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Michigan Voters Want Environmental Voices Shaping Climate Policy, Instead of Big Polluters Like Factory Farms

By Grace Adcox and Isa Alomran

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Michigan Voters Want Environmental Voices Behind Climate Policy, Not Big Polluters

With the aim of meeting the state's ambitious climate targets under the Michigan Healthy Climate Plan, Michigan lawmakers have proposed Senate Bill 275, which would establish a "Clean Fuel Standard" for the state. Some lawmakers have touted the bill as a climate win, given its intent to lower the carbon intensity of fuels used and establish a market for trading carbon intensity credits in Michigan. The bill, however, includes renewable natural gas, including biomethane, among a list of so-called clean transportation fuels, which are not clean and will delay decarbonization efforts in the state.

Despite the name invoking ideas of sustainability and natural inputs, manure-derived biomethane is anything but. Biomethane is produced through a process of anaerobic digestion – a process which turns the copious amounts of manure collected from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) into methane fuel and other byproducts, including dirty runoff. Not only would this bill lead to water and air quality impacts in Michigan, but it would also reward companies in polluting industries with financial credits for turning waste into biomethane.

In a survey conducted with Farm Forward, Data for Progress finds that large pluralities of Michigan voters, at minimum, believe oil and gas companies and large factory farms have negative environmental and health impacts. Voters most want environmental organizations (64%), clean energy companies, like wind and solar producers (62%), public health organizations (62%), and small family farms (59%) involved in shaping and implementing climate legislation. In contrast, voters least want fossil fuel companies (48%), and large-scale CAFOs (40%) involved in climate legislation. Moreover, after learning information about the groups that influenced the creation of the Clean Fuel Standard bill and reading language from both supporters and opponents of the bill, respondents switched from 52% initial support for the bill to only 37% by the final assessment.
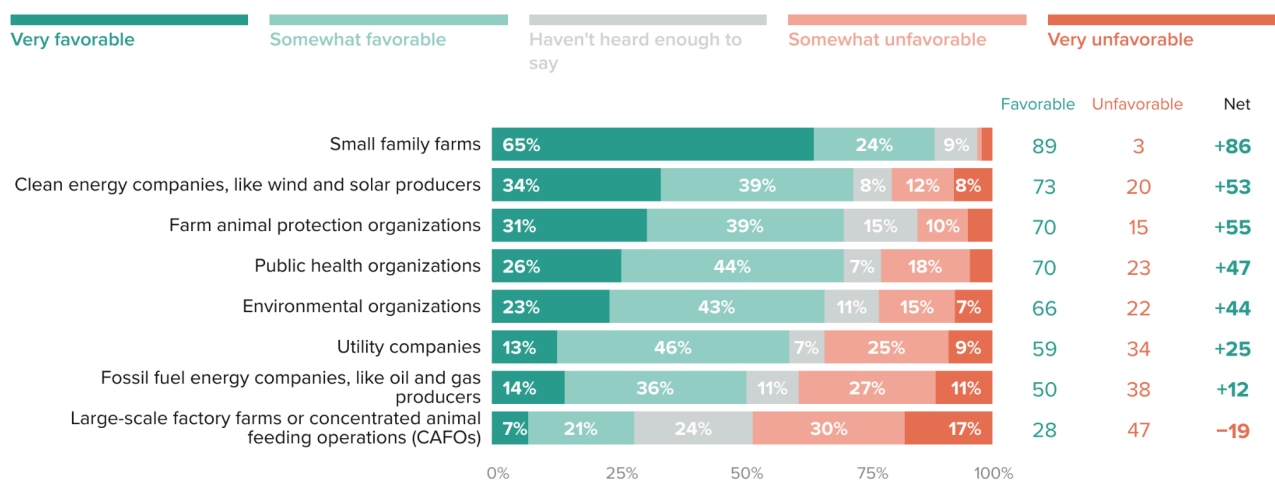
Additionally, the survey finds that almost three-quarters of Michigan voters (73%) support making polluters pay for damages from climate disasters, like wildfires, droughts, and floods. This includes strong bipartisan support, with majorities of Democrats (88%), Independents (67%), and Republicans (65%) in favor of making polluters pay for their climate impacts.

