



# Public Opinion on US Energy and Environmental Policy

*Key findings from a nationwide survey among 1,101 likely 2016 voters,  
conducted December 5 to 9, 2014 for the*

Center for American Progress





# KEY FINDINGS



## Key Findings

- Promoting the development of renewable energy sources is a leading item on the public's energy agenda, and five in nine voters want the federal government to do more than it currently is to promote sources such as wind and solar power.
- While voters support increased reliance on natural gas in the coming years, by a two-to-one margin they put a higher priority on protecting public lands and natural places from overdevelopment than on opportunities for oil and natural gas drilling on public lands.
- Two frames for setting energy policy have strong resonance with the public:
  - ✓ A BALANCED energy policy that addresses energy independence while better protecting public health, public lands, and clean drinking water; and
  - ✓ A CLEAN energy policy that promotes innovation and manufacturing jobs while spending the transition to cleaner renewable forms of energy.Both of these frames have stronger appeal than an “ALL OF THE ABOVE” energy frame



## Key Findings

- In addition to renewable energy, large majorities support other progressive policy initiatives, including:
  - ✓ Strengthening protections against pollution of drinking water and clean air; and
  - ✓ Permanently protecting special public lands for future generations.
- Conversely, majorities strongly oppose key initiatives that the new leadership in Congress is expected to push that would weaken protection for drinking water and clean air, sell off some national forests or other public lands, and allow drilling on highly valued recreation lands.
- Americans strongly oppose lifting the restrictions on oil exports, both on an unaided basis and after hearing point-counterpoint arguments on the topic.
- Focusing on ties to Big Oil and the Congress's continued support for taxpayer subsidies of fossil fuel industries is a compelling frame against an anti-environment, fossil fuels agenda in Congress.



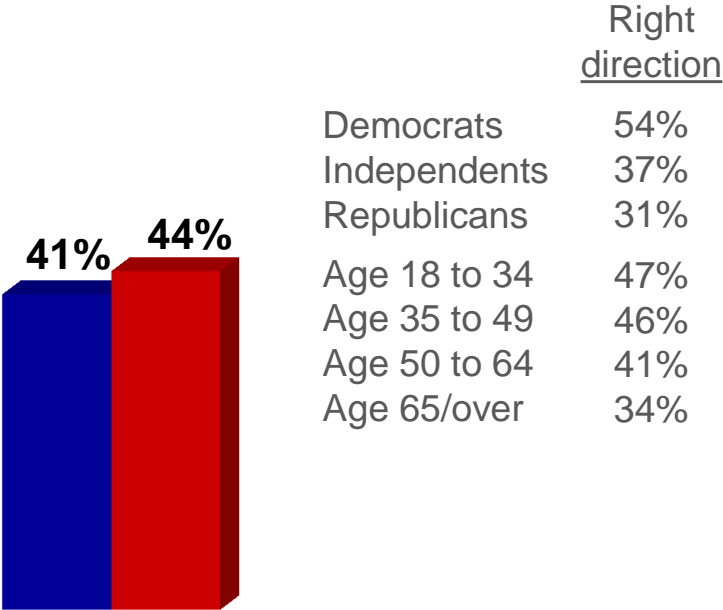
# **PRIORITIES ON ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT**



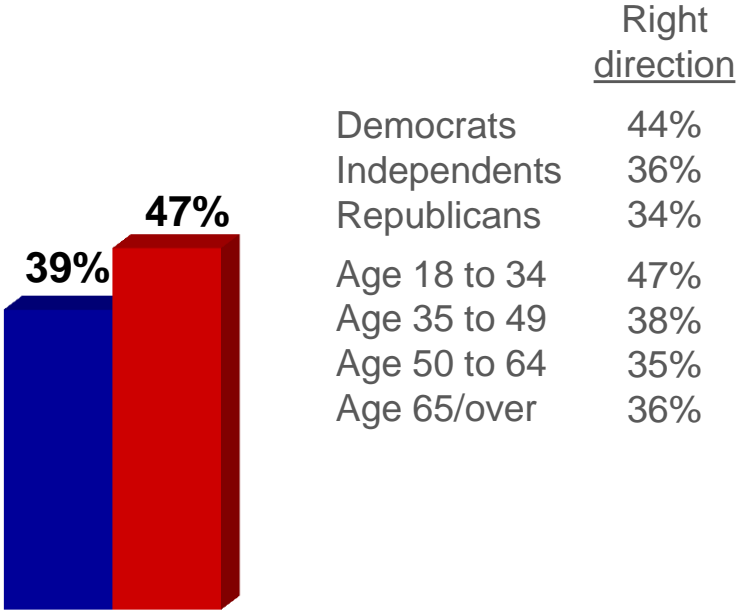
# Voters are divided on the direction of US policy on energy and the environment; Democrats are relatively more optimistic.

