

Energy

Western voters want cleaner energy – whether that comes in the form of pollution controls on drilling or in encouraging solar power. And while they continue to be concerned about reliance on foreign energy, they view lower gas prices as more economically beneficial than domestic oil and gas jobs.

Strong support for clean energy and reducing drilling-related emissions; mixed views on other policies.

The 2016 State of the Rockies survey assessed Western voters’ views on a number of policy initiatives (one of which – export of U.S. crude – was acted upon prior to survey release). Support ranges from overwhelming to complete division, indicating the level of discernment which voters bring to these issues.

Potential Congressional Actions Ranked By Support

	Total Support	Total Oppose	D/S
Require oil and gas producers who operate on national public lands to use updated equipment and technology to prevent leaks of methane gas during the extraction process and reduce the need to burn off excess natural gas into the air	80%	10%	+70%
Continue tax incentives for solar and wind energy production	76%	16%	+60%
Increase the royalty fees paid by companies which drill for oil and gas or mine for coal and minerals on national public lands	58%	25%	+33%
Gradually reduce the amount of new coal mines allowed to operate on national public lands	48%	31%	+17%
Make it easier for oil companies to export American crude oil to buyers overseas	42%	41%	+1%



- Support for reducing emissions from drilling by requiring oil and gas producers to use updated equipment and technology tops 70% in all seven Western states, and is above 80% in both Arizona and Colorado. More than three-quarters of voters across the political spectrum also support this policy (76% of GOP, 82% of independents and 85% of Democrats).
- Continued tax incentives for solar and wind energy production also receive clear majorities of support in all seven states, and is strongly supported by greater than 50% of voters in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Nevada. The policy tends to register the strongest support among key swing sub-groups of voters like Latinos (81% support), millennial voters (82%), and moderates (81%).



- There is also substantial support in the Western states for increasing the royalty fees paid by companies that drill for oil and gas or mine for coal and minerals in the West, with support for increased fees being especially strong in Arizona and Colorado where 62% provide a thumbs up for this policy.
- Voters in the West are less sure about gradually reducing the number of new coal mines that are allowed to operate on public lands. This policy proposal receives a majority of support in only Colorado (53% support), and is opposed by a majority in the neighboring state of Wyoming (33% support, 54% oppose). It engenders a more partisan response as only one-in-three GOP voters (34%) express support, compared to 50% of independents and 62% of Democrats.
- Western voters' views on making it easier for oil companies to export American crude oil are even more mixed, splitting right down the middle at 42% support/41% oppose. Again, Wyoming is an outlier in views, with a solid majority (59%) saying they support making it easier for companies to export crude oil - 14 points higher than in any other Western state.

Voters in the West most want to encourage the use of solar power in their state.

Nearly half (48%) of Western state voters most want to encourage the use of solar power in their home state, followed by wind power at 15%. No other energy source is in double digits as the most preferred energy source. Support for the increased use of solar power is highest in sunny Arizona (68%) and Nevada (53%), but it tops the list in every state except Montana, where wind power is preferred, and Wyoming, where there is no consensus on what energy source voters would most encourage.

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.

Coal power hits double digits only in Wyoming, where it is tied with wind power at 22% as the energy source voters would most want to encourage there.

Energy production on public lands deemed acceptable, provided that increased safeguards for land and water are in place.

Continued drilling and mining for oil, natural gas, coal, and other minerals on national public lands if safeguards for land and water are increased is the preferred option among voters in all seven Western states.

Thinking about the government practice of companies leasing the right to drill and mine for oil, natural gas, coal and other minerals on national public lands - What would you tell the next Administration to do in your state -

This option is preferred in every single state, including Wyoming, which is often the outlier on energy issues. Even in this energy-dependent state, 56% support continued drilling with additional safeguards, and only 18% would opt for the status quo.



There is also no partisan distinction on this issue, with 54% of Republicans, 54% of Independents, and 50% of Democrats backing continued drilling with increased safeguards for water and land. It is worth noting that only 17% of Western GOP voters choose increasing drilling on public lands as preferable. In contrast, 37% of Democrats would advocate for stopping all drilling and mining on public lands (9% of Republicans concur).

Lower gas prices are perceived to be bigger economic boon than oil and gas jobs.

Seven-in-ten Western voters (71%) say the western economy benefits more from lower gas prices that help consumers, rather than higher gas prices that help the oil and gas economy. In six of seven states, a decisive majority of voters say that the western economy benefits more from lower gas prices than it would from higher gas prices, which would help the oil and gas economy. Again, Wyoming is the exception, as 53% of voters in the Cowboy State say their economy benefits more from higher gas prices.



Voters in the West still see the country's dependence on foreign oil as a serious problem.

Just under three-quarters (73%) of voters view our dependence on foreign oil as a serious problem, with 42% saying it is an extremely or very serious problem. While this is clearly a significant majority of voters, it is the fourth straight year the number has declined both overall and by intensity.

