

Energy Attitudes: Americans Support Clean Energy

The world was watching to see whether leaders would bring forth ambitious climate plans at the United Nations’ COP26. To reach agreements and the conference’s goal of [global net zero by mid-century](#), it has been acknowledged that we must rapidly transition away from oil and coal and invest in clean energy. The United States issued statements conveying ambitious climate intentions. Ensuring we meet these goals requires support from the American people.

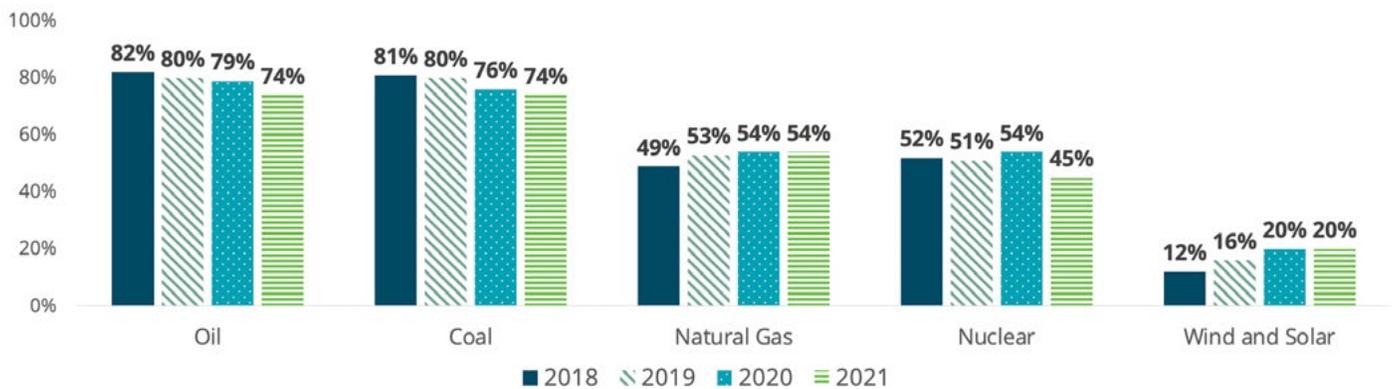
In preparation, ecoAmerica researched the current perspectives of Americans on clean energy and other energy sources. In the fourth annual survey on this topic, the November 2021 American Climate Perspectives Survey indicates how sentiment has shifted from 2018 to today.

ecoAmerica’s survey finds notable shifts in understanding and support for several energy sources. The findings show strong support for clean energy coupled with the need for education on the energy-climate connection. The majority of Americans support wind and solar research and development (R&D), and nearly 3/5 Americans support next generation nuclear R&D. Support for nuclear energy has grown, especially among Democrats. However, nuclear waste disposal and health and safety concerns remain.

Education Is Needed on the Energy and Climate Change Connection

ecoAmerica’s research finds that in 2021, 74% of Americans understand that burning oil contributes to unhealthy air pollution and climate change. While this is a majority, it is important to note that the results represent an 8 point decline since 2018. 74% of Americans likewise understand that coal contributes to climate change, representing a 7 point decline since 2018. Understanding has grown 5 points for natural gas (54%) and 7 points for nuclear (45%) over the past four years, however, the misconception that wind and solar energy contribute to climate change has grown 8 points from 12% to 20%.

The percentage of Americans who understand oil and coal contributes to climate change drops, while those who misunderstand wind and solar contribution grows. Survey question: How much does each of these energy sources contribute to unhealthy air pollution and climate change? “A lot” and “Some” 1,110 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error