■ US is moving in the right direction    ■ US is off on the wrong track

## Issues involving energy



## Issues involving the environment



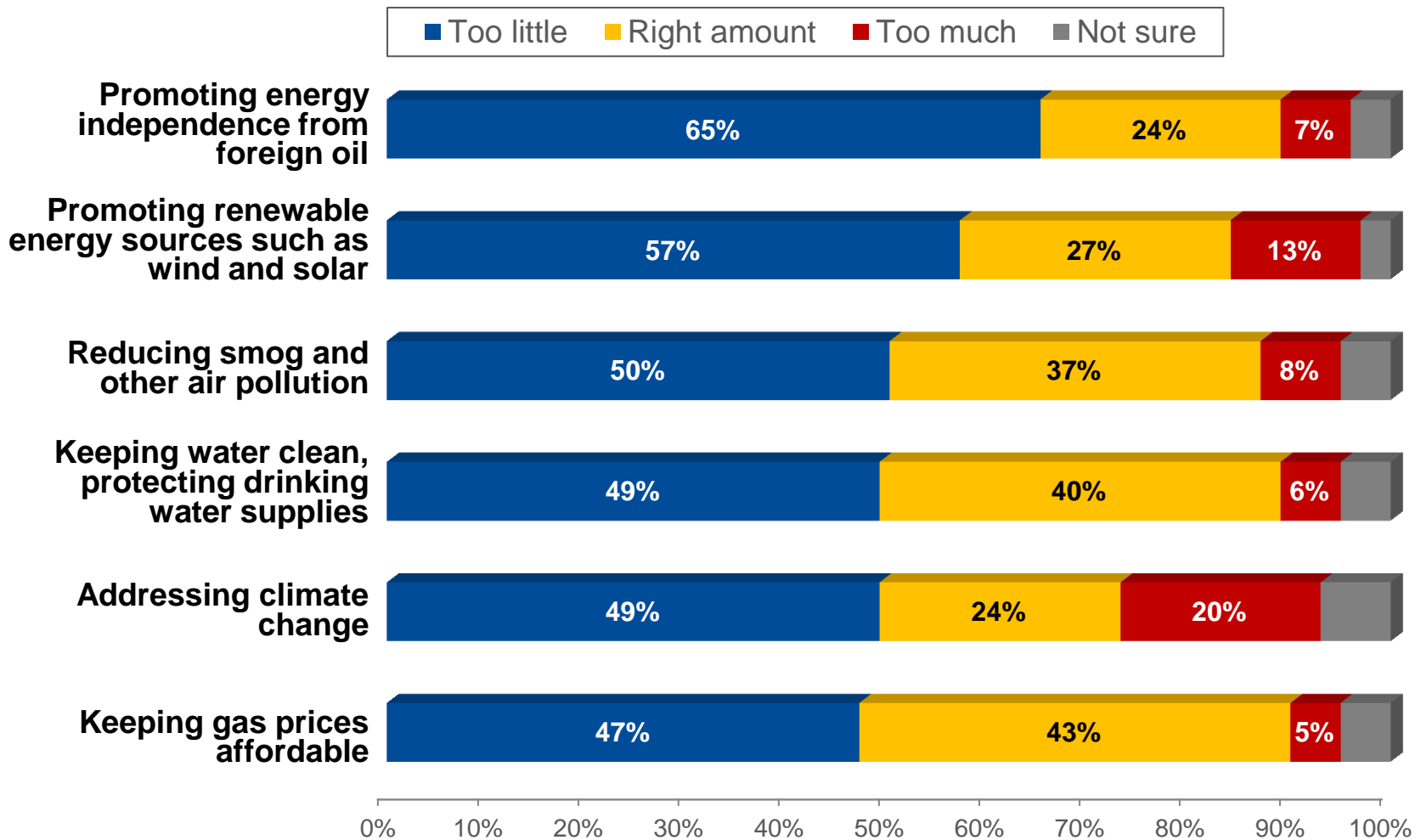
# Whether thinking about energy or the environment, voters want the president and Congress to focus on alternative and renewable energy.

*What would you most like the president and Congress to do related to this issue?  
(Volunteered aggregated responses)*

Energy Policy		Environmental Policy	
More renewable energy/sources	11%	More alternative energy, different forms of energy	10%
Less dependent/reliant on foreign oil	10%	Need to protect/save our environment	8%
Use more solar power	9%	Less talk and more action, do something, work together	7%
Drill for oil in US, use our oil/resources	9%	Keep water clean, need clean water	7%
Find alternative energy, look for other sources, do more research	7%	More solar energy, focus on solar, make solar panels more accessible	7%
Allow Keystone pipeline, activate it	7%	Clean energy	6%
Do something, make a decision, take a stand, agree on something	7%	Make sure we have clean air, focus on keeping air clean	5%
Protect the environment, take care of our air, space, planet	7%	Get Keystone pipeline, need Keystone pipeline	5%
Lower prices/rates, keep prices down, more affordable	5%		

