

# Americans and Energy Policy: The Myth of the Partisan Divide

---

A Survey for the Civil Society Institute  
April 25, 2012

*ORC*International

# Table of Contents

	<b><u>Page</u></b>
Methodology.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Detailed Findings.....	11

# Methodology

This ORC International report for the Civil Society Institute presents the findings of a survey conducted among a sample of 1,019 adults comprising 506 men and 513 women, 18 years of age and older. The survey results have been weighted by age, gender, education, race and region to demographically reflect the population.

The survey was conducted by telephone among 769 landline participants and 250 cell phone participants during the period of March 22-25, 2012. The margin of error for the survey is plus or minus three percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

# Executive Summary

# Executive Summary (1)

Contrary to what appears to be assumed by some political commentators, there is no major partisan divide among Americans on clean energy policy questions. In fact, the survey data reflect largely bipartisan agreement in terms of both concerns about key issues and also favored courses of action:

- More than eight out of 10 Americans (83 percent) – including 69 percent of Republicans, 84 percent of Independents, and 95 percent of Democrats -- agree with the following statement: ‘The time is now for a new, grassroots-driven politics to realize a renewable energy future. Congress is debating large public investments in energy and we need to take action to ensure that our taxpayer dollars support renewable energy-- one that protects public health, promotes energy independence and the economic well being of all Americans.’
- Even with high gasoline prices today, 85 percent of Americans – including 76 percent of Republicans, 87 percent of Independents, and 91 percent of Democrats -- agree with the statement “(e) nergy development should be balanced with health and environmental concerns” versus just 13 percent who think “health and environmental concerns should not block energy development.”

# Executive Summary (2)

- Two thirds of Americans (67 percent) think that “political leaders should help to steer the U.S. to greater use of cleaner energy sources – such as increased efficiency, wind and solar – that result in fewer environmental and health damages.” Under a third of Americans (30 percent) think that “political leaders should stay out of the energy markets and let private enterprise have a free hand in picking energy sources and setting prices.”
- About two out of three Americans (66 percent) – including 58 percent of Republicans, 65 percent of Independents, and 75 percent of Democrats -- agree that the term “‘clean energy standard’ should not be used to describe any energy plan that involves nuclear energy, coal-fired power, and natural gas that comes from hydraulic fracturing, also known as ‘fracking’”.
- Eight out of 10 Americans agree that “water shortages and the availability of clean drinking water are real concerns. America should put the emphasis on first developing new energy sources that require less water and result in lower water pollution. “Only 15 percent of Americans think that “America should proceed first with developing energy sources even if they may have significant water pollution and water shortage downsides.”

# Executive Summary (3)

- More than eight out of 10 Americans (82 percent) – including 78 percent of Republicans, 81 percent of Independents, and 85 percent of Democrats -- agree with the following statement: ‘Whether they are referred to as ‘subsidies,’ ‘tax incentives’ or ‘loan guarantees,’ the use of taxpayer dollars for energy projects are long-term investments. However, government incentives for energy must benefit public health and economic well-being. Clear guidelines are needed to direct public energy investments by shifting more of the risk from taxpayers and ratepayers and more to the companies involved.’”
- More than two out of three Americans (68 percent) think it is “a bad idea for the nation to ‘put on hold’ progress towards cleaner energy sources during the current economic difficulty.”
- About two out of three Americans (68 percent) – including 60 percent of Republicans, 76 percent of Independents, and 74 percent of Democrats -- think that America’s “new energy future” should be guided by the “precautionary principle,” which would work very much like the Hippocratic oath does for doctors: “The precautionary principle would advocate a conservative approach to the use of technologies that may put public health at risk and create irreversible environmental harm. If there is not enough scientific evidence showing that it is safe, precaution should guide decisions in those cases.”

# Executive Summary (4)

- About three out of four Americans (75 percent) – including 58 percent of Republicans, 84 percent of Independents, and 86 percent of Democrats -- think that “Congress and state public utility commissions that regulate electric utilities should put more emphasis on renewable energy and increased energy efficiency ... and less emphasis on major investments in new nuclear, coal and natural gas plants.”
- More than three out of four Americans (77 percent) – including 70 percent of Republicans, 76 percent of Independents, and 85 percent of Democrats -- agree that “(t)h energy industry's extensive and well-financed public relations, campaign contributions and lobbying machine is a major barrier to moving beyond business as usual when it comes to America’s energy policy.”
- Nearly six in 10 Americans (56 percent) are now aware of the natural gas drilling process commonly referred to as “fracking.” Fewer than three in 10 Americans (28 percent) are “not aware at all” of this extraction process.



# Executive Summary (5)

- Despite high gas prices, fewer than one in five Americans (16 percent) think that “the energy price paid by consumers is the only factor that makes any difference. Production damages, such as from mining, environmental impacts such as pollution, health harms, and other costs associated with energy should be considered less important factors.” By contrast, 81 percent of Americans believe that “the price paid by consumers is only part of the cost of energy. We have to look at the whole picture -- including environmental and health damages -- when we talk about what a particular source of energy costs America.”
- Eight out of 10 Americans (81 percent) who are aware of fracking say that they are concerned – including nearly half (47 percent) who are “very concerned” – about the impact of fracking on water quality.
- About nine out of 10 Americans (89 percent) agree that “U.S. energy planning and decision making must be made with full knowledge and understanding about the availability of water regionally and locally, and the impact this water use from specific energy choices has on their economies, including agricultural production.”

# Executive Summary (6)

- Four out five Americans (80 percent) – including 78 percent of Republicans, 83 percent of Independents, and 82 percent of Democrats -- oppose the use by utilities in some states of advance billing – known as “Construction Work in Progress” – to pay for the construction of new nuclear and other power plants. Only 13 percent agree that “ratepayers should pay for electricity they use, and construction of nuclear reactors and other power plants that may come on line in the future.”
- About three out of four Americans (73 percent) agree that “federal spending on energy should focus on developing the energy sources of tomorrow, such as wind and solar, and not the energy sources of yesterday, such as nuclear power.” Fewer than one in four (22 percent) say that “federal spending on energy should focus on existing energy sources, such as nuclear, and not emerging energy sources, such as wind and solar.”
- Eight out of 10 Americans think U.S. taxpayers and ratepayers should not “finance the construction of new nuclear power reactors in the United States through tens of billions of dollars in proposed new federal loan guarantees.” Three out of four Americans (76 percent) would support “a shift of federal loan-guarantee support for energy away from nuclear reactors and towards clean, renewable energy, such as wind and solar.”

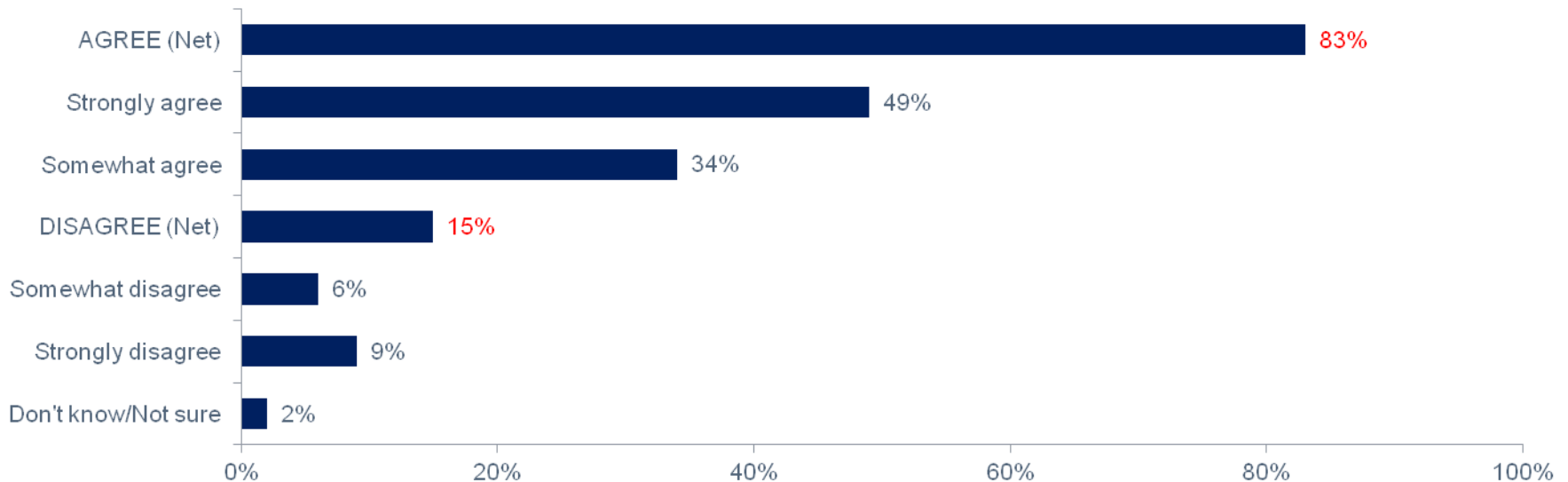
# Detailed Findings

# Time for a Grassroots-Driven Politics to Realize a Renewable Energy Future

A majority of Americans (83%) agree it is time for a grassroots driven politics to realize a renewable energy future. Opposition to this idea runs at just 15%.

- Groups who are most in agreement with this idea include women (89%), those age 18-34 (93%), and Democrats (95%).