Michiganders View Polluting Industries Less Favorably, and Think They Have Negative Environmental and Health Impacts

Strong majorities of Michigan voters have favorable views of small family farms (89%) and clean energy companies, like wind and solar producers (73%), compared with just 28% and 50% who have favorable views of large-scale factory farms and fossil fuel companies, respectively. Notably, nearly a quarter of Michigan voters are not familiar enough with CAFOs to assess their views either way. Around two-thirds of Michiganders also hold favorable views of farm animal protection organizations (70%), public health organizations (70%), and environmental organizations (66%).

Michigan Voters Strongly Favor Small Family Farms and Clean Energy Companies, Contrasting With Views of Factory Farms and Fossil Fuel Companies

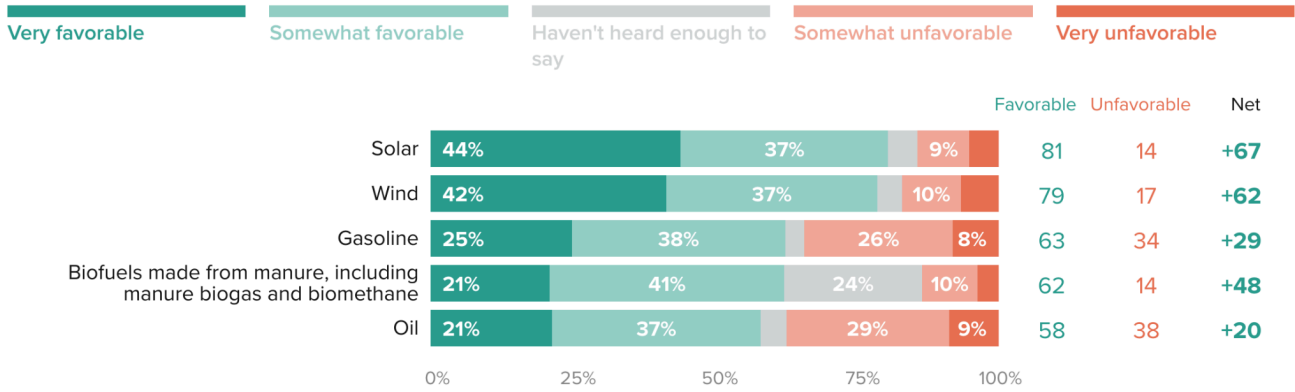Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the following groups?

Very favorable | Somewhat favorable | Haven't heard enough to say | Somewhat unfavorable | Very unfavorable

Group	Favorable	Unfavorable	Net
Small family farms	89	3	+86
Clean energy companies, like wind and solar producers	73	20	+53
Farm animal protection organizations	70	15	+55
Public health organizations	70	23	+47
Environmental organizations	66	22	+44
Utility companies	59	34	+25
Fossil fuel energy companies, like oil and gas producers	50	38	+12
Large-scale factory farms or concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs)	28	47	−19

Bar chart values:
- Small family farms: 65%, 24%, 9%
- Clean energy companies, like wind and solar producers: 34%, 39%, 8%, 12%, 8%
- Farm animal protection organizations: 31%, 39%, 15%, 10%
- Public health organizations: 26%, 44%, 7%, 18%
- Environmental organizations: 23%, 43%, 11%, 15%, 7%
- Utility companies: 13%, 46%, 7%, 25%, 9%
- Fossil fuel energy companies, like oil and gas producers: 14%, 36%, 11%, 27%, 11%
- Large-scale factory farms or concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs): 7%, 21%, 24%, 30%, 17%

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When asked about their views toward types of energy, Michigan voters strongly favor clean energy sources, like solar (81%) and wind (79%), over gasoline (63%), biofuels including manure biogas and biomethane (62%), and oil (58%). This contrast is most easily observed in the intensity of favorability, where pluralities of voters view solar (44%) and wind (42%) very favorably, while no more than a quarter say the same of gasoline (25%), biofuels, including manure biogas and biomethane (21%), and oil (21%). Importantly, we notice that, unlike other energy sources, about a fourth of Michigan voters haven't heard enough about biofuels to form an opinion.