# Voters think the federal government is doing too little to promote energy independence and renewable energy.

*How much is the federal government doing on this?*

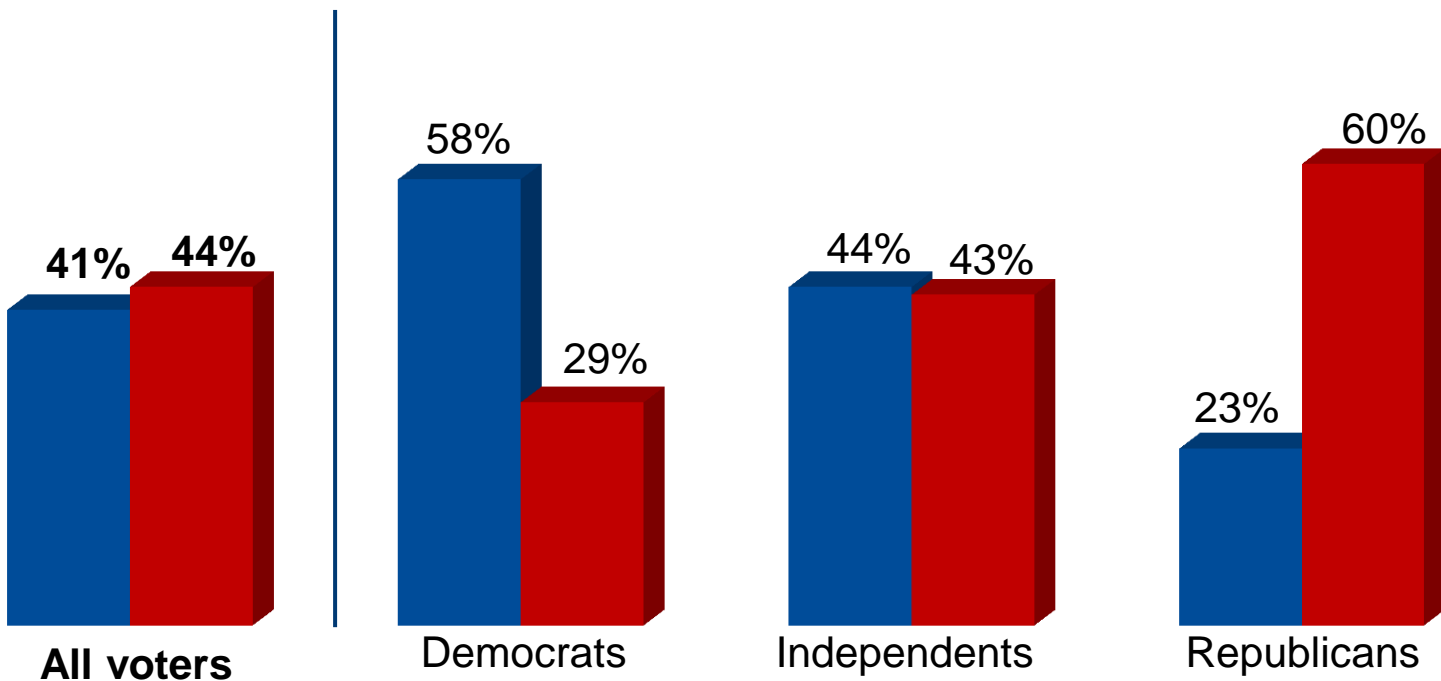




# There are sharp partisan divides on the best route to achieving US energy independence.

*Which is the better approach for the US to achieve energy independence from foreign oil?*

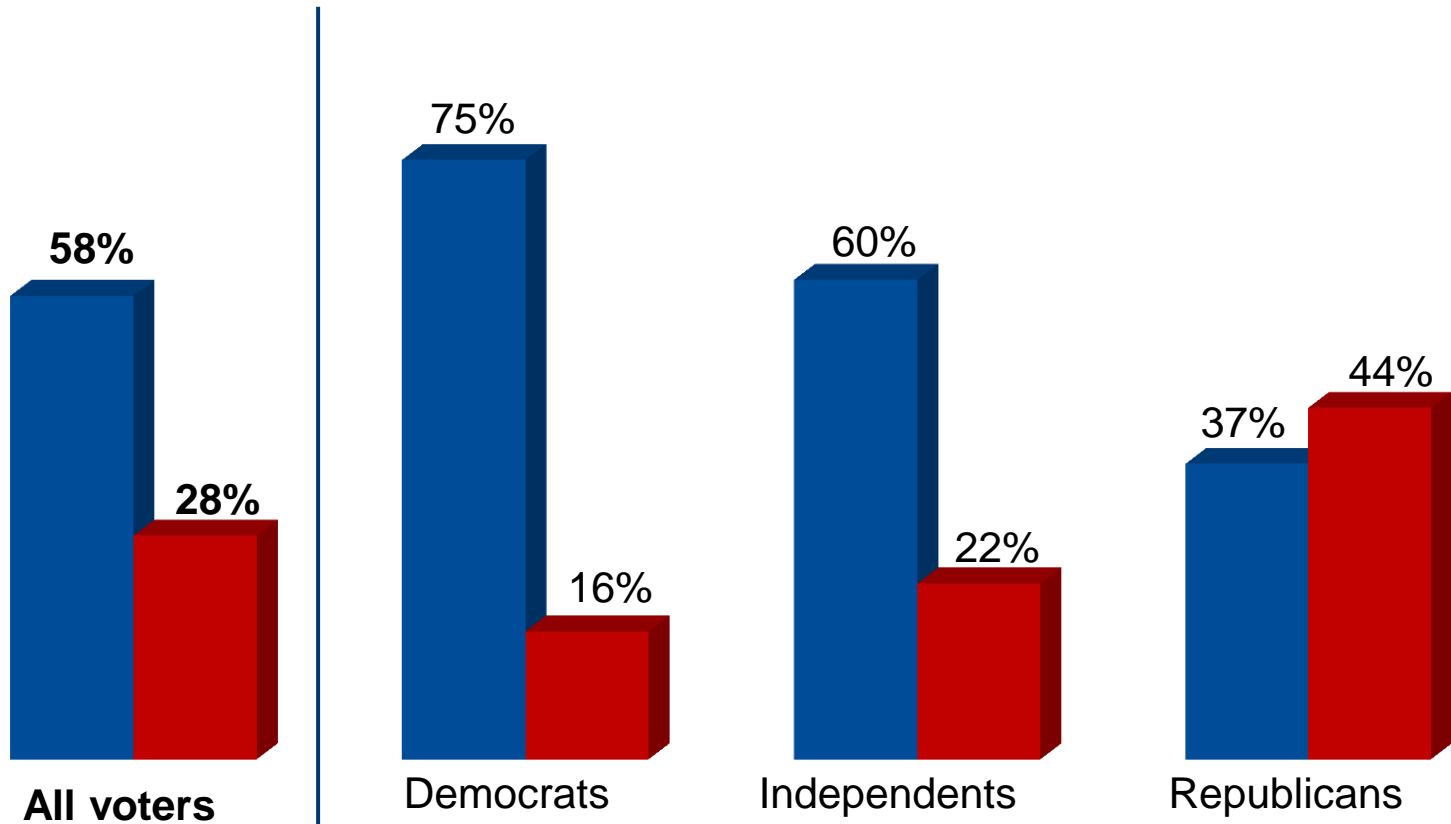
- Development of renewable energy resources such as wind and solar power
- Development of America's own oil, natural gas, and coal