## Americans Agree it is Time for a Grassroots Driven Politics to Realize a Renewable Energy Future



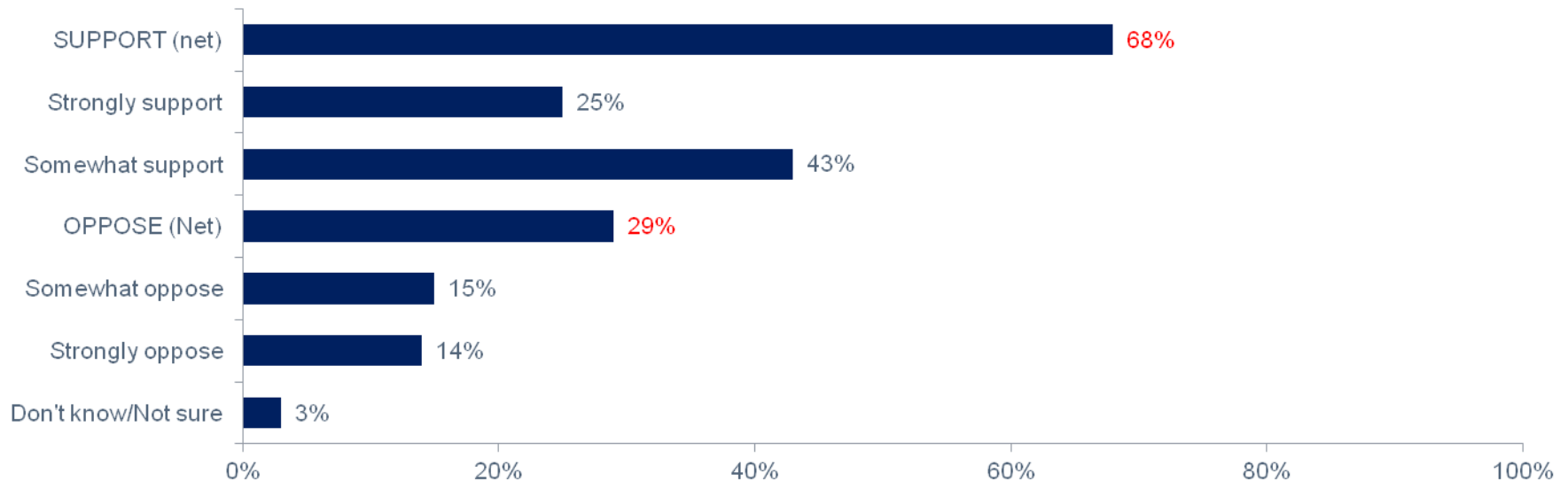
B1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The time is now for a new, grassroots-driven politics to realize a renewable energy future. Congress is debating large public investments in energy and we need to take action to ensure that our taxpayer dollars support renewable energy – one that protects public health, promotes energy independence and the economic well being of all Americans. Do you...

# Should the Precautionary Principle be a Guiding Rule for American Energy Policy?

A majority of Americans (68%) support the precautionary principle as it was explained to them and agree it should be a guiding rule for American energy policy. About three in 10 are opposed to this concept.

- Support is highest for using the precautionary principle as a guiding rule among those age 18-34 (72%), Independents (76%), and Democrats (74%).

## Americans Support the Precautionary Principle as a Guiding Rule for American Energy Policy



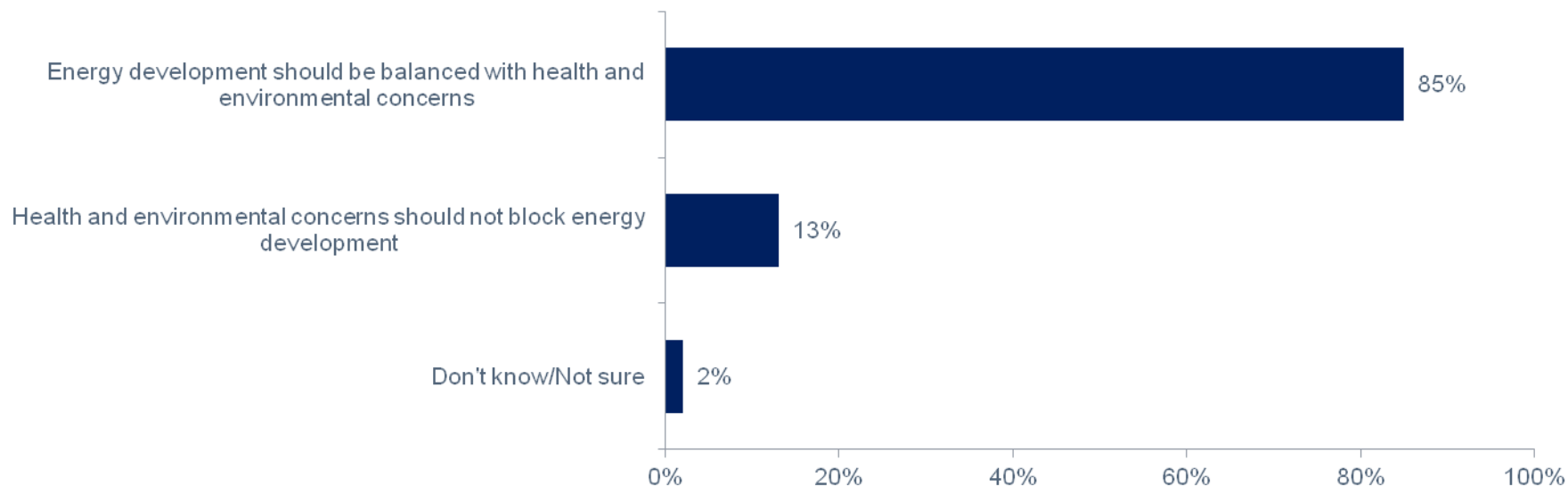
B2: Some experts say that what is known as the 'precautionary principle' should guide planning and decision making as America works to create a new energy future that goes beyond 'business as usual' approaches. Here's how that would work: The precautionary principle would advocate a conservative approach to the use of technologies that may put public health at risk and create irreversible environmental harm. If there is not enough scientific evidence showing that it is safe, precaution should guide decisions in those cases. To what extent do you support or oppose this principle as a guiding rule for American energy policy? Do you...

# Are New Energy Sources More Important than Caution About the Public's Health?

A majority of Americans (85%) would prefer that the country explore new energy sources while also balancing health and environmental concerns. Only 13% think it is so important to find new energy sources that the search should not be blocked by health and environmental concerns.

- Groups who are even more in favor of achieving this balance include Democrats (91%).

## Energy Development Should be Balanced with Health and Environmental Concerns



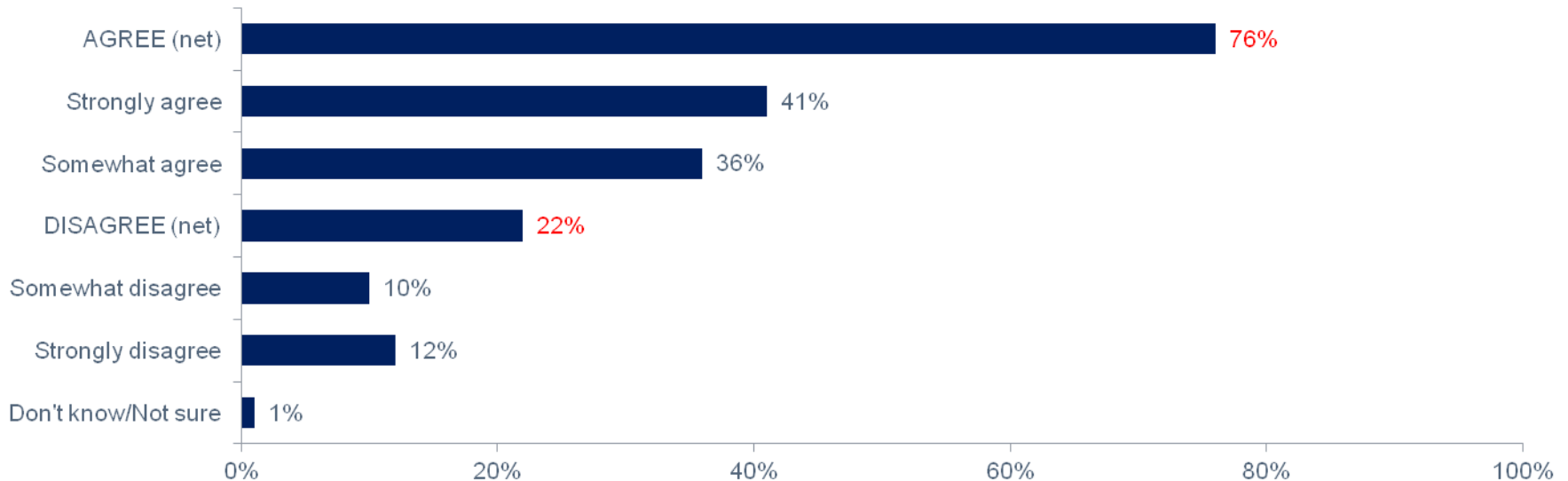
B3: Some people say that finding new energy sources is the paramount concern, and the need for caution about the public's health and the environment in finding new energy sources is overstated. Other people say it is possible to strike a balance between the public's health and environmental concerns on the one hand and the need to find new sources of energy on the other. Which of these two approaches most closely reflects your views? Would you say...?

# Achieving A Sustainable Energy Future by 2050 Through Renewable Energy and Efficiency

A majority of respondents (76%) agree that the U.S. should move toward a sustainable energy future by the year 2050 through a reduction in the use of current forms of energy, and instead move to a greater use of renewable forms of energy and efficiency. One in five (22%) disagree with that statement.

