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●● The McHarg Center

# GREEN INDUSTRIAL POLICY FOR DOMESTIC AND GLOBAL CLIMATE JUSTICE IS POPULAR

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- ▶ **Even with talking points giving partisan cues, a green industrial policy agenda is popular.** For nearly every element of a progressive green industrial policy, consistent with the Green New Deal, support outweighed opposition, usually by substantial margins. This was true for both Democrats and Independents. And in every question, we offered typical Democratic and Republican talking points, to indicate the standard terms of debate.
- ▶ **There is broad support for massive investment in green technology.** We found greater support than opposition for a trillion-dollar investment in green technology across every demographic group and party identification label except Republicans, who strongly oppose the policy.
- ▶ **Specific examples of green technology, including collective and justice-oriented measures, are extremely popular.** We found striking support for a number of specific green technology investments, including over 60% support for investments in renewable energy, smart grid technology, battery technology, electric buses, and retrofitting buildings with a focus on low-income housing. The one specific green technology that most respondents opposed investing in was meat alternatives.
- ▶ **Concrete examples of green technology are popular with Republicans.** More Republicans support than oppose investments in renewable energy, electric buses, underground high-voltage transmission, electric minivans and pickup trucks for rural and suburban areas, smart grid technology, retrofitting buildings with an emphasis on low-income housing, and battery technology.
- ▶ **Generous fair trade policies in green technologies, in solidarity with low-income countries, are popular.** There is majority support—55% in favor—for two kinds of green fair trade: new trade rules to ensure strong labor rights, consultation of indigenous communities, and sustainable practices for mining and manufacturing in low-income countries; and sharing green technology at low- or no-cost with low-income countries. This is consistent with a broader, global climate justice agenda.
- ▶ **Democratizing access to high-level work in green technology is popular.** There is greater support than opposition for full federal scholarships to cover the costs of graduate degrees in fields linked to new green technologies, for anyone with the needed talent and qualification.

## BACKGROUND

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The global economy is hurting and conditions are likely to worsen substantially. The spread of COVID-19 has reached global pandemic status. Increasing disruption is triggering underlying weaknesses in the global and domestic US economies. Markets are crashing. Besides the terrible short-term costs of illness and recession, we must worry about a fossil fueled reboot where “[retaliatory emissions](#)” would result from a return to oil, gas, and coal-powered growth. Ongoing carbon pollution threatens runaway climate chaos.

Economic crises also present opportunities for transformative change. For the first time since the Great Recession, oil demand appears to be flattening. The fossil fuel sector, already hugely reliant on government subsidies, will no doubt demand more state largesse to stay afloat. (The Trump administration is already plotting a [bailout of shale companies](#).) But the public shouldn’t foot the bill for planetary destruction. Instead, progressive policymakers and movements should [seize the moment to fight for a Green New Deal](#).

We need massive public investment to deploy and improve life-saving green technologies.

Now is the time to debate—and plan for—a bold, green industrial policy approach for the United States, where our government institutions would use public spending and coordination to generate a green stimulus. This would ensure that the coming economic rebound is simultaneously low-carbon and just, putting us on a path to decarbonize the economy, democratize green innovation, and contribute to fair green trade with the rest of the world. This green industrial policy would be an essential pillar of the broader Green New Deal agenda proposed by Sen. Bernie Sanders, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and others. Green New Deal advocates rightly

emphasize a greater role for the federal government in spurring the development and accelerated deployment of no-carbon energy and other green technologies to combat the climate emergency and inequality at the same time.

But is massive public investment in green technology popular? And are Americans interested in justice-oriented versions of green technology policies?

In this round of research, we focused on whether Americans support extremely high levels of public funding on green technology through the federal government; a range of specific green technologies, from electric buses to housing retrofits; new fair trade agreements to a) ensure that mining and manufacturing in low-income countries is done with the highest environmental and labor standards, and with enforcement of indigenous rights, and b) make US green technologies available to low-income countries at very low cost; and free university graduate education at every level for priority green technology fields.

For the sake of simplicity—and to avoid getting too wonky in a survey—we did not distinguish between research and development, and deployment (i.e., research on new solar panel technology, versus funding to install solar panels). We think both are needed, and we assume that respondents intuit that this investment entails both research *and* deployment.

For each question that we polled, we included typical Democratic and Republican talking points, so that respondents were exposed to likely political messaging before indicating their support or opposition to particular policies. This improves our confidence in the robustness of the results in our highly polarized public discourse.

Overall, Democratic talking points emphasized reducing carbon pollution, making technologies

more affordable, creating union jobs, increasing access to education, and making global trade fairer. Republican talking points emphasized avoiding government waste, the efficiency and efficacy of the private sector, and the benefits of economic deregulation and free trade.

Broadly speaking, we wanted to know if Americans were ready for a form of green industrial policy that is transformative in its scale; includes concrete technologies to immediately improve Americans' lives; brings more Americans into the production of green technology through union jobs and higher education; and makes global trade more fair.