# Voters put priority on protecting public lands over drilling.

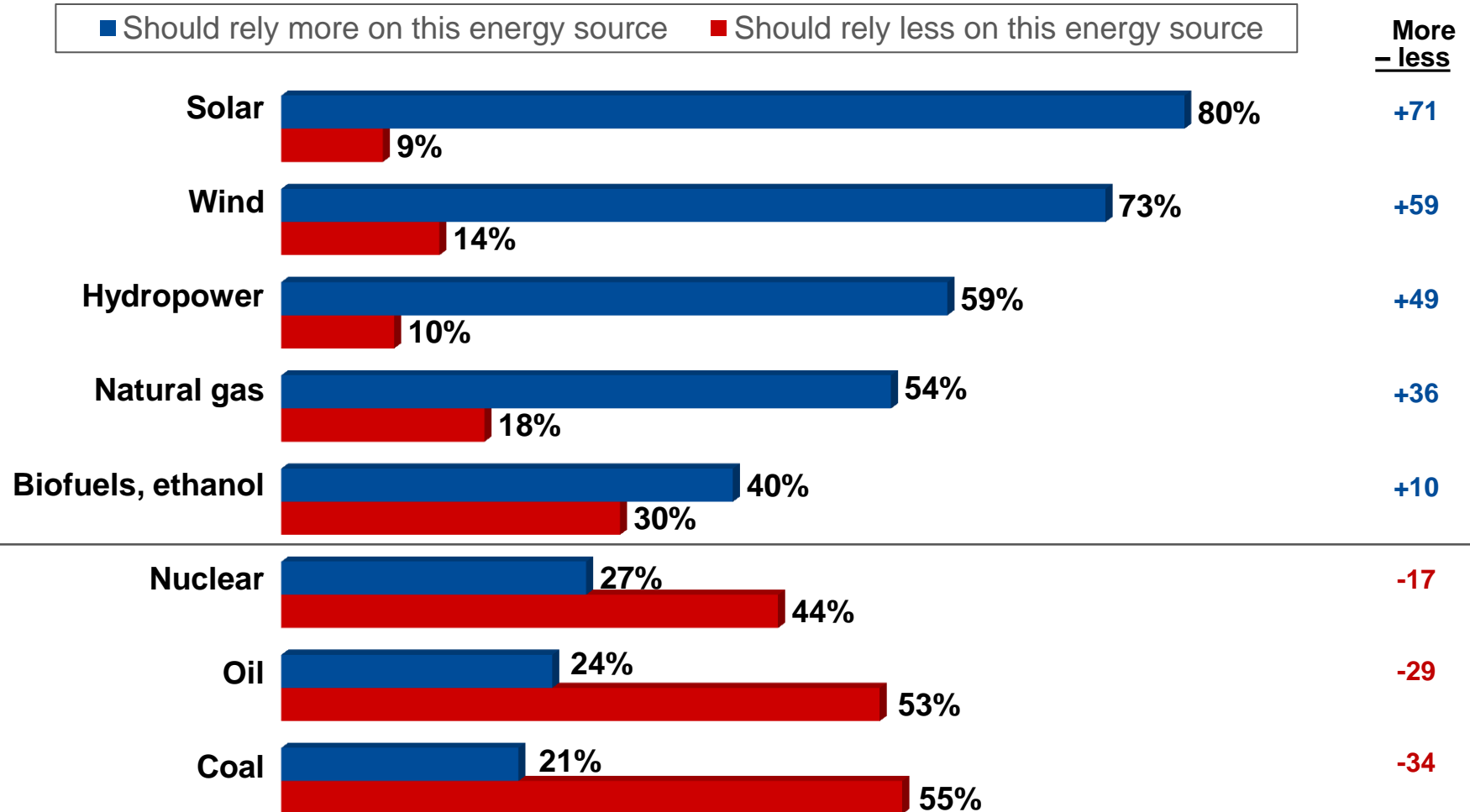
*On which one of these should the federal government focus more?*

- Protecting public lands and natural places from overdevelopment
- Opportunities for oil and natural gas drilling



# Looking toward the future, voters want the US to rely more on renewable energy and less on oil and coal.

*How much should the United States rely on this energy source in the next five years?*





# **ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

# Voters want a balanced or clean energy approach.

*Proportions rating each as a very appealing approach to energy and the environment\**

**A balanced energy policy** that meets our needs for energy independence while better protecting public health, our national public lands, and clean drinking water

Selected as  
best approach



29%

**A clean energy policy** that promotes American innovation and manufacturing jobs, speeding up the nation's transition to cleaner, renewable forms of energy like wind and solar



27%

**A consumer-first energy policy** that ends taxpayer subsidies for the oil industry, improves the efficiency of our cars, and provides Americans with more choice and more energy alternatives to coal and other dirty fuels



16%

**A true all-of-the-above energy policy** that boosts the use of ALL domestic energy resources including coal, oil and gas, and renewable energy sources like wind and solar



25%

\*8-10 ratings on a zero-to-10 scale, 10 = extremely appealing



# A balanced energy policy is the most consistently preferred approach across party lines; a clean energy and all-of-the-above approach elicit partisan reactions.

