



# VOTERS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT CLIMATE EQUITY POLICIES

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ Voters express high levels of concern about the pollution of air, water, and soil in their communities, as well as pollutants within their households—all key indicators of environmental injustice.
- ▶ A majority of voters (67 percent), including a majority of Democrats, independents, and Republicans, support a federal equity mapping initiative.
- ▶ A majority of voters (53 percent) agree that new clean energy jobs would benefit low-income communities and communities of color that are disproportionately affected by hazardous pollution from factories and industrial plants.

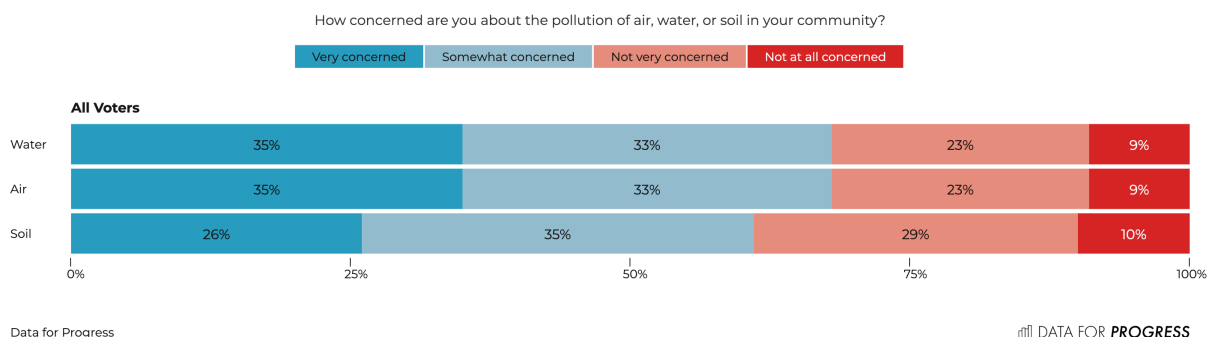
## INTRODUCTION

In a new policy memo, Designing a New National Equity Mapping Program: Identifying Communities That Face Environmental Injustice, Using Lessons Learned from State Mapping Programs, Evergreen Action outlines considerations and approaches to improve and expand equity mapping to inform federal policymakers and ensure efficient and effective investments in communities on the front lines of poverty, pollution, and climate change.

In a series of September and October surveys, Data for Progress assessed voters' concerns about the impacts of pollution, inequality and climate change on their own lives as well as support for several policies and approaches Evergreen Action addresses in this memo.

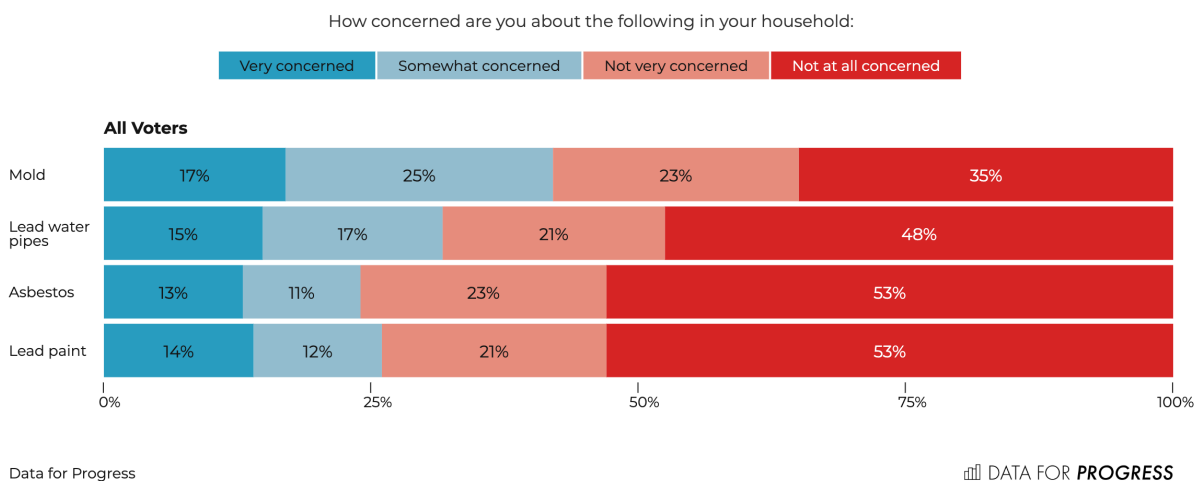
We asked voters a series of questions regarding their concerns about pollution and economic insecurities, key indicators of environmental injustice. When asked how concerned they are about air, water, and soil pollution in their communities, an overwhelming majority of voters express some level of concern about all three. Sixty-eight percent of voters say they are concerned about water pollution, 68 percent of voters say they are concerned about air pollution, and 61 percent of voters say they are concerned about soil pollution.

