

**TO: NRDC and LCV**  
**FROM: Hart Research Associates**  
**DATE: October 5, 2016**  
**RE: Americans' Views on Federal Fossil Fuel Policy and Clean Energy**

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*On behalf of the Natural Resources Defense Council and the League of Conservation Voters, Hart Research conducted a nationwide survey among a representative sample of 1,103 registered voters to assess their views on federal fuel policy and clean energy. The survey included oversamples of African-American and Hispanic voters to reach 179 and 135 interviews among each group respectively. Interviews were conducted from September 21 to 25, 2016, with respondents contacted by landline and cell phone. The margin of error is  $\pm 2.9$  percentage points for the full national sample, with higher tolerances for subgroups.*

## **Overview of Findings**

The vision most Americans hold for America's energy future centers on clean, renewable sources; they advocate investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy over traditional fossil fuel sources, and they give priority to developing clean energy, even if this means limiting the development of US supplies of oil, gas, and coal. Americans express concern about a number of potential negative outcomes of continued production and use of fossil fuels, with their greatest concern being the health threat this poses to humans.

Consistent with their preference for clean, renewable energy, Americans have a negative reaction to the idea of leasing public lands and waters for fossil fuel development. There is robust support for permanently protecting the Arctic and Atlantic coasts from drilling, especially from Millennials. Moreover, a majority of Americans support stopping the expansion of new leases for fossil fuel development on public lands and waters. Democrats, independents, and Millennials are also overwhelmingly supportive of using clean, renewable sources for energy.

## Detailed Findings

**1. By nearly three to one, Americans feel that investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources is preferable to investment in more traditional sources such as oil, gas, and coal.** Sixty-two percent (62%) of all Americans feel that investing in energy efficiency and renewables is the better path in planning for America’s energy future, compared with 22% who view traditional energy sources as the better investment. Democrats strongly favor renewables over traditional energy sources, as do independents. Indeed, only conservative Republicans—about 26% of the public—lean more toward traditional energy sources; 43% regard traditional energy sources as the better investment, versus 37% who favor energy efficiency and renewable sources. Millennials also are significantly more likely to favor investment in energy efficiency and renewables.

<b>Preferred Path for America’s Energy Future</b>		
	<b>Invest More in Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Sources</b>	<b>Invest More in Traditional Energy Sources</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All Americans	62	22
Democrats	78	12
Independents	69	16
Non-conservative Republicans	49	22
Conservative Republicans	37	43
18 to 34	77	14
35 to 49	60	17
50 to 64	61	24
65 and older	49	34

**2. Americans take a dim view of federal leasing of America’s public lands and waters for the extraction of oil, gas, and coal, particularly in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans.** More than half (52%) of all Americans are unfavorable toward federal leasing of public lands and waters for this purpose, while about one in four (24%) feel *very* unfavorable. When asked specifically about leasing publicly owned waters in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, these proportions increase to 57% unfavorable and 33% very unfavorable. There is a sizable partisan divide on these points: large majorities of Democrats and independents are unfavorable toward these practices, while Republicans tend to favor the leasing of public lands for fossil fuel extraction. Younger Americans are significantly more negative toward these practices.

<b>Reaction to Leasing Public Lands for Fossil Fuel Development</b>				
	<b>General Federal Leasing</b>		<b>Arctic/Atlantic Leasing</b>	
	<b>Favorable</b>	<b>Unfavorable</b>	<b>Favorable</b>	<b>Unfavorable</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All Americans	42	52	38	57
Democrats	28	66	22	74
Independents	37	58	31	64
Republicans	62	33	60	35
18 to 34	39	56	32	65
35 to 49	37	55	38	56
50 to 64	43	53	39	57
65 and older	48	45	44	50

**3. Among six different energy development proposals, only expanding renewable energy sources such as wind and solar has wide support.** This holds true across party ID, with 93% of Democrats, 90% of independents, and 84% of Republicans favoring this proposal—indeed, this is the most popular proposal among each of the partisan groups. Drilling and extraction of fossil fuels on public lands—generally and off the Atlantic and Arctic coasts—garner majority *unfavorable* scores across Americans as a whole. Again, Democrats are notably opposed to each of these proposals.

<b>Reaction to This Energy Proposal</b>		
	<b>Favorable</b>	<b>Unfavorable</b>
<b>All Americans</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Expanding development of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar	89	9
Expanding development of nuclear power	48	47
Allowing, for the first time, oil drilling and extraction by oil companies off the Atlantic coast of the United States	45	51
Expanding oil drilling and extraction of oil, gas, and coal by private companies on public lands owned by the United States	42	54
Allowing, for the first time, oil drilling and extraction by oil companies in the Arctic Ocean	41	55
Expanding natural gas drilling and extraction by companies using hydraulic fracturing, or fracking	35	57

**4. Democrats and independents overwhelmingly want to protect against drilling in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, while Republicans only nominally favor their development for fossil fuel extraction.** Overall, 61% of Americans favor protecting and preserving the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans, versus 26% who want to expand drilling and extraction in these areas. Nearly

eight in 10 (79%) Democrats favor protecting and preserving the Arctic and Atlantic. Among independents, two-thirds (67%) choose protection over drilling, while Republicans skew somewhat in the opposite direction: 45% of Republicans favor expanding drilling in the Arctic and Atlantic Ocean, compared with 37% who favor protection.