*Proportions selecting each as the best approach to energy and the environment*

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Independents</u>	<u>Republicans</u>
<b>A balanced energy policy</b> that meets our needs for energy independence while better protecting public health, our national public lands, and clean drinking water	28%	30%	29%
<b>A clean energy policy</b> that promotes American innovation and manufacturing jobs, speeding up the nation's transition to cleaner, renewable forms of energy like wind and solar	38%	26%	18%
<b>A true all-of-the-above energy policy</b> that boosts the use of ALL domestic energy resources including coal, oil and gas, and renewable energy sources like wind and solar	14%	24%	38%
<b>A consumer-first energy policy</b> that ends taxpayer subsidies for the oil industry, improves the efficiency of our cars, and provides Americans with more choice and more energy alternatives to coal and other dirty fuels	18%	17%	14%

# Large majorities of voters support progressive policy proposals.

■ Strongly support this proposal President Obama is considering ■ Somewhat support proposal

**Strengthen protections against pollution of drinking water and air**



**Permanently protect some public lands: monuments, wildlife refuge areas, wilderness**



**Increase fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks**



**Expand wind, solar, renewable energy development**



**Set limits on amount of carbon pollution from power plants**



**Require oil companies to use oil from US public lands/offshore here, not export US oil**

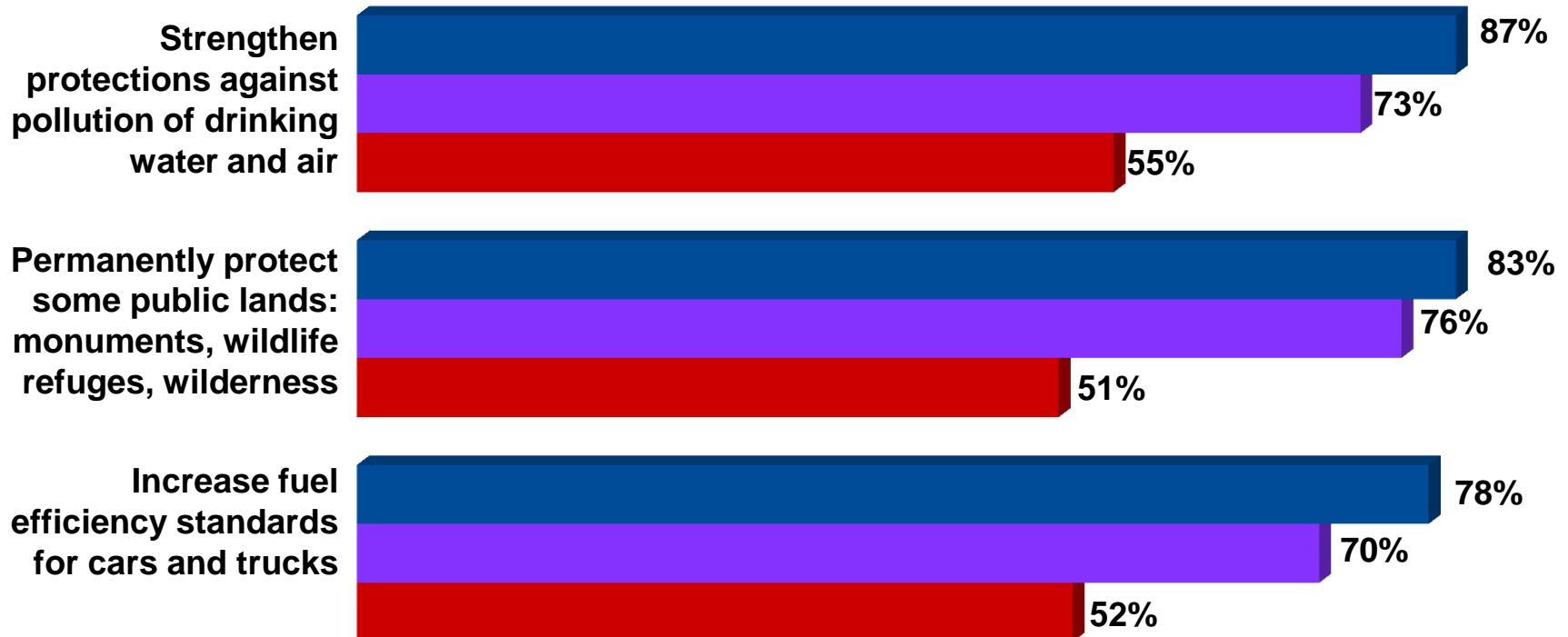


**Cut back on taxpayer-funded subsidies for oil, gas, coal companies**



# Proposals to keep our air and water clean, protect public lands, and increase fuel-efficiency standards all receive strong support across parties.

*Proportions who strongly support each policy*





# Voters strongly oppose numerous proposals the new Congress is expected to take up.

■ Strongly oppose this proposal Republicans are considering    ■ Somewhat oppose proposal