Michigan Voters Favor Clean Energy Sources Over Fossil Fuels and Biofuels

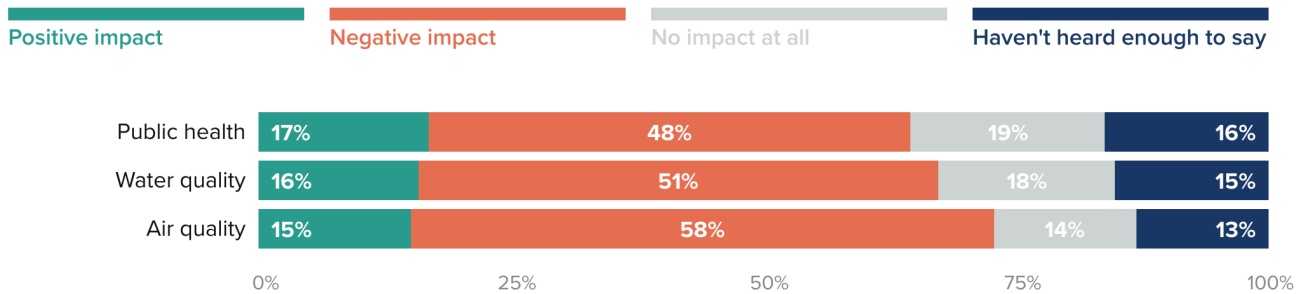Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the following energy sources?

Very favorable | **Somewhat favorable** | **Haven't heard enough to say** | **Somewhat unfavorable** | **Very unfavorable**

	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Haven't heard enough to say	Somewhat unfavorable	Very unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	Net
Solar	44%	37%	9%			81	14	**+67**
Wind	42%	37%	10%			79	17	**+62**
Gasoline	25%	38%		26%	8%	63	34	**+29**
Biofuels made from manure, including manure biogas and biomethane	21%	41%	24%	10%		62	14	**+48**
Oil	21%	37%		29%	9%	58	38	**+20**

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

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Next, respondents were asked to share their views about the specific impacts of industries on the local environment and human health. When considering the impacts of oil and gas companies, a majority of Michiganders believe that they negatively impact air quality (58%) and water quality (51%), while a plurality think they negatively impact public health (48%).

Michigan Voters Believe Oil and Gas Companies Have Negative Environmental and Health Impacts

Please say whether you think that **oil and gas companies** have a positive or negative impact on the following areas for Michigan communities or if you think they do not make an impact at all:
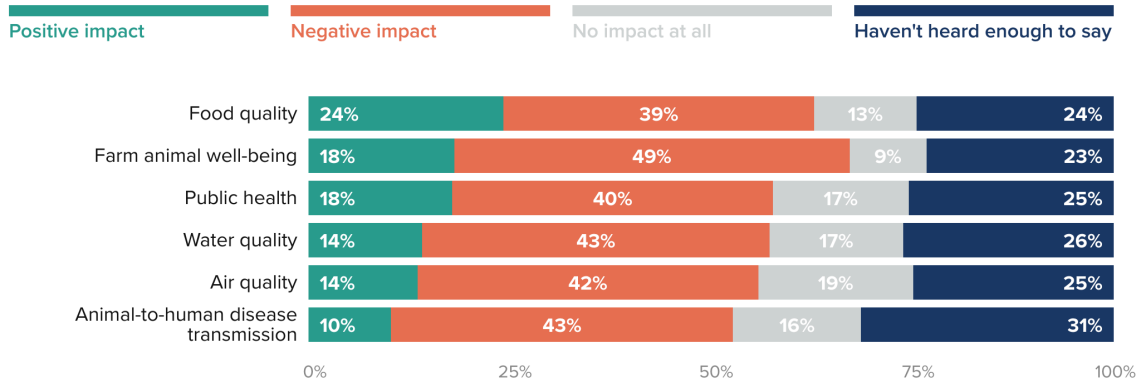
Positive impact | **Negative impact** | **No impact at all** | **Haven't heard enough to say**

	Positive impact	Negative impact	No impact at all	Haven't heard enough to say
Public health	17%	48%	19%	16%
Water quality	16%	51%	18%	15%
Air quality	15%	58%	14%	13%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

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Similarly, pluralities of Michigan voters think large factory farms have a negative impact on farm animal well-being (49%), water quality (43%), animal-to-human disease transmission (43%), air quality (42%), public health (40%), and food quality (39%). Notably, compared to voter perceptions of oil and gas companies, a larger proportion of Michiganders "haven't heard enough to say" what impact factory farms might have, indicating lower levels of voter awareness and knowledge of factory farms.

