

Perspective on Public Opinion

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Growing Public Mandate To Build More Nuclear Power Plants

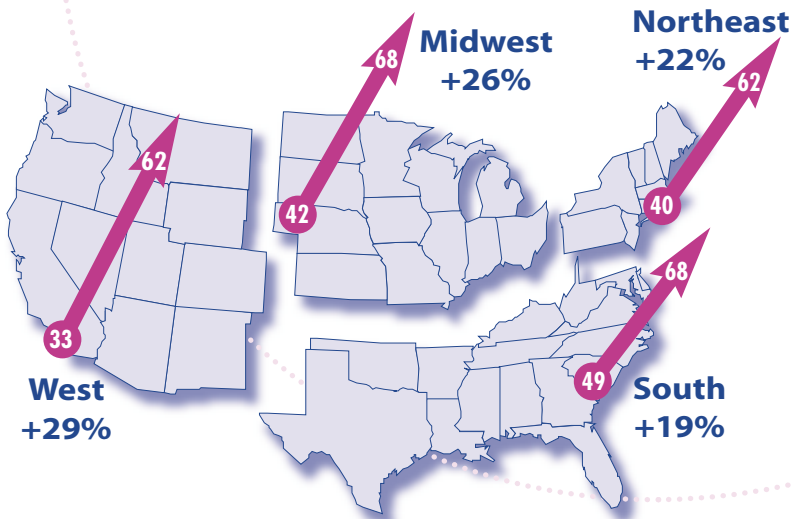
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Public support for building new nuclear power plants has increased dramatically in the past few months, as concern about energy shortages and prices spreads across the nation. Two-thirds of U.S. adults—66%—now support building more nuclear power plants, compared with 51% in January and 42% in October 1999. That's an increase of 24 percentage points over the past year and a half.

Support for building new nuclear power plants has increased substantially in all regions, with the largest changes in the Western region, where energy shortages are most prominent, and the Midwest.

The trends are from national opinion surveys for NEI by Bisconti Research, Inc. with Bruskin Research—most recently March 20-22. All surveys cited are with nationally representative samples of 1,000 U.S. adults who were interviewed by telephone. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points.

The survey also found increased support for renewing the federal licenses of nuclear power plants, which produce 20% of U.S. electricity. On the question of whether we should “renew the license of nuclear energy plants that continue to meet federal safety standards,” 87% agreed—up eight percentage points from 79% in October 1999.



Percent Who Agree: “We should definitely build more nuclear energy plants in the future”

	Oct. 1999 %	Jan. 2001 %	Mar. 2001 %	Change %
All U.S.	42	51	66	+24
West	33	52	62	+29
Midwest	42	53	68	+26
Northeast	40	49	62	+22
South	49	52	68	+19

Also, nearly three-quarters agreed we should “keep the option to build more nuclear energy plants in the future”—up 13 percentage points from 60% in October 1999.

And 78% agreed with the statement, “Considering the electricity shortages in California and other states, electric utilities should prepare now so that new nuclear power plants could be built if needed in the next five years.” Nearly half (46%) agreed strongly, and

only 11% disagreed strongly.

One of the reasons the public believes it makes sense to prepare now for building new nuclear power plants is that the majority views nuclear energy as an important fuel of the future. In fact, 70% in the March survey said nuclear energy should play a “very important” or “somewhat important” role in meeting America’s future electricity needs.

New Nuclear Power Plants Acceptable at Nearest Existing Plant Sites

The idea of “Not in My Backyard,” or NIMBY, is well-known and often applied by the public. A common phenomenon is the public rejection of new facilities of any kind in their area. In this survey, we asked the public’s opinion about adding a new nuclear power plant at sites where nuclear power plants are already operating, because that is where some new plants could be built.

The survey used a split sample to assess the difference between *acceptability* and *favorability* regarding a new nuclear power plant. Those in one half of the sample were asked about whether a new nuclear power plant would be acceptable. Those in the other half of the sample were asked if they would favor, oppose, or reserve judgment about a nuclear power plant addition.

