

Public support for regulation of power plant emissions under the Clean Power Plan

a report from the National Surveys on Energy and Environment

Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency launched a major new greenhouse gas reduction initiative in June 2014 through the release of its proposed Carbon Pollution Standards for Existing Power Plants. Better known as the Clean Power Plan (CPP), EPA outlined a proposal that would seek an overall reduction in emissions from existing electricity-generating facilities that would fall 30 percent below 2005 levels by 2030, with interim targets beginning in 2020. This built on existing federal regulatory strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles and newly-proposed electricity generating facilities.

One unique dimension of the Clean Power Plan is its provision of significant latitude to individual states in crafting a plan to reach required emission reductions. The Plan provided a specific emission reduction target for each state, which ranged considerably across states and regions but collectively would achieve a national 30 percent reduction. It also offered a series of “building blocks” that could lead to reduced emissions and provided a wide range of policy options that individual states might consider in formulating a response.

The Plan has received intensive media coverage since its launch and an extended period of public engagement.¹ This included a series of well-publicized public hearings around the nation and a formal public comment process that was so heavily engaged that its deadline was ultimately extended to December 1, 2014. EPA has begun to review these comments and is also meeting extensively with various stakeholders in preparing to issue a modified version by mid-2015. Many states have begun to explore possible responses, both individually and with regional partners, ranging from active consideration of policy options to litigation to attempt to reverse this federal initiative.²

This significant climate policy initiative was included in the National Surveys on Energy and Environment for the first time in our Fall 2014 survey, placed into a larger instrument that explored other policy questions and ongoing analysis of public attitudes on climate change. We attempted to secure public views on the general merits of the Clean Power Plan as well as test support for a number of the more prominent policy options that states have been encouraged to consider in weighing compliance possibilities. Other important findings from the Fall 2014 survey will be presented in subsequent reports.

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Key Findings

- A strong majority (73%) of Americans support requiring significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from new power plants.
- Slightly fewer Americans (67%) support the Clean Power Plan to reduce carbon emissions from existing power plants.
- When asked about specific policies that states might use to reduce emissions under the Clean Power Plan, support is strongest for requiring energy efficiency standards for new homes and appliances (84%) and renewable portfolio standards (79%). In contrast, a majority of Americans (59%) oppose increasing taxes on fossil fuels used to generate electricity and 45% oppose allowing businesses to buy and sell permits to release greenhouse gases (i.e., cap and trade).
- Opinion is split on how Americans would like their states to respond to the federal government's Clean Power Plan (CPP); 43% want their state to delay until more is known about the CPP and see how other states respond, while 41% would like their state to cooperate and enter into negotiations with the federal government on a CPP plan. Only 9% of residents would like their state to refuse to cooperate and join other states in suing the federal government to attempt to block the CPP.
- There is general agreement among Republicans as well as Democrats about the merits of each of these emission reduction policies. In fact, the only area where there is a true partisan divide is on how states should respond. The majority (52%) of Democrats would like their state to cooperate and enter into negotiations with the federal government on a CPP plan, while the majority (52%) of Republicans would rather have their state delay until more is known about the CPP and see how other states respond.
- Americans who do not believe that climate change is occurring show less support than believers in global warming for policies that reduce carbon emissions. Even so, among those who do not believe in global warming, 70% support increased energy efficiency standards, 57% support renewable portfolio standards, and 49% (a plurality) support federal requirements to reduce emissions from new power plants.