In its scale and orientation to social justice in the US and abroad, the proposed agenda is consistent with ambitious Green New Deal visions.

Our package thus represents, on one hand, a departure from minimalist climate policies proposed by centrists and free-market energy institutes. On the other hand, it also differs from conservative green stimulus proposals, which would emphasize some version of market leadership and “America first” rhetoric. In contrast, we set up questions that tested the specific benefits of massive *public* investment, prioritizing union jobs and affordability, and solidarity with low-income countries and their communities.

## RESULTS: SUPPORT FOR A TRILLION-DOLLAR INVESTMENT IN GREEN TECHNOLOGY

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If the United States is going to decarbonize its power sector in the next decade, or even close to that fast, it will require enormous investment in deploying and improving green technologies. The Green New Deal agenda stands out for emphasizing the scale of action needed, and the fact that it should benefit ordinary people the most—for instance, by making the green economy more affordable than the one it replaces. During the 2008-09 debate over the stimulus that President Obama oversaw, his advisers believed that it was essential to keep proposed spending under \$1 trillion to avoid triggering a groundswell of political opposition. The “t word” (trillion) was the line the Obama administration refused to cross. But unless we cross that line, we will not have the resources we need to decarbonize at scale.

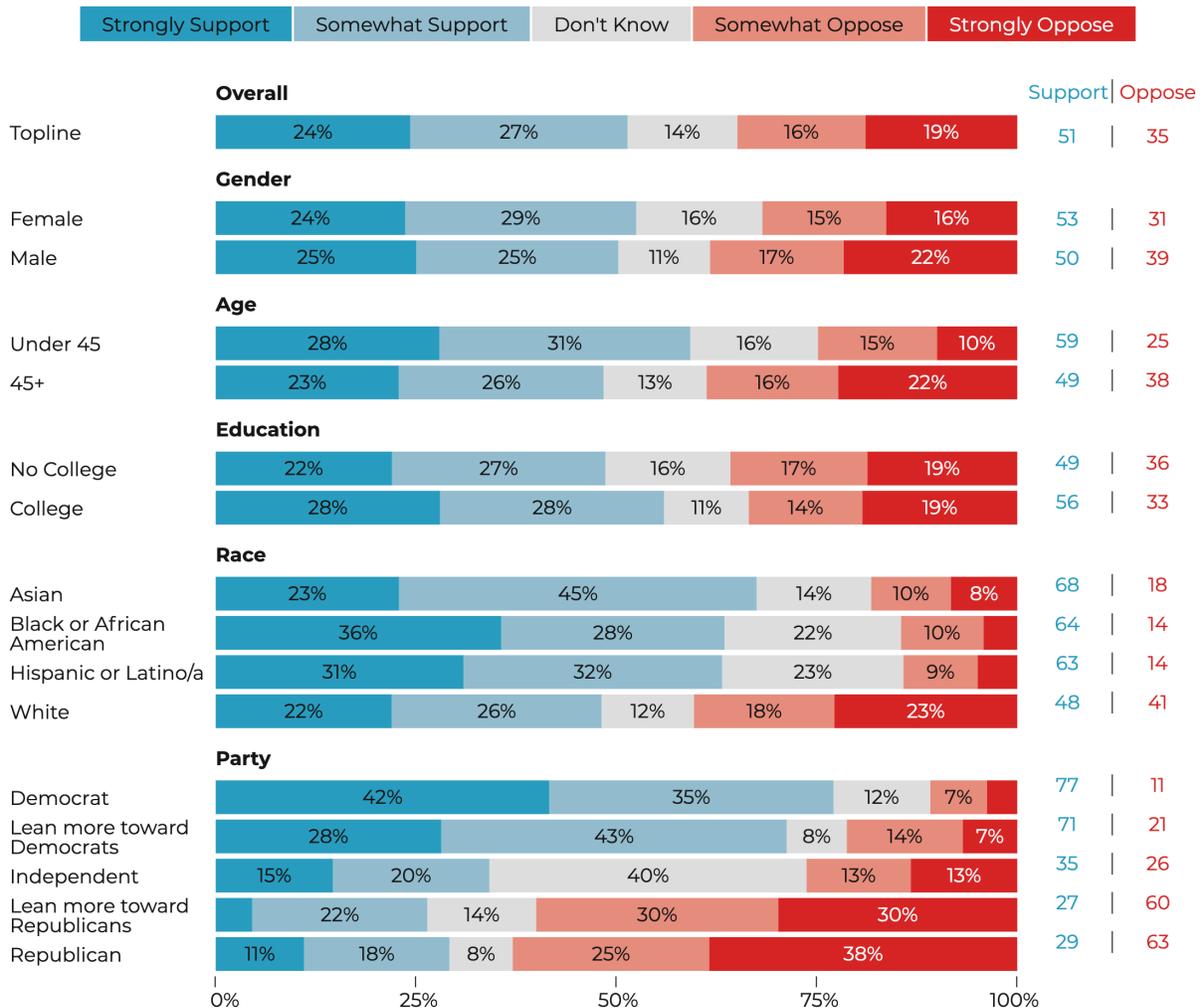
To assess in broad terms the public's appetite for green industrial policy, we tested support for a massive, "trillion-dollar investment" in green technologies, spearheaded by the US Department of Energy, and prioritizing affordable access to these technologies for all Americans. We included likely partisan talking points in the question.