### Voters Are Very Concerned About Air, Water, and Soil Pollution in Their Communities



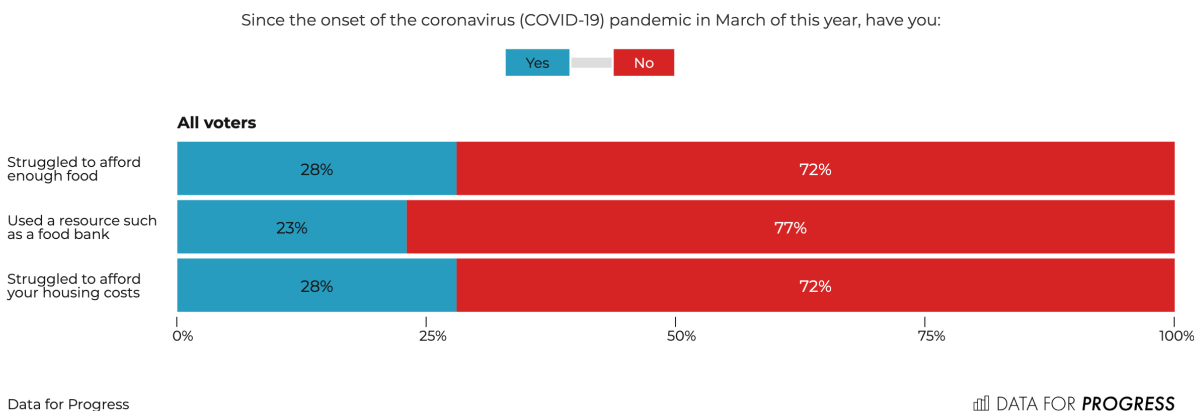
Voters are also concerned about pollutants within their homes. Forty-two percent of voters say they are concerned about mold, over a third of voters (32 percent) say they are concerned about lead water pipes, 24 percent say they are concerned about asbestos, and 26 percent say they are concerned about lead paint in their homes.

## Voters are Concerned About Pollutants Within Their Homes



Over a quarter of voters also say that they are facing food and housing insecurity since the onset of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Twenty-eight percent of voters say they have struggled to provide enough food for themselves or their households, 23 percent say they have used a resource such as a food bank, and 28 percent say they have struggled to afford housing costs, like rent or mortgage payments<sup>1</sup>.