- Those who tend to agree the most include females (82%), those aged 18-34 (86%), households with incomes of less than \$35,000 (81%), households with three or more people and households with any children present (both 81%), Independents (83%) and Democrats (88%).

## The United States Should Move to a Sustainable Energy Future by 2050 Through a Reduction in Our Reliance on Nuclear Power, Natural Gas and Coal and Launch an Initiative to Boost Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency.



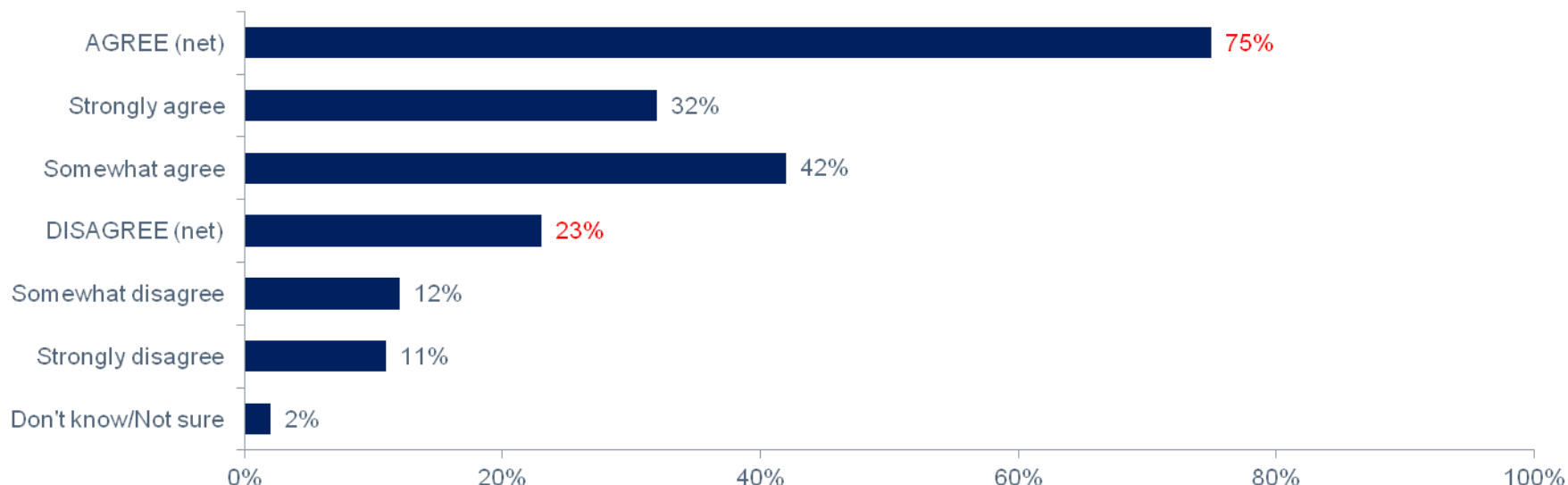
B4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The United States should move to a sustainable energy future by 2050 through a reduction in our reliance on nuclear power, natural gas and coal, and instead, launch a national initiative to boost renewable energy and energy efficiency." Do you...

# Increase Emphasis on Renewable Energy and Efficiency and Decrease Investments in Other Forms of Energy

A majority of respondents (75%) also agree that energy regulators should push for a sustainable energy future by 2050 by emphasizing renewable forms of energy and energy efficiency. One in five (23%) disagree with that statement.

- Those who tend to agree the most include females (80%), those aged 18-34 (84%), households with incomes of less than \$35,000 (82%), Independents (84%) and Democrats (86%).

## Congress and State Public Utility Commissions That Regulate Electric Utilities Should Put MORE Emphasis on Renewable Energy and Increased Efficiency ... and LESS Emphasis on Major Investments in New Nuclear, Coal and Natural Gas Plants



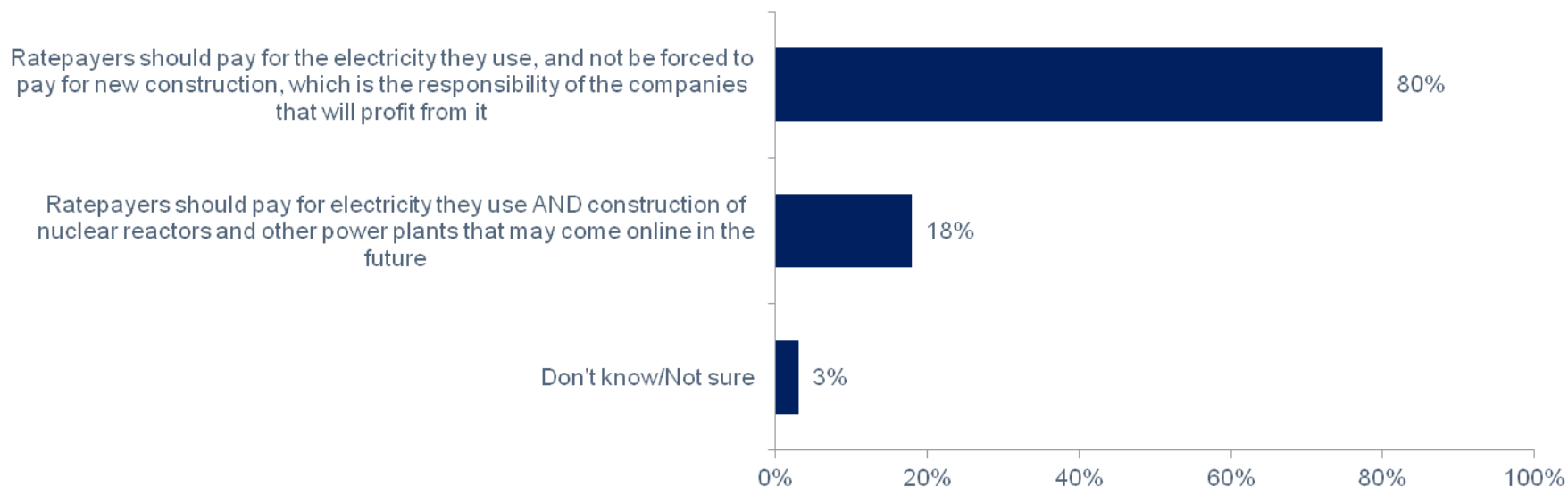
B5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Congress and State public utility commissions that regulate electric utilities should put MORE emphasis on renewable energy and increased energy efficiency ... and LESS emphasis on major investments in nuclear, coal and natural gas plants." Do you....



# Charging Ratepayers for Construction Work in Progress

A majority of Americans (80%) do not think utilities should charge the ratepayers for construction work on new nuclear reactors and other similar plants before they have started generating energy. Eighteen percent believe the utility should be allowed to do this.

## Views on Utilities Charging Ratepayers for Construction Work in Progress



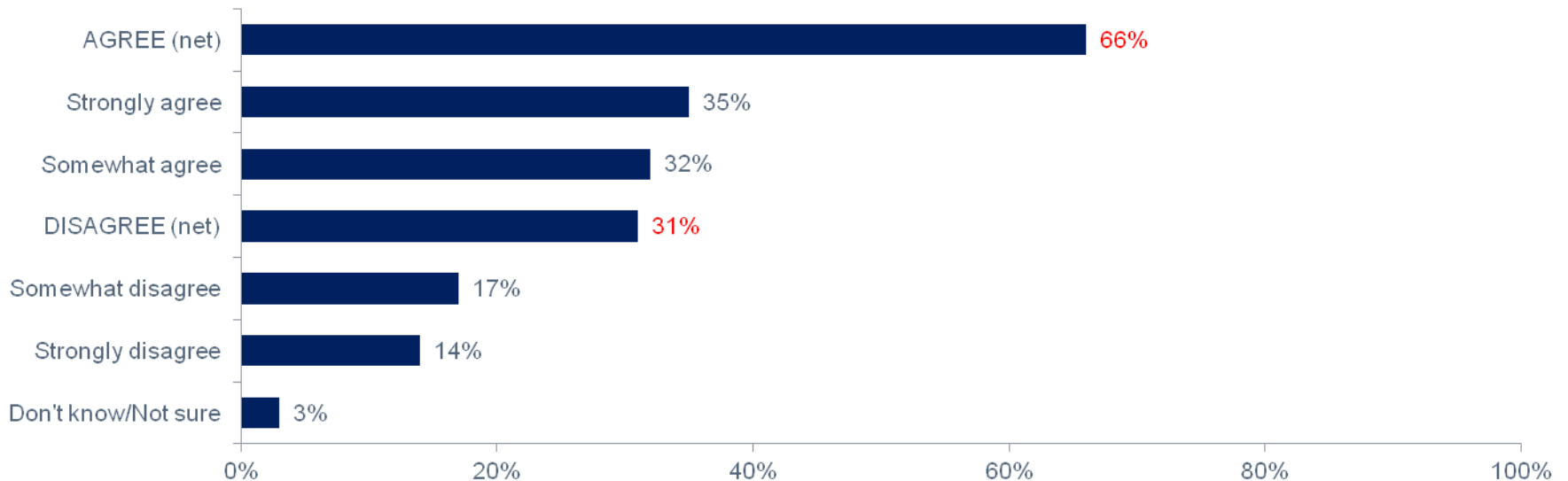
B6: Utilities in some states are allowed to charge electricity ratepayers for "Construction Work in Progress" for new power plants. This means that ratepayers – instead of the companies – pay for construction of new nuclear reactors and other major power plants before any electricity ever reaches customers, thereby lowering the financial risks to shareholders. Knowing this, which of the following statements about "Construction Work in Progress" most closely reflects your view?