A Plurality of Michigan Voters Think Large Factory Farms Have Negative Impacts on the Environment and Both Human and Animal Health

Please say whether you think that **large-scale factory farms**, also known as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), have a positive or negative impact on the following areas for Michigan communities, or if you think they do not make an impact at all:

Positive impact | **Negative impact** | No impact at all | **Haven't heard enough to say**

	Positive	Negative	No impact	Haven't heard
Food quality	24%	39%	13%	24%
Farm animal well-being	18%	49%	9%	23%
Public health	18%	40%	17%	25%
Water quality	14%	43%	17%	26%
Air quality	14%	42%	19%	25%
Animal-to-human disease transmission	10%	43%	16%	31%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

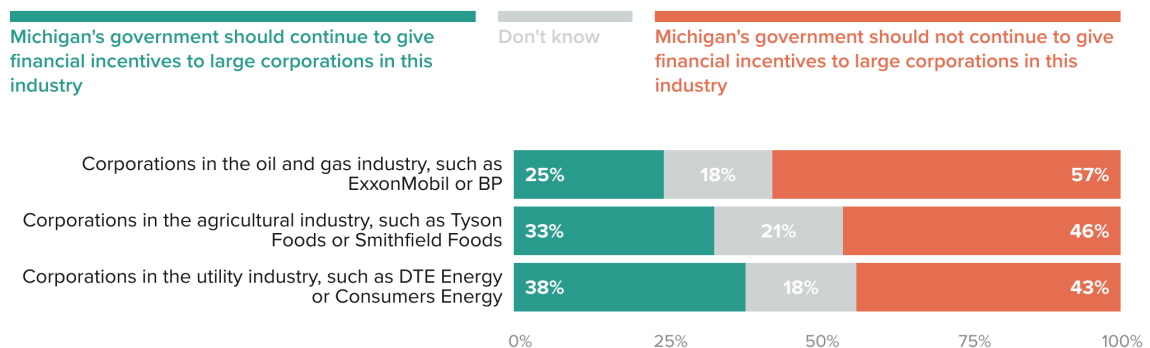April 6–14, 2024 survey of 834 Michigan likely voters

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Before introducing any information about the Michigan Clean Fuel Standards bill and specific incentives included within the bill, respondents were given a description of how state governments can provide financial incentives to support the growth and development of specific industries. They were then asked whether Michigan should or should not give such financial incentives to the oil and gas, agriculture, and utility industries. A majority of Michigan voters oppose the state providing incentives to oil and gas (57%), while a plurality oppose financial incentives for agricultural (46%) and utility companies (43%).

A Majority of Michigan Voters Oppose the State Government Providing Financial Incentives to Oil and Gas Companies

Governments use the income they generate from taxpayers to provide financial incentives, including grants, taxpayer-backed loans with favorable terms, or tax breaks, to companies in specific industries in order to support their economic development and growth.

For each of the following types of corporations, please say whether you think Michigan should or should not continue to give them financial incentives:

Michigan's government should continue to give financial incentives to large corporations in this industry | Don't know | **Michigan's government should not continue to give financial incentives to large corporations in this industry**

	Should continue	Don't know	Should not continue
Corporations in the oil and gas industry, such as ExxonMobil or BP	25%	18%	57%
Corporations in the agricultural industry, such as Tyson Foods or Smithfield Foods	33%	21%	46%
Corporations in the utility industry, such as DTE Energy or Consumers Energy	38%	18%	43%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

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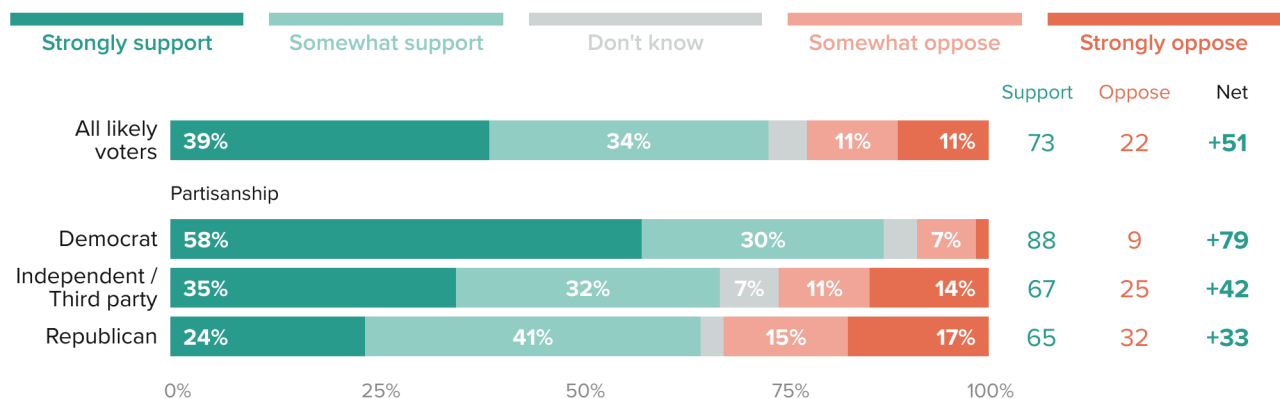**Michiganders Support Climate Action, Want to See Trusted Actors Involved**

