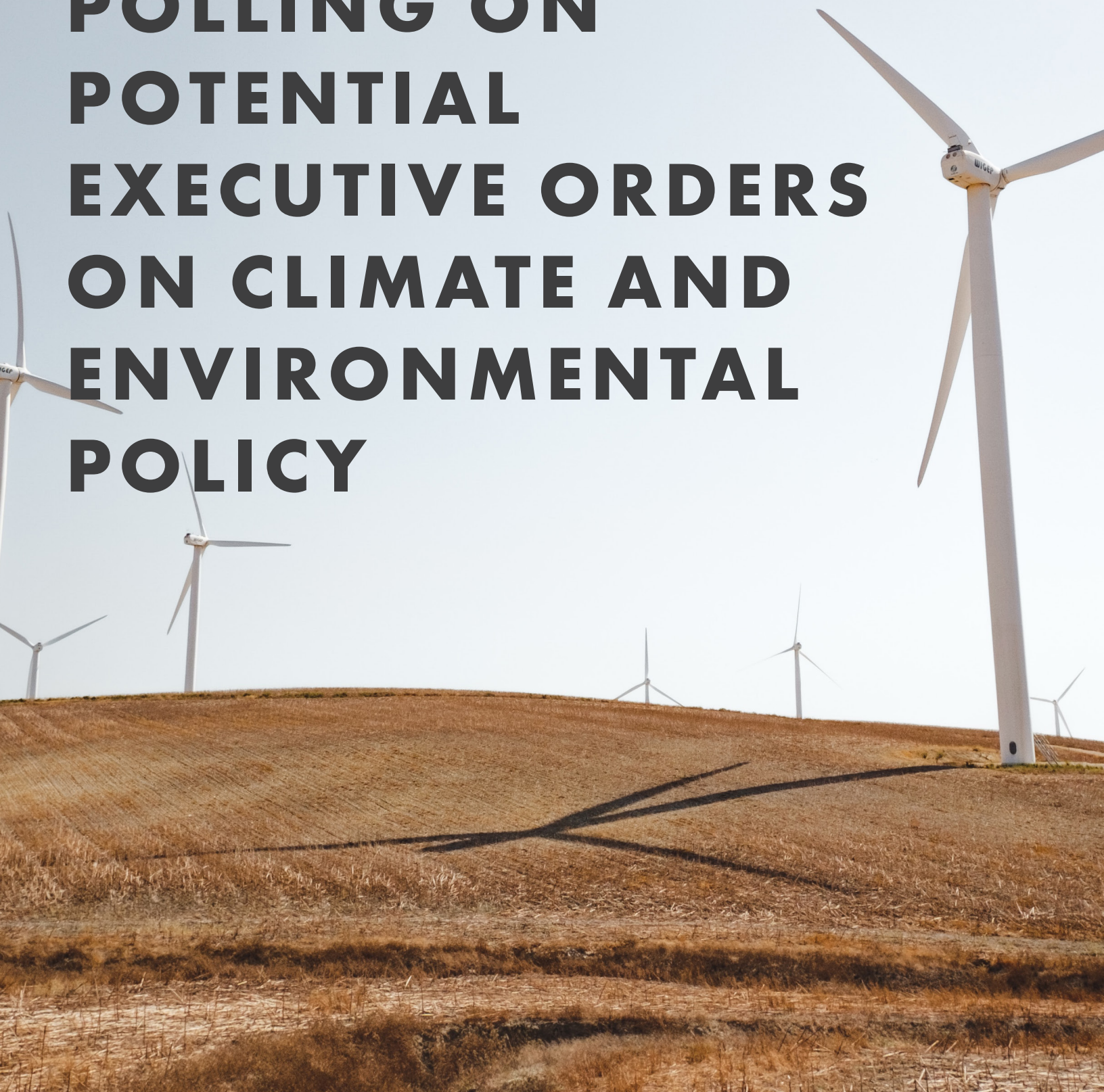# POLLING ON POTENTIAL EXECUTIVE ORDERS ON CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

As gridlock becomes the norm in Congress, the executive branch is an increasingly appealing vehicle for climate policy. We explore public opinion about a wide range of possible executive orders to reduce carbon emissions. We find that these executive orders have broad public support; voters remain supportive even after hearing Republican arguments against executive action.

Executive summary

▶ Voters overwhelmingly support new policies to regulate carbon pollution and protect the environment, even when they are explicitly told that doing so would involve unilateral action by the president.