# The Definition of Clean Energy Should Not Include Nuclear, Coal Fired or Natural Gas from Fracking

A majority of respondents (66%) also agree that the definition of clean energy should not include nuclear energy, energy derived from coal burning plants or natural gas derived from fracking. Three-in-ten disagree that these types of energy should be eliminated from the definition of clean energy.

- Those who tend to agree the most include females (71%), those aged 18-34 (73%), and Democrats (75%).

## The Definition of Clean Energy Should not Include Nuclear, Coal-Fired Plants or Natural Gas Derived from Fracking



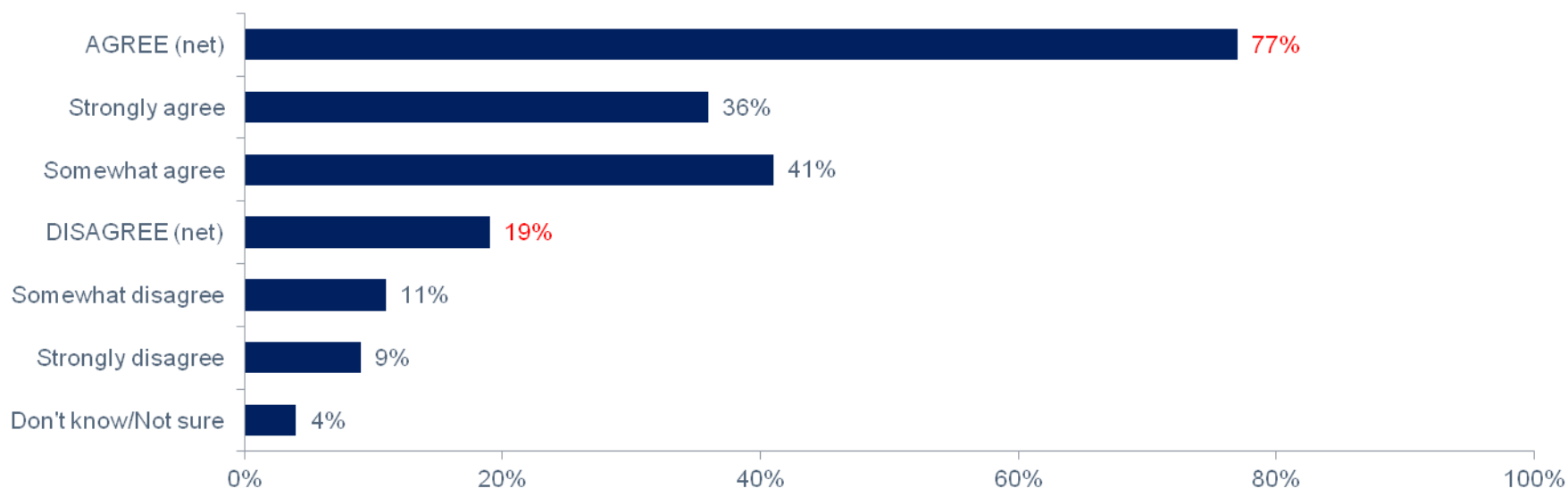
B7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The term clean energy standard should NOT be used to describe any energy plan that involves nuclear energy, coal-fired power and natural gas that comes from hydraulic fracturing, also known as fracking. All of these energy sources produce pollution and cannot be considered clean. Do you..."

# The Energy Industry's Public Relations and Lobbying Efforts are a Barrier to Moving Beyond our Current Energy Policies

A majority of respondents (77%) also agree that the energy industry's efforts in public relations and lobbying are an impediment for changing our current energy policies. One in five (19%) do not think these activities are an impediment.

- Those who tend to agree the most include respondents aged 18-34 (89%), those in the Midwest (83%), households with three or more members (81%), and Democrats (85%).

## The Energy Industry's Public Relations and Lobbying is a Barrier to Moving Beyond Business as Usual When it Comes to America's Energy Policy.

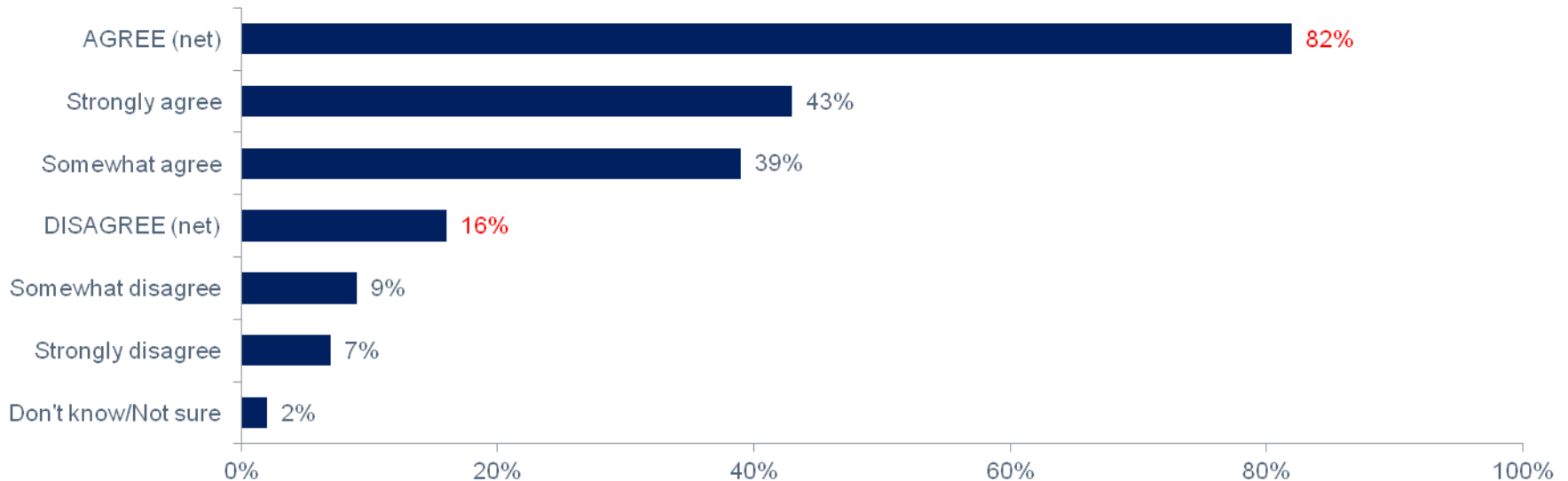


B8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "The energy industry's extensive and well-financed public relations campaign contributions and lobbying machine is a major barrier to moving beyond business as usual when it comes to America's energy policy." Do you...

# The Need to Shift the Risk of Energy Investment from Taxpayers to the Utilities Involved

A majority of respondents (82%) agree that when taxpayer money is used to for energy projects, the risk needs to be shifted away from the public and onto the utilities. Only 16% disagree that the risk should be shifted to the utilities involved.

## Whether They are Referred to as Subsidies, Tax Incentives or Loan Guarantees, the use of Taxpayer Dollars for Energy Projects are Long-Term Investments. Clear Guidelines are Needed to Direct Public Energy Investments by Shifting More of the Risk from Taxpayers to the Companies Involved.

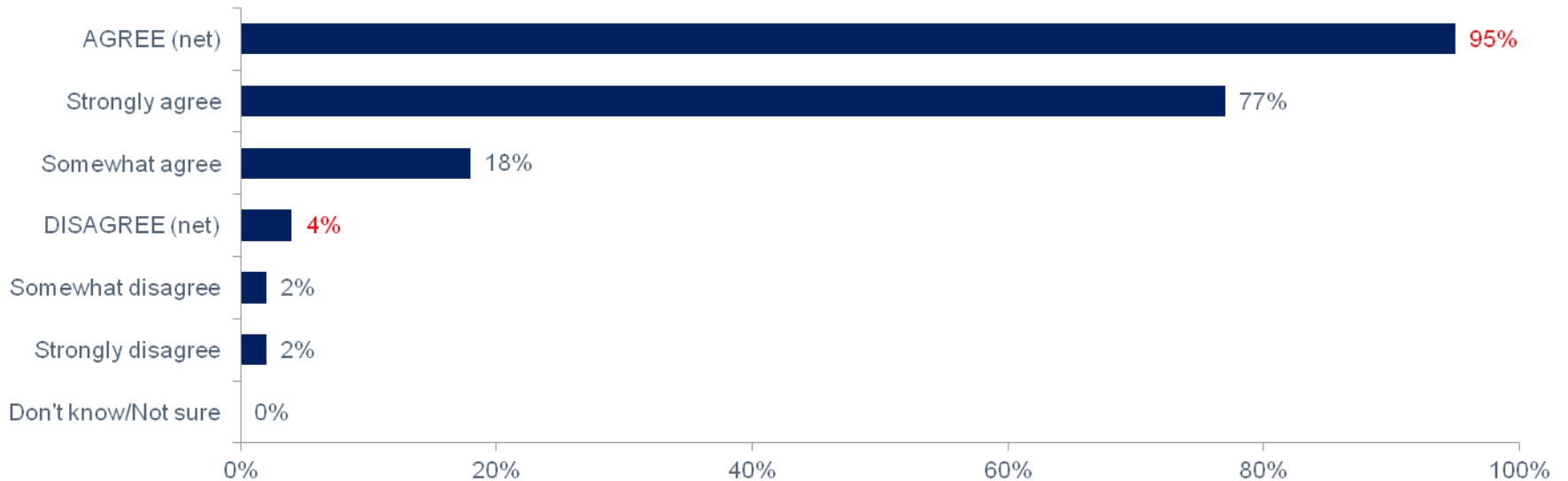


B9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Whether they are referred to as "subsidies", "tax incentives" or "loan guarantees", the use of taxpayer dollars for energy projects are long-term investments. However, government incentives for energy must benefit public health and economic well-being. Clear guidelines are needed to direct public energy investments by shifting more of the risk from taxpayers and ratepayers and more to the companies involved. Do you..."