The next section of the survey solicited more general views on climate action. Respondents were given a short description of recent city and state efforts across the country to sue oil and gas companies to hold them accountable for the [costs of climate damage](#) and mitigation. Almost three-quarters of Michigan voters (73%) support making polluters pay for damages from climate disasters like wildfires, droughts, and floods. This includes strong majorities of Democrats (88%), Independents (67%), and Republicans (65%).

Michigan Voters Across Party Lines Strongly Support Making Climate Polluters Pay for Their Damages

Cities and states across the United States are paying billions of dollars to deal with climate disasters like wildfires, droughts, and floods.

Now, a number of those cities and states are suing oil and gas companies to make them pay their fair share of the damage their pollution has caused.

Would you support or oppose making polluters pay for climate damages?

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Don't know	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Support	Oppose	Net
All likely voters	39%	34%		11%	11%	73	22	**+51**
Partisanship								
Democrat	58%	30%		7%		88	9	**+79**
Independent / Third party	35%	32%	7%	11%	14%	67	25	**+42**
Republican	24%	41%		15%	17%	65	32	**+33**

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On top of strong support for making polluters pay, more than two-thirds of Michigan voters (67%) support state legislators passing policies to address climate change. Democrats express near-universal support (95%) for implementing state climate policies, with a majority of Independents (61%) also in support. Republicans are split nearly evenly, with 47% who oppose climate legislation and 48% who support it.

A Strong Majority of Michigan Voters Support State Legislators Implementing Climate Policies

Do you support or oppose Michigan state legislators implementing policies aimed at addressing climate change?

Strongly support   **Somewhat support**   **Don't know**   **Somewhat oppose**   **Strongly oppose**

		Support	Oppose	Net
All likely voters	32% / 35% / 12% / 15%	67	27	**+40**

Partisanship

		Support	Oppose	Net
Democrat	63% / 32%	95	4	**+91**
Independent / Third party	23% / 38% / 11% / 14% / 14%	61	28	**+33**
Republican	10% / 37% / 19% / 29%	47	48	**−1**