We asked:

*Some Democrats have proposed a trillion-dollar investment to grow existing programs in the Department of Energy for funding for advanced green technologies? Democrats believe that massive public investment will grow the 21st century green economy and ensure that new technologies are affordable to everyone. Republicans believe the government should let businesses choose what to invest in, and that public funding doesn't work. Do you support or oppose this policy?*

As seen below, there is majority support for massive green investment, including overall, 51% of respondents supporting, 35% opposing, and 14% don't know. Support exceeds opposition in every demographic category. Some contrasts of note are 10% greater support from respondents under 45 compared to over 45, and 15-20% higher support from non-white respondent groups.

## Support for a Trillion Dollar Investment in Green Technology



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Democrats overwhelmingly support this proposal, Independents support by a narrower margin, and Republicans are opposed. (As we will see below, specifying concrete investment targets raises both overall and Republican support substantially.)

## RESULTS: SPECIFIC TARGETS OF INVESTMENT FOR GREEN INDUSTRIAL POLICY

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Concrete ideas focus the mind and can help cut through partisan intuitions that operate at a high level of abstraction. By exploring support for different potential technologies, we can also see whether there is a strong bias toward individualistic versus collective, justice-oriented green technologies. (“Green technology” isn’t a single thing, but a broad field of very different potential policies and types of social organization.) To test support for concrete investment targets, we gave a broad overarching argument, then listed a number of specific options .

We asked:

*New technologies will need to be developed to reduce carbon pollution and increase safety from climate disasters. Democrats have proposed major public investment in green technology. Democrats believe public investment is necessary to ensure rapid technological improvement, affordable*

*prices for new technologies, and encourage the hiring of union workers. Republicans believe that technological development has always been spurred on by private companies and that public investment is a waste of taxpayer money. Would you support or oppose major public investment in the following solutions?*

- ▶ *Electric buses*
- ▶ *Meat alternatives (like Beyond Meat)*
- ▶ *Renewable Energy*
- ▶ *Underground high-voltage transmission*
- ▶ *Electric minivans and pickup trucks for rural and suburban areas*
- ▶ *Smart grid technology which allows customers to sell energy they produce back to energy providers*
- ▶ *Retrofitting buildings with a focus on low-income housing*
- ▶ *Battery technology*

As seen on the next page, we found strong support for all but one specific green technology investments (meat alternatives), including over 60% support for investments in renewable energy, smart grid technology, battery technology, electric buses, and retrofitting buildings with a focus on low-income housing. It seems advocates of meat alternatives will need to make better, more frequent public arguments. This is especially the case for cellular meat (“lab meat”), which [probably requires substantial public funding](#) to become economically viable.

Also, note that support for collective services like electric buses, and justice-oriented efficiency measures, like building retrofits for low-income homes, are winning priorities. These are also approaches that would help reduce overall energy demand, thus generating economic development that reduces overall resource use. This is necessary for a long-term shift toward more sustainable forms of prosperity.

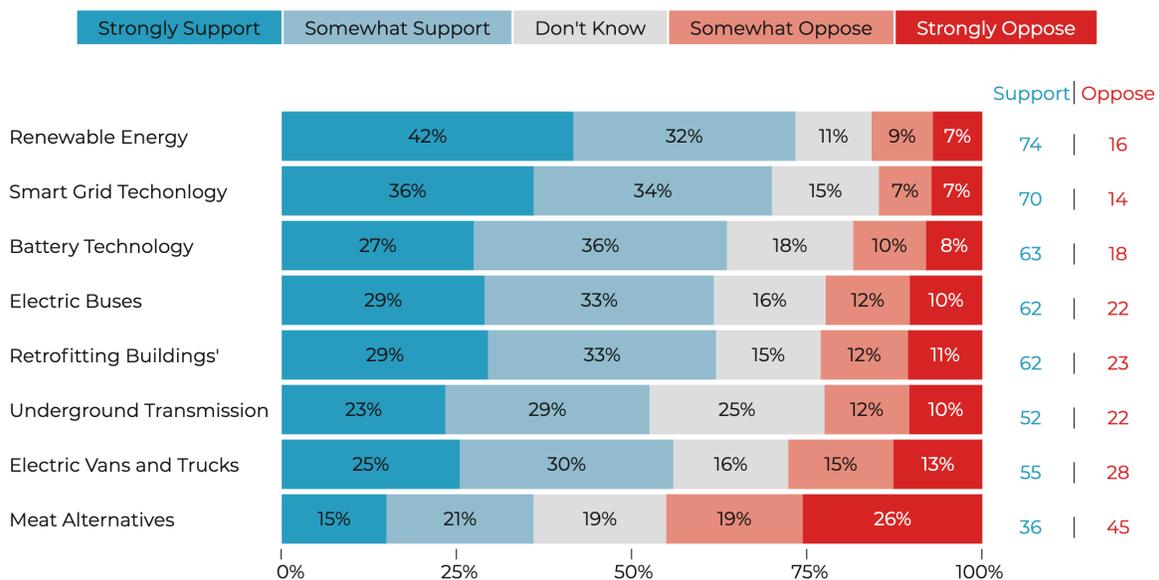
Strikingly, funding for electric buses, renewable energy, smart grid technology, retrofitting buildings with a focus on low-income housing, and battery technology all polled above 60% support. In comparison, support for a trillion-dollar investment in the green economy, with no specified technologies, polled at 51% support. This suggests that progressive policymakers and social movements should prioritize concrete

