

World Publics Strongly Favor Requiring More Wind and Solar Energy, More Efficiency, Even If It Increases Costs

November 19, 2008

Most Think It Will Save Money in the Long Run

[Questionnaire/Methodology \(PDF\)](#)

[Full report \(PDF\)](#)

[Press Release \(PDF\)](#)



A new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 21 nations finds very strong support for the government requiring utilities to use more alternative energy, such as wind and solar, and requiring businesses to use energy more efficiently, even if these steps increase the costs of energy and other products. Fewer than half of the nations polled favor putting more emphasis on nuclear energy or on coal or oil.

(Photo: [Taylor Dundee](#))

In all nations most people reject the view that shifting to alternative energy sources would hurt the economy, believing instead that it would save money in the long run.

"It is quite remarkable that there is such unanimity around the world that government should address the problem of energy by emphasizing alternative energy sources and greater efficiency," comments Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org. "Equally remarkable is how little the governments around the world are following the public's lead."

The poll of 20,790 respondents was conducted between July 15 and November 4, 2008 by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. Margins of error range from +/-2 to 4 percent.

Interviews were conducted in 21 nations, including most of the largest nations--China, India, the United States, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Russia--as well as Argentina, Azerbaijan, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, the Palestinian Territories, Poland, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, and Ukraine. Interviews were also conducted in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau. The publics included represent 61 percent of the world population.

Alternative Energy Sources

Asked how much emphasis their government should put on a number of approaches to the problem of energy, the most popular among respondents is for the government to put more emphasis on installing solar or wind energy systems. Majorities favor it in 20 of the 21 nations led by South Korea (89%), Kenya (88%), France (88%), Italy (88%), and the US (87%). Only Russia (a major oil producer) lags behind, with just 50 percent in favor. On average, 77 percent favor greater emphasis on solar or wind.

Respondents were also asked about the possibility of the government "requiring utilities to use more alternative energy, such as wind and solar, even if this increases the cost of energy in the short run." Even with the costs highlighted, majorities in all but two nations favor the idea, though the average level of support slips a bit to 69 percent. Support is again highest in South Korea (96%), France (88%), and Kenya (87%). The public in Taiwan also shows widespread support (88%).

Once again Russia departs from the norm with a divided response, and only a plurality in Azerbaijan (another oil producer) favors the idea.

One of the reasons that emphasizing increased costs in the short run has little impact on support may be that respondents are also optimistic that shifting to alternative energy sources will save money in the long run. Presented two competing arguments about the cost of "making a major shift to alternative energy sources, such as wind and solar," in all nations a majority takes the view that "with the rising costs of energy, it would save money in the long run." On average two thirds (66%) take this optimistic view. In no nation does a majority favor the view that it "would cost so much money that it would hurt the economy."

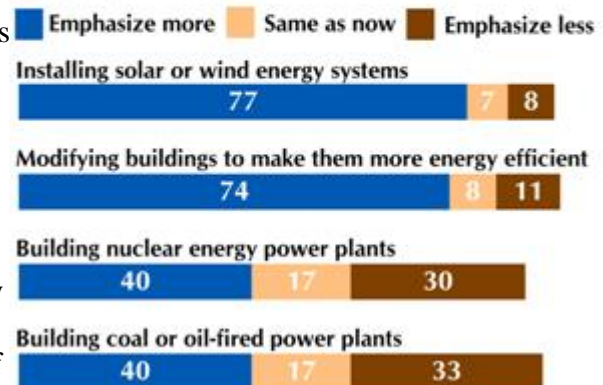
Increasing Efficiency

The second most popular approach to the problem of energy is to put more emphasis on "modifying buildings to make them more energy efficient," and is favored by majorities in all nations. On average 74 percent favor this approach. Support

Approaches to the Problem of Energy

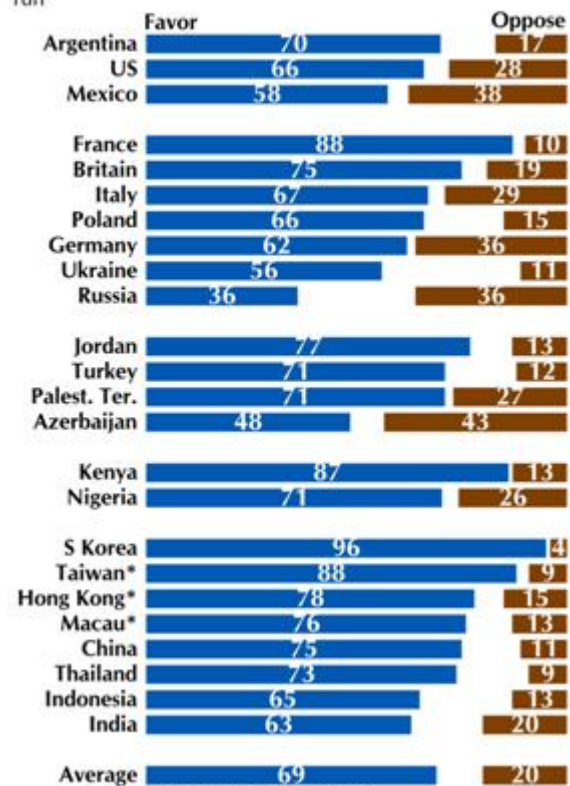
(Average of 21 Countries)

I would like you to consider different ways to deal with the problem of energy. For each one please tell me if you think our country should emphasize it more, less, or the same as now...



