



What politicians really care about: Polls!

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Americans have surprisingly complex attitudes toward both the environment and energy policy, so I always lament when I see polls that ask the extremely simplistic question: Which do you support - Energy/Economic Growth vs. Environment Protection? As if everytime a wetland habitat is destroyed / saved, the nation's GDP goes up or down accordingly. Or that all economic activity is not in some part dependent on a fully functioning eco-system that produces the food we eat, the water we drink, the air that we breathe and the open green spaces that we enjoy. But it is a general indicator of the types of trade-offs people are willing to make to get their energy fix.

A recent [poll](#) by the Pew Center of 1,523 Americans, conducted Sept. 8-11 shows that when given a choice between protecting the environment OR developing new sources of energy, 57% of Americans choose energy in September 2005 versus 49% in March 2005, while protecting the environment has declined from 42% to 36%. The recent run-up in energy prices, particularly at the pump has caused many Americans to support new energy projects, despite the potential for environmental damage. The percentage of Americans favoring drilling in ANWR has increased from 42% to 50%, with the strongest increases coming from Democrats and Independents.

However, the poll also showed a willingness by Americans to support a wide range of energy efficiency ideas and a decidedly negative opinion of nuclear power:

The public overwhelmingly supports government efforts to require better fuel efficiency from cars, trucks and SUVs. Fully 86% favor the government requiring improved efficiency; there is virtually no partisan difference on this issue. Sizable but smaller majorities back several other possible policies to address the energy situation, including tax breaks alternative energy, more funding of mass transit, but also (more concerningly for price controls on fuel and energy (69%). But despite growing concern over energy supplies and prices, most Americans oppose the government promoting the increased use of nuclear power (53%).

As "[Citizens for Sustainable Living](#)" who are aware of peak oil, we need to take advantage of the public's current openness to new alternative sources of energy and willingness to increase use of more efficient means of transportation to promote policy solutions that help the economy through lower energy costs and help protect the environment and reduce our dependence on the Middle East - Win, Win, Win!

We also need to educate the public about why energy subsidies for oil and gas are bad economic/fiscal, environmental and security policies. We also need to reframe the energy/economy vs environmental debate to be more Win-Win and less of a zero sum game.



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