language about specific targets of investment.

Results also suggest that Democratic talking points on making green technology affordable and creating union jobs are more compelling than Republican talking points stating that public investment is wasteful and that the private market is the most effective innovator.

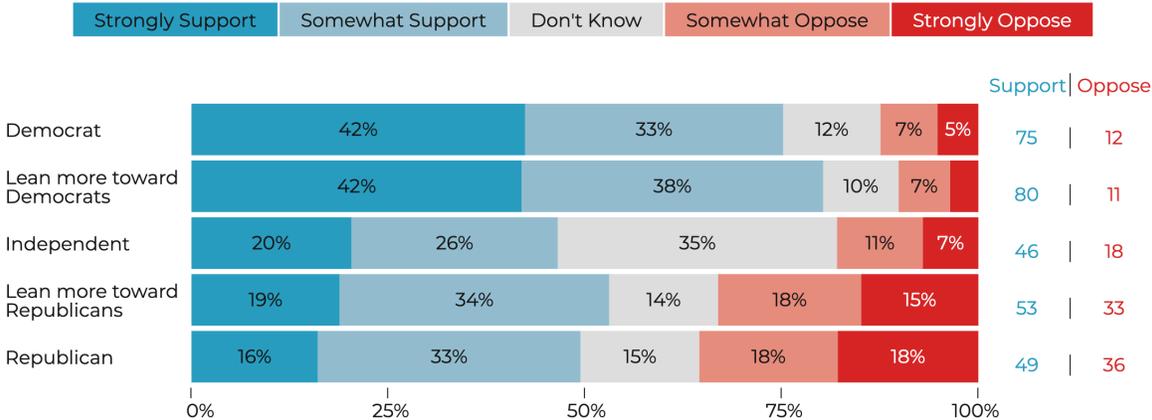
We also found that concrete examples of green technology are popular with Republicans. More Republicans support than oppose investments in renewable energy, electric buses, underground high-voltage transmission, electric minivans and pickup trucks for rural and suburban areas, smart grid technology, retrofitting buildings with an emphasis on low-income housing, and battery technology. The graphs below show party breakdowns for each specific policy.

## Support for Major Public Investments in Green Solutions



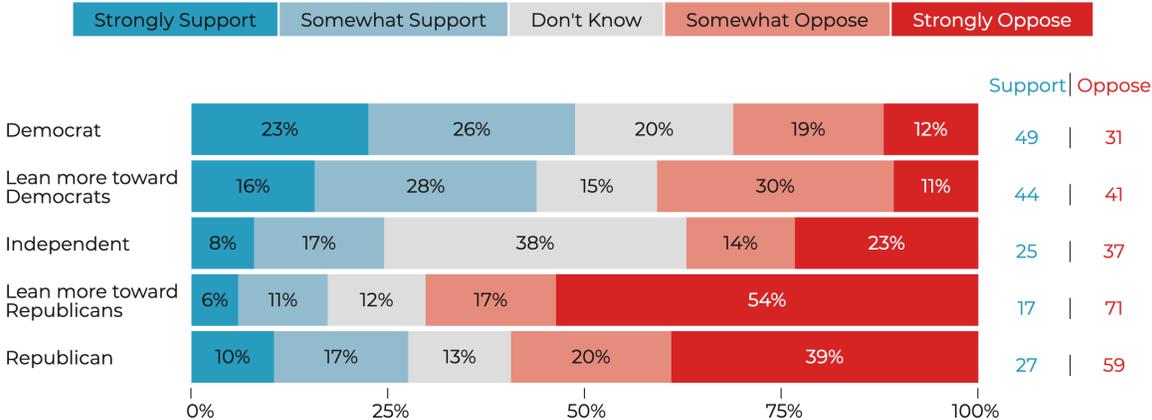
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### Support for Investment in Electric Buses by Party