Requiring Utilities to Use Alternative Energy

Do you favor or oppose the government...: Requiring utilities to use more alternative energy, such as wind and solar, even if this increases the cost of energy in the short run



* Not included in average of nations

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ranges from 54 percent in India and the Palestinian Territories to 89 percent in Great Britain and France.

Respondents were also asked whether they favor the government "requiring businesses to use energy more efficiently, even if this might make some products more expensive." Highlighting the cost factor, as well as making the effort mandatory, means support is a bit lower--though, on average, a majority of 58 percent favors the idea.

Sixteen nations favor the idea, in 14 by majorities, led by Britain (79%) and South Korea (74%), along with very high support in Taiwan (80%), Hong Kong (71%), and Macau (71%).

The five nations that do not support the idea are all oil-producing countries. A majority is opposed in Azerbaijan (55%), as are pluralities in Russia (43%) and Indonesia (47%). Mexicans and Nigerians are divided.

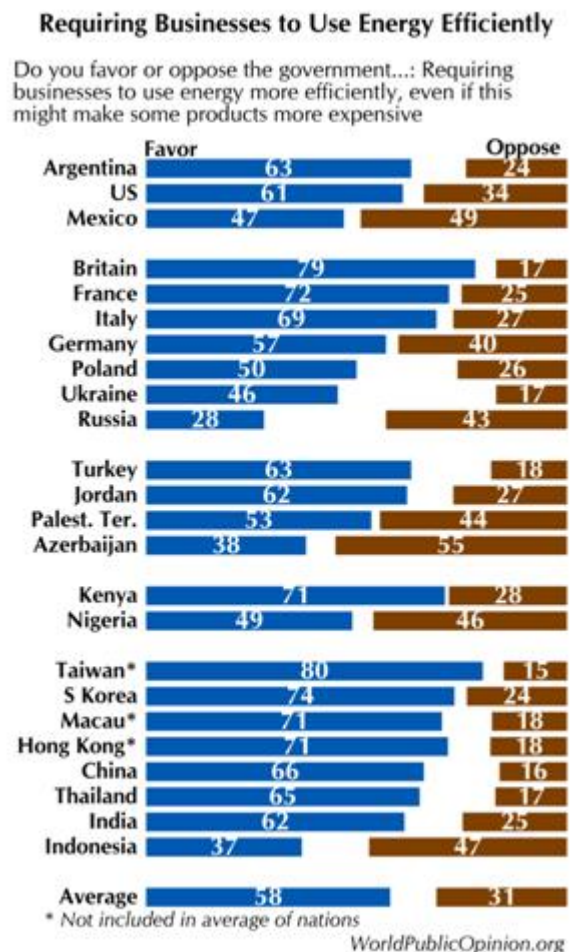
Another possible energy conservation measure that would create costs for consumers receives more modest support. The idea of "having an extra charge for the purchase of models of appliances that are not energy-efficient" is supported by publics in 12 nations--in eight by majorities. However, it is also opposed in seven nations--in six by majorities. On average, 48 percent favor the idea while 39 percent oppose it.

Support for such a charge is highest in Kenya (74%), Italy (69%), Indonesia (61%) and France (60%). Majorities are also supportive in Taiwan (55%), Hong Kong (55%), and Macau (53%). The nations with a majority rejecting the idea include Thailand (64%), Argentina (62%), the Palestinian Territories (58%), Mexico (57%), Germany (54%) and the United States (52%).

Worldwide, individuals with higher income are more likely to support the measure than those with lower income.

Nuclear Energy

An unpopular approach to dealing with the problem of energy is to put more emphasis on building nuclear energy power plants. Publics in only nine nations favor this idea (8 majorities, 1 plurality). On average just 40 percent favor doing so.



The most enthusiastic nations are China (63%), Jordan (58%), Kenya (57%) and Nigeria (56%). Jordan and Nigeria have each announced plans to build their first nuclear power plants. China, South Korea and Argentina all have significant nuclear power production now. Italy closed down its nuclear energy program in 1988--following a referendum held after the Chernobyl disaster--and is now debating a resumption of the program.

On the other hand, only four nations favor putting less emphasis on nuclear energy. These include a majority in Germany (63%) and pluralities in Mexico (50%), Ukraine (49%), and Indonesia (40%). A plurality in Macau (44%) also favors less emphasis.

Coal and Oil

The least popular approach to addressing the problem of energy is to put greater emphasis on "building coal or oil-fired plants." Only seven publics favor doing so and only five of these are majorities. On average, 40 percent favor this approach.

The countries most positive about increasing emphasis on coal or oil-fired power are Kenya (69%), Jordan (63%), Argentina (60%), Nigeria (56%) and Turkey (52%). In Indonesia, a 50 percent plurality favors greater emphasis, while 34% do not (less, 24%; same, 10%). In Thailand, a 41 percent plurality wants more emphasis (less, 19%; same 13%).

Nearly half favor a greater emphasis on oil and coal in the Palestinian Territories (46%), Mexico (46%), and Azerbaijan (45%). But in these cases an approximately equal or greater number favors less or the same emphasis.

At the same time there is little support for putting less emphasis on coal and oil. Germany is the only country where a majority (62%) prefers this approach. On average, just 31 percent favor less emphasis.

However, nearly half favor less emphasis in the US (49%), France (46%), and Italy (46%). In each case, approximately the same number favors more or the same level of emphasis.