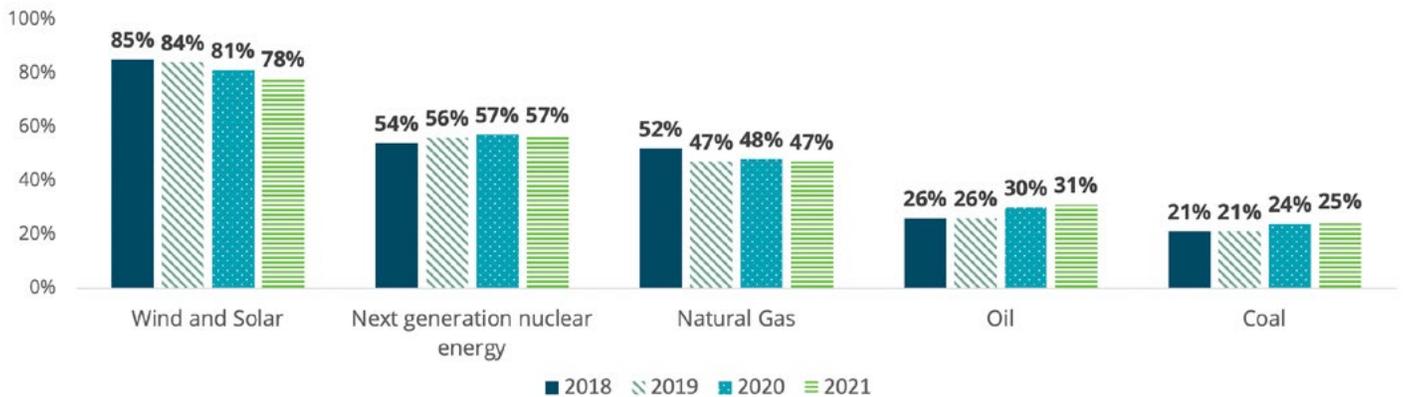


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American Support for Energy Research and Development Has Risen and Fallen

Nearly 4 in 5 (78%) of Americans think the US should spend more on wind and solar R&D. However, this percentage has dropped 7 points since 2018. 57% of Americans support nuclear energy R&D in 2021, growing from 54% in 2018. Findings show that support for natural gas R&D has remained steady after dropping from 52% in 2018 to 47% in 2019. Meanwhile, a 5 point increase in support has unfolded for oil, and a 4 point increase for coal, between 2018 and 2021. These trends may be partially attributed to [disinformation](#) spread about climate change by fossil fuel industries.

Nearly 4 in 5 Americans support wind and solar research and development, nearly 3 in 5 support nuclear energy. Survey question: In the next few years, should the United States be spending more or less on research and development of each of the following energy sources? “A lot more” and “More” 1,110 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error

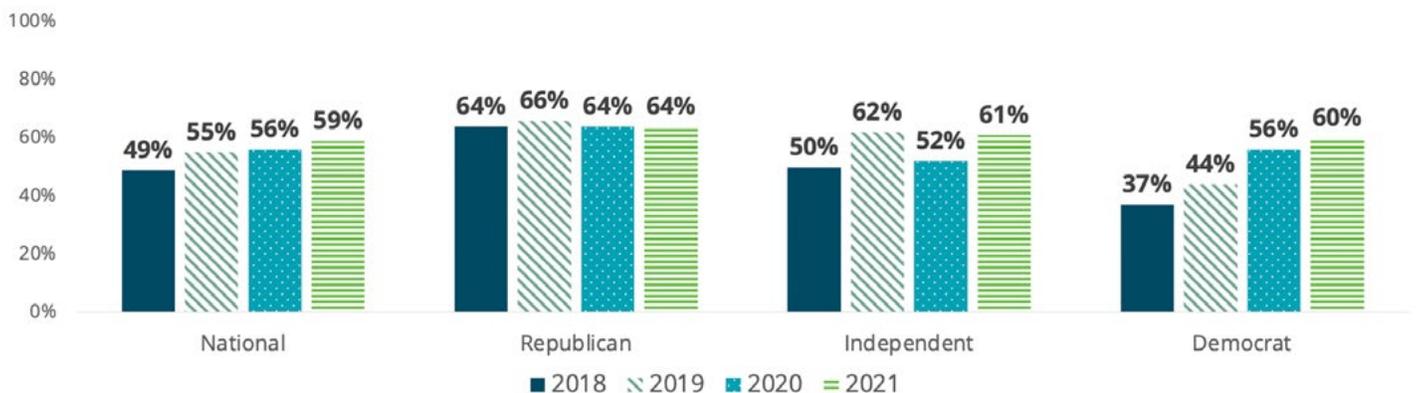


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Support for Nuclear Energy Is on the Rise

ecoAmerica’s study finds that American support for nuclear power has grown 10 points from 2018 to 2021. Three years ago, 49% of Americans said they supported nuclear compared to 59% today. Republican support has remained steady over the four years. Independent support has shifted with just about half of Independents supporting nuclear in 2018 and just over 3 in 5 supporting nuclear in 2021 (61%). Steady growth unfolds for Democrats, with support consistently increasing between 2018 and 2021. In 2021, 60% of Democrats report support for nuclear energy, compared to 37% in 2018.