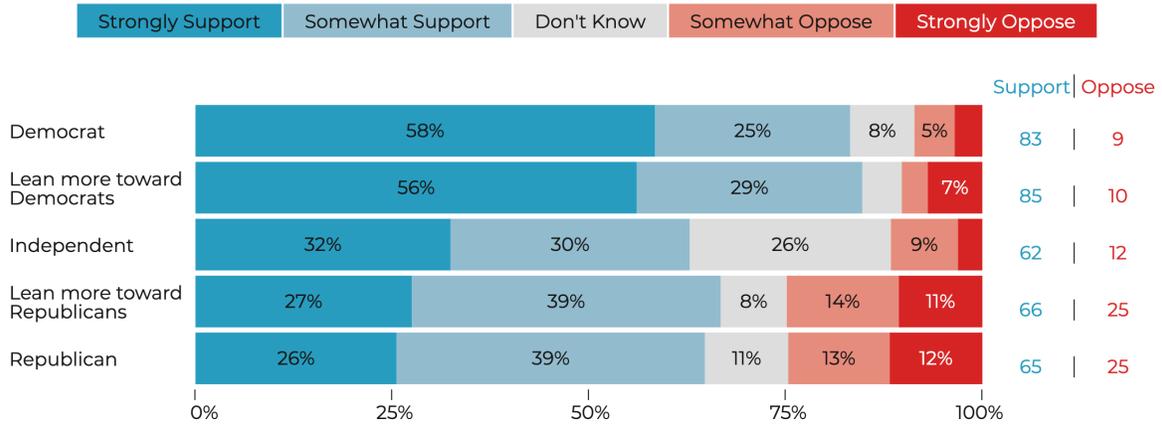
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### Support for Investment in Meat Alternatives by Party



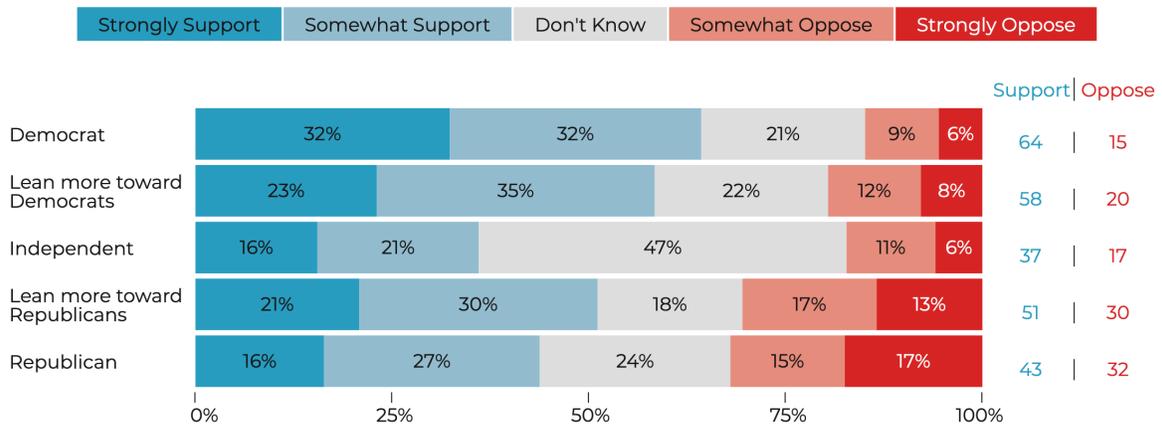
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## Support for Investment in Renewable Energy by Party



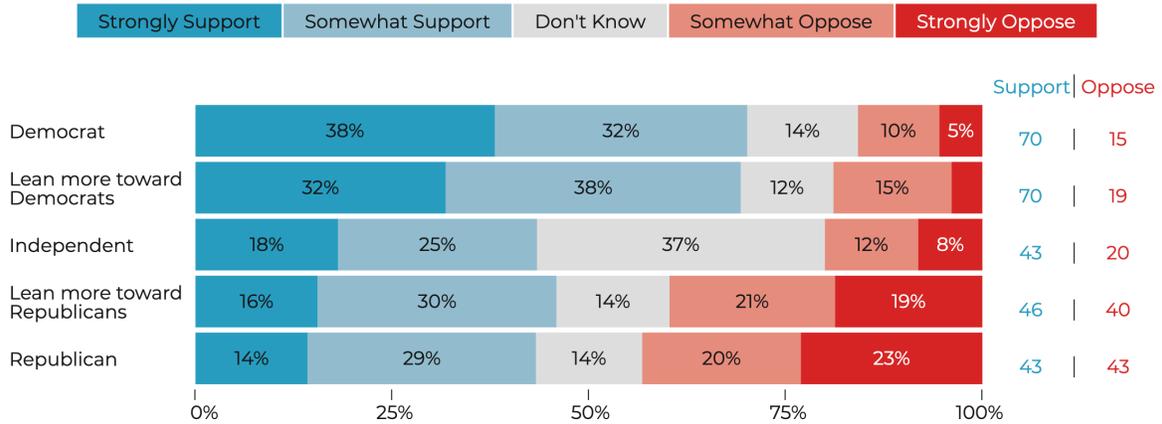
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## Support for Investment in Underground Transmission by Party