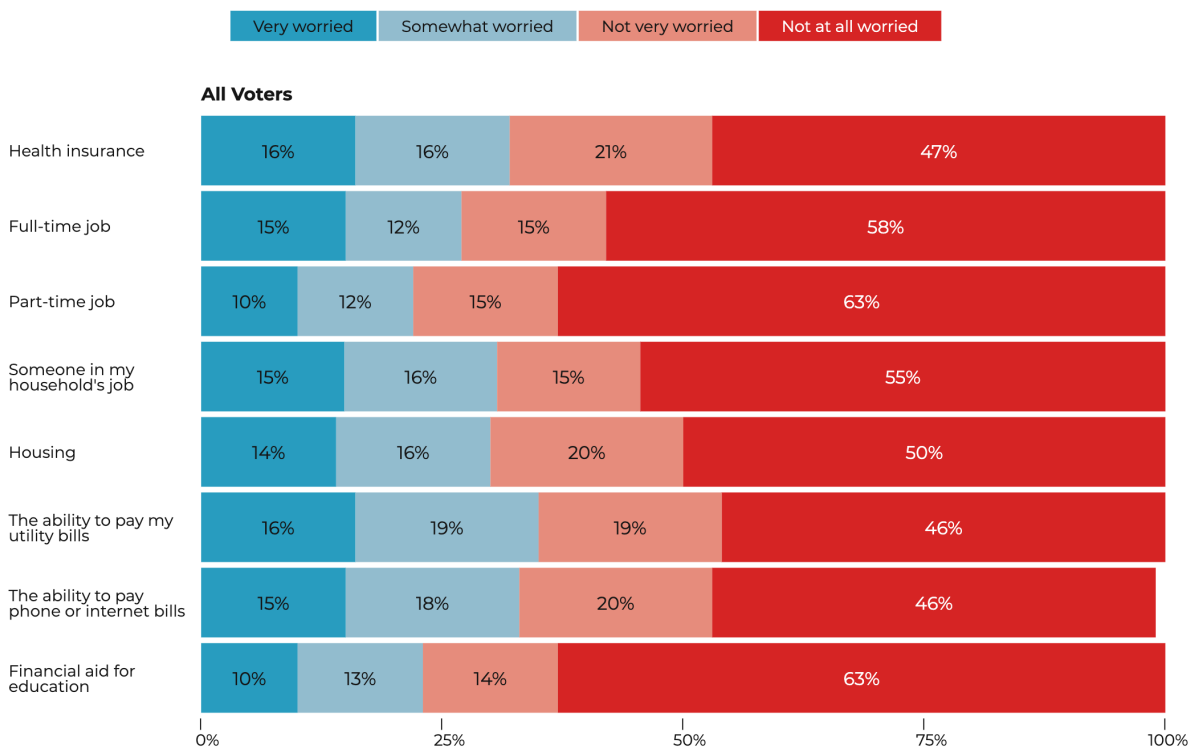
## Over a Quarter of Voters Say They Are Facing Food and Housing Insecurity Since the Onset of Coronavirus



We also asked voters how worried they are about losing critical components of financial security. Voters are most worried about losing the ability to pay utility bills (35 percent) and phone or internet bills (33 percent). Nearly a third (32 percent) of voters say they are concerned about losing health insurance, someone in their household's job (31 percent), and housing (30 percent). About a quarter of voters (27 percent) say they are worried about losing their full-time job, financial aid for education (23 percent), and a part-time job (22 percent).

## Voters Are Worried About Losing Financial Security

How worried are you about losing any of the following over the next few months?



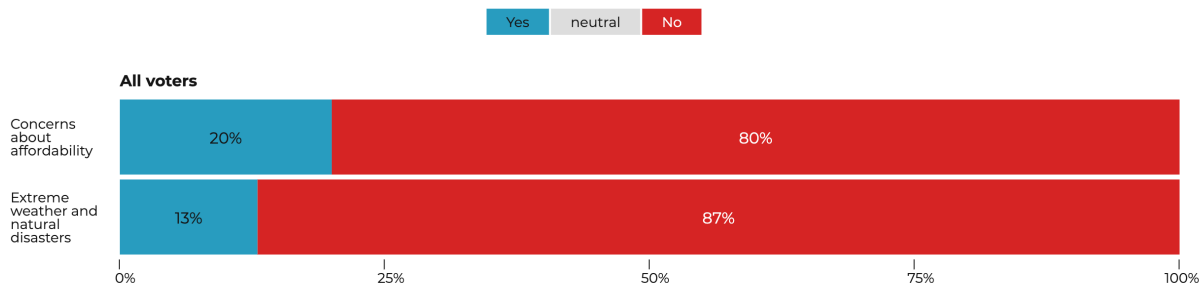
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Voters also express concerns about affordability and extreme weather in determining their living situations. A fifth of voters (20 percent) say they have considered moving or leaving their community due to concerns about affordability, and 13 percent say they have considered moving due to extreme weather events and natural disasters like floods, hurricanes, and natural disasters.

## Voters Face Concerns About Affordability and Extreme Weather When Evaluating Their Living Situations

Within the past year, have you considered moving or leaving your community due to:



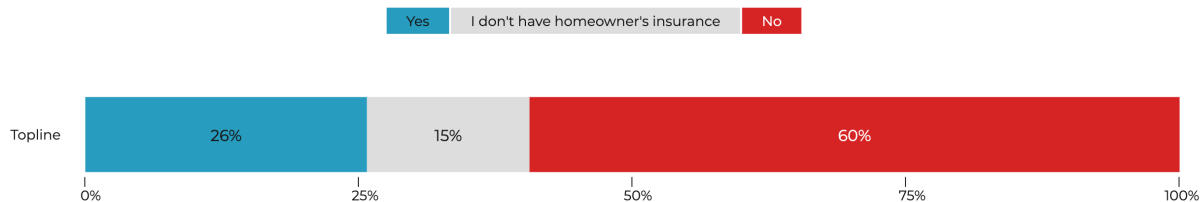
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In addition to re-considering moving because of extreme weather and natural disasters, just over a quarter (26 percent) of voters are concerned about extreme weather and natural disasters increasing the cost of their homeowner's insurance.