Support for nuclear power grows, especially among Democrats. Survey question: America’s traditional nuclear power plants produce around 20% of our electricity. Which is closest to your opinion? “Strongly support nuclear power” and “Somewhat support nuclear power” 1,110 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error

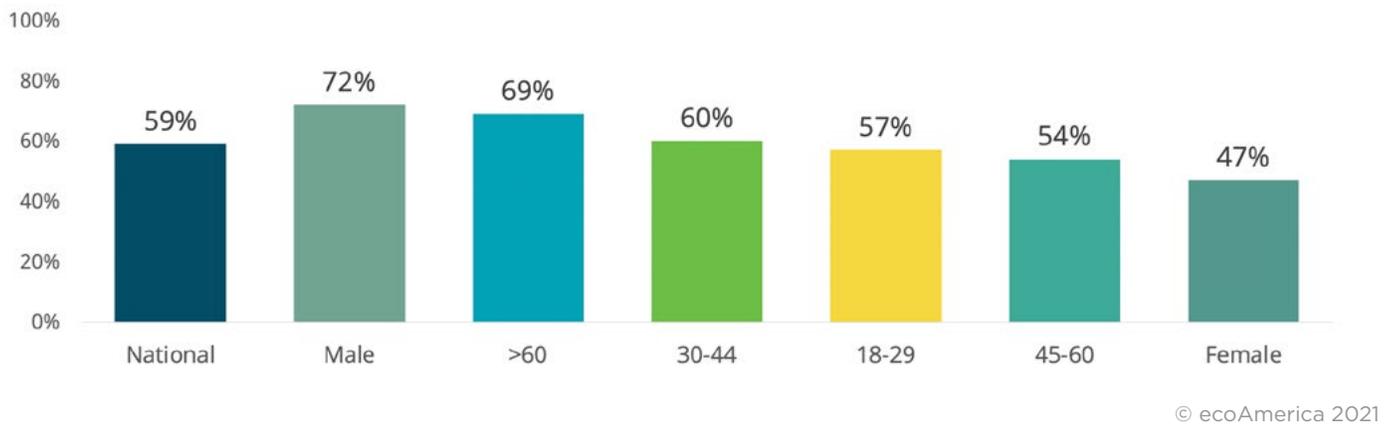


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Males and Adults Over 60 Support Nuclear Energy More than Other Groups

Compared to other demographic groups, males report the highest level of support for nuclear energy in the US. Nearly 3 in 4 males (72%) say they either strongly or somewhat support nuclear power. Adults over 60 report more support than other age groups. 69% of adults >60 support nuclear energy compared to 60% of adults between 30-44, 57% of adults between 18-29, and 54% of adults between 45-60. The least supportive demographic surveyed are females — less than half (47%) support nuclear power.

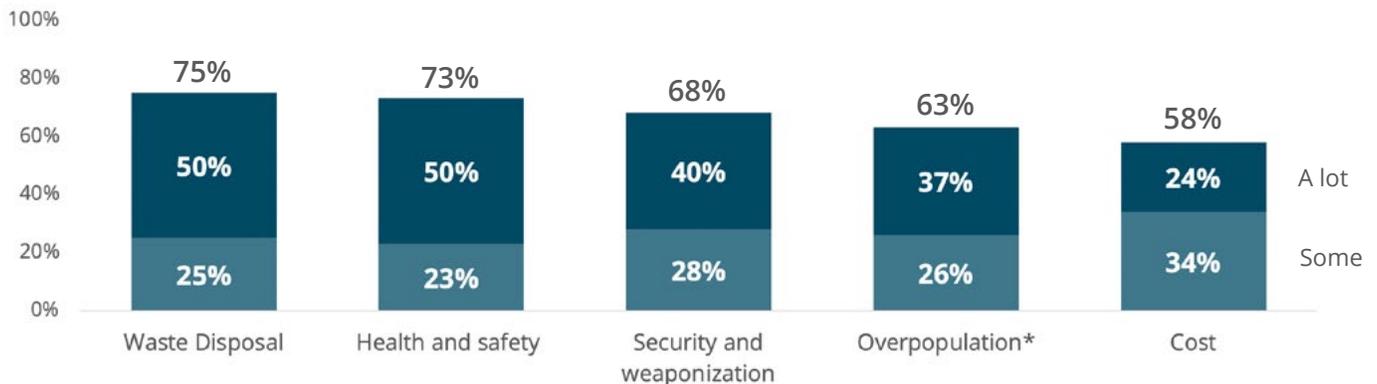
Males and adults over 60 years in age support nuclear energy the most Survey question: America's traditional nuclear power plants produce around 20% of our electricity. Which is closest to your opinion? "Strongly support nuclear power" and "Somewhat support nuclear power" 1,110 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error



Concerns About Nuclear Energy Remain but Wane

Three quarters (75%) of Americans report that they are concerned about nuclear waste disposal, including 50% who say waste disposal concerns them "a lot" and 25% who say it makes them somewhat concerned. Health and safety concerns are reported by 73% of Americans, including 50% who say health and safety concerns them "a lot" and 23% who say "somewhat." Other concerns include 68% of Americans reporting concern with security and weaponization, 63% reporting concern about overpopulation, and 58% reporting concern about the cost of nuclear energy.