▶ The most-popular proposals among those we surveyed include requiring pollution disclosure requirements of companies and reinstating prior efficiency standards, while more-contentious orders include an outright ban on new fossil fuel development on federal land.

▶ Sizeable groups of self-described Republicans support energy and environmental reforms; about one in three Republicans support overturning decreases in fuel standards—even when explicitly told this would be a reversal of Trump policy.

▶ Voters identifying as independent or with third parties resembled Democratic voters in their support for these policies.

▶ A messaging experiment suggests that support for such policies is resilient to counterarguments involving either "process concerns" about executive overreach, or an argument that the private sector should tackle these issues.

Policies

Democratic presidential candidates have proposed a range of executive actions they would take to fight climate change. This survey included several items related to hypothetical policies a future president could enact via executive order to protect the environment and improve energy efficiency, among other policies. The following table includes the full text of each item and a short descriptive label that will be used in figures throughout this memo. For each item, voters could report if they strongly supported, somewhat supported, somewhat opposed, strongly opposed, or were unsure how they felt about that item.

LABEL	FULL TEXT
Stricter power plant pollution limits	Would you [support or oppose] stricter carbon pollution limits for new and existing power plants? This would give the Environmental Protection Agency the ability to set new limits. on carbon pollution.
Reverse Trump vehicle fuel efficiency	Would you [support or oppose] reversing the Trump Administration's policy that allows cars to be less fuel efficient? This policy would raise fuel efficiency standards for new cars, making cars pollute less.
Gov't buys clean energy, vehicles	Would you [support or oppose] the federal government using its purchasing power to buy clean energy and electric vehicles?
No new fossil fuel on gov't land	Would you [support or oppose] stopping new fossil fuel projects on lands the federal government owns?
Gov't considers pollution in permits	Would you [support or oppose] requiring the federal government to consider carbon pollution in all permits and regulations?
Public info on corporate pollution	Would you [support or oppose] requiring companies to make information public on carbon pollution and other environmental harms from their activities?
Military invest in reducing pollution	Would you [support or oppose] directing the military to spend money on reducing its carbon pollution, for example by investing in clean energy?
Energy efficiency standards for buildings and appliances	Would you [support or oppose] strengthening national efficiency standards for buildings and appliances, supporting technologies that require less energy?
U.S. rejoin Paris Agreement	Would you [support or oppose] re-admitting the United States to the Paris climate agreement, an international agreement to pursue global carbon emission reductions?

Topline results

The most-popular policies were providing public information on corporate pollution and strengthening energy-efficiency standards, which were supported by margins of 56 points and 55 points, respectively. A second tier included policies to adopt stricter carbon-pollution limits for power plants, to consider carbon pollution in federal permitting, to purchase of clean energy and electric vehicles by the federal government, to direct military investment in clean energy, and to rejoin the Paris climate agreement. The margins of support for these policies ranged between 25 points and 40 points. Even the least-popular policy of ending new fossil fuel projects on federal lands still enjoyed clear approval, with a margin of support of 15 points.
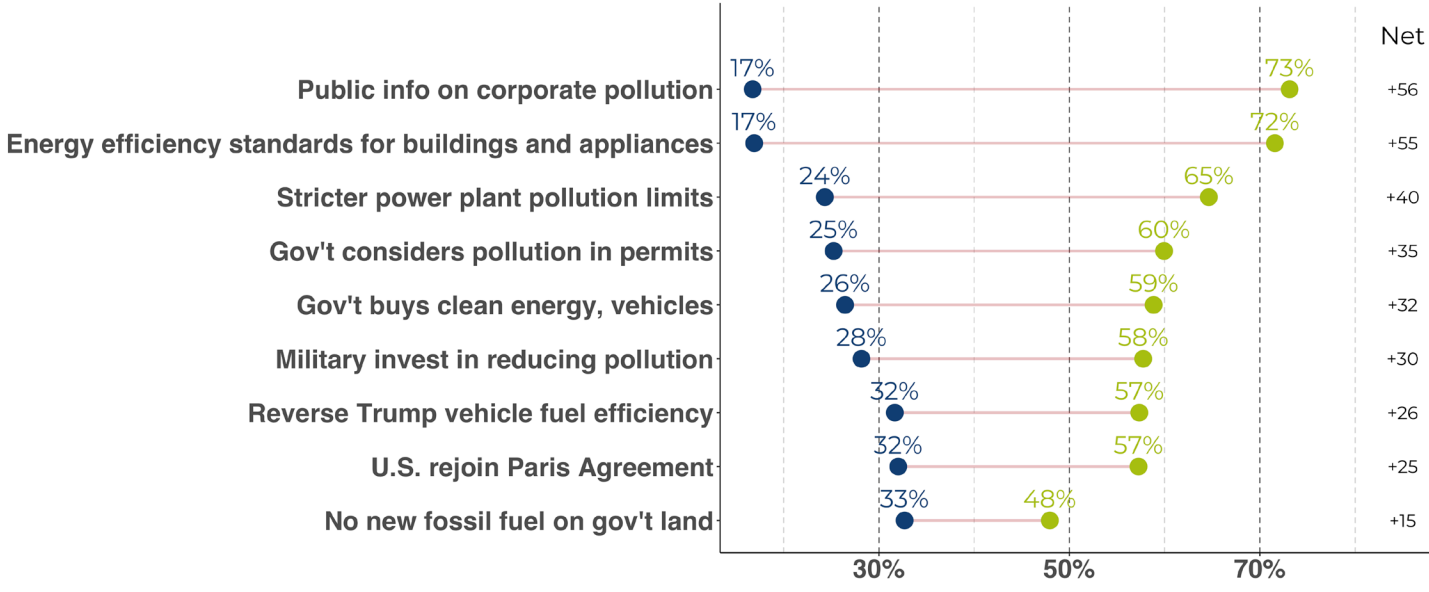
Broken out by party identification, the same general order of popularity held for each policy; the same policies that were most popular among Democrats were also the most popular among Republicans and independents, and vice versa. Independent and third-party voters sided with Democrats in supporting each of these policies.