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%
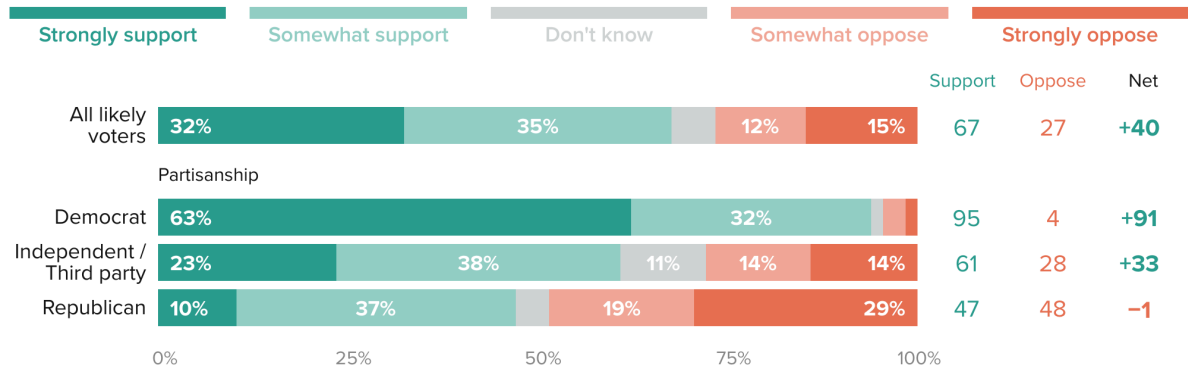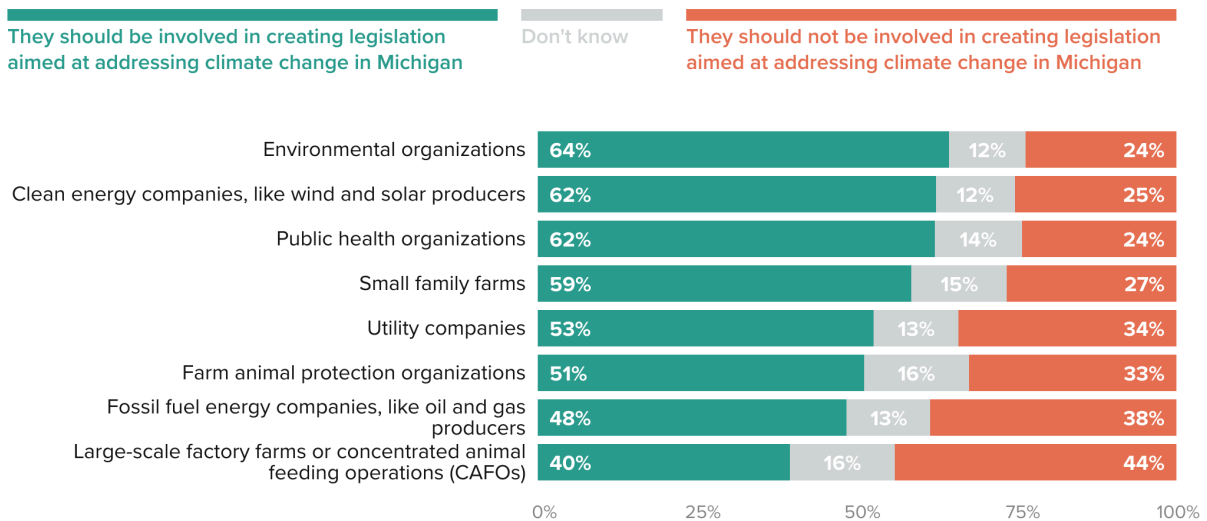
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When it comes to the process of how those bills are created, Michigan voters have clear views about the actors they most trust to be involved in shaping and implementing climate legislation. Michiganders most want environmental organizations (64%), clean energy companies like wind and solar producers (62%), and public health organizations (62%) involved in crafting climate policies. In contrast, voters least want fossil fuel companies (48%) and factory farms (40%) involved in climate legislation.

Michigan Voters Would Like to See Environmental Organizations Involved in Climate Legislation Along With Clean Energy Companies and Public Health Organizations

Do you think each of the following groups should or should not be involved in creating legislation aimed at addressing climate change in Michigan?

They should be involved in creating legislation aimed at addressing climate change in Michigan   **Don't know**   **They should not be involved in creating legislation aimed at addressing climate change in Michigan**

Environmental organizations	64% / 12% / 24%
Clean energy companies, like wind and solar producers	62% / 12% / 25%
Public health organizations	62% / 14% / 24%
Small family farms	59% / 15% / 27%
Utility companies	53% / 13% / 34%
Farm animal protection organizations	51% / 16% / 33%
Fossil fuel energy companies, like oil and gas producers	48% / 13% / 38%
Large-scale factory farms or concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs)	40% / 16% / 44%

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

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Michiganders Oppose a Michigan Clean Fuel Standard Driven by Industry Lobbyists

Turning to the Michigan Clean Fuel Standard bill, respondents were next given a brief description of the proposed legislation, which aims to cut carbon emissions from transportation fuels by at least 25% by 2035 over 2019 levels. The bill would also create a system for tracking the carbon emissions from fuels produced in or brought to Michigan, and establish financial credits for companies for the fuels they produce that have lower carbon emissions than those of traditional fossil fuels.

After reading a basic description of the bill, a slim majority of voters (52%) support the policy, including a majority of Democrats (72%) and a plurality of Independents (47%). In a follow-up question, voters were then informed that agriculture, oil and gas, and utility companies influenced the bill's provisions, which include large financial incentives to those same companies for producing fuels, like manure-derived biomethane. After voters are given this additional information, topline support for the Clean Fuel Standard bill falls to 44%, including a 22-point drop among Democrats and a 7-point drop among Independents.

In the final assessment, voters read messages in support and opposition to the Clean Fuel Standard bill. The support statement focused on how the bill could help Michigan meet its goals for a healthy climate while lowering carbon emissions from fuels and generating targeted investments in cleaner fuel sources, while the opposition statement focused on the involvement of lobbyists from the oil and gas, utilities, and agricultural industries to ensure the bill would fund the production of polluting fuels and reward these same industries. After this question, support for the bill falls even further to 37%, with support dropping by another five points among Democrats.

