

# The Politics of Conservation

*Voters see conservation issues as important in their decision, and a place where leaders ought to be able to find common ground. But they also say these issues are not well understood by candidates for President or Congress.*

**Conservation is deemed an important issue in whether or not to support a candidate.**

Three-quarters of Western voters (75%) say that “issues involving public lands, waters, and wildlife” are important in deciding whether or not to support a candidate, even when “compared to other issues like the economy, health care and education.” In fact, three-in-ten (31%) say it is “very important, meaning a primary factor” in their decision.

Conservation rates as an issue of importance for voters in every state in the West, including what are likely to be critical “swing” states in the presidential election, Colorado and Nevada (77% important in both). Conservation issues are deemed important by many of the most critical “swing” sub-groups as well, including Latinos (84% important), millennials (76%), moderates (74%), and suburban women (71%).

Most voters in the West describe themselves as “conservationists” (63%), with Montanans and Wyoming residents most likely to say the moniker fits them (71%). The label is nearly as likely to apply to Republicans (60%), as independents (63%) and Democrats (68%).

75%

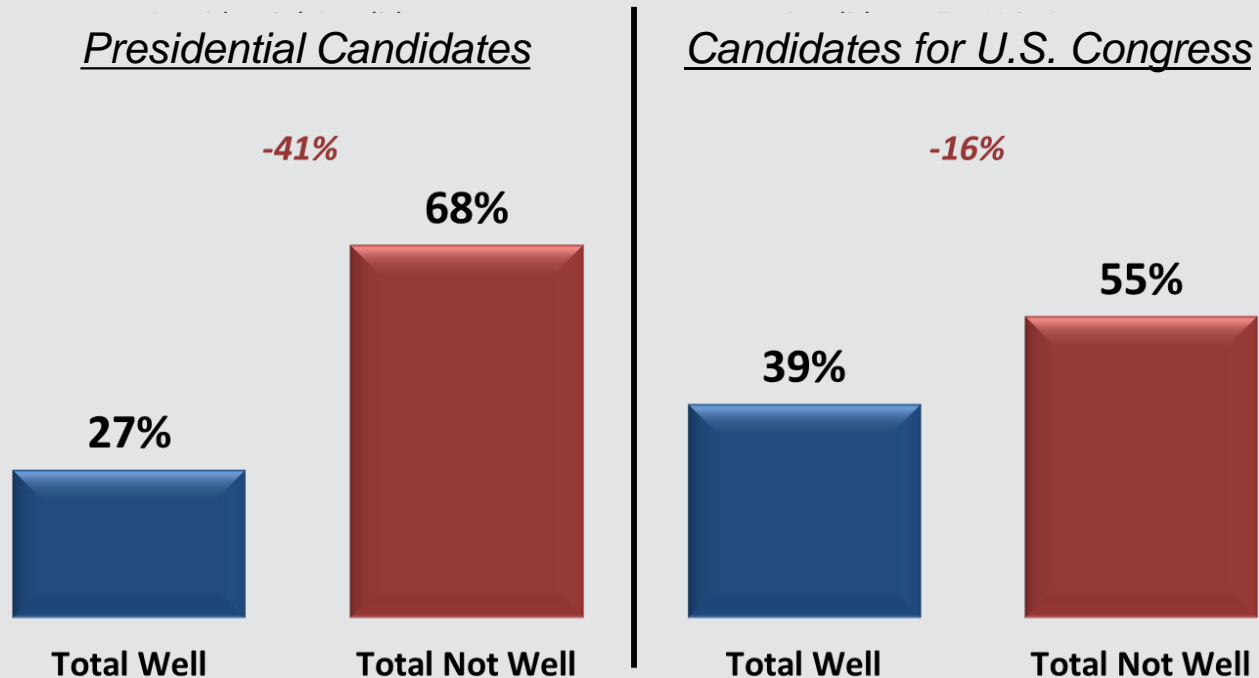


■ **Total Important**



## ***Majorities of Western voters say candidates at the presidential and Congressional level do not “get” these issues facing the West.***

More than two-thirds (68%) of voters think most presidential candidates do not “understand issues involving public lands, waters, and wildlife in the West” well (only 27% say they do). Candidates for U.S. Congress are judged somewhat less harshly by the electorate, as only 55% say they do not understand these issues well, while two-in-five (39%) say they do. Solar power is also the top choice across party lines, at 38% with Republicans, 51% with Independents, and 58% with Democrats choosing it as the most preferable.



There is not a single state where more voters think candidates for either level of office comprehend these issues well, rather than view them lacking. Perhaps most interesting is that party matters very little in their evaluation of the candidates on these issues. Independents are the most dismissive, but the views of Democrats and Republicans are within the margin of error of each other with majorities saying candidates at either level do not understand these issues well.



**Conservation issues are judged to be an area where leaders should be able to find common ground.**

By more than an eight-to-one ratio, voters view conservation issues as areas where leaders should be able to compromise, rather than ones where that may not be possible due to the differences. This overwhelming sense that conservation is an area where elected officials should be able to find common ground is evident in every state and with every single sub-group in the region.

**Issues where elected officials and state leaders should work together and seek to find common ground**

**85%**

**Issues where elected officials and state leaders should not compromise if there are differences**

**10%**

**Too Much Partisanship In Politics by Party**

This is despite the fact that voters say that “too much partisanship and division in politics” is a serious problem in their state (83% serious; 58% extremely or very serious). It is judged to be a more serious problem than any other concern tested in every single state, except Wyoming. The concern over divisiveness is shared by voters of all political persuasions, as well.

