

# Majorities see government efforts to protect the environment as insufficient

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Majorities of Americans say the federal government is doing too little to protect key aspects of the environment, according to a new study released today by Pew Research Center.

In a national survey of 2,541 U.S. adults, 69% of Americans say the federal government isn't doing enough to protect [water quality](#) of lakes, rivers and streams and 64% say the same about air quality. Two-thirds (67%) say the government is doing too little to reduce the effects of [climate change](#).

At the same time, the survey, conducted March 27-April 9, 2018, found that Americans are closely divided (52% to 48%) over whether or not it is possible to cut back on regulations while still effectively protecting air and water quality. There is a wide political divide on this issue, with around three-quarters of Republicans (74%, including independents who lean to the Republican Party) convinced this is possible but a majority of Democrats (64%, including independents who lean Democratic) convinced it is not possible.

And, although large majorities of Americans—including majorities of both political parties—favor expanding solar and wind turbine facilities, the political divides over fossil fuels remain vast.

Republicans and Democrats also remain divided over whether the Earth is warming and the importance of human activity in the process. In addition, there are wide political differences over whether policies aimed

at reducing the effects of [climate](#) change have a positive impact on the environment and the economy. Republicans are skeptical about whether policies aimed at reducing climate change benefit the environment, with 72% of Republicans and Republican leaners saying these policies either make no difference or do more harm than good. Further, a 57% majority of Republicans and those leaning to the GOP say these policies hurt the U.S. economy. By contrast, most Democrats (66%, including leaners) think such policies help the environment, and most see either no harm to the economy (39%) or net benefits (45%) from such policies.

"While majorities of Americans believe the government isn't doing enough to protect the environment and reduce the effects of climate change, about half of conservative Republicans see the government as doing about the right amount to protect air and water quality," says Cary Funk, director of science and society research and lead author of this report. "Republicans and Democrats are largely at odds over how much regulation is needed to safeguard the environment and reduce the effects of climate change."

Also among the findings:

Roughly six-in-ten Americans (59%) say climate change is having at least some effect on their local community.

- About six-in-ten (59%) think climate change is affecting their local community either a great deal or some; 31% of Americans say the effects of climate change have had an impact on their personal lives.
- When asked about the kinds of effects from climate change Americans have observed in their [local community](#), 45% of those asked point to changes in the weather, including increased frequency of severe storms, droughts, floods and wildfires.

Republicans and Democrats remain divided over the evidence and main causes of climate change.

- Slightly more than half (53%) of Americans say the Earth is getting warmer mostly due to human activity; 29% say it is due to natural patterns, and 17% say there's no solid evidence the Earth is getting warmer at all.
- Three-quarters of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents believe the Earth is warming primarily due to human causes; 26% of Republicans and Republican leaners say the same.

More Republicans say reducing reliance on foreign [energy sources](#) should be a top policy priority; more Democrats say the U.S. should prioritize environmental protection.

- Majorities of Americans believe the top priorities for U.S. energy policy should be protecting the environment from the effects of energy development (72%), increasing reliance on [renewable energy sources](#) (71%), reducing dependence on foreign energy sources (69%), keeping consumer energy prices low (66%) or creating jobs in the energy sector (58%).
- Eight-in-ten Republicans and Republican leaners (80%) say reducing dependence on foreign energy sources should be a top policy priority.
- Meanwhile, similar shares of Democrats (including leaners) believe protecting the environment from the effects of energy development (83%) or increasing America's reliance on renewable energy sources (80%) should be top priorities.

Renewable energy sources have bipartisan support, but there is a wide partisan gap over expanding fossil fuel sources.

- Large majorities of Americans are in favor of expanding solar (89%) and wind (85%) power. Fewer Americans support expanding hydraulic fracturing (39%), offshore oil and gas drilling (39%) or coal mining (37%); 44% of Americans support more nuclear power plants.
- There are wide political divides over fossil fuels. Including independents who lean to each party, roughly two-thirds (64%) of Republicans support more offshore drilling compared with 22% of Democrats; 60% of Republicans support more coal mining vs. 20% of Democrats; and 60% of Republicans approve of more hydraulic fracturing compared with 25% of Democrats who say the same.

Republican Millennials are less inclined than their elders in the GOP to support increased use of fossil fuel energy sources.

- For example, 75% of Republicans and GOP-leaning independents in the Baby Boomer and older generations support the increased use of offshore drilling compared with 44% of Millennial Republicans and Republican leaners.
- Among Democrats, there are no more than modest differences by generation on beliefs about these [energy](#) issues.

**More information:** To read the report click here:  
[www.pewinternet.org/2018/05/14...ent-as-insufficient/](http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/05/14...ent-as-insufficient/)

Provided by Pew Research Center

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