## Over a Quarter of Voters Are Concerned About Extreme Weather and Natural Disasters Increasing the Cost of Homeowner's Insurance

Are you concerned that fires, floods, hurricanes, or other natural disasters in your area might impact the cost of your homeowner's insurance?



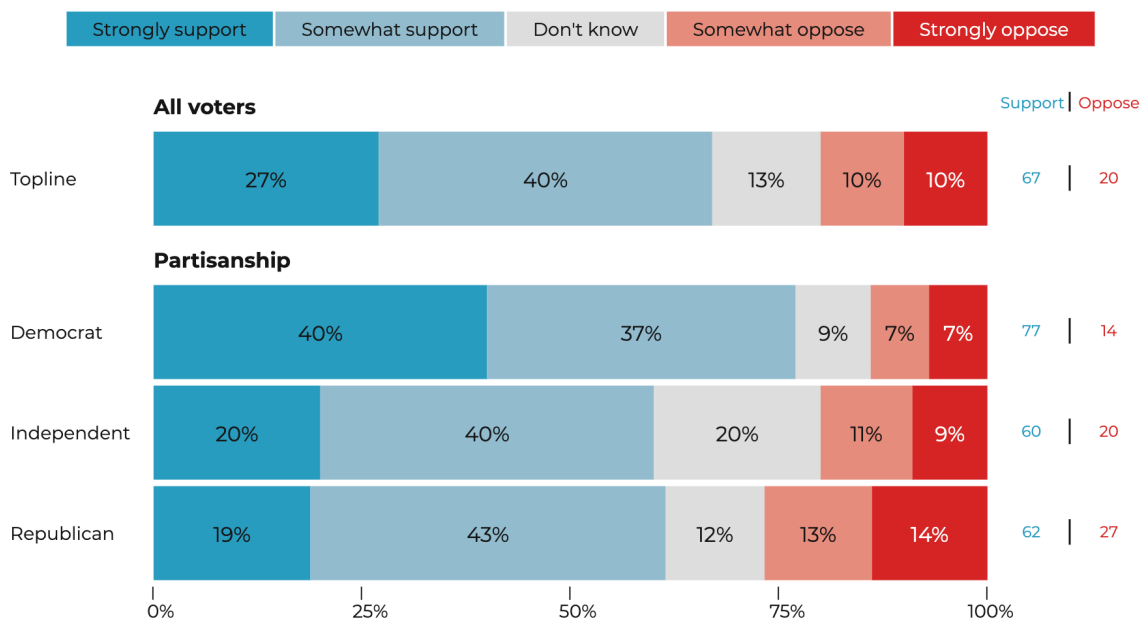
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To assess voters' support for several environmental justice policies that benefit frontline communities, we first asked voters whether they support or oppose a federal 'equity mapping' initiative to measure past, present, and future impacts of pollution on communities and ensure that future clean energy investments are made in the communities that need it the most. A majority of all voters (67 percent) support this proposal, including a majority of voters who self-identify as Democrats (77 percent), independents (60 percent) and Republicans (62 percent).

## A Majority of Voters Support a Federal 'Equity Mapping' Initiative

Would you support or oppose a federal 'equity mapping' initiative to measure the past, present, and future impacts of pollution on communities to ensure that future investments in clean energy are distributed to the communities that need it the most?