Voters reported that they were most skeptical of a new executive order banning new fossil fuel on government land. While we have found in previous research that there is support for new energy alternatives broadly, our framing here strongly reminded voters that this would also include stopping current projects that would produce energy facilities on federal lands. With that in mind, voters support a moratorium on fossil fuel projects on government land by 15 points on net.

On net, Republicans opposed most of these proposals, with the exception of policies that would strengthen [building/appliance] efficiency standards and require the disclosure of corporate pollution.

Activists and advocates should not discount how popular these reforms are among Republicans, however. For example, an item that explicitly asked voters about enacting stricter carbon-pollution limits for power plants, which would reverse the Trump administration's repeal of the Clean Power Plan, garnered the support of about one in three Republican voters, and the support of almost two in three independent voters.

Overall

	Oppose	Support	Net
Public info on corporate pollution	17%	73%	+56
Energy efficiency standards for buildings and appliances	17%	72%	+55
Stricter power plant pollution limits	24%	65%	+40
Gov't considers pollution in permits	25%	60%	+35
Gov't buys clean energy, vehicles	26%	59%	+32
Military invest in reducing pollution	28%	58%	+30
Reverse Trump vehicle fuel efficiency	32%	57%	+26
U.S. rejoin Paris Agreement	32%	57%	+25
No new fossil fuel on gov't land	33%	48%	+15

Democrat (n = 463)

	Oppose	Support
Public info on corporate pollution	4%	88%
Energy efficiency standards for buildings and appliances	4%	85%
Stricter power plant pollution limits	3%	87%
Gov't considers pollution in permits	7%	80%
Gov't buys clean energy, vehicles	9%	78%
Military invest in reducing pollution	7%	80%
Reverse Trump vehicle fuel efficiency	14%	75%
U.S. rejoin Paris Agreement	8%	83%
No new fossil fuel on gov't land	17%	63%

Independent/Other (n = 382)

	Oppose	Support
Public info on corporate pollution	18%	70%
Energy efficiency standards for buildings and appliances	17%	69%
Stricter power plant pollution limits	28%	59%
Gov't considers pollution in permits	28%	55%
Gov't buys clean energy, vehicles	28%	56%
Military invest in reducing pollution	31%	53%
Reverse Trump vehicle fuel efficiency	33%	57%
U.S. rejoin Paris Agreement	35%	53%
No new fossil fuel on gov't land	36%	42%

Republican (n = 314)

	Oppose	Support
Public info on corporate pollution	33%	54%
Energy efficiency standards for buildings and appliances	36%	54%
Stricter power plant pollution limits	51%	38%
Gov't considers pollution in permits	49%	36%
Gov't buys clean energy, vehicles	51%	35%
Military invest in reducing pollution	56%	31%
Reverse Trump vehicle fuel efficiency	56%	32%
U.S. rejoin Paris Agreement	64%	24%
No new fossil fuel on gov't land	52%	33%