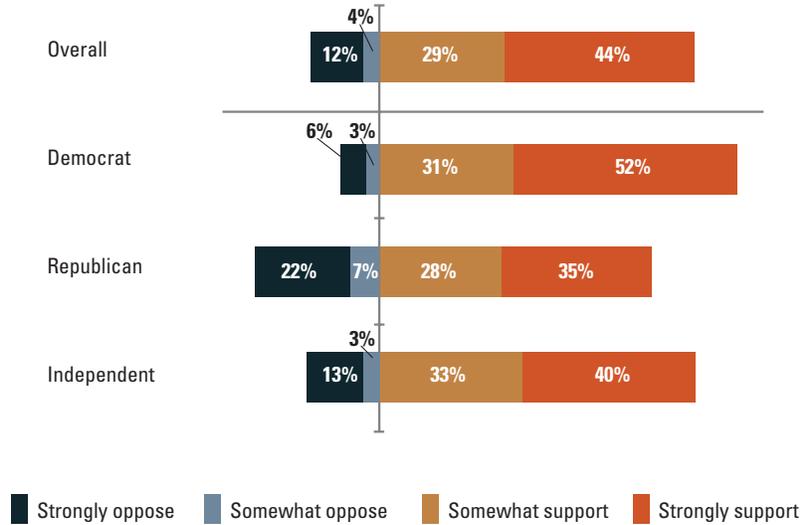


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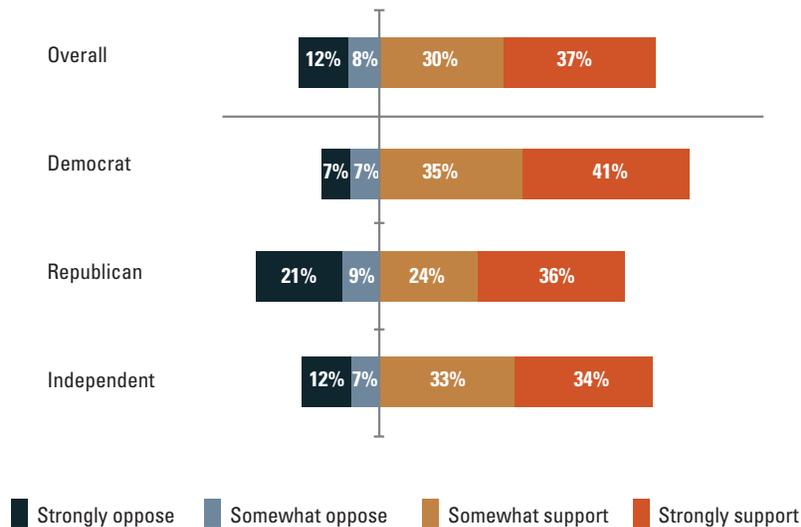
Fall 2014 Frequency Report

Questions related to power plant emissions or the Clean Power Plan

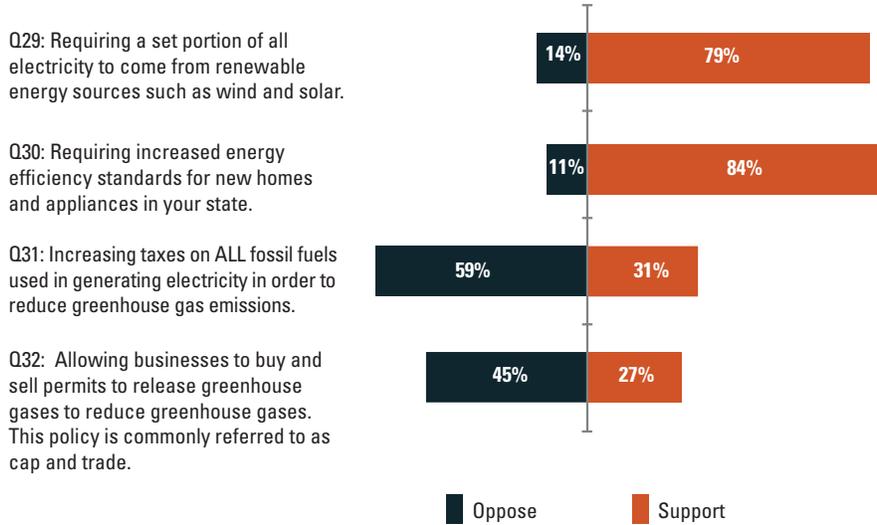
Q27: The federal government now requires that any new power plant reduce their greenhouse gas emissions significantly. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose these requirements?