Two-thirds (67%) said that, “if a new power plant were needed to supply electricity,” they would find it acceptable to “add a nuclear power plant next to the nearest nuclear power plants that are already operating.” Only 25% said it would not be acceptable, and eight percent were unsure.

Those in favor of a new nuclear power plant outnumbered those opposed by more than two to one (42% to 19%).

More than one-third said they would reserve judgment about adding a new nuclear power plant at the nearest existing nuclear power plant site.

Those sentiments prevailed also among the public who said that their electric company already operates a nuclear power plant.

Acceptability of Adding a New Nuclear Plant at the Nearest Existing Plant

► *Question:* “If a new power plant were needed to supply electricity, would it be acceptable to you or not acceptable to you to add a nuclear power plant next to the nearest nuclear power plants that are already operating?”

	All U.S. Public %	Those Whose Electric Company Operates Nuclear Power Plant %
Acceptable	67	76
Not acceptable	25	20
Don't know	8	3



Supply Reliability and Environmental Protection Are Public Priorities

Opinions about building new nuclear power plants coincide with growing concerns about the energy situation in the United States.

Between January and March of this year, the percentage saying it is extremely or very important that President Bush and Congress deal with energy policies in the next year increased from 69% to 81%. Those saying it is extremely important jumped 18 percentage points—from 26% to 44%. The January survey was by the Gallup Organization (January 10-14, national adult sample of 1,004).

The March survey also asked how much priority the president and Congress should give in their national energy policy to five specific energy- and environment-related goals. Maintaining a reliable energy supply and environmental protection ranked highest among these goals. But almost everyone said all five goals should be given at least medium priority.

The survey also asked how much priority we, as a nation, should give to five ways of meeting energy goals. Energy efficiency and research and development into new and improved energy sources ranked higher than building new plants.

But 87% said that building new power plants should be given at least medium priority. The public distinguishes between energy efficiency and cutting back our use of energy. Energy efficiency is supported more than conservation.

Importance for President and Congress To Act on Energy Policy

► **Question:** “How important is it to you that the president and Congress deal with energy policies in the next year—is it extremely important, very important, moderately important, or not that important?”

	January 2001 %	March 2001 %
Extremely important	26	44
Very important	43	37
Moderately important	25	13
Not that important	2	5
Don't know	4	1

Energy Policy Priorities

► **Question:** “In developing a national energy policy, should the president and Congress give high, medium, or low priority to each of the following goals?” (Randomized)*

	%			Don't Know
	High	Medium	Low	
Assuring a reliable energy supply	81	15	3	2
Protecting the environment	74	21	4	1
Improving air quality	69	25	5	1
Stabilizing prices	65	26	8	1
Increasing energy independence	62	29	6	4

► **Question:** “Should we, as a nation, give high, medium, or low priority to each of the following possible ways of meeting energy goals?” (Randomized)*

	%			Don't Know
	High	Medium	Low	
Increasing energy efficiency	80	15	3	1
Increasing research into new and improved energy sources	77	19	3	1
Improving energy transmission and delivery systems	58	34	5	3
Building new power plants to meet electricity demand	56	31	12	1
Cutting back our use of energy	52	34	13	2

* Items listed were read to respondents in random order.

Three Out of Four Agree We Should Prepare to Build Nuclear Plants

► *Question:* “Please tell me if you personally strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements”:

	Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Somewhat Agree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Don't Know %
We should keep the option to build more nuclear energy plants in the future.	73	34	39	10	13	3
Considering the electricity shortages in California and other states, electric utilities should prepare now so that new nuclear power plants could be built if needed in the next five years.	78	46	32	8	11	3
We should definitely build more nuclear energy plants in the future.	66	31	35	12	18	4
When their original operating license expires, we should renew the license of nuclear energy plants that continue to meet federal safety standards.	87	50	37	5	5	4

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