

Most Favor Conservation In Response to Energy Needs

Fewer than four in 10 Americans approve of George W. Bush's work to date on the nation's energy woes – and most prefer conservation over fossil-fuel and nuclear power production as the prime solution, contrary to the administration's position.

While just 39 percent approve of Bush's handling of the energy situation, disapproval also is muted, at 43 percent. The rest, 18 percent, are withholding judgment, which places substantial weight on public response to the energy plan the administration is to release Thursday.

Bush's handling of the energy situation	
Approve	39%
Disapprove	43
No opinion	18

The stakes are high: In recent ABC News polls 64 percent of adults have said the country was headed into an energy crisis and 48 percent said rising gasoline prices have caused them financial hardship. Such concerns carry the potential for political backlash.

The administration has urged expanded development of fossil fuels and nuclear power, and signaled that conservation won't be its chief priority. "Conservation may be a sign of personal virtue, but it is not a sufficient basis for a sound, comprehensive energy policy," Dick Cheney, author of the energy policy, said two weeks ago. He said the nation needed to build the equivalent of a new power plant every week for 20 years.

The majority differed in this national, random-sample telephone survey conducted for ABC News.com. Fifty-six percent said the best way for the federal government to handle the nation's energy needs was by encouraging greater conservation by industries, other businesses and individual Americans. Just 35 percent said it was preferable to encourage more oil and gas drilling, coal mining and construction of nuclear power plants.

Preferred approach to handle energy needs:	
Conservation	56%
Fossil fuel/nuclear production	35

While conservation is often presented as mainly a matter of household consumption, ABCNews.com reported last month that personal consumption of power (at home and

outside of work) accounts for less than a fifth of the nation's energy use, and is no higher now than 10 or 20 years ago, given more efficient systems and appliances. The report, at <http://more.abcnews.go.com/sections/us/dailynews/energyuse010424.html>, said industry, commerce and transportation account for more than three-quarters of the country's energy consumption.

PARTY TIME – There's a strong political component to ratings of Bush's performance on energy, and also a connection – though a less powerful one – in views on conservation vs. production.

On Bush, 73 percent of Republicans approve of his handling of the energy situation; that drops very sharply to 31 percent of independents and further to 17 percent of Democrats. Republicans divide about evenly on whether conservation or production is preferable; most independents and Democrats express a preference for conservation.

	Bush's handling/energy situation			Preferred approach:	
	Approve	Disapprove	No opin.	Conservation	Production
Republicans	73%	13	14	47%	44
Independents	31	51	18	59	31
Democrats	17	69	14	61	34

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News.com survey was conducted by telephone May 9-13, 2001, among a random national sample of 1,022 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at: <http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Here are the full results:

91. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the energy situation in this country?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
5/13/01	39	43	18

92. Which of these do you think is the best way for the federal government to handle the country's energy needs - by encouraging (more oil and gas drilling, coal mining and construction of nuclear power plants); or by encouraging (greater energy conservation by industries, other companies and individual Americans)?

	Production	Conservation	No opinion
5/13/01	35	56	9

END