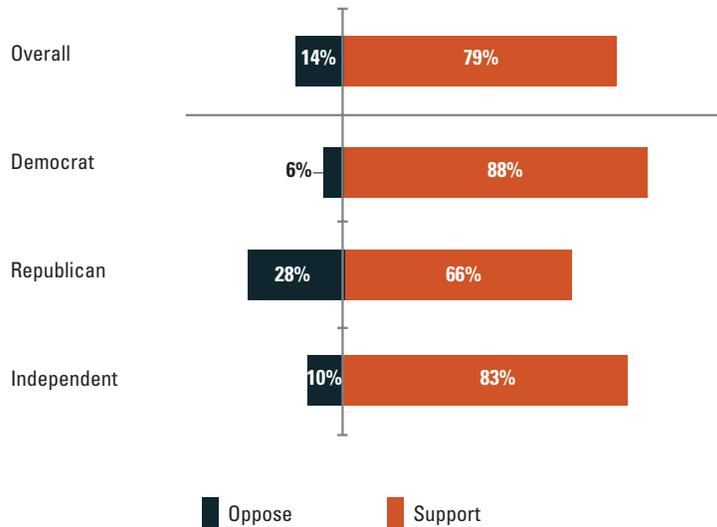
Q28: The federal government has introduced a Clean Power Plan that is designed to reduce greenhouse gases from existing power plants. It gives each state flexibility in deciding how to reduce these emissions through negotiations with the federal government. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose this policy?



The new federal Clean Power Plan lets states pick from a series of options in deciding on how to reduce power plant emissions. For each of the following policy options I read please indicate if you support or oppose your state adopting that policy as a means of reducing emissions?

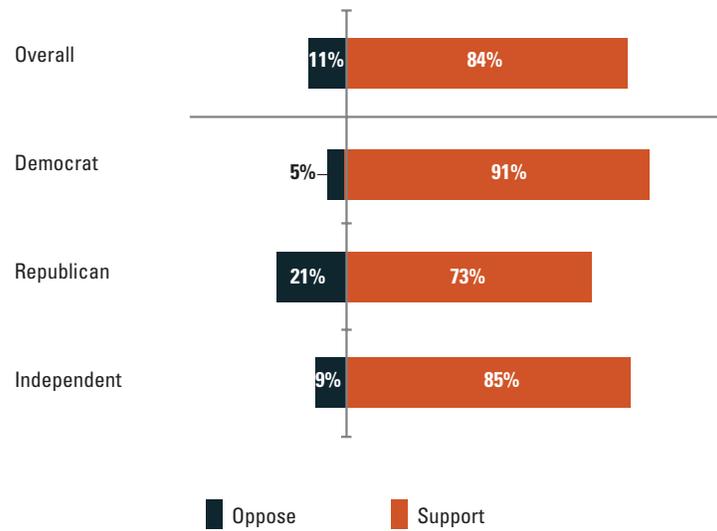


Q29: Requiring a set portion of all electricity to come from renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.

