

Values predict attitudes toward nuclear power

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Concerns about climate change and energy independence have led to renewed calls for the resurgence of nuclear power. Therefore, it is important to understand the level of and bases for public attitudes, both supporting and opposing nuclear power. According to a new study published in the March issue of the journal *Risk Analysis*, the American public is ambivalent about nuclear power. Public support is highest among those who trust the nuclear industry and the agencies that regulate it, and traditional values predicted support of nuclear power.

Stephen C. Whitfield of Booz, Allen and Hamilton, Inc., Eugene A. Rosa of Washington State University, and Amy Dan and Thomas Dietz of Michigan State University examined data from a U.S. national survey to see whether public attitudes toward [nuclear power](#) were affected by perceptions of risk as well as people's values, beliefs, and trust in the institutions that influence nuclear power.

Results show that perceived risk is lowest among those who trust the [nuclear industry](#) and its regulators. Trust in nuclear power is a key factor in [public support](#).

Traditional values, such as assigning importance to family, patriotism and stability predicted support of nuclear power. People associated with altruistic values, such as concern with the welfare of other humans and species, were the least supportive of nuclear power. Less trust and lower education predicted greater perceived risk of nuclear power. Surprisingly, concern with global environmental problems, such as

climate change, did not lead to increased support for nuclear power.

The findings are consistent with a long line of survey evidence and suggest that unless trust in the nuclear industry and its regulators can be increased, the hopes for a resurgence of nuclear power in the U.S. may be premature.

"The primary cause of attitudes toward nuclear power is a deficit in public trust of the industry and of the federal agencies that regulate it," the authors note. "Trust is a fundamental factor in public perceptions of risk and support for nuclear and other technologies."

Source: Wiley ([news](#) : [web](#))

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