In previous memos, we have found [broad public support](#) for many elements of the Green New Deal as well as for other significant climate and energy reforms, and this memo's results are in line with those prior findings. Despite a constant barrage of Republican attacks to the contrary, our results suggest there is clear enthusiasm for substantial reforms to the energy economy, even if executive orders are needed to accomplish them.
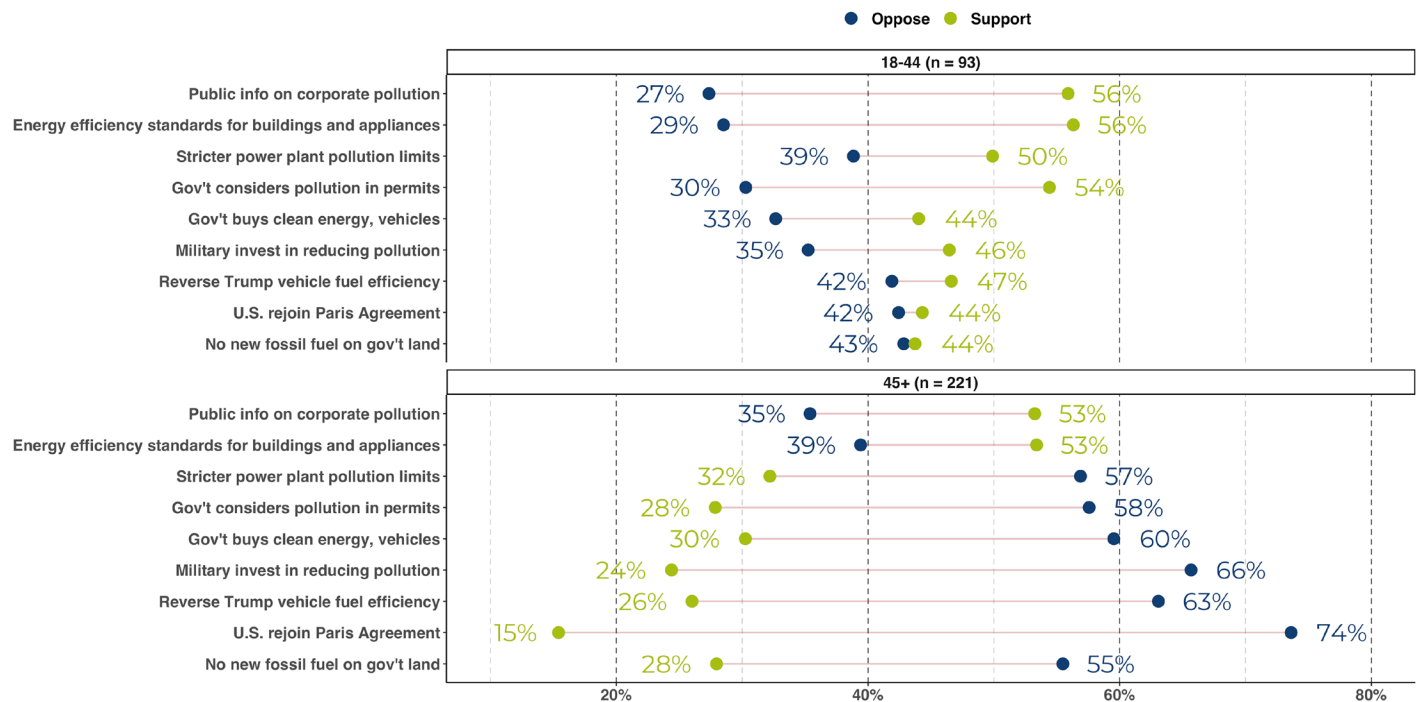
Notably, Republicans were most clearly opposed to rejoining the Paris Agreement, an international agreement on combating climate change from which Trump withdrew the United States early in his presidency—a move completed earlier this month. As such, due to its increased salience and strong association with President Trump, it is not surprising to see that Republican voters overwhelmingly oppose reversing the withdrawal from the treaty.

We also examined how various subgroups of Republicans feel about each of the potential executive orders, given that support and opposition were closer among

Republicans, and that they demonstrated net support for two of the policies.

Younger Republicans (ages eighteen to forty-four) showed net support for all nine policies, while older Republicans (ages forty-five and up) showed net support for only two of the nine policies. Older Republicans demonstrated strong net opposition to: stricter carbon-pollution limits, the government considering pollution when making decisions about permits, the government purchasing green energy and electric vehicles, the military investing in reducing their pollution, reversing Trump's vehicle fuel-efficiency policy, rejoining the Paris Agreement, and preventing new fossil fuel projects on government land. However, younger Republicans tended to support these items, even if some are only by small pluralities.