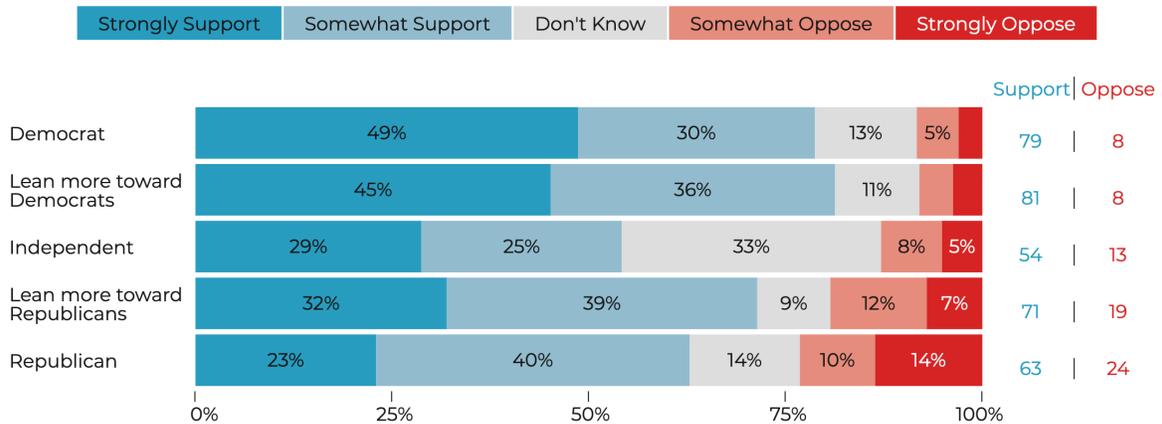
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## Support for Investment in Electrics Minivans and Trucks by Party



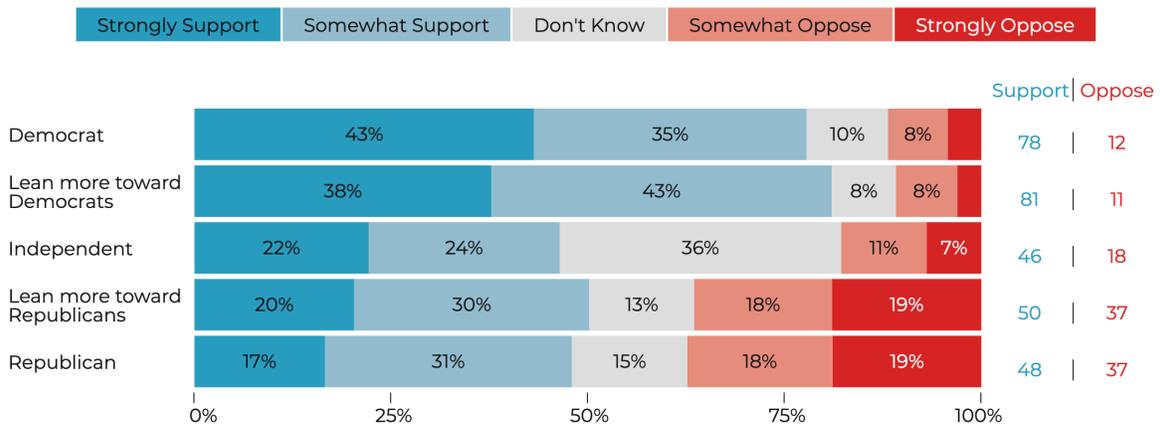
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## Support for Investment in Smart Grid Technology by Party



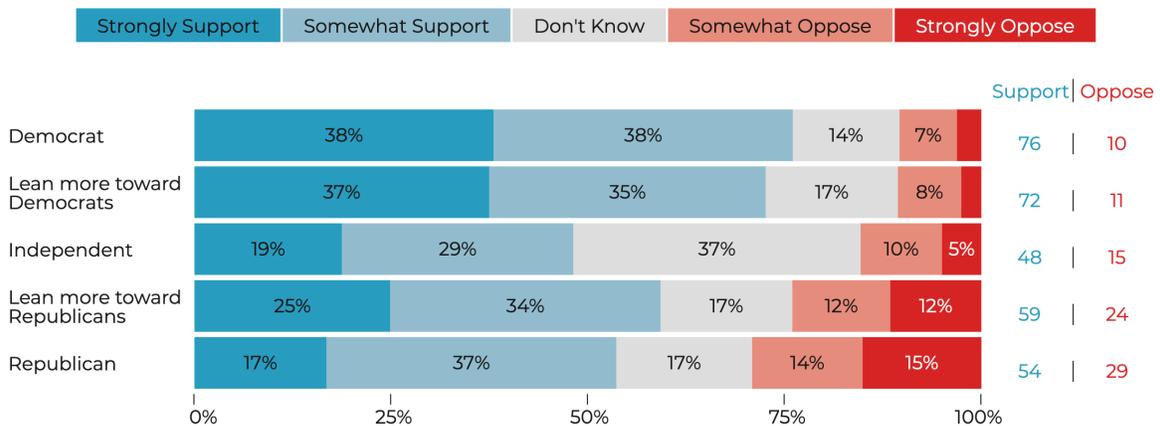
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## Support for Investment in Retrofitting Buildings with a Focus on Low-Income Homes by Party