These questions reveal as voters learn more information about the involvement of industry lobbyists in this climate policy, they switch from a majority in support of the bill (52% support, a +15-point margin) to a plurality in opposition to the bill by the final assessment (37% support, a -9-point margin).
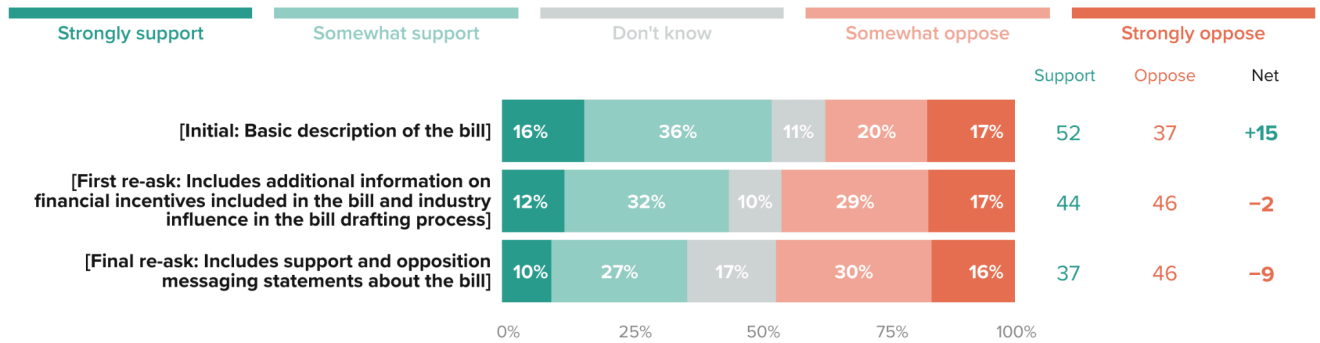
Initial Support for the Michigan Clean Fuel Standard Bill Drops After Respondents Read About Industry Influence and Messaging from Supporters and Opponents of the Bill

Michigan legislators have proposed a Clean Fuel Standard bill to cut carbon emissions from **transportation fuels** by at least 25% by 2035, compared with emission levels in 2019.

The bill would establish a system to track carbon emissions from fuels produced in or brought to Michigan. It would reward companies for producing fuels with carbon emissions lower than those of traditional fossil fuels by giving them credits for these fuels.

Companies could use or sell those credits for profit to other industries to satisfy legal greenhouse gas emission limits, even if they do not actually reduce the total amount of emissions they output.

Do you support or oppose this proposed bill?

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Don't know	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	Support	Oppose	Net
[Initial: Basic description of the bill]	16%	36%	11%	20%	17%	52	37	+15
[First re-ask: Includes additional information on financial incentives included in the bill and industry influence in the bill drafting process]	12%	32%	10%	29%	17%	44	46	−2
[Final re-ask: Includes support and opposition messaging statements about the bill]	10%	27%	17%	30%	16%	37	46	−9

0%   25%   50%   75%   100%

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To understand which ways to talk about the bill with Michigan voters are most persuasive, respondents were next asked to review a series of messages and assess how convincing each is as a reason to oppose the bill.

Overall, two framings are considered convincing by strong majorities across partisanship. The first framing that is considered somewhat or very convincing by 73% of Michiganders overall, including 66% of Republicans, 68% of Independents, and 82% of Democrats, focuses on the bill's potential impacts on the environment and public health, mentioning that awarding financial credits and using taxpayer dollars to produce biogas would "create more dirty runoff, contamination of drinking water, and emissions that pollute our environment."

The other framing that is considered convincing by 71% of Michigan voters overall, including 62% of Republicans, 68% of Independents, and 82% of Democrats, compares allowing oil and gas companies to influence climate policy to allowing tobacco companies to be involved in healthcare policy, and states that Michiganders deserve environmental policies that aren't influenced by these major industries that pollute the environment.

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Michigan Voters Consider Messages That Link Fossil Fuel Influence Over Climate Legislation With Tobacco Influence Over Health Policy and That Focus on Environmental and Health Threats from Biogas as Effective