Looking at Republicans by gender, it is clear that Republican women are driving Republican support for requiring corporations to provide information on their environmental impacts and strengthening national standards of building and appliance efficiency. Small

Oppose ● Support ●

18-44 (n = 93)

	Oppose	Support
Public info on corporate pollution	27%	56%
Energy efficiency standards for buildings and appliances	29%	56%
Stricter power plant pollution limits	39%	50%
Gov't considers pollution in permits	30%	54%
Gov't buys clean energy, vehicles	33%	44%
Military invest in reducing pollution	35%	46%
Reverse Trump vehicle fuel efficiency	42%	47%
U.S. rejoin Paris Agreement	42%	44%
No new fossil fuel on gov't land	43%	44%

45+ (n = 221)

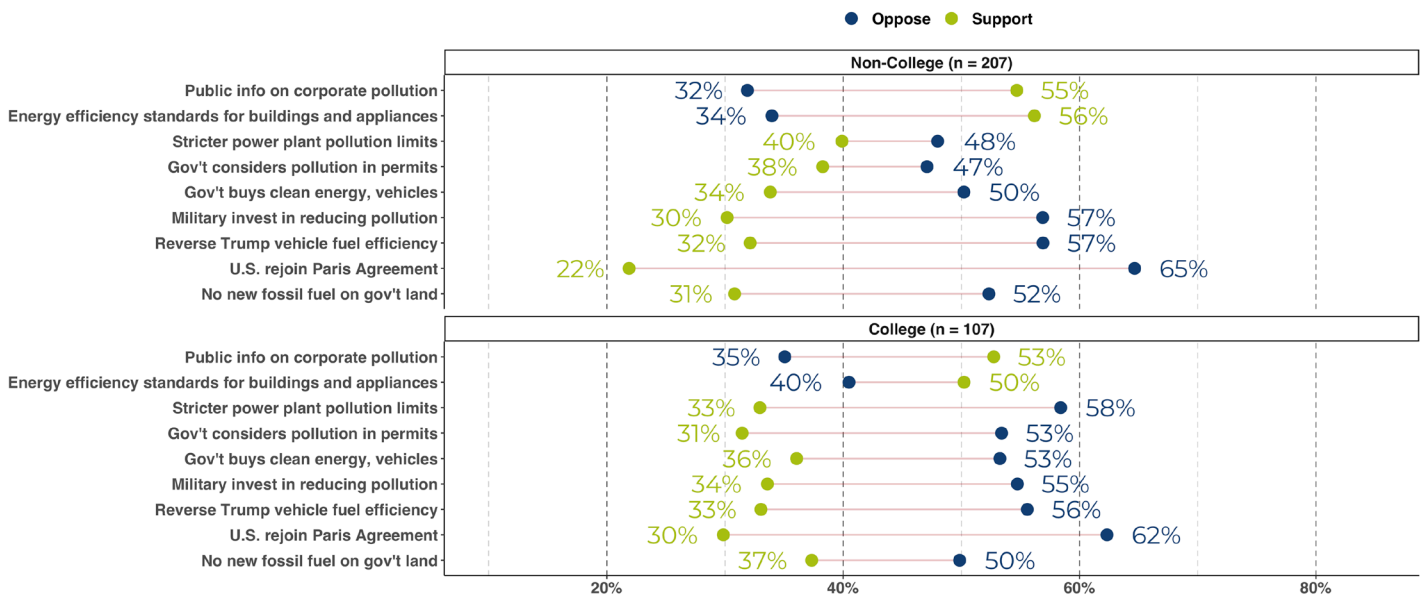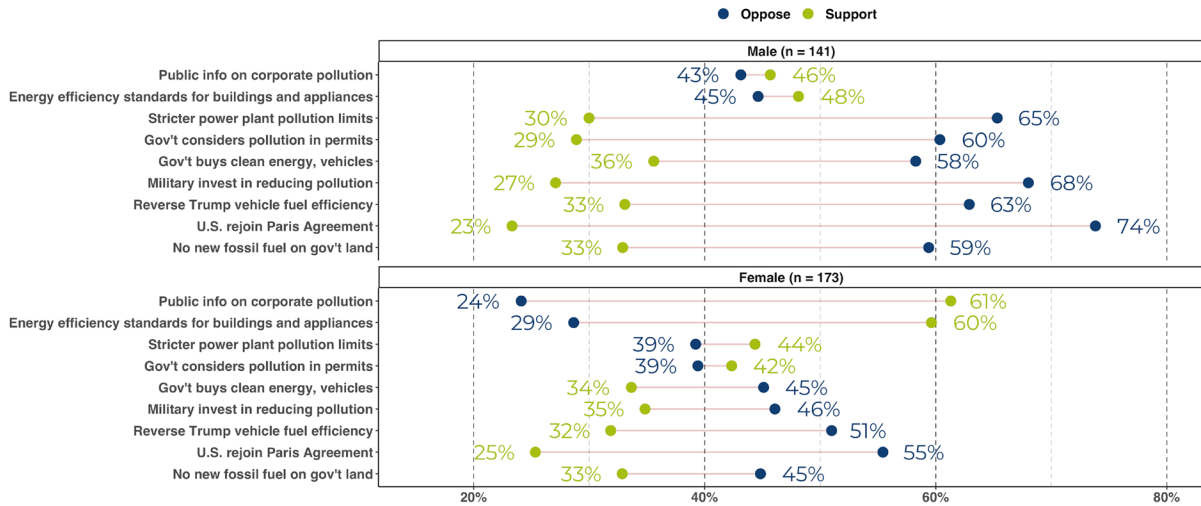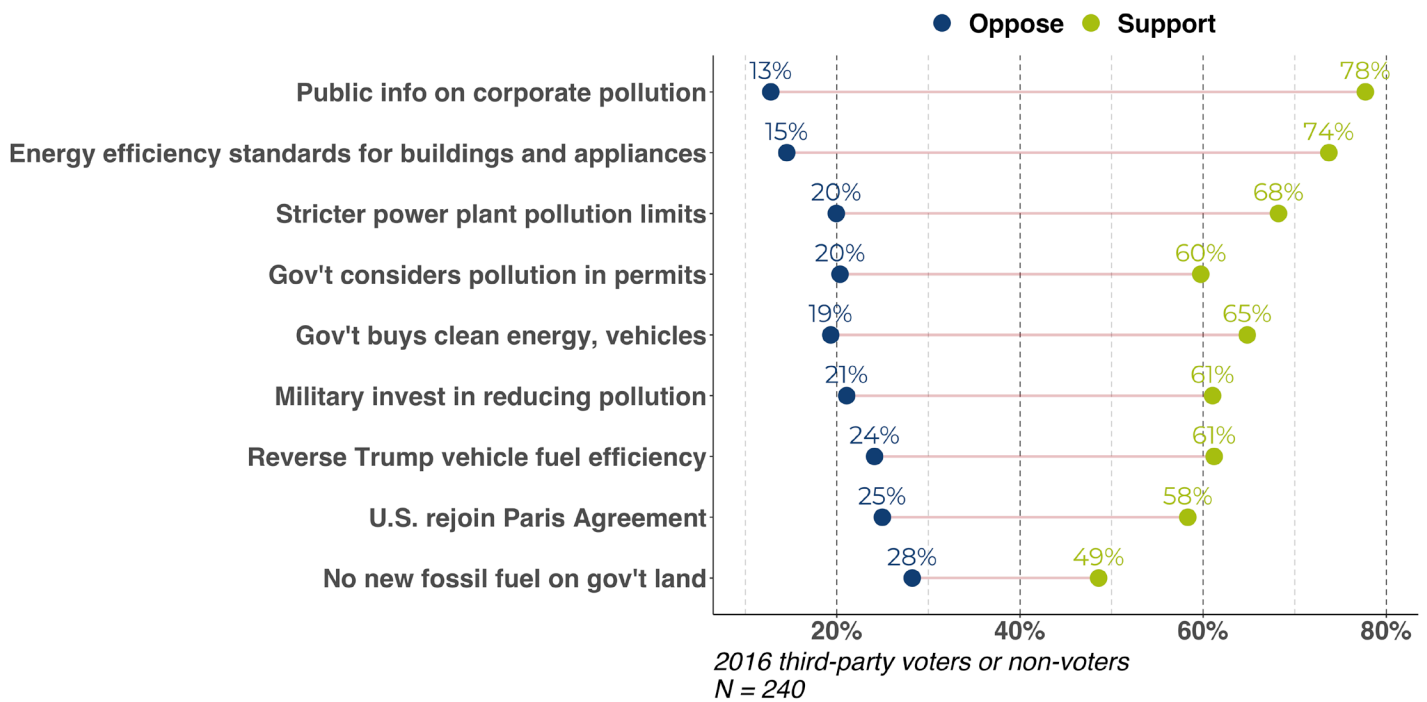|	Support	Oppose
Public info on corporate pollution	35%	53%
Energy efficiency standards for buildings and appliances	39%	53%
Stricter power plant pollution limits	32%	57%
Gov't considers pollution in permits	28%	58%
Gov't buys clean energy, vehicles	30%	60%
Military invest in reducing pollution	24%	66%
Reverse Trump vehicle fuel efficiency	26%	63%
U.S. rejoin Paris Agreement	15%	74%
No new fossil fuel on gov't land	28%	55%