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## Support for Investment in Battery Technology by Party



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# RESULTS: FAIR TRADE INVOLVING GREEN TECHNOLOGIES

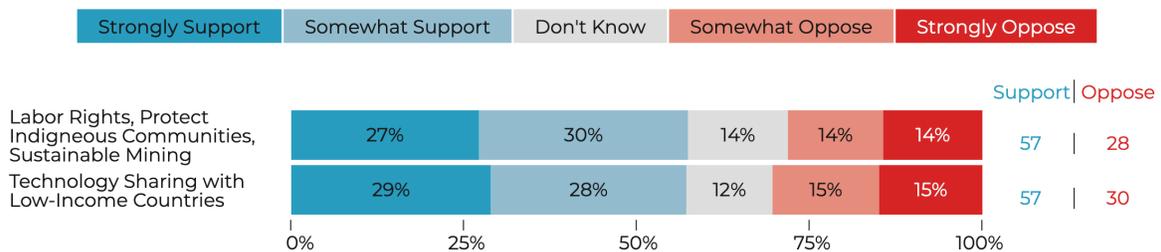
Trade policy is an intensely contested issue in American politics. American workers and communities need to benefit from US public investment. But that does not necessarily stand in the way of global solidarity. There is no inherent tension between the interests of American workers and communities, and the interests of their counterparts around the world. Would Americans support a green industrial policy package that also protects workers, indigenous communities, and ecosystems in low-income countries? This is especially important given increasing [reports](#) on how mining and manufacturing of renewable energy and other green technologies can have devastating consequences in the Global South. Countries in the Global South who have contributed the least to planetary emissions may also lack funds to buy cutting-edge green technologies, even when they are necessary to help the world decarbonize in a fast and just way. Would Americans support sharing the fruits of our public green investment at low- or no-cost to low-income countries, even when advocated in moral terms?

We asked:

*Many developing countries cannot afford the most modern clean technologies of the green economy. Some Democrats have proposed that the US share cutting-edge green technologies at low or no cost with the low-income countries most impacted by climate change. Democrats believe that sharing the best technologies to poor countries at low cost is morally just, and also the best strategy to ensure that all countries reduce carbon pollution as quickly as possible. Republicans believe that American companies should maximize profits from selling their technology. Do you support or oppose this policy?*

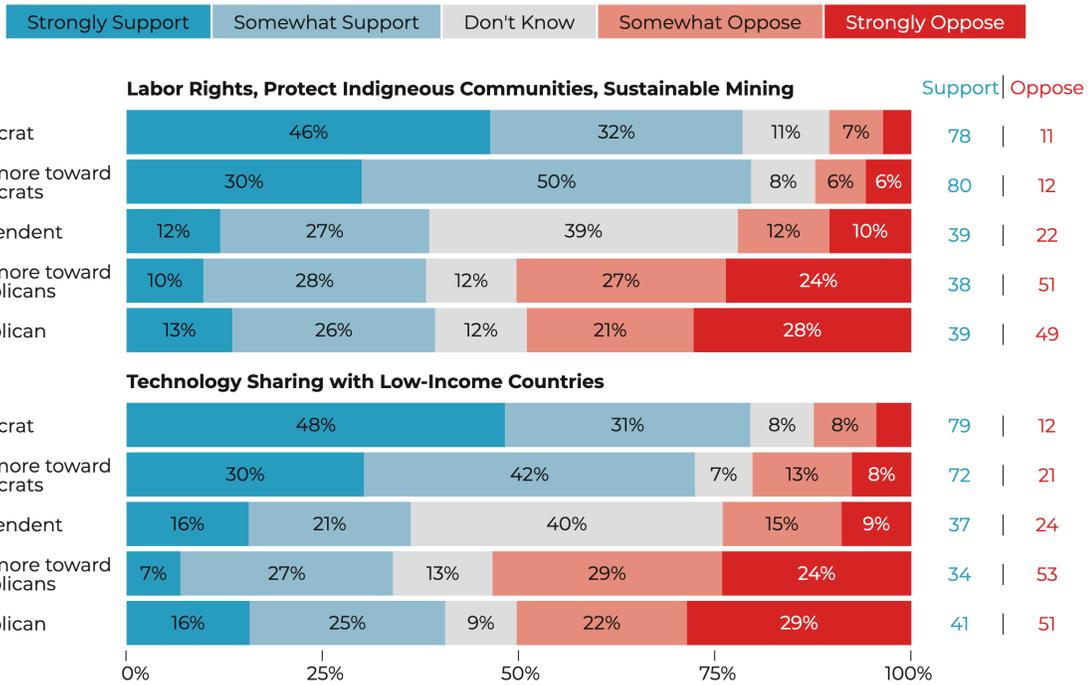
*The renewable energy industry has been criticized for encouraging low wages and pollution in developing countries where there is mining and manufacturing for green technology. Some Democrats have proposed that US trade agreements should require strong labor rights, consultation with indigenous communities, and environmental sustainability at each stage of economic production. Democrats believe that everyone has the right to a dignified job and clean air and water--no matter what country they live in. Republicans believe that free trade and deregulation results in the lowest prices for consumer goods and boosts economic growth. Do you support or oppose this policy?*

## Support for Fair Trade Policies



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## Support for Fair Trade Policies by Party



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We are heartened to see support for our two fair trade questions at over 55% support. In a context where both ends of the political spectrum are calling for new trade rules, this suggests that talking about fairer green trade, with benefits to both the US and low-income countries and their communities, is politically popular. This is consistent with the broad global climate justice

agenda, including the large number of groups organizing around global solidarity in the US-based climate justice movement.

