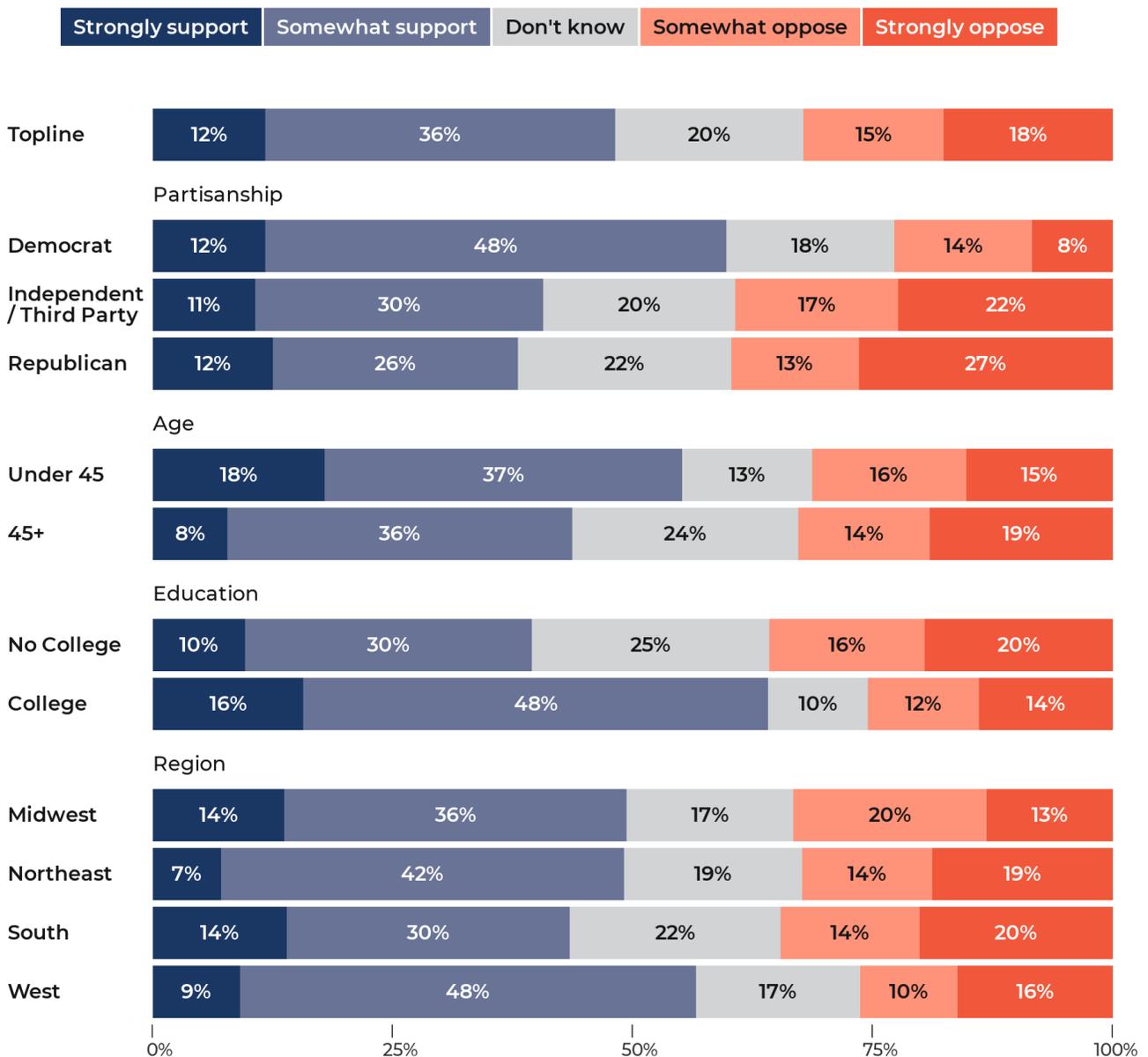
President Biden has also expressed openness to a carbon border tax, which the United States could leverage to incentivize a reduction of global emissions and allow U.S. goods to remain competitive in foreign markets like China. However, this will almost certainly not be welcome by China and has the potential to upset bipartisan cooperation on climate efforts. Despite this possibility, a near majority of voters (48 percent) support a carbon border tax, including a majority of Democrats (60 percent) and a plurality of independents (41 percent) (Figure 16). With Republicans nearly split on the issue (38 percent support, 40 percent oppose), there is significant potential for bipartisan collaboration on this policy proposal.

