

Conservation and Voting

Entering the 2014 election year, Westerners tell us that a candidates' position on conservation issues can sway them – either for or against that candidate.

A number of pro-conservation stands by a candidate are warmly received by voters, with significant pluralities indicating they would be much more likely to vote for a candidate who espouses these views.

We tested eight different positions that a Congressional candidate could take in order to assess the impact of those positions on the Western electorate:

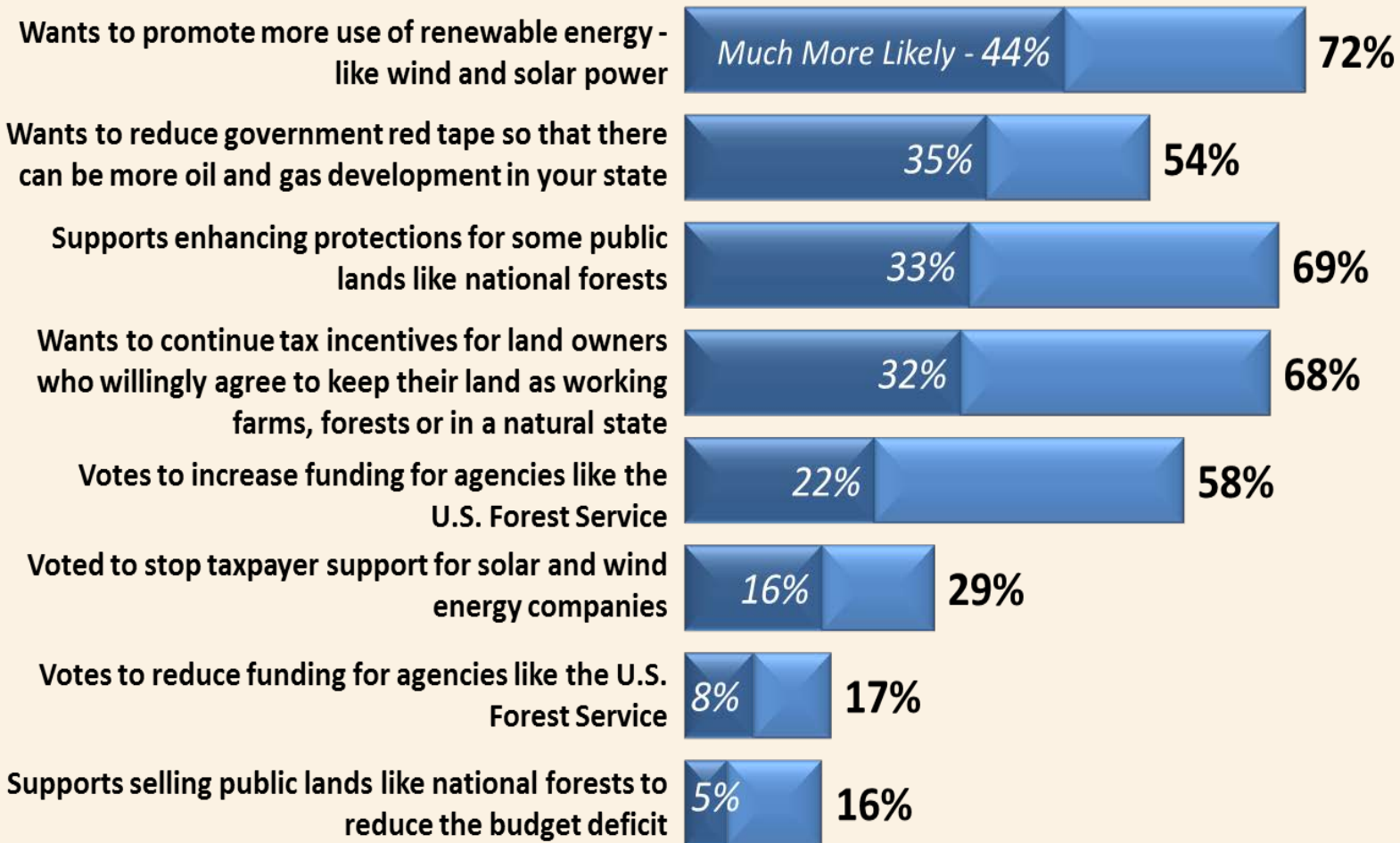
“In thinking about the elections for U.S. Congress this November, please tell me how a candidate taking each of the following positions would impact your vote - would it make you more likely or less likely to vote for that candidate, or would it not make much difference in your vote decision?”



Developing energy and protecting public and private lands can be considered “vote motivating” issues.