Overall, support for these ideas exceeds opposition among both Democrats and Independents. Republicans are moderately opposed.

# RESULTS: INCREASING ACCESS TO SPECIALIZED GREEN TECHNOLOGY CAREERS

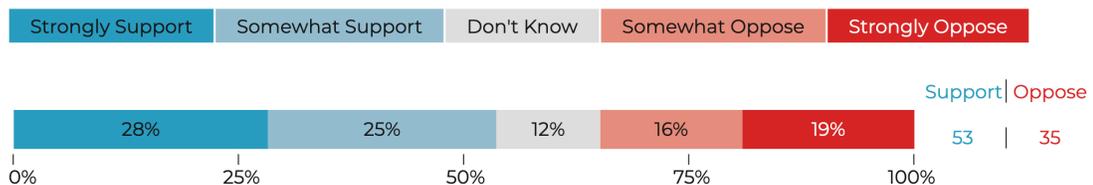
Green technology is a rapidly growing field. Who will have the opportunity to do specialist work in this area? As the Bernie Sanders campaign has argued repeatedly for tuition-free public colleges and education, we focus here on graduate degrees. Masters degrees in particular can be extremely expensive. But it is surely most just — and effective! — to make sure that any person with the requisite talent and skills is able to pursue the education needed to contribute to developing green technologies. We viewed this

question as just one piece of what will hopefully be a broader debate on how to democratize green innovation.

We asked:

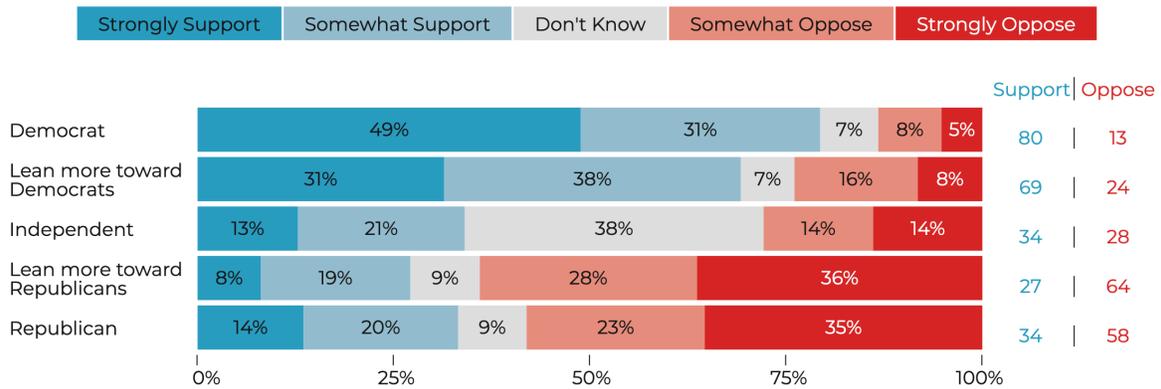
*Spending years in masters and PhD programs is expensive, so many low-income people and people of color do not pursue graduate degrees in science and technology, limiting their ability to contribute to green innovation. Democrats have proposed federal scholarships to fully fund all qualifying students for a graduate degree in clean energy and other low-carbon sectors. Democrats believe that people from any racial background or social class with the talent and motivation to help transform the economy should have the chance to do so, without risking crippling debts. Republicans believe that guaranteeing scholarship funds is a waste of taxpayer money and the most talented students will eventually pay off debts thanks to high-paying jobs. Do you support or oppose this policy?*

## Support for Scholarships in Clean Technology Degrees



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## Support for Scholarships in Clean Technology Degrees by Party



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## CONCLUSION

A massive investment in green industrial policy consistent with a Green New Deal agenda is popular. It is especially popular when expressed in terms of concrete investments, whether these would be beneficial to individuals, groups, or low-income people specifically. This agenda does not require any kind of “economic patriotism” framing, as fair trade policies around green technology are popular. Finally, there is support for ensuring that anyone should be able to pursue graduate degrees working on green technology, with federal scholarships ensuring universal access to this field of study.

## METHODOLOGY

Data for Progress conducted a survey of 2142 likely voters using a web panel from 3/2/2020 to 3/3/2020. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is  $\pm 2.1$  percent.

Full question wording and data available [here](#).

COVER PHOTO  
Andreas Gücklhorn/Unsplash