Public divides over environmental regulation and energy policy

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A 54% majority of U.S. adults believe that "government regulations are necessary to encourage businesses and consumers to rely more on renewable energy sources," while 38% support the notion that "the private marketplace will ensure that businesses and consumers rely more on renewable energy sources, even without government regulations," according to a new Pew Research Center survey.

The representative survey of more than 1,000 U.S. adults finds Americans lean toward regulations, not economic markets alone, as the most effective way to push towards renewable energy consumption.

However, a close divide exists on a core question shaping policy debates today: whether it is possible to cut back environmental regulations and still effectively protect water and air quality. Some 49% think it is possible to trim regulations and still protect air and water, compared with 47% who believe it is not possible to protect those resources with fewer regulations.

The survey also finds that 54% of American adults believe the Trump Administration is doing too little to protect the environment, while 30% think the administration is doing "about the right amount." And just 5% believe the administration is doing too much.

"Americans tend to support a 'check all that apply' approach to energy policy," said Cary Funk, lead author and associate director of research at Pew Research Center. "About half of the public believes that a range of

environmental and economic considerations should be top priorities in the country's energy policies. While there are sizeable partisan divides over how much importance to place on protecting the environment in energy policy, Republicans and Democrats hold more similar views about the importance of low consumer costs and creating jobs in the [energy sector](link)."

Among the main findings:

Americans, as a whole, support giving priority to both environmental and economic dimensions of [energy policy](link):

- 53% say protecting the environment from the effects of energy development and use should be a "top priority"
- 52% describe increasing reliance on [renewable energy sources](link) as a top priority
- 49% think creating jobs within the energy sector should be a top priority
- 49% argue that keeping consumer energy prices low should be a top priority
- 48% see reducing dependence on foreign energy sources as a top priority

Most Americans see renewable energy sources as effective in minimizing air [pollution](link):

- 88% say solar power is "very effective" (68%) or "somewhat effective" (20%) in minimizing air pollution
- 84% think wind power is "very effective" (63%) or "somewhat effective" "(21%) in minimizing air pollution

The public is less confident about whether other [energy](link) sources are effective in minimizing air pollution:

- 55% say nuclear power is "very effective" (28%) or "somewhat effective" (27%) in minimizing air pollution.
- 72% of adults believe natural gas is "very" (30%) or "somewhat effective" (42%) in minimizing air pollution.
- Minorities consider either oil (41%) or coal (34%) at least somewhat effective in minimizing air pollution.

These are some of the findings from a Pew Research Center survey conducted among a nationally representative sample of 1,012 adults, ages 18 or older from May 3-7, 2017. The margin of sampling error based on the full sample is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

  More information: www.pewinternet.org/2017/05/16 … n-and-energy-policy/

Provided by Pew Research Center

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