There are also broad levels of support for a carbon border tax across both age and educational groups. Voters under 45 support this proposal by a 24-point margin (55 percent support, 31 percent oppose), while voters over 45 support it by an 11-point margin (44 percent support, 33 percent oppose). While college-educated voters overwhelmingly support a carbon border tax by a 38-point margin (64 percent support, 26 percent oppose), non-college-educated voters support the proposal by only a 4-point margin (40 percent support, 36 percent oppose). Though a near majority of Midwestern voters (49 percent), Northeastern voters (49 percent), and Southern voters (44 percent) support a carbon border tax policy, voters in the West—home to some of the nation's biggest ports and trade hubs—most strongly support this proposal (57 percent).



## FIGURE 16 | Voters Support a Carbon Border Tax Despite the Risk of Heightened Trade Disputes with China

Some lawmakers are proposing the United States put a fee on carbon pollution. Part of this plan includes a carbon border tax, a fee on any products imported from a country that does not tax carbon emissions. Supporters of this plan say that a carbon border tax would encourage other countries to reduce their emissions and allow U.S. goods to remain competitive in foreign markets, like China. Opponents say this could create a major trade dispute with China, which strongly dislikes this proposal. Some say a carbon border tax could threaten future positive deals with China, including on climate change. Do you support or oppose a carbon border tax?



Dec. 8 to Dec. 9, 2020, survey of 1,040 likely voters



## CONCLUSION

As world leaders and the global climate community anticipate President Biden's incoming agenda, he should feel confident knowing that U.S. voters support his campaign promises to prioritize the United States taking ambitious climate actions and rejoining the global climate community and that establishing a renewed partnership with China to collaborate on combating the global climate crisis will increase domestic support for his own efforts.

While it is encouraging that voters express such high levels of support for the United States working with China on addressing climate change and increasing production of clean energy technologies, what is even more encouraging is that support for these partnerships is resilient. Even when proposals regarding U.S.-China partnerships on climate action are pitted against alternative proposals, voters support the United States pursuing a path of collaboration with China rather than one of isolation and pure competition. By simulating how support for U.S. climate collaboration with China is resilient against different points of view that could arise in the public discourse, supporters of creating this climate partnership can take comfort in knowing that public opinion is already on their side.

One potential roadblock that Biden will face in enacting his global climate agenda is the opposition from Republican voters to forming any U.S. partnerships with China, including on climate change. Though Republican voters are significantly less supportive than Democrats and independents of the United States working with China on climate change and clean energy, Biden and his administration can be tactful in their messaging to break through to these hesitant Republican voters. Support for climate collaboration with China is highest among Republicans when voters are shown messages related to the United States maintaining its leadership on the issue and

ensuring the United States keeps up with China's growing force as a clean energy production leader.

In addition to emphasizing messaging around healthy competition, Biden could take steps to reassure voters that he is holding China accountable for its climate commitments and ensuring it is being a team player in the global climate fight. One way Biden could do this is to push for actions that voters overwhelmingly agree China should take, such as achieving carbon neutrality sooner than its pledged timeline of before 2060, stopping the financing of fossil fuel projects abroad through the BRI, and stopping the construction of new coal power plants at home. Other ideas that have been proposed to pressure China into reducing emissions from the BRI are also widely popular, and voters support additional measures such as a carbon border tax—even when they are presented with the possibility of Chinese opposition toward the proposal.

President Biden enters office at an unprecedented time in history and faces the immense challenges of addressing the crises of the coronavirus pandemic and climate change. As such, voters agree that COVID-19 and climate change should be the top issues Biden discusses with President Xi Jinping at their first significant encounter. With voters indicating they are open to collaboration with China to tackle the climate crisis together, a revamped and reimagined U.S.-China climate partnership under a Biden administration is a likely—and for Biden, electorally savvy—possibility that can start taking shape in the very near future.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

From December 8 to December 9, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,040 people nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points.