For each of the following messages, please state how convincing, if at all, each is as a reason to **oppose** the recently proposed Michigan Clean Fuel Standard bill:
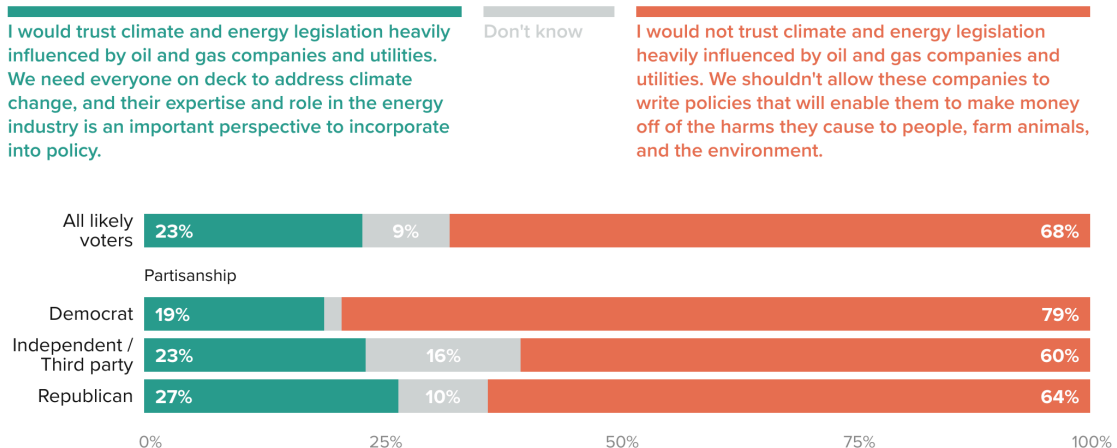
	Very convincing	Somewhat convincing	Not very convincing	Not at all convincing	Convincing	Not convincing	Net
Michiganders deserve environmental policies that are not influenced by oil and gas companies, utility companies, or large agricultural companies. We wouldn't allow tobacco companies to be involved in health care policy, so why should we involve major polluters in environmental policies?	31%	40%	19%	11%	71	30	+41
Michiganders deserve clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. Awarding credits for and using taxpayer dollars to fund the production of biogas on factory farms does neither of these things. This bill would create more dirty runoff, contamination of drinking water, and emissions that pollute our environment and harm the health of our lakes and the ecosystems they support.	28%	45%	17%	11%	73	28	+45
Climate policies that give large financial incentives to oil and gas companies and factory farms aren't real climate policies. Transportation fuel made from manure burns no cleaner than natural fossil gas. This is a greenwashing bill that companies are using to give themselves a continued license to pollute.	23%	44%	23%	11%	67	34	+33
Michiganders need climate policies that address the health impacts caused by industrial animal agriculture and oil and gas production. Promoting manure-derived biogas will lead to more industrial pollution that causes our community to face asthma and other chronic health conditions.	22%	44%	23%	11%	66	34	+32
The valuable credits awarded to big agricultural companies from this bill will lead to the continued expansion of factory farms, risking increased greenhouse gas emissions, air and water pollution, and the explosion of diseases like avian flu that could start the next human pandemic.	21%	44%	23%	13%	65	36	+29
Incentivizing large industrial agriculture companies to produce manure biogas will not only hurt human and environmental health but also harm rural communities and risk farm animal welfare and safety by encouraging the expansion of industrial livestock facilities.	21%	42%	26%	11%	63	37	+26

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Lastly, a strong majority of voters agree (68%) with a statement saying that they would not trust climate and energy legislation heavily influenced by oil and gas companies and utilities, compared with less than a quarter (23%) who agree a statement saying that they would trust legislation influenced by oil and gas companies and utilities.

Michigan Voters Across Partisanship Say They Would Not Trust Climate Legislation Influenced by Fossil Fuel Companies or Utilities

Which of these statements best describes your view, even if neither is exactly right?

I would trust climate and energy legislation heavily influenced by oil and gas companies and utilities. We need everyone on deck to address climate change, and their expertise and role in the energy industry is an important perspective to incorporate into policy.

Don't know

I would not trust climate and energy legislation heavily influenced by oil and gas companies and utilities. We shouldn't allow these companies to write policies that will enable them to make money off of the harms they cause to people, farm animals, and the environment.

	Trust	Don't know	Not trust
All likely voters	23%	9%	68%
Partisanship			
Democrat	19%		79%
Independent / Third party	23%	16%	60%
Republican	27%	10%	64%

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Conclusion

There is a strong appetite for climate legislation among Michigan voters. However, the findings from this survey reveal that this support is conditional on these prospective climate policies actually delivering meaningful environmental and health benefits **without unduly** benefiting polluters.

Survey Methodology

From April 16 to 23, 2024, Data for Progress and Farm Forward conducted a survey of 834 likely voters in Michigan using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, geography, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is ±3 percentage points.

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