

Americans Expecting a Power Shift in Energy Supply in Next 10 Years

By Dina Smeltz and Rachel Bronson

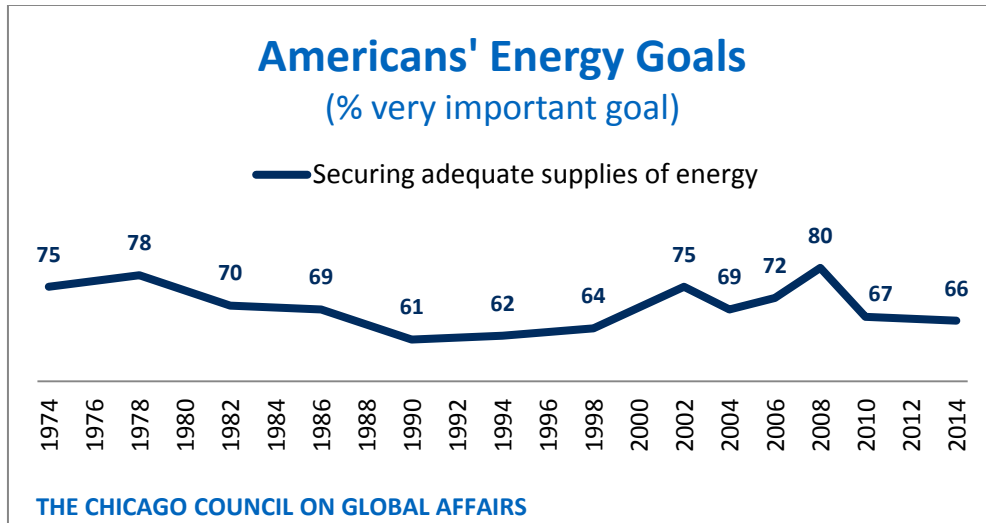
A global energy revolution is underway, driven in part by new technologies to unlock untapped resources and drive energy efficiency. A recent Chicago Council Survey shows that Americans place a high priority on a secure energy supply and support the development of renewable energy. While renewables have many virtues, the public does not necessarily understand the urgency of developing alternative energy as a means to limit climate change. Nevertheless, Americans clearly lean toward cleaner methods of powering the country and expect renewable sources will overtake fossil fuels as the primary US energy sources in the next 10 years.

Energy a top priority for Americans

Americans have long considered securing adequate supplies of energy a top goal for US foreign policy. Going back decades to the first Chicago Council Survey in 1974, majorities have rated securing energy supplies a very important goal (66% in 2014 and 75% in 1974). In the 2014 survey, it ranks second only to protecting the jobs of American workers. In addition, since 2010, three in four say that reducing US dependence on foreign oil is a very important goal (74% today).

The public has been slower to recognize the attendant issue of climate change, although more now than in the past four years view limiting climate change as a very important goal (41% compared to 33% in 2012, 35% in 2010, 42% in 2008). If the views of American academic, government, and business leaders make an impact on public opinion, concern about climate change among the public could rise. New results from a 2014 Chicago Council Leaders Survey show that leaders, like the public, also emphasize securing energy supplies as a top priority.¹ But leaders also consider climate change a top threat and say that limiting climate change should be one of the highest goals for US foreign policy.

¹The 2014 Chicago Council Leaders Survey was conducted online among a random sample of academics, government officials, congressional staffers, business leaders, journalists, and religious leaders in the United States. A full report is forthcoming.



Emphasis on developing renewables, especially if business or government picks up the bill