# The Public Needs to Learn More About our Energy Choices and Their Implications

Nearly all respondents agree that Americans need to learn more about our energy choices and their implications for food security and public health (95%).

## The Public Needs to Learn More About our Energy Choices and Their Implications for Food Security, Safe Drinking Water and Public Health

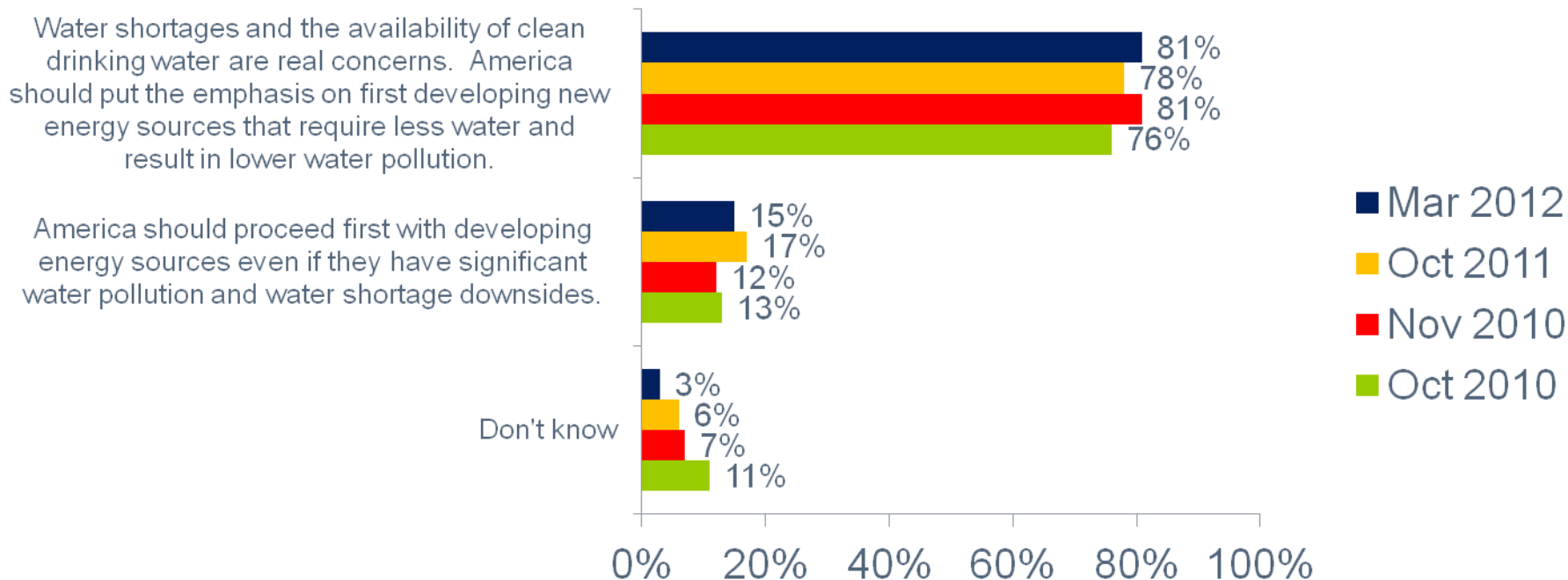


B10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Americans need to learn more about our energy choices for the future, and the related implications for food security, safe drinking water, and public health. Do you..."

# The Future Focus of America's Energy Production

A majority of Americans (81%) think the country should focus their energy production on those sources that require less water and result in lower amounts of water pollution. Fifteen percent favor energy production without consideration for the amount of water used or the pollution that may result.

- Those who tend to agree the most with this statement include females (87%), households with incomes of \$35,000 or less (86%), those with less than a college degree (87%) and Democrats (88%).



B11: Which of the following statements best expresses your view about where America should focus its energy production in the future? (March 2012)

QN3: Many energy sources, such as natural gas, coal, tar sands, nuclear and biofuels, require large amounts of water and have raised concerns about resulting contamination of drinking water and use of scarce water resources. Which of the following statements BEST expresses your view about where America should focus its energy production in the future? (October 2011)

QD8: Which of the following statements BEST expresses your view about where America should focus its energy production in the future? (November 2010)

QR8: Some energy sources – such as natural gas, coal, tar sands, nuclear and biofuels – require large amounts of water and have raised concerns about resulting contamination of drinking water sources and other water. Which of the following statements BEST expresses your view about where America should focus its energy production in the future? (October 2010)

Bases: March 2012 (1,019), October 2011 (1,049), November 2010, (1,012), October 2010 (1,011)

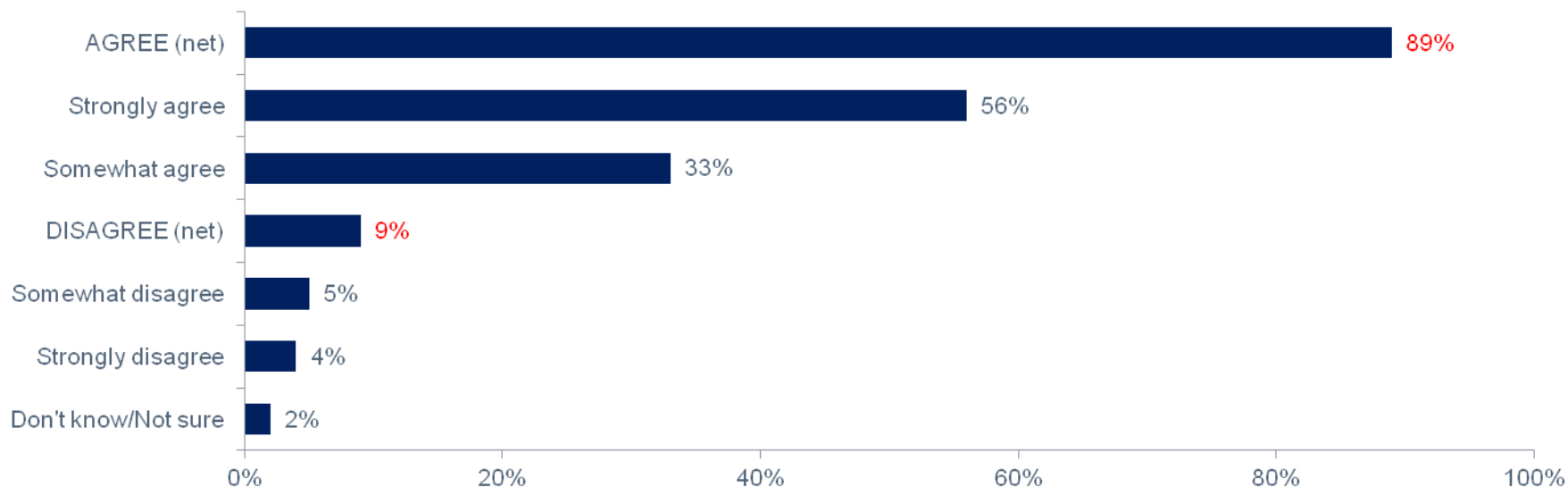
The question wording and the statements vary somewhat from year to year. The statements shown are the most recently asked in March 2012.

# Energy Planning Must Take Into Account the Available Local Water Supply

A majority of respondents (89%) agree that the energy planning in this country must take into account the available local water supply. Less than one in 10 disagree with this.

- Those who tend to agree the most include females (92%), respondents aged 18-34 (93%), those with less than a college degree (95%), and Democrats (93%).

## Energy Planning Must Take Into Account the Available Local Water Supply



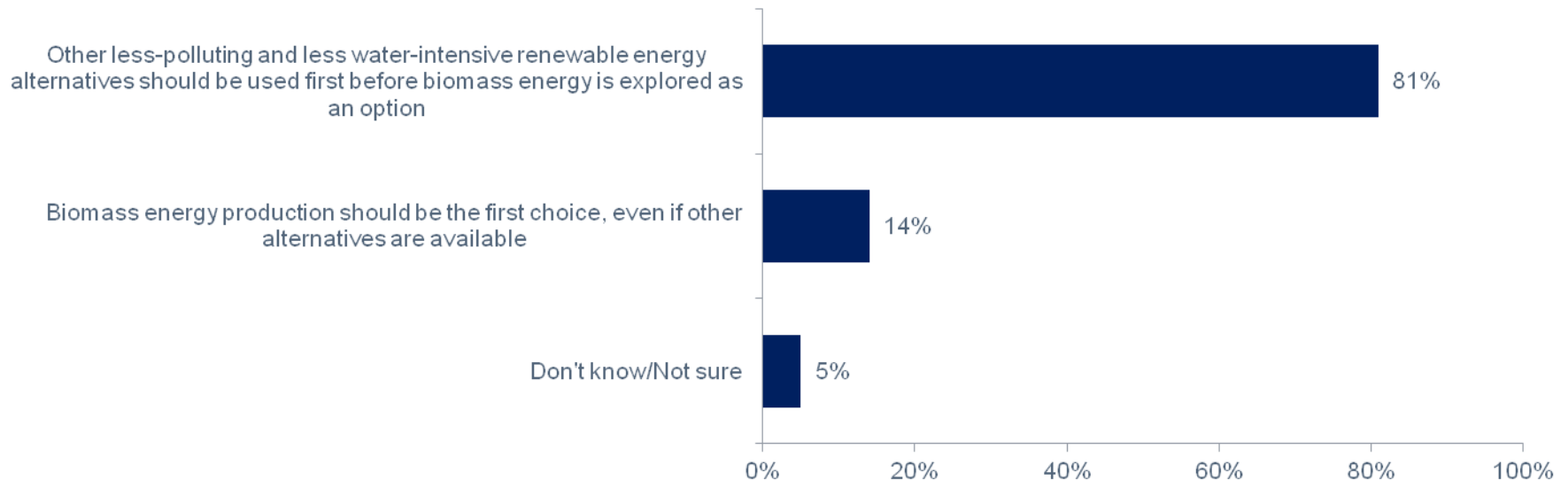
B12. Presently, the Federal government does not have a comprehensive understanding of what our water budget looks like, yet major investments are being made in water-intensive energy sources. Knowing this, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "U.S. energy planning and decision making must be made with the full knowledge and understanding about the availability of water regionally and locally, and the impact this water use from specific energy choices has on their economies, including agricultural production." Do you...