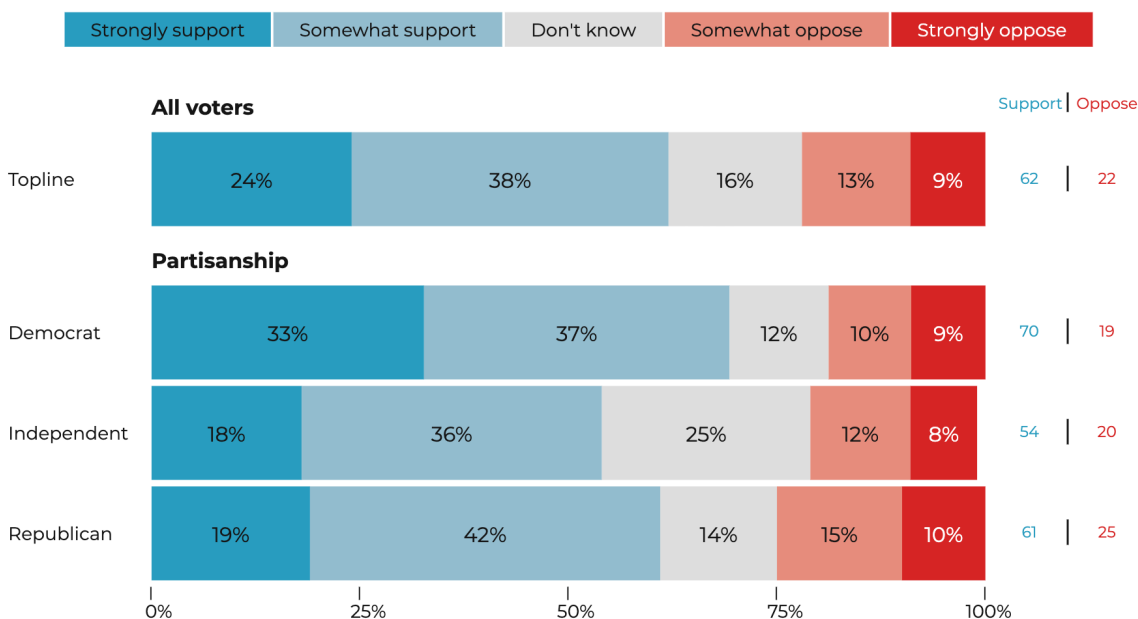
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We then provided voters with a brief definition of cumulative impacts and asked if they support or oppose the federal government tracking and analyzing cumulative impacts to identify disadvantaged communities that should be targeted for federal assistance. A majority (62 percent) of all voters support this initiative, including a majority of Democrats (70 percent), independents (54 percent), and Republicans (61 percent).

## A Majority of Voters Support Government Analysis of Cumulative Impacts

'Cumulative impacts' are defined as the past, present, and future environmental harms (such as exposure to different types of pollution) that combine with existing factors like public health and economic disparity to amplify and worsen the quality of life in certain communities that bear the brunt of these impacts. Would you support or oppose the federal government tracking and analyzing cumulative impacts to identify disadvantaged communities that should be targeted for government resources and new investments?



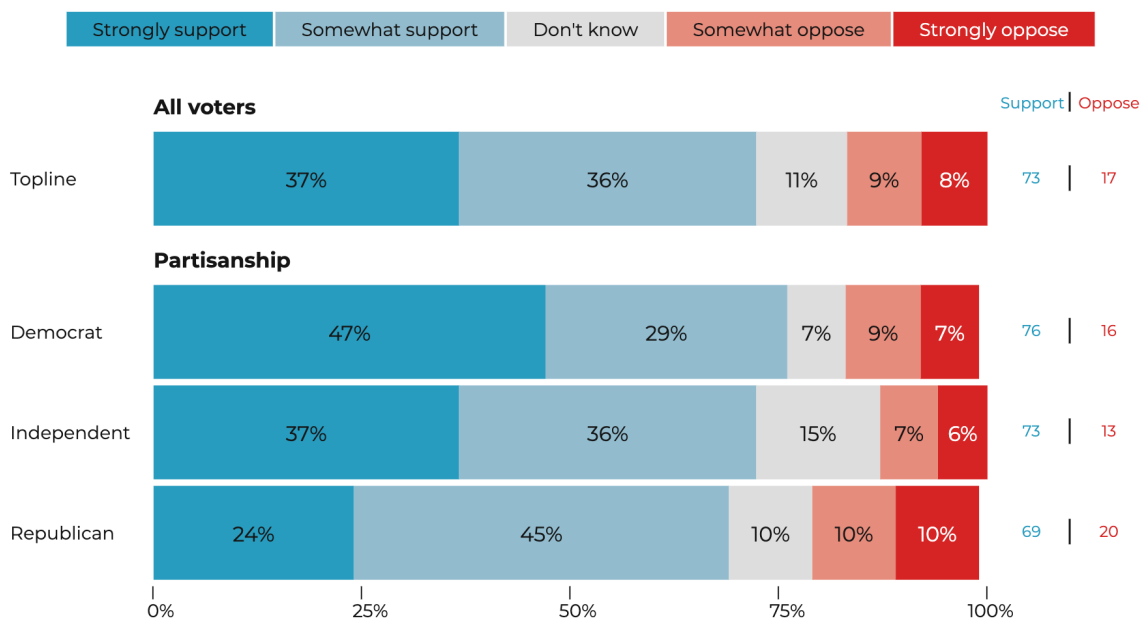
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Voters express similarly high levels of support establishing 'buffer zones' to prevent oil and gas drilling from occurring within a certain distance of schools, playgrounds, and other public areas with children. A majority of all voters (73 percent) support this proposal, including a majority of Democrats (76 percent), independents (73 percent), and Republicans (69 percent).