Waste disposal and health and safety remain top nuclear concerns. Survey question: People have concerns about upgrading nuclear energy. Which of the following make you concerned? "A lot" and "Some" 1,110 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error

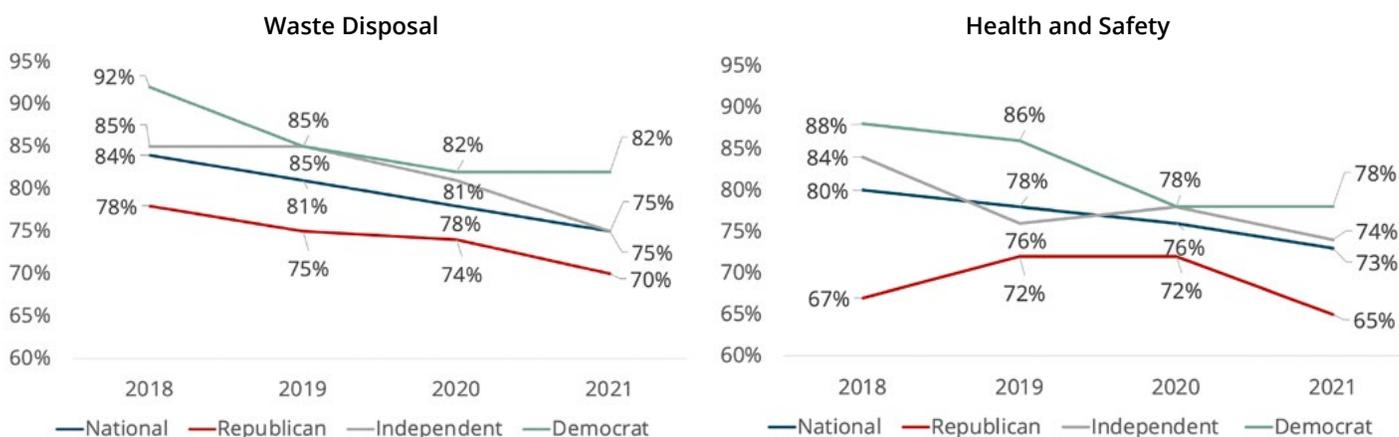


*overdevelopment, leading to natural habitat loss

While waste disposal and health and safety are the top concerns regarding nuclear energy among Americans, findings show notable decreases since 2018. Concerns about waste disposal dropped 9 points nationally from 84% of Americans in 2018 reporting concern to 75% in 2021. Among Democrats and Independents, concern dropped 10 points from 92% to 82% and 85% to 75% respectively. Republican concern dropped 8 points from 78% to 70%.

As for health and safety, American concern has decreased 7 points from 80% in 2018 to 73% in 2021. Democrat and Independent concerns dropped 10 points from 88% to 78% and 84% to 74% respectively. Concern has varied over the past four years for Republicans — at 67% in 2018, 72% in 2019, 72% in 2020, and 65% in 2021.

Concerns wane, broken down by political party. Survey question: People have concerns about upgrading nuclear energy. Which of the following make you concerned? "A lot" and "Some" 1,110 national respondents. +/- 3% margin of error



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Full data is available in the accompanying [toplines](#).

Methodology

ecoAmerica designed and administered this survey, which was conducted online on August 27-September 10, 2021 using Survey Monkey. The survey yielded a total of 1,110 complete adult responses. The sample was drawn from an online panel and the respondents were screened to ensure that they were over the age of 18. The margin of error for the sample is +/-3%. In interpreting the survey results, it is important to note that all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error. Thus, the results of a survey may differ from the results that would be obtained if the entire population was interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends upon both the total number of respondents in the survey and the percentage distribution of the responses to a particular question. For example, if 50% of the respondents in a sample of 1,110 respondents answered, "Yes" to a particular question, we can be 95% confident that the true percentage would fall within 3 points, or range from 47% to 53%.

Suggested Citation

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ecoAmerica does not hold a formal position on nuclear energy.

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