# Americans Prefer That Other Energy Producing Options Be Explored Before Biomass Production

A majority of Americans (81%) think the other energy producing options should be explored first before biomass energy production is explored. Fourteen percent are in favor of proceeding with biomass energy production before other options are explored.

- Those who tend to agree the most include respondents age 45-54 (89%), and Democrats (85%).

## Should Biomass Energy Production be Used First or Only After Other Less Polluting Options are Explored?



*B13: Biomass energy production – which involves the use of wooded areas and other vegetation on a large scale – creates pollution and requires large amounts of water in the conversion process. In many cases, less polluting and less water-intensive renewable-energy alternatives are available at the local level. Given that, which of the following statements most closely reflects your view?*

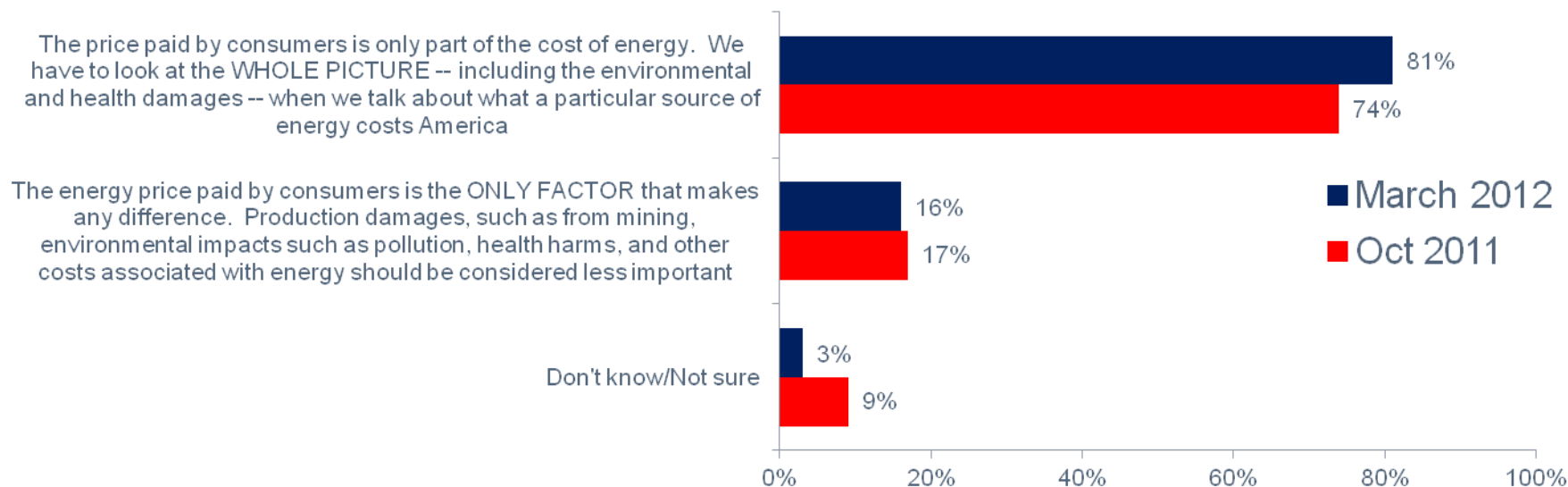


# Factors to Take Into Consideration When Calculating the Cost of Energy

A majority of Americans (81%) think the price paid by consumers is just one factor to take into consideration when calculating the cost of an energy source. Sixteen percent think cost is the only factor and other issues such as environmental damage should not be taken into consideration.

- Those who tend to agree the most include females (84%), respondents age 18-34 (86%) and those 45-54 (85%), as well as those with less than a college education (88%), and Democrats (87%).

## What Factors Should America Take Into Consideration When Calculating the Cost of Energy Sources?



B14: How do you think America should look at various energy sources? March 2012, N= 1,019

N5: Which of the following best describes how you think America should look at various energy sources such as coal and nuclear? October 2011, N= 1,049

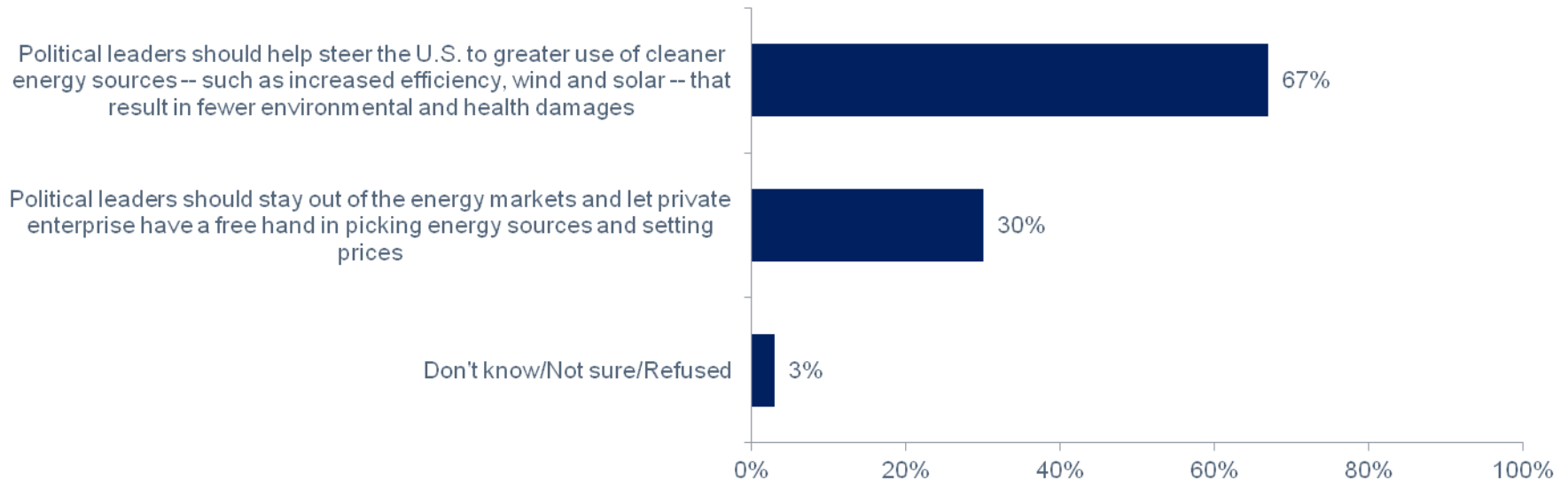
The question wording and statements vary slightly over time. The statements shown are those asked most recently.

# The Role Political Leaders Should Take In Energy Policy

About two-thirds (67%) of Americans think political leaders should take an active role and help steer the U.S. to greater use of clean energy sources. Three-in-10 think political leaders should stay out of the energy markets and let private enterprise pick energy sources and set prices.

- Those who tend to agree the most include females (74%), respondents age 18-34 (74%), as well as those with household incomes of less than \$35,000 (76%), Independents (74%) and Democrats (84%).