## A Majority of Voters Support Establishing 'Buffer Zones' Around Fossil Fuel Drill Sites

Would you support or oppose establishing 'buffer zones' to prevent oil and gas drilling from occurring within a certain distance of schools, playgrounds, and other public places with children?



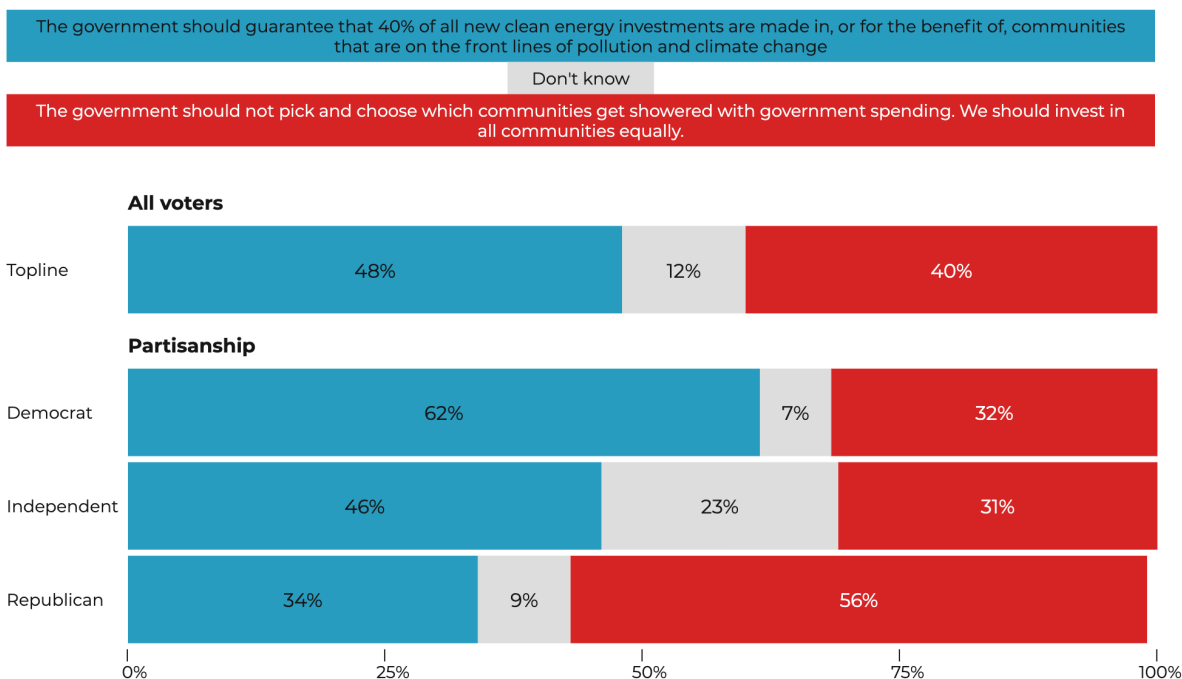
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To further assess the popularity of environmental justice measures, we presented voters with a statement for and against each proposal and asked them to choose which one they more closely agreed with. When we asked voters if they think the government should guarantee 40% of all new clean energy infrastructure investments are made in frontline communities or if the government should not pick and choose which communities get showered with government spending, a plurality of voters (48 percent) agree the government should target investments in frontline communities. A majority of Democrats (62 percent) and a plurality of independents (46 percent) agree with these targeted investments, but a majority of Republicans (56 percent) think the government should not pick and choose and rather invest in all communities equally.