pluralities of Republican men support these policies, but a majority of women support these policies, with net support at a minimum of about 30 points among women.

Republican women also support policies that instruct the EPA to have stricter pollution limits, and that require the government to consider environmental impacts in permits and regulations—while strong majorities of

Republican men oppose them. Even when women were in net *opposition* to policies, they were so to a smaller extent than men.

Counter to what we expected, no systematic differences were found between college-educated Republicans and non-college-educated Republicans on these.

Oppose ● **Support** ●

	Oppose	Support
Public info on corporate pollution	13%	78%
Energy efficiency standards for buildings and appliances	15%	74%
Stricter power plant pollution limits	20%	68%
Gov't considers pollution in permits	20%	60%
Gov't buys clean energy, vehicles	19%	65%
Military invest in reducing pollution	21%	61%
Reverse Trump vehicle fuel efficiency	24%	61%
U.S. rejoin Paris Agreement	25%	58%
No new fossil fuel on gov't land	28%	49%

2016 third-party voters or non-voters
N = 240

We looked at support for these executive orders among voters who either sat out the 2016 election, or voted for a third-party candidate. While the sample size is small (N = 240), there is a clear pattern of support for these actions to protect the environment. At least 60 percent of these voters support all but two of the policies—no new fossil fuel on government land and rejoining the Paris Agreement, which still enjoy a large plurality of these votes. Environmental policies such as these are popular and should be used to engage with voters in 2020.

Public-lands messaging

Later in the survey, we presented voters with a messaging experiment to test two opposing messages about environmental reform. All respondents saw the same Democratic message, which included an argument in favor of the next president using an executive order to stop all new drilling and leasing for fossil fuels on public lands, and to reinstate Obama-era rules on pollution control. Half of respondents saw a Republican counterargument centered on a direct statement of process concerns that characterized the proposal as an "executive overreach." The other half of respondents saw a Republican counterargument centered on the practical concerns of the policy, namely that traditional investments in energy are better bets than new, untested green energy.

Respondents were told more information about the order preventing drilling and leasing for fossil fuels on public lands. This description read:

> *Some Democrats have argued the next President should use an executive order to stop all new drilling and leasing for fossil fuels on public lands*

and reinstate rules in place during the Obama Administration designed to prevent chemical spills into our lakes, rivers, and streams, and to direct the federal government to develop new clean energy facilities using federal land. They argue that this would help protect America's federal lands and to ensure America is a global leader in clean technology.

Republicans argue...

Do you [support or oppose] an executive order to stop all new drilling and leasing for fossil fuels on public lands?

The Republicans argument was either:

Republicans argue that this is a dangerous overreach of executive authority that would deprive states and local governments from making important economic decisions. They argue the next President should work with state and local governments to protect the

environment rather than push a unilateral federal takeover.

Or:

Republicans argue that drilling and conventional energy development is a better use of land than untested "green" technology, and that private businesses will develop energy more efficiently than a federal bureaucracy.

Respondents were then asked:

Do you [support or oppose] an executive order to stop all new drilling and leasing for fossil fuels on public lands?