## The Role Political Leaders Should Take in Energy Policy



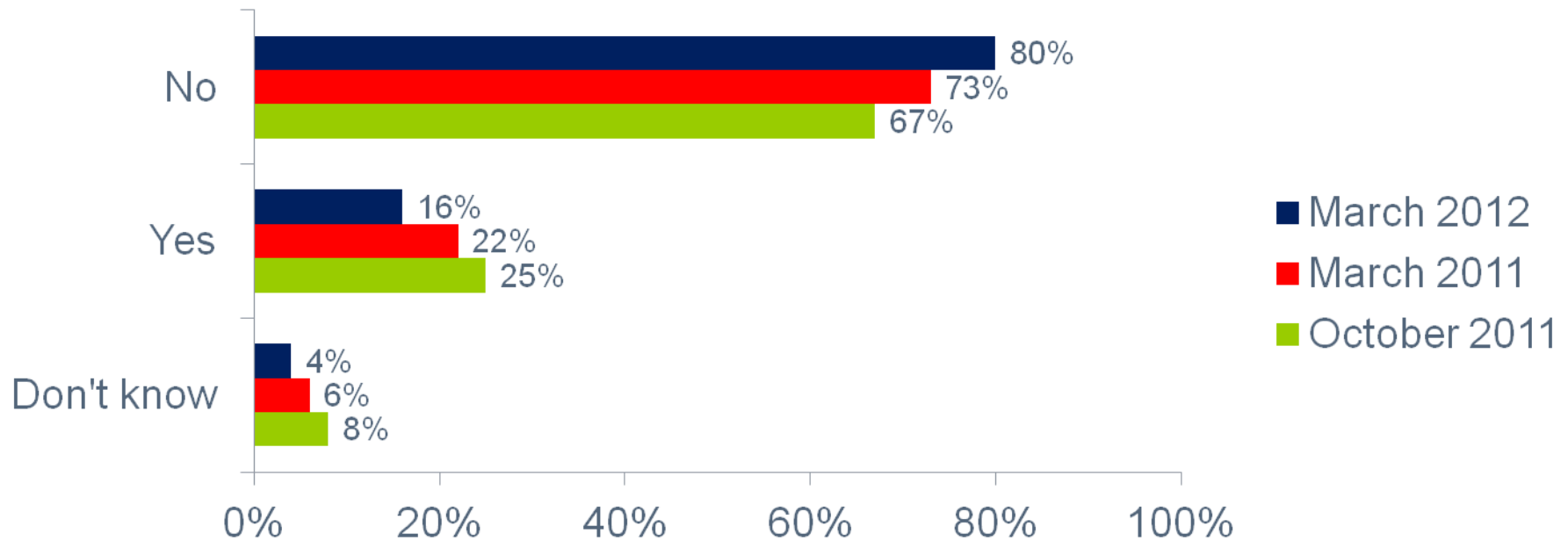
B15: Which statement MOST ACCURATELY reflects your position on political leadership and energy policy?

# Should Taxpayers Provide Loan Guarantees for New Nuclear Power Reactors?

Eight in 10 respondents (80%) do not think taxpayers or ratepayers should pay for the construction of new nuclear reactors in this country.

- Those who are even more strongly against taxpayers paying for new construction include women (85%), households with \$35-50,000 in income (87%), households with two people (86%), and Democrats (84%).

## Should Ratepayers Finance the Construction of Nuclear Power Reactors?



B16: Do you think taxpayers and ratepayers should finance the construction of new nuclear power reactors in the United States through tens of billions of dollars in proposed federal loan guarantees? (March 2012)

QA5: Do you think taxpayers should take on the risk for the construction of new nuclear power reactors in the United States through billions of dollars in new federal loan guarantees for new reactors? (March 2011)

QN7: Do you think taxpayers and ratepayers should provide taxpayer backed loan guarantees for the construction of new nuclear power reactors in the United States through proposed tens of billions in federal loan guarantees for new reactors? (October 2011)

Base: March 2012: 1,019; March 2011: 814; October 2011: 1,049;

Proprietary & Confidential: ORC International 2011

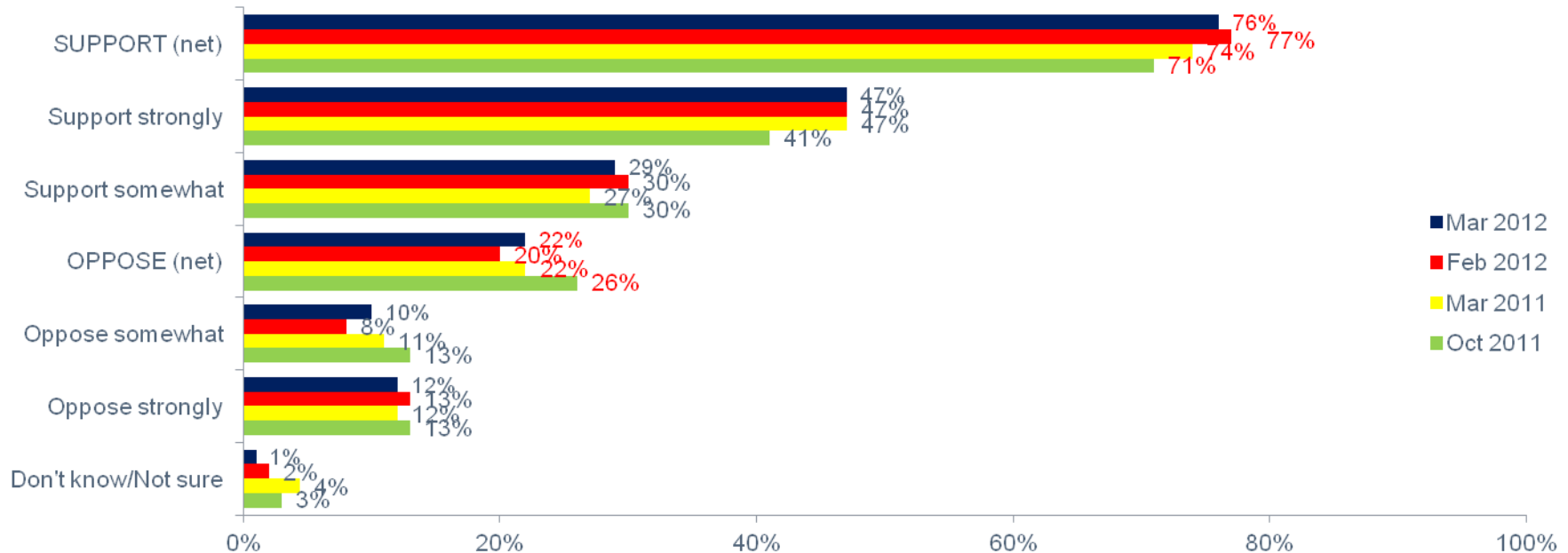
P.27

# Support for Shifting Federal Support From Nuclear Reactors to Clean Energy

Three-fourths (76%) would support shifting federal support away from the building of nuclear reactors toward more clean, renewable forms of energy.

- Support is higher among women (82%), those age 18-34 and age 45-54 (both 82%), those in the Northeast (84%), households with incomes less than \$75,000 (80%), Independents (88%) and Democrats (87%).

## Support/Oppose Shifting Support from Nuclear Reactors to Clean Energy

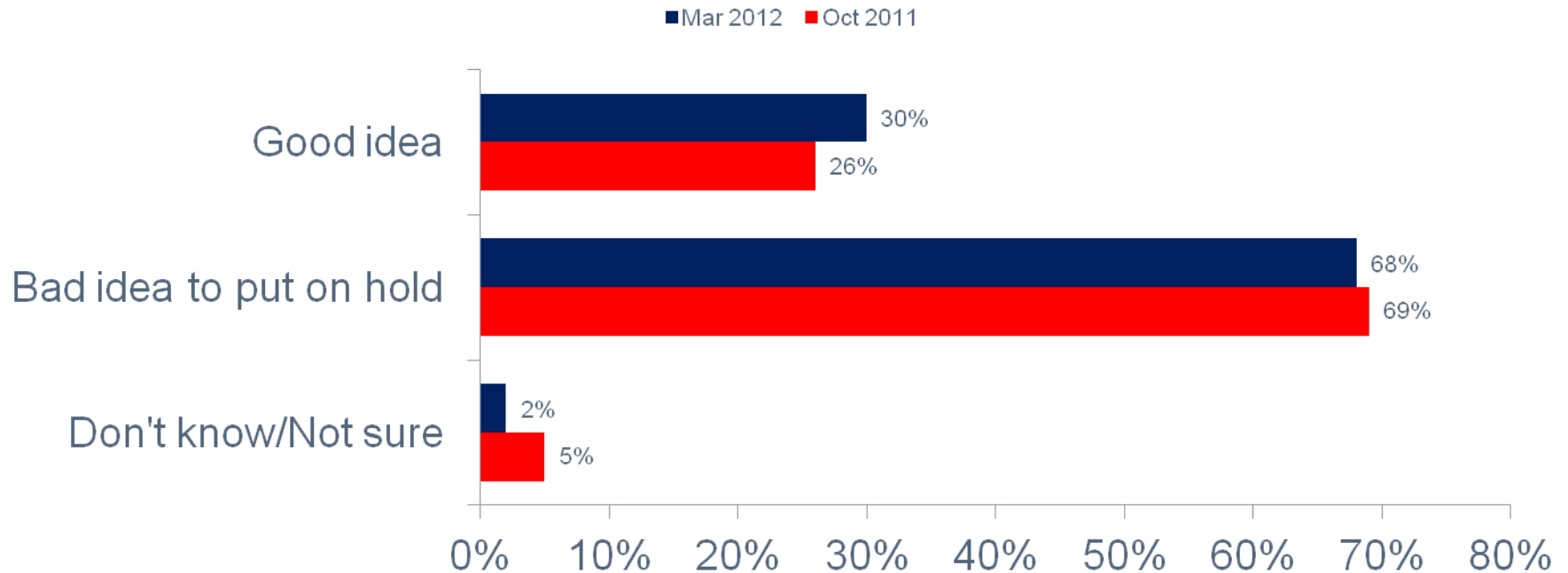


B17: Here is another question about federal support for energy development... would you support or oppose a shift of federal loan-guarantee support for energy AWAY from nuclear reactors and TOWARDS clean, renewable energy, such as wind or solar? Would you ...  
 Sample sizes: March 2012: 1,019; February 2012: 1,032; March 2011: 814; October 2011: 1,049.

# Should Clean Energy Exploration be Put on Hold During Difficult Economic Times?

More than two-thirds think exploration for new forms of clean energy should not be put on hold even during bad economic times.

## Putting Clean Energy Development on Hold During Bad Economic Times



B18. America is going through difficult economic times today. Do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea for the nation to put on hold progress towards cleaner energy sources during the current economic difficulty?