**Weaken protections for our drinking water supplies and clean air**



**Sell some national forests or public lands to help balance the budget**



**Allow drilling for oil/gas on highly valued recreation lands, national forests/national parks**



**Stop creation of new national parks, wilderness areas, and monuments**



**Allow oil and gas companies to export more US oil and gas to foreign countries**

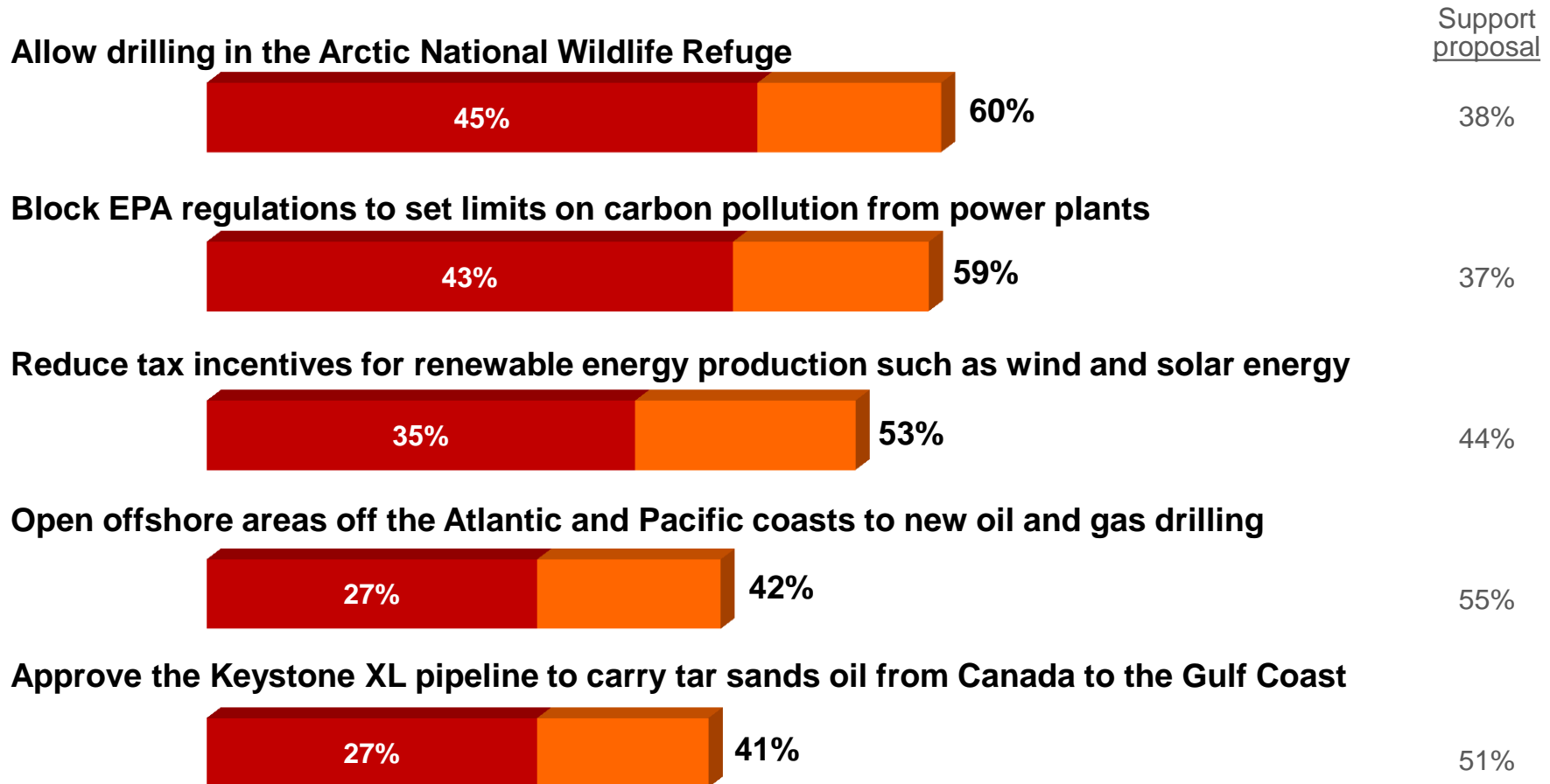


**Loosen protections for endangered wildlife**



# Voters oppose numerous proposals the new Congress is expected to take up; Keystone pipeline and offshore drilling more mixed

■ Strongly oppose this proposal Republicans are considering ■ Somewhat oppose proposal





# Large majorities of voters across party lines oppose allowing oil and gas companies to export more US oil overseas.

*Support for proposals concerning US oil that President Obama/Republicans in Congress are considering*

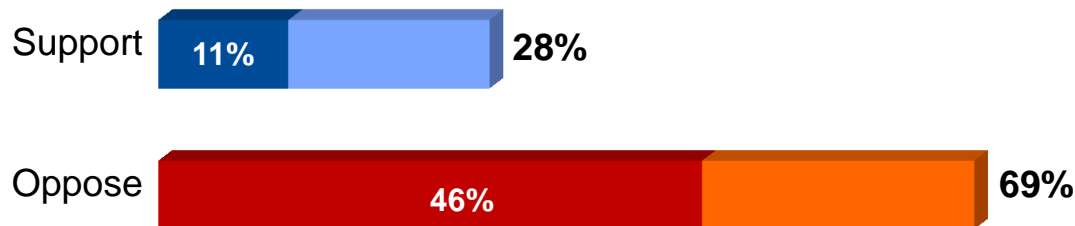
(all voters)

**Require oil companies to use oil produced here from US public lands/offshore to meet US energy needs, not export to other countries**



	<u>Support</u>
Democrats	84%
Independents	82%
Republicans	82%

**Allow oil/gas companies to export more US oil/gas to foreign countries**



	<u>Oppose</u>
Democrats	75%
Independents	69%
Republicans	61%

# Seven in 10 voters prefer investing in refinery capacity at home over lifting restrictions on the export of domestic oil after hearing arguments for both sides.

*With which argument about lifting restrictions on oil exports do you agree more?*

(all voters)

**Lifting restrictions on oil exports would only increase gas prices here at home while making oil companies richer.** And because exporting oil overseas would reduce the amount available to meet our domestic needs, it could threaten American energy security. Instead, we should invest in more refinery capacity here at home so that more US oil can be refined and sold domestically, which would create jobs and keep energy prices low.



Democrats	71%
Independents	74%
Republicans	69%

**We need to lift restrictions on oil exports to allow US oil to be sold to foreign countries.** Selling American oil to customers overseas will lead to more investment in US oil production, which will help to strengthen our economy and create jobs, and will lower prices at the pump. Exporting more US oil will help our allies abroad, improve American energy security, and reduce the power of foreign oil cartels.