This message test occurred later in the survey, after voters had already been asked plainly whether they supported or opposed stopping fossil fuel projects on federal land.
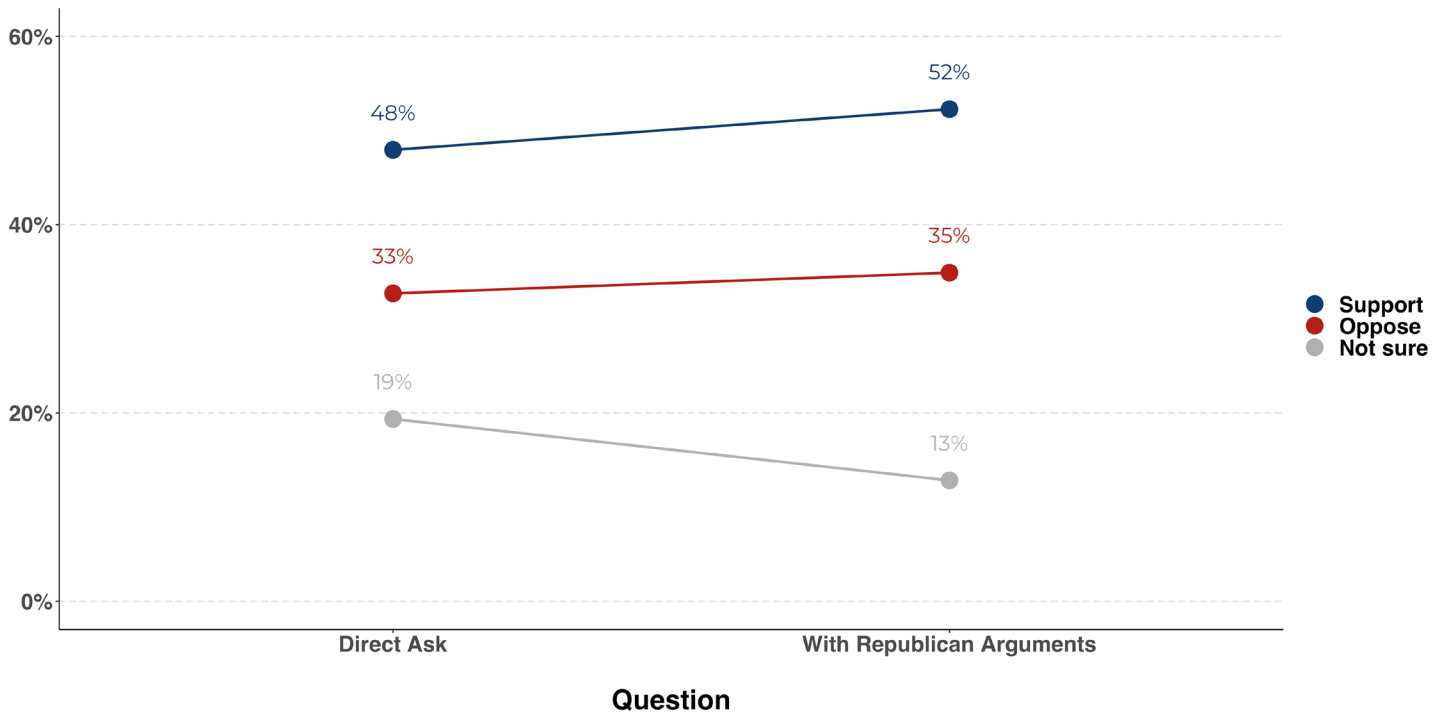
No differences were found between the two Republican arguments; there was 52 percent support and 35 percent opposition in both conditions. This suggests the policy is resilient to both Republican arguments.

Adding more information and a partisan frame decreased the proportion of respondents who were "not sure," with similar, small increases in both support and opposition. Comparing this more-detailed, partisan-framed ask (collapsing across both Republican arguments) to the plain, less-detailed ask from earlier in the survey:

Including the explicitly partisan framing and Republican arguments slightly increased the share of respondents who either supported or opposed the measure. One would expect this polarization effect after introducing partisan arguments for and against the policy.

Conclusion

Voters are ready to support a president who uses executive orders to protect the environment. To ensure that these results mimicked a real-world context where voters are exposed to messages on both sides of an issue, we were as explicit as possible about expanding government activity in each of these proposals, and we tested two different and realistic counterarguments that Republicans have offered against such reforms in the past. Despite this, we found voters are clearly ready for action on the climate, even if it requires ambitious executive action by the next president.

Large majorities of independents and surprising pluralities of Republicans side with the Democrats on many of these reforms. Democrats should not shy away from climate and energy reforms as major campaign issues going forward. Despite years of debate over such reforms—including Republican disinformation campaigns against the Green New Deal—practical and meaningful reforms to climate and energy policy remain overwhelmingly popular.

Methodology

On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue fielded a survey including 1,159 US voters on YouGov's online panel. The survey was fielded from October 19 through October 21, 2019, and was weighted to be representative of the population of US voters by age, race/ethnicity, sex, US Census region, and 2016 presidential vote choice. The survey included several items on executive orders the next president might use to address climate change and other environmental issues.