Voters are clearly still seeking energy to be produced in their states, with 72% more likely and 44% much more likely to vote for a candidate who wants to promote the use of renewable energy – like wind and solar power in their state. This view extends across party lines - Republicans (59%), Independents (69%), and Democrats (89%) are more inclined to back a candidate who advocates for the use of renewable energy. Similarly, sixty-nine percent (69%) of voters are more likely and 33% much more likely to vote for a candidate who supports enhancing protections for some public lands like national forests.

Candidate Positions Ranked By Much More Likely

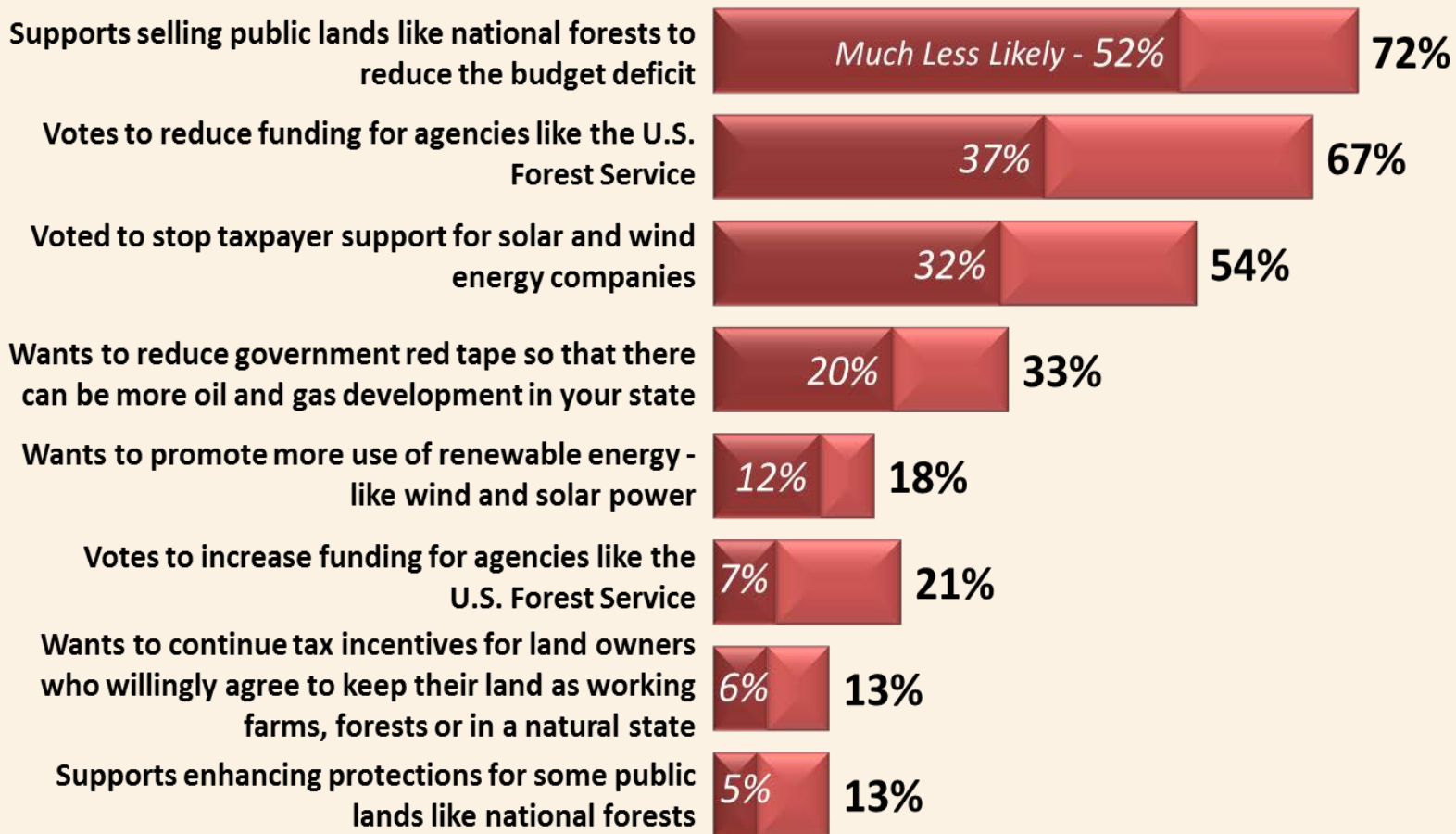


Typically, a position that reaches 30 percent more likely or greater is one that can be considered effective. Key swing voter groups – in particular suburban women, young voters, and Latinos – consistently are most impressed by a candidate who takes a pro-conservation stand.

The most significant negative by far is espousing the sale of public lands to help reduce the budget deficit.

Fully 72% of voters would be less likely to vote for a candidate who supports selling public lands like national forests to reduce the budget deficit, with more than half (52%) saying it would make them much less likely. Voters across the political spectrum reject a candidate who is for selling off public lands with enough intensity this could be considered an effective campaign issue. This is true with voters of all political affiliations: Republicans (65% less likely), Independents (72%), and Democrats (83% less likely).