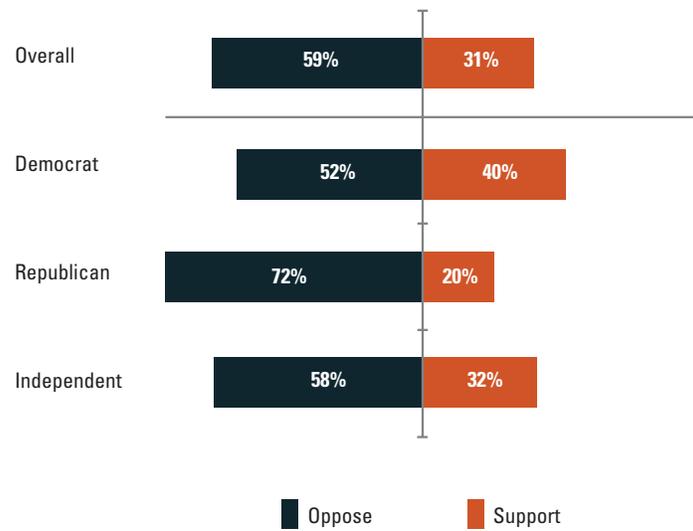




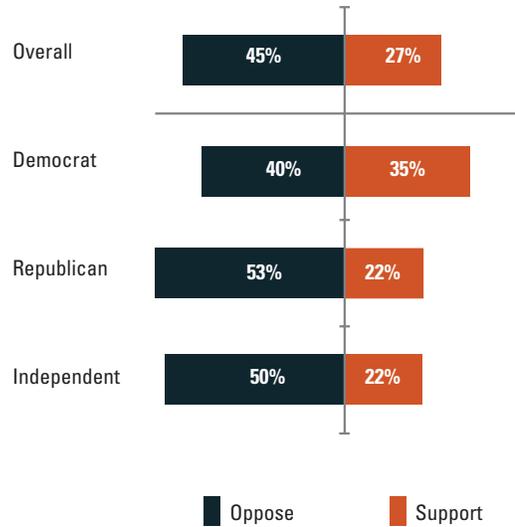
Q30: Requiring increased energy efficiency standards for new homes and appliances in your state.



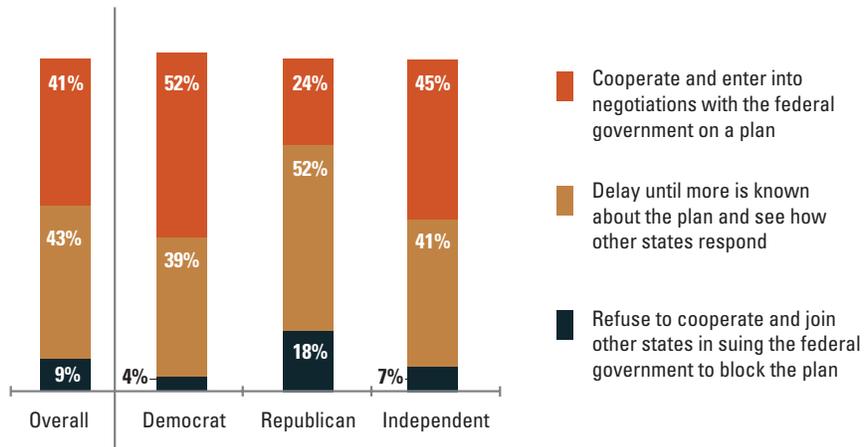
Q31: Increasing taxes on ALL fossil fuels used in generating electricity in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



Q32: Allowing businesses to buy and sell permits to release greenhouse gases to reduce greenhouse gases. This policy is commonly referred to as cap and trade.

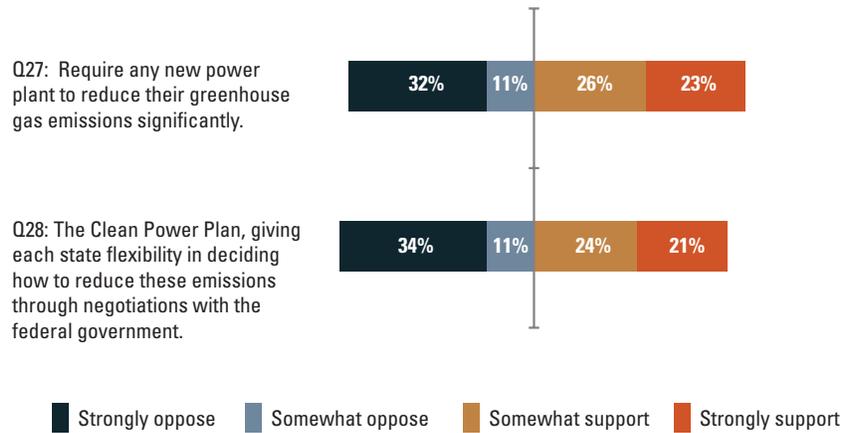


Q33: Each state is required to adopt its own emission reduction plan under the federal government's Clean Power Policy. Which approach to this federal requirement would you like your state to take?