## A Plurality of Voters Support Ensuring 40% of Federal Clean Energy Investments Benefit Low-Income Communities

Which statement comes closer to your view?



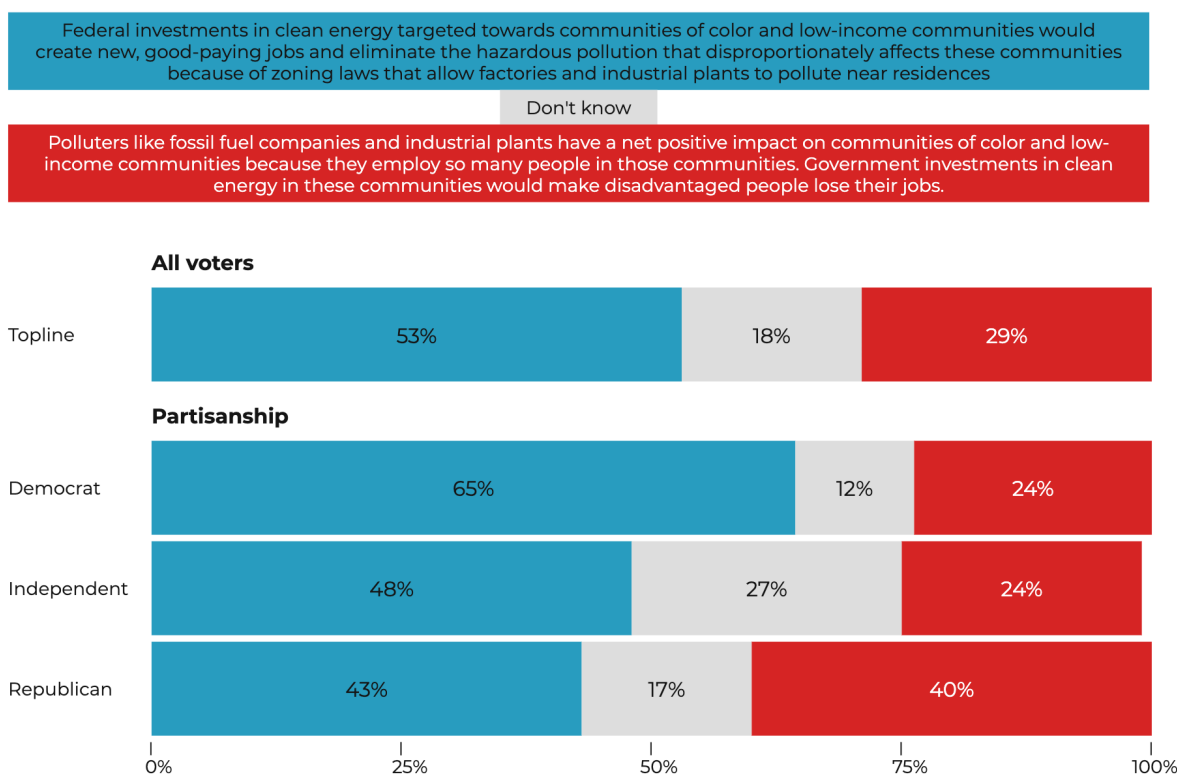
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We then asked voters whether they think fossil fuel companies have a net negative or net positive impact on low-income communities and communities of color. A majority of voters (53 percent) think that federal investments in clean energy targeted towards low-income communities and communities of color will benefit these disproportionately affected communities, while only 29 percent of voters think polluters like fossil fuel companies and industrial plants have a net positive impact on these communities. A majority of Democrats (65 percent), a plurality of independents (48 percent), and a narrow plurality of Republicans (43 percent) all agree that the federal government should target clean energy investments towards communities disproportionately affected by pollution caused by factories and industrial plants.

## A Majority of Voters Agree Low-Income Communities and Communities of Color Are Disproportionately Affected by Pollution

Which statement comes closer to your view?