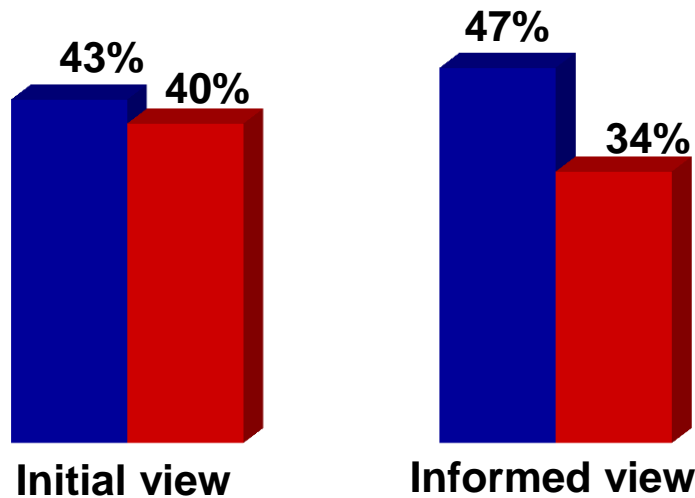


# After hearing proposals from both sides, voters' preference is for the president's agenda over Congress's

*Whom do you trust more to have the right approach on issues related to energy and the environment?*

■ President Obama   ■ Republicans in Congress

(all voters)

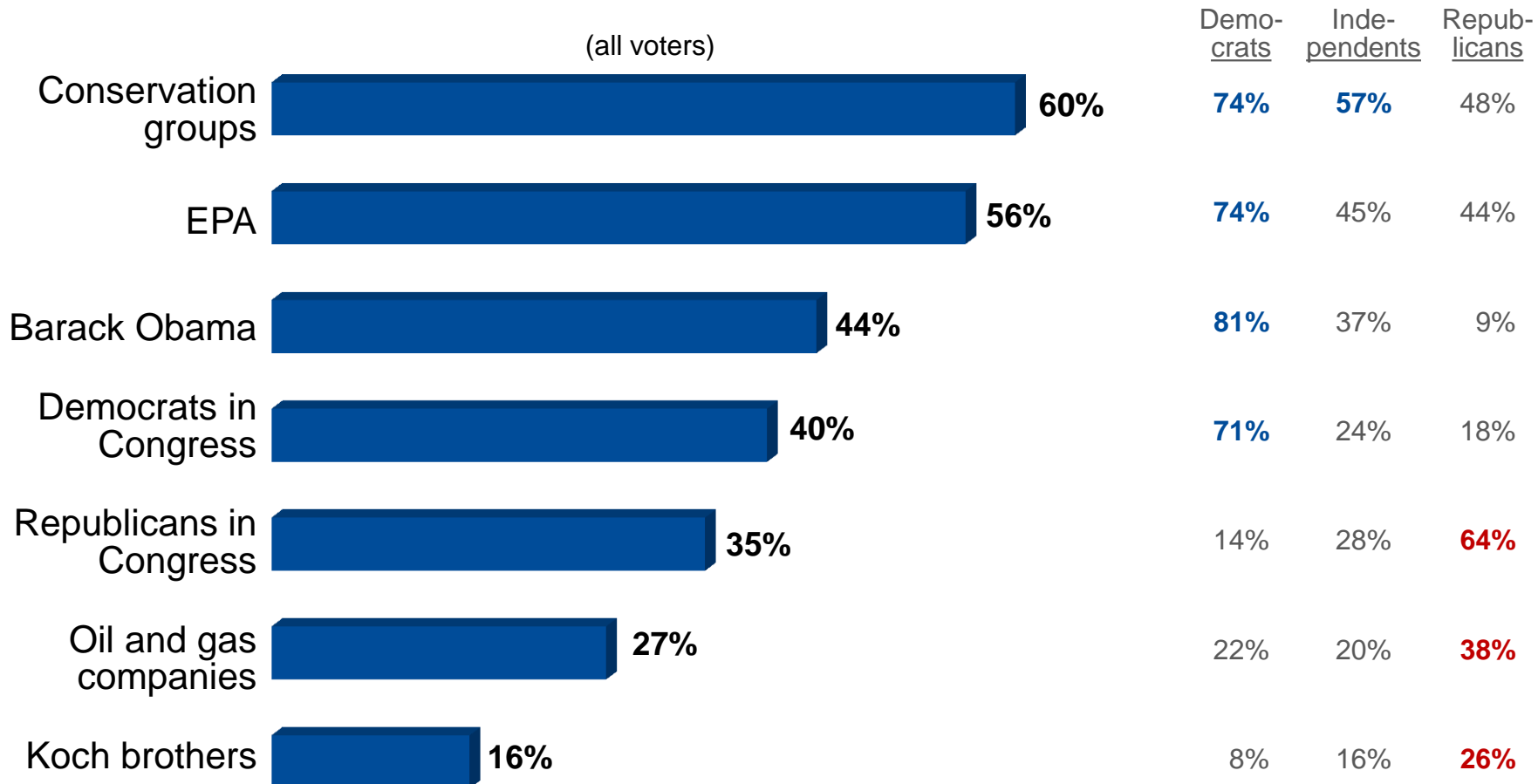


*Differential: Obama minus Congress*

	<u>Initial view</u>	<u>Informed view</u>
<b>All voters</b>	<b>+3</b>	<b>+13</b>
Men	-1	+6
Women	+7	+18
Age 18 to 34	+19	+37
Age 35 to 49	+4	+14
Age 50 to 64	-2	+5
Age 65/over	-5	-2
Democrats	+73	+74
Independents	+7	+18
Republicans	-74	-57

# Conservation groups and the EPA are the most trusted groups on energy and the environment.

*Proportions who trust each a great deal/fair amount to have the right approach on energy/environment issues*





# Putting air and water at risk and tax giveaways to oil companies are voters' biggest concerns about the energy platform of the new Congress.