Candidate Positions Ranked By Much Less Likely

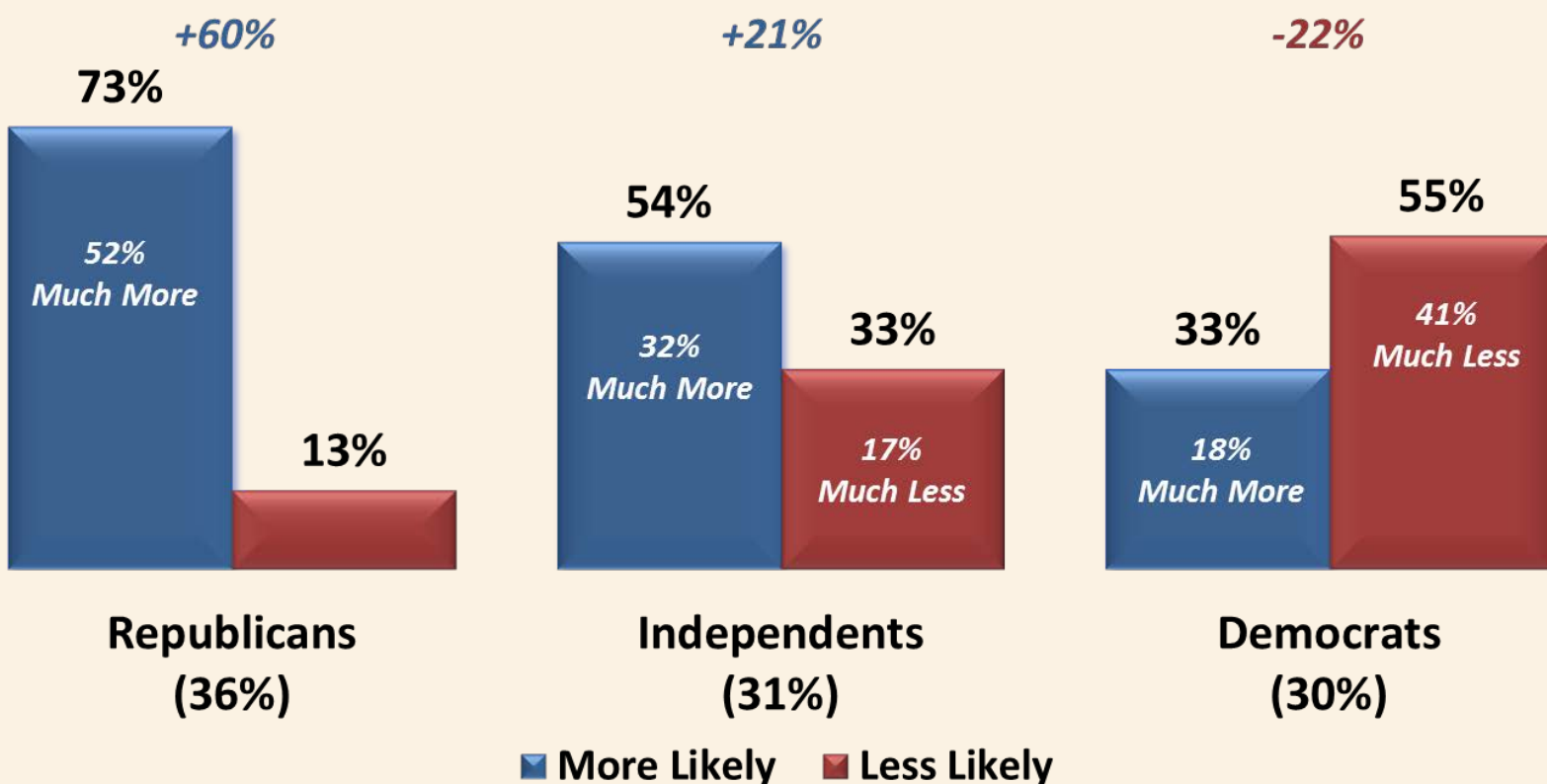


In fact, the vast majority of voters advocate for exactly the opposite – 83 percent agree that “funding for national parks, national forests and other public lands should not be cut, as it provides a big return for a small investment.” Voters clearly reject a penny wise but pound foolish approach to public lands.

Reducing red tape to spur oil and gas development can be a powerful negative or positive, depending on one’s partisan affiliation.

The most partisan issue we tested was “A candidate who wants to reduce government red tape so that there can be more oil and gas development in your state.” As the following graph demonstrates, voters view this issue very differently depending on their political identification:

Reduce Red Tape/Oil and Gas Development By Party



Overall, voters are far more likely to show support for candidates who seek to protect natural areas and public lands while proceeding with energy development.

