

Americans don't hate living near solar and wind farms as much as you might think

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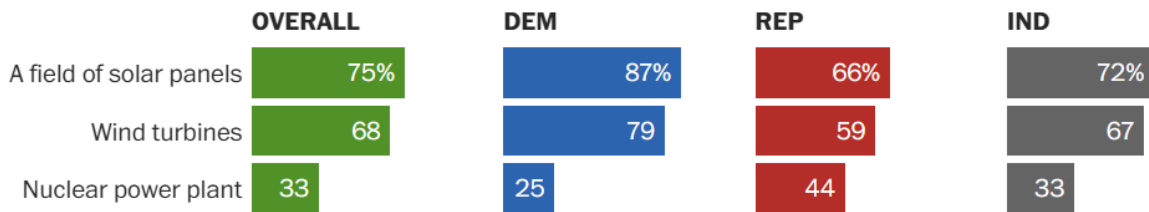
As renewable energy becomes more widespread in the United States, large and bipartisan majorities of Americans say they wouldn't mind fields of solar panels and wind turbines being built in their communities, according to a [Washington Post-University of Maryland poll](#).

Three-quarters of all Americans say they would be comfortable living near solar farms while nearly 7 in 10 report feeling the same about wind turbines. And these attitudes appear to remain largely consistent regardless of where people live. According to the poll, 69 percent of residents in rural and suburban areas say they would be comfortable if wind turbines were constructed in their area, as do 66 percent of urban residents.

General comfort with green energy infrastructure crosses party lines, with 66 percent of Republicans saying they are comfortable with a field of solar panels being built in their community and 59 percent comfortable with wind turbines. Among Democrats, 87 percent are comfortable with solar farms and 79 percent with wind farms. By contrast, fewer than half of Democrats or Republicans would welcome a nuclear power plant in their community.

Most Americans, including Democrats and Republicans, say they would be comfortable with solar panels and wind turbines in their communities

Q: Would you be comfortable or uncomfortable if each of these were built in your community? (Percent saying comfortable)



Source: July 13-23, 2023, Washington Post-University of Maryland poll of 1,404 adults with an error margin of +/- 3.5 percentage points, including 531 Democrats, 325 Republicans and 431 independents with error margins between 6-7.5 points.

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In the United States, widespread support for renewable energy appears to have been fairly consistent over the years, said Leah Stokes, an associate professor of environmental politics at the University of California at Santa Barbara. But while backing renewables remains popular among many Americans, experts say progress can be impeded by a small, yet vocal, opposition, which can be driven in part by the sentiment of “Not in My Backyard,” or NIMBYism.

“Deploying lots of renewable electricity is not a slam dunk,” said Doug Vine, director of energy analysis at the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions. “We know things like permitting reform and NIMBYism are a challenge for renewable electricity and transmission projects. The closer that these projects get to where many people are, the more challenges that can arise.”

A need for renewables

The United States is the world’s [second-largest greenhouse gas emitter](#), and [one-quarter of the country’s carbon dioxide emissions](#) come from electricity generation. President Biden has set a goal of [eliminating carbon pollution](#) from the U.S. power sector by 2035 — a target that necessitates a massive shift from fossil fuels.

Many Americans appear to recognize the critical role renewable energy sources play in reducing emissions and combating climate change. According to the Post-UMD poll, the more concerned people say they are with climate change, the more likely they are to feel comfortable with wind and solar farms being built in their communities.

Patrick Reynolds, 48, who lives in Fort Worth, said he is very comfortable with large-scale solar or wind farms in his community.

“It seems to be better for the environment and better for the health of humanity,” said Reynolds, a Republican. He added that he is in the process of installing solar panels on the roof of his home.

“I’ve always had a love for the environment,” he said. “I believe if you take care of the environment, the environment will take care of you.”

Samantha Brown, who lives in the Bronx but grew up in Upstate New York, agrees. “I’m only 27, but I’ve seen climate change. And if we keep trending this way, it worries me. ... What will things look like for my [future] children one day if things aren’t mitigated?”

The rural community where she grew up used grants to install solar panels that now provide energy to the local public schools. And they also have wind turbines that she says brought revenue to local industries. “We are a relatively poor community in rural

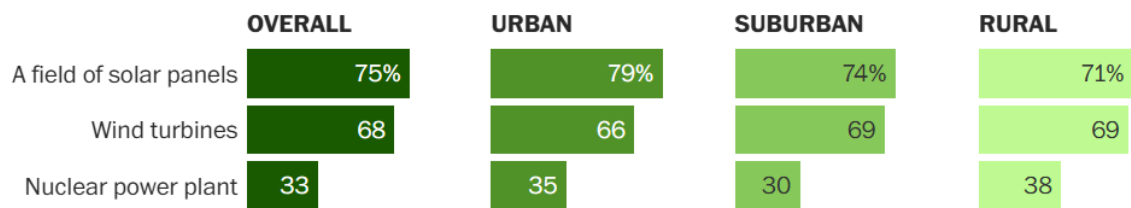
America, and we embraced solar,” she said. And while her upstate community has “a lot of hills and space” to install solar panels and wind turbines, she sees the potential in the Bronx as well.

“There’s opportunity for solar anywhere,” she said. “You can integrate solar onto existing buildings.”

That comes across in the Post-UMD polling data, too. The poll finds 79 percent of urban residents feel comfortable with a field of solar panels being built in their community, as do 74 percent of suburban residents and 71 percent of rural residents.

Comfort with solar and wind farms spans urban and rural areas

Q: Would you be comfortable or uncomfortable if each of these were built in your community? (Percent saying comfortable)



Source: July 13-23, 2023, Washington Post-University of Maryland poll of 1,404 adults with an error margin of +/- 3.5 percentage points, including 549 people in urban areas, 635 in suburban areas and 220 in rural areas with error margins between 5.5-9 points.

EMILY GUSKIN / THE WASHINGTON POST

The weight of opposition

The number of people who oppose projects is typically small, but their views can have outsize effects, said Stokes, who recently [published a study](#) on opposition to wind energy in North America.

“It isn’t what the majority of people think, but they are managing to make a significant dent in wind energy development in this country,” she said.

Ricky Richards, 64, of Clifton, Tex., cited the potential negative effects on property values and the environmental impact on land as reasons he felt very uncomfortable with a large solar or wind farm in his rural community southwest of Dallas.

“I have neighbors now who used to have a view out their front porch of a green pasture, now they basically have a 300-acre mirror in their front yard that reflects light into their house,” said Richards, a civil engineer who identifies as a Republican.

For community members who have concerns about renewable energy infrastructure being built near where they live, experts say one effective action is early and regular engagement. Vine said his organization has arranged regional roundtables that bring together local governments, academics, environmental groups, community representatives and project developers, among others, to dive into various issues related to renewables.

“That’s the secret sauce in making sure that these things come together,” he said.

The poll was conducted by The Post and the University of Maryland’s Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement from July 13 to July 23. The sample of 1,404 U.S. adults was drawn from the NORC AmeriSpeak Panel, an ongoing survey panel recruited through random sampling of U.S. households. Overall results have a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points; the error margin is larger among subgroups.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2023/10/03/solar-panels-wind-turbines-nimby>

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