**5. In a head-to-head choice, Americans prioritize clean energy over fossil fuels by two to one.** Six in 10 (60%) Americans feel that developing clean energy should be given priority, even if this means limiting the development of the nation’s oil, gas, and coal supplies. By contrast, only 30% would give priority to developing fossil fuel supplies, even if clean energy were to suffer as a result. The majority opinion holds across all age groups.

<b>Energy Priority</b>		
	<b>Development of clean energy should be given priority, even if that means limiting the development of US supplies of <u>oil, gas, and coal</u></b>	<b>Development of US supplies of oil, gas, and coal should be given priority, even if clean energy development <u>suffers to some extent</u></b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
All Americans	60	30
18 to 34	66	30
35 to 49	57	30
50 to 64	65	28
65 and older	53	32

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**6. Americans’ preference for clean energy may be due in part to the concerns many have about the negative outcomes of fossil fuel development and use.** These concerns center foremost on the contamination of water supplies and the harm to human health through the release of hazardous chemicals. These are the top concerns across all demographic groups—regardless of political ideology—followed by increased air pollution and respiratory disease. While majorities of Americans also are concerned about harm to wildlife, the impact on climate change, and the diversion of investment away from clean energy, these constitute second- or third-tier concerns. Democrats and independents are more likely than Republicans to be concerned about each risk, but even among conservative Republicans, two-thirds are concerned about contamination to water supplies (67%) and the release of chemicals that are hazardous to human health (66%).

Total Very/Extremely Concerned About This Risk Associated with Continued Production/Use of Fossil Fuels	All Americans %
Contaminating water supplies	83
Releasing chemicals that are hazardous to human health	81
Increasing air pollution and respiratory disease, such as asthma	71
Harming wildlife and wildlife habitats	67
Releasing carbon pollution that contributes to climate change	63
Diverting investment away from clean, renewable energy sources	58

**7. After hearing detailed arguments opposing and supporting the expansion of oil, gas, and coal development on America’s public lands and in its oceans, Americans affirm their opposition to expanded leasing for fossil fuel development.**

More than half (55%) of Americans come down on the side of stopping the expansion of oil, gas, and coal development on America’s public lands and waters, and 45% *strongly* feel that this practice should be stopped. Among Democrats, 76% advocate an end to expanded fossil fuel extraction and 66% feel strongly about this; 60% of independents also want to stop expansion. Only the most conservative Republicans fully favor expanded leasing of public lands and waters for drilling and extraction—71% of this group support this. Non-conservative Republicans are divided, with 46% favoring expanded fossil fuel development and 40% opposing expanded development.

**8. Consistent with their preference to end expanded fossil fuel development on public lands and oceans, solid majorities of Americans would support the Obama administration halting new leasing.**

More than half (55%) of all Americans say that they would favor the administration stopping the expansion of oil, gas, and coal development on public lands and waters, compared with 39% who would oppose it. Support for this action is overwhelmingly strong among Democrats (80% would favor it), but is also strong among independents (61% would favor it). Millennials and minorities also are noteworthy in their strong support for stopping new fossil fuel development. Support for the administration permanently protecting the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans from oil drilling is even higher, with 59% of all Americans favoring this action, including 84% of all Democrats and 63% of all independents.

<b>Reactions to Obama Administration Actions</b>				
	<b>Stop Federal Leasing of Public Lands and Waters</b>		<b>Permanently Protect Arctic/Atlantic Oceans</b>	
	<b>Favor %</b>	<b>Oppose %</b>	<b>Favor %</b>	<b>Oppose %</b>
All Americans	55	39	59	36
Democrats	80	15	84	12
Independents	61	33	63	35
Republicans	24	70	28	67
Whites	49	45	53	42
African Americans	75	21	81	14
Hispanics	69	23	74	26
18 to 34	64	31	67	30
35 to 49	53	41	56	39
50 to 64	55	39	60	36
65 and older	48	46	51	42

**9. While climate change is not Americans’ chief concern relative to the continued production and use of fossil fuels, most Americans favor keeping as much of our current supplies of oil, gas, and coal in the ground as possible to avoid making climate change worse.** Sixty-five percent (65%) of all Americans favor this idea, and 45% strongly favor it. At 87%, Democrats exhibit the most support, including 66% who are strongly in favor. Only among conservative Republicans is a majority opposed to keeping it in the ground: 60% oppose, while 33% favor.

<b>Keep It in the Ground to Avoid Making Climate Change Worse</b>		
	<b>Favor %</b>	<b>Oppose %</b>
All Americans	65	28
Democrats	87	9
Independents	65	26
Non-conservative Republicans	54	36
Conservative Republicans	33	60