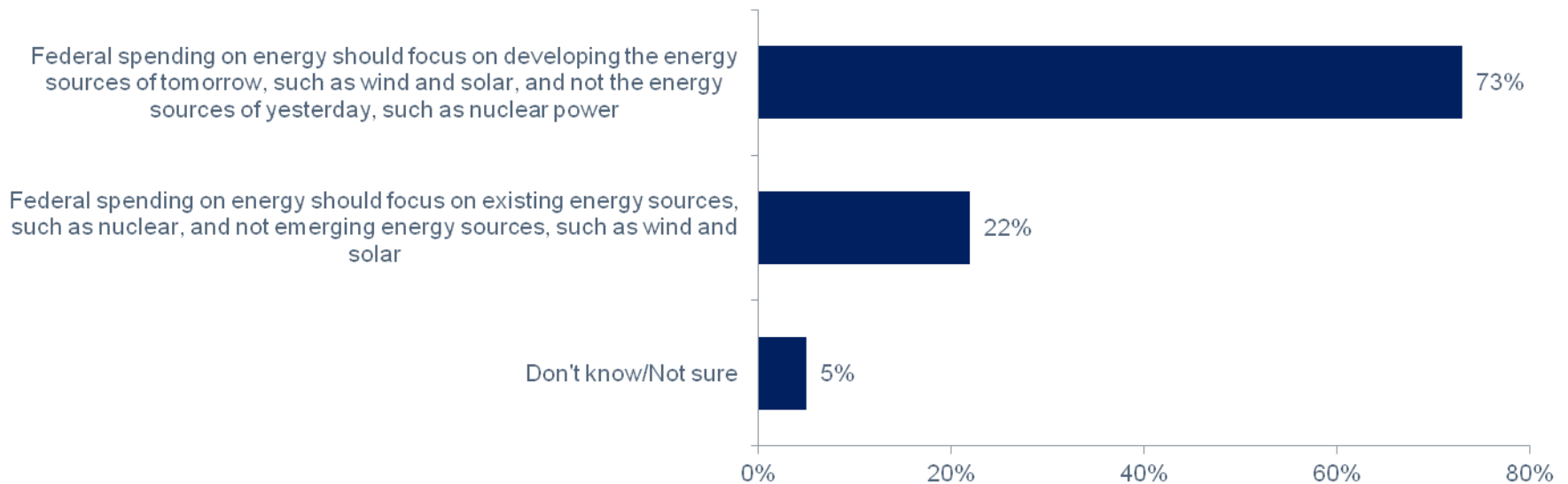
Sample sizes: March 2012: 1,019; October 2011: 1,049.

# Where Should Federal Spending on Energy Focus?

Nearly three-fourths think federal spending on energy should focus on energy sources of the future such as wind and solar. Twenty-two percent would prefer that federal spending remain focused on energy sources such as nuclear.

- Those who are in favor of a shift in federal spending toward alternative energy sources include women (78%), those age 18-34 (83%), households with less than \$35,000 in income (80%), and Democrats (87%).

## Where Should Federal Spending on Energy Focus?



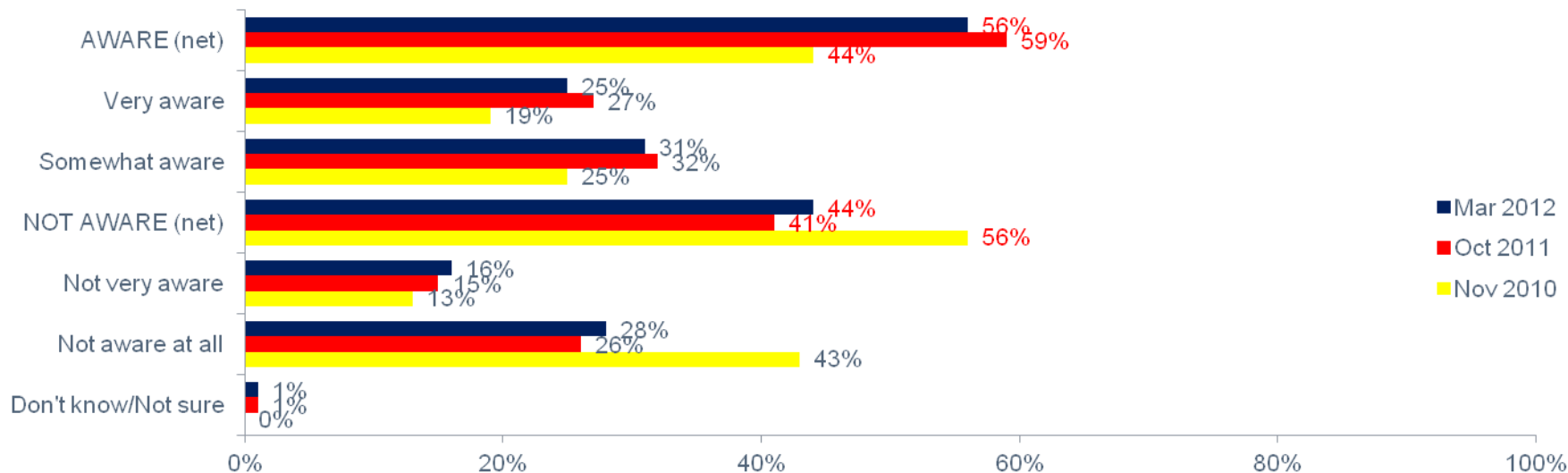
B19. America has been the global center for innovation since the industrial revolution, giving the world antibiotics, air travel, mass communications technologies and the internet. Presently, only about 15 percent of the U.S. Department of Energy budget goes to renewable energy development. On the other hand, more than 60 percent of the same budget is dedicated to nuclear weapons and nuclear energy. Which of the following statements most closely reflects your views about this situation? .

# Awareness of Fracking

About half (56%) of Americans are aware of a process called fracking. Forty-four percent have not heard of this process.

- Awareness is far higher among men (63%), those age 55 or older (68%), college graduates (68%) and those with incomes of \$100,000 or more (63%).

## Awareness of Fracking



B20: The following questions are about a natural gas drilling process sometimes referred to as "fracking," which requires large amounts of water. Fracking involves blasting millions of gallons of water mixed with chemicals and sand into the ground to release natural gas from rock formations thousands of feet underground. Concerned homeowners and others say the process can poison drinking water supplies, but oil and gas industry representatives say there's no proof that fracking chemicals have contaminated drinking water. Prior to this survey, how aware would you say you were about this issue?

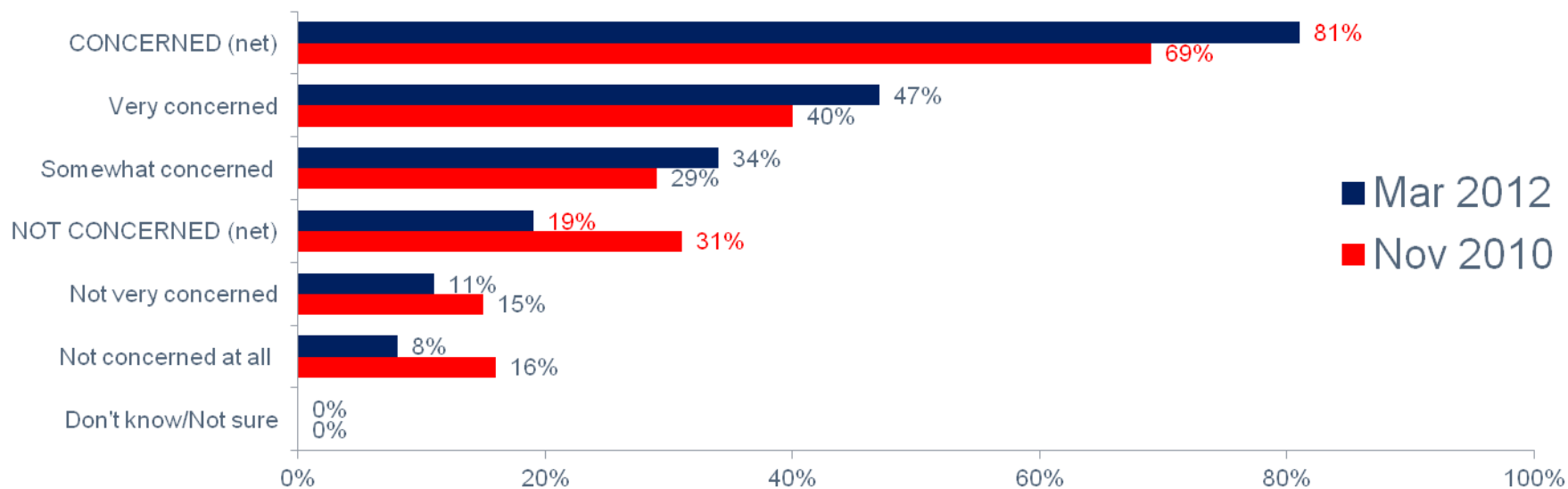
Sample sizes: March 2012: 1,019; October 2011: 1,049; November 2010: 1,012.

# Concern About Fracking

Among those aware of fracking, 81% are concerned about the procedure. Only 19% are not concerned.

- Concern is highest among women (88%), those in the Northeast (88%), those in households with incomes of less than \$35,000 (90%), Independents (89%) and Democrats (91%).

## Concern About Fracking (Among Those Aware)



B21. Still thinking of the natural gas drilling process sometimes referred to as fracking, how concerned are you about this issue as it relates to water quality? Are you...  
Sample sizes: March 2012: 649; November 2010: 493.