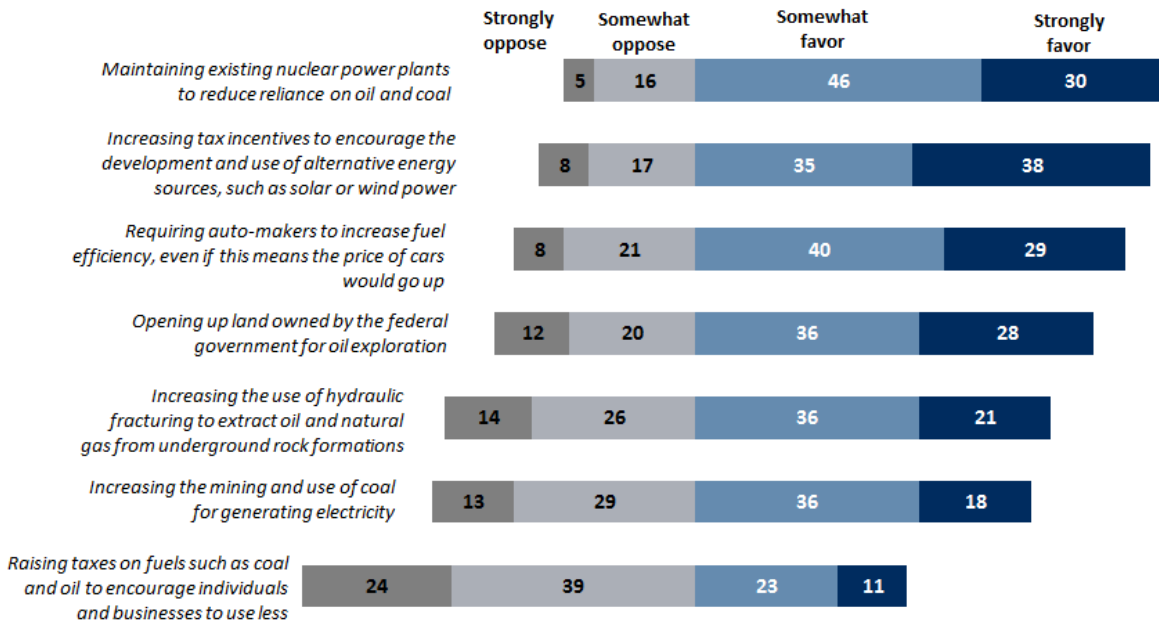
According to a Nuclear Energy Institute Survey conducted in March 2014, the most important public considerations for the way electricity is produced has little to do with climate change. Americans prioritize reliability (83%), clean air (80%), affordable pricing (77%), and efficiency (76%), followed by energy security (72%), job creation (65%), and economic growth (64%). A solution to climate change is the least important item (51%).

Still Americans across the political spectrum favor measures that emphasize the development of alternative energy and energy conservation. Somewhat surprisingly, the Chicago Council results show that the most popular of the proposals presented is maintaining *existing* nuclear power plants to reduce reliance on oil and coal (76%). Other polls show that support for building new nuclear power plants is much lower. For example, a 2014 Gallup Poll found that 51 percent oppose *expanding* the use of nuclear energy (47% favor it).

Americans favor tax incentives as well as requirements on auto manufacturers. Seven in 10 favor increasing tax incentives to encourage the development and use of alternative energy sources, such as solar or wind power (73%) and requiring automakers to increase fuel efficiency, even if this means the price of cars would go up (69%). Two-thirds also favor opening up land owned by the federal government for oil exploration (65%). Gallup poll results from this year also show that two in three Americans favor setting higher emissions and pollution standards for business and industry (65%, down from 84% in 2007) and imposing mandatory controls on carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases (63% down from 79% in 2007).

Smaller majorities support increasing the use of hydraulic fracturing to extract oil and natural gas from underground rock formations (56%) and increasing the mining and use of coal for generating electricity (55%). The sole proposal in the Chicago Council Survey that Americans oppose is raising taxes on fuels such as coal and oil to encourage individuals and businesses to use less (34% favor, 63% oppose), a cost they would have to bear personally.

American Views on Energy Policy



THE CHICAGO COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Americans Expect Major Shifts in Energy Supply in Next 10 years

While these results show that Americans favor continuing the development of fossil fuels, larger numbers prefer alternative types of energy and conservation. Gallup also found that when asked to choose between the two, twice as many Americans emphasize the development of alternative energy production, such as wind and solar power, to the production of more oil, gas, and coal supplies (64% to 32%). And in fact, somewhat surprisingly, Americans expect that renewable energy will make up the bulk of the energy supply in a decade. The Nuclear Energy Institute Survey found that when asked which of several energy sources will be the *primary* source of electricity in 10 years, top responses include solar energy (26%), natural gas (18%), wind power (17%), and nuclear energy (15%). No more than one in 10 names hydroelectric power (9%), coal (8%), or oil (5%), although coal and gas currently comprise more than two-thirds of US electricity generation today.