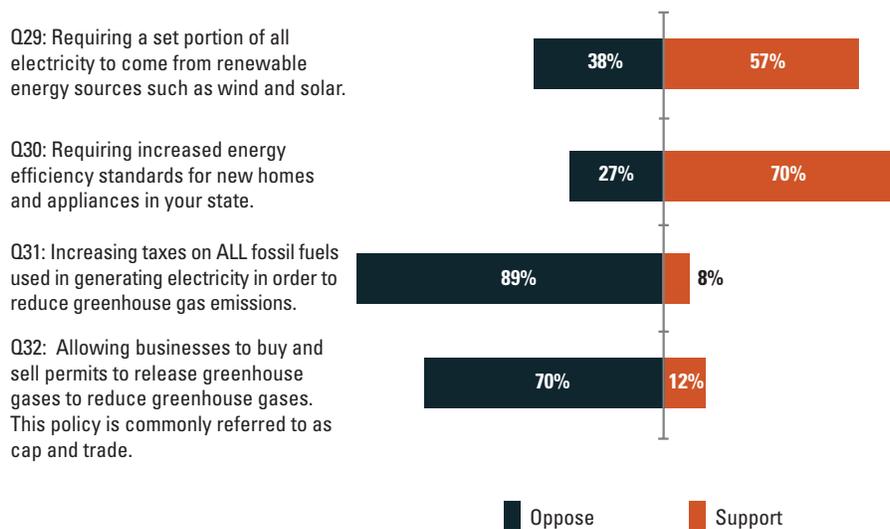




Only respondents who do NOT believe climate change is occurring



Only respondents who do NOT believe climate change is occurring



Methodology

This report presents the results of a telephone survey of 942 adult (age 18 or older) residents of the United States between October 6 and November 6, 2014. Respondents were interviewed in English on both land lines (519) and cell phones (423) by the staff of the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion (MCIPO) in Allentown, Pennsylvania on the Institute's Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. Of the 423 cell phone respondents 348 had no landlines in their household. Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by the Marketing Systems Group (MSG), Horsham, Pennsylvania. Both landline and cell phones were chosen randomly from sampling frames of United States landline and cell numbers provided by MSG.

With a randomly selected sample of 942 respondents the margin of error for the surveys is +/- 3.5% at a 95% level of confidence. Margins of error for questions with smaller sample sizes will be larger. In addition to sampling error, one should consider that question wording and other fielding issues can introduce error or bias into survey results. The sample data has been weighted by age, race, educational attainment, income and gender to reflect 2013 population parameters for these factors provided by the United States Census Bureau. The calculation of sampling error takes into account design effects due to the weighting identified above. In order to reach a representative sample of adult Americans both land lines and cell phones are called up to 10 times. The response rate for this survey, as calculated using the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) RR3 formula, is 15%. Due to rounding the totals provided in the frequency report may not total 100. The question wording is presented in its entirety. The full instrument will be available upon release of subsequent reports in early 2015. The instrument was designed by Christopher Borick of Muhlenberg College and Barry Rabe of the University of Michigan, with invaluable input from Kirsten Engel from the University of Arizona Law School.

For more detailed information on the methods employed, please contact the MCIPO at 484-664-3444 or email Dr. Borick at cborick@muhlenberg.edu.

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Notes

1. Neuhauser, A. (2014, December 2). Boon or Bust? States, businesses take sides on Clean Power Plan. *U.S. News and World Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.usnews.com>
2. Holden, E. and Detrow, S. (2015, January 5). Texas, Calif. throw their weight around on power plan regulations. *ClimateWire*. Retrieved from <http://www.eenews.net/climatewire/stories/1060011064>



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