*Selected biggest concerns about potential consequences of congressional Republicans' energy policies*

**They would put our clean air and drinking water supplies at risk**



**They continue big giveaways to big oil companies at the expense of taxpayers**



**They would expand drilling on national public lands, forests, and other precious areas**



**They would make climate change worse**



**They would promote the reliance on non-renewable, dirty energy sources**



**None of these (VOL)**



# Democrats are most concerned about air/drinking water; independents and Republicans put equal importance on giveaways to oil companies.

*Selected biggest concerns about potential consequences of Republicans' energy policies*

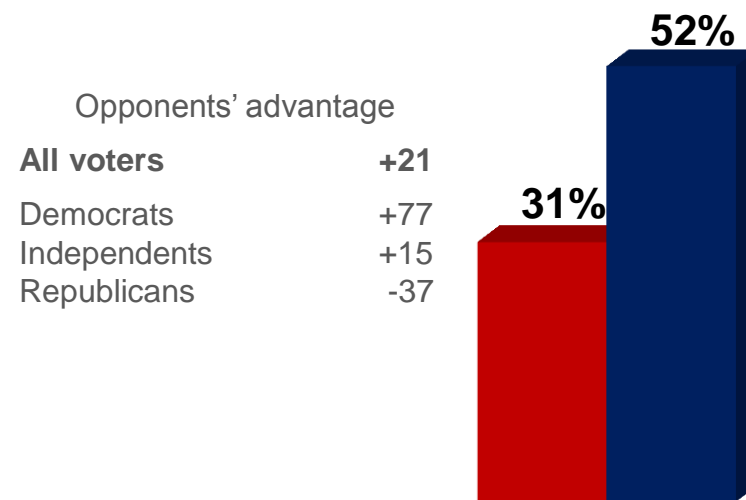
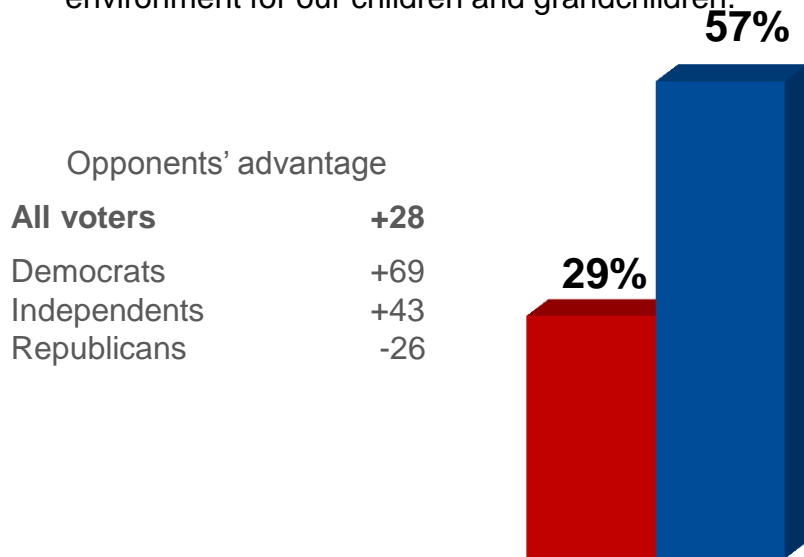
	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
They would put our clean air and drinking water supplies at risk	<b>41%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>31%</b>
It continues big giveaways to big oil companies at the expense of taxpayers	29%	<b>28%</b>	<b>30%</b>
They would expand drilling on national public lands, forests, and other precious areas	22%	17%	15%
They would make climate change worse	23%	16%	9%
They would promote the reliance on non-renewable, dirty energy sources	15%	16%	12%
None of these (VOL)	3%	14%	18%



# Congressional Republicans' defense falls far short against criticisms that it would only help Big Oil companies or harm the environment.

*With which do you agree more?*

- **Congressional Republicans' approach:** The best way to advance America's energy independence is to take full advantage of the abundant oil, gas, and coal resources already in the US. We need to let the free market and the public's preferences determine which energy sources succeed by reducing regulations on the development of traditional energy resources and ending government subsidies for alternative energy ventures that often fail.
- **Opponents/Big Oil frame:** (Congressional Republicans' approach) would only help Big Oil companies, which dump millions of dollars into TV ads and political campaigns to protect their government giveaways. The fossil fuel industry already gets as much as \$18.5 billion in taxpayer-funded subsidies every year. Instead of giving oil and gas companies more subsidies, we need to focus on investing in clean and renewable energy and protecting the environment for our children and grandchildren.
- **Opponents/enviro frame:** (Congressional Republicans' approach) is not a balanced one because it will harm the environment and increase American dependence on non-renewable and dirty energy sources. The Republican plan calls for more drilling in America's oceans, national forests, and public lands, reducing protections against air and water pollution, and will increase carbon pollution that scientists say is responsible for climate change.





# **KEY FINDINGS AMONG HISPANICS**

*Interviews with 201 Hispanic voters, including oversample*



## Key Findings among Hispanics

- Like voters overall, Hispanic voters want to see the US increasingly relying on renewable energy sources.
- Solid majorities of Hispanic voters trust the EPA (66%), conservation groups (64%), and President Obama (55%) to take the right approach on issues related to energy and the environment. They are relatively more trusting of Democrats (48%) than Republicans (34%) than voters overall.
- Hispanic voters believe a balanced energy policy and a clean energy policy represent the best approaches to energy and the environment.
- Like voters overall, Hispanics strongly support a progressive policy platform on energy and the environment, especially proposals to strengthen protections on clean air and water, permanently protect public lands, and increase fuel efficiency standards.