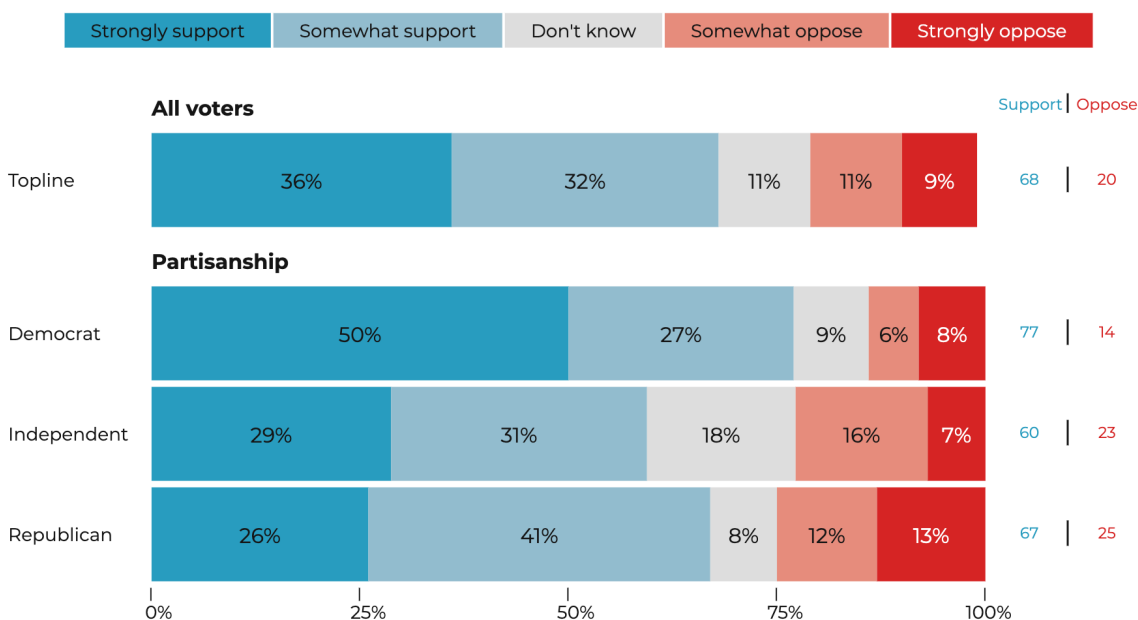
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Support for establishing 'buffer zones' holds steady, even when voters are shown arguments against the proposal. A majority of all voters (68 percent) support banning oil and gas extraction activities from within 2,500 feet of schools, playgrounds, and other public areas with children. Bipartisan support remains high, as a majority of Democrats (77 percent), independents (60 percent), and Republicans (67 percent) support establishing buffer zones around fossil fuel activities.

## A Majority of Voters Support 'Buffer Zones' Even When Shown Arguments Against the Proposal

Some lawmakers are proposing a law that would create a 'buffer zone' to prevent oil and gas extraction activities from within 2,500 feet of schools, playgrounds, and other public areas with children. Supporters of this proposal say that it is an important safety measure to protect children. They also say it will improve public health in low-income communities and communities of color, which are disproportionately impacted by oil and gas activities in their communities. Opponents of this proposal say that the 2,500 foot buffer is an arbitrary distance and is just a loophole to effectively ban oil and gas production. They also say this proposal will cost many good-paying, high-skilled jobs in low-income communities and communities of color. Do you support or oppose a proposal to ban oil and gas extraction activities from within 2,500 feet of schools, playgrounds, and other public areas with children?



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The results indicate that environmental concerns are widespread and that actions to address environmental justice, including a federal equity mapping initiative, the ongoing analysis of cumulative impacts on frontline communities, and targeted clean energy investments in low-income communities and communities of color are popular with voters. There is strong bipartisan support for several of these measures, including an equity mapping initiative, ongoing analysis of cumulative impacts, and establishing buffer zones to ban oil and gas extraction activities from within 2,500 feet of schools, playgrounds, and other areas with children. Given the high levels of concern voters express around pollution both within their communities and in their own households, it is no surprise that proposals to identify and address pollution in disproportionately affected communities is popular among voters. Policymakers can confidently champion these measures knowing voters have their back..

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY:

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From September 25 to September 27, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,092 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points

From October 2 to October 3, 2020, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,106 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is +/- 2.9 percentage points.

## ENDNOTE

1. These findings are in line with findings from [a recent study](#) on the impact of coronavirus conducted by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Data for Progress sampled voters nationwide in late September and early October and weighted responses to be representative of the likely voting population, whereas this study sampled adults in the four largest U.S. cities from July-August 2020.

COVER PHOTO  
Kristen Morith/Unsplash