



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER  
For The People & The Press

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Support for Offshore Oil and Gas Drilling Rebounds

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## Opposition to Nuclear Power Rises Amid Japanese Crisis

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## Support for Offshore Oil and Gas Drilling Rebounds Opposition to Nuclear Power Rises amid Japanese Crisis

Not surprisingly, public support for the increased use of nuclear power has declined amid the ongoing nuclear emergency in Japan. Currently, 39% say they favor promoting the increased use of nuclear power while 52% are opposed. Last October, 47% favored promoting the increased use of nuclear power and the same percentage (47%) was opposed.

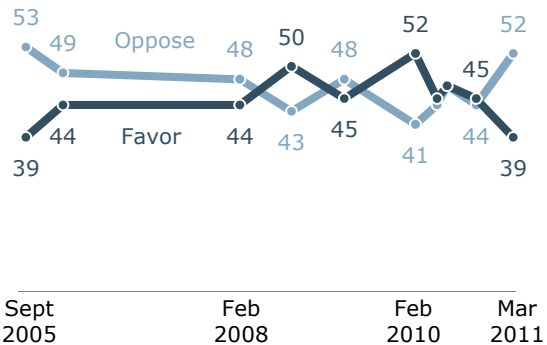
Opinion about expanding the use of nuclear power has fluctuated in recent years. However, the current measure matches a previous low in support for increased nuclear power recorded in September 2005 (39% favor, 53% oppose).

The latest national survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted March 17-20 among 1,004 adults, finds little recent change in opinions about other energy policies – with one notable exception. With the recent surge in gas prices, support for increased offshore oil and gas drilling continues to rebound.

Currently, 57% say they favor allowing more offshore oil and gas drilling in U.S. waters while 37% are opposed. Last June amid the massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, there was more opposition (52%) than support (44%) for allowing more offshore drilling. Support for increased offshore energy drilling is approaching to its pre-Gulf spill level; in February 2010, the public backed increased offshore drilling by about two-to-one (63% to 31%).

The survey shows that substantial majorities continue to support increased federal funding for research on wind, solar and hydrogen technology (74%); spending more on

### Most Now Oppose the Increased Use of Nuclear Power



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 17-20, 2011.

subway, rail and bus systems (61%); and providing tax incentives for the purchase of hybrid vehicles (58%). These measures are virtually unchanged from last October, though there is less support for alternative energy research and spending on mass transit than from 2005-2009.

## Continuing Gender Gap over Nuclear Power

There has long been a wide gender gap in views of increased use of nuclear power and these differences persist amid the crisis in Japan. By greater than two-to-one (63% to 26%), women oppose promoting the increased use of nuclear power. A narrow majority of men (53%) favor the increased use of nuclear power while 42% are opposed.

The proportion of college graduates that supports the expanded use of nuclear power has fallen by 13 points since October (from 57% to 44%). College graduates remain slightly more likely than those with less education to support more use of nuclear power, but the gap has narrowed.

About half of Republicans (49%) favor the expanded use of nuclear power compared with 41% of independents and 31% of Democrats. There were comparable partisan differences in these views last October.

### Fewer College Graduates Back Increased Use of Nuclear Power

<i>Promoting the increased use of nuclear power...</i>	Oct 2010		Mar 2011	
	Favor %	Oppose %	Favor %	Oppose %
Total	45	44	39	52
Men	58	36	53	42
Women	33	52	26	63
18-29	39	51	41	55
30-49	43	49	34	60
50-64	49	40	42	49
65+	49	34	45	42
College grad+	57	35	44	50
Some college	45	45	37	54
HS or less	37	50	38	53
Republican	57	35	49	41
Democrat	36	55	31	60
Independent	47	42	41	54

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 17-20, 2011. PEW27b. Figures may add to 100% because of rounding.

## Are U.S. Nuclear Plants Safer?

Overall, about a quarter of Americans (24%) think that nuclear power plants in the United States are designed to be safer than those in Japan. A 53% majority says nuclear plants in this country are designed to be about as safe as nuclear facilities in Japan while 10% say plants in the United States are less safe.

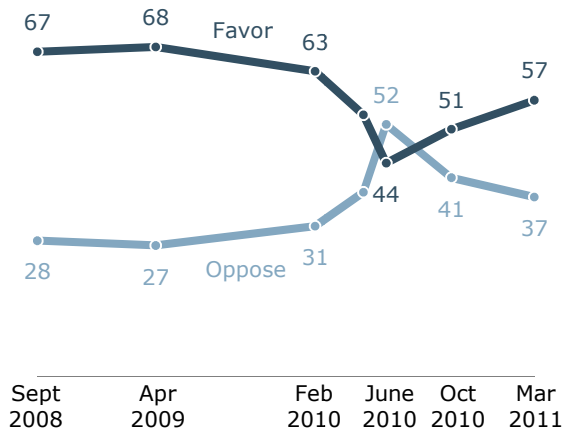
At the time of the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986, the public generally viewed U.S. nuclear plants as safer than those in the Soviet Union. In a May 1986 Washington Post/ABC News poll, 55% said that U.S. plants were safer (the question asked about overall safety, not the design of the plants).

## New Turn in Views of Offshore Drilling

Public views of allowing increased offshore oil and gas drilling shifted noticeably last year in response to the Gulf oil leak. Since last summer, they have shifted again. Currently, 57% favor allowing more oil and gas drilling in U.S. waters, up 13 points since last June (44%). Nonetheless, support for expanded offshore drilling remains lower than in February 2010 (63%).

Since last June, support for expanded offshore oil and gas drilling has increased across most demographic and political groups. Still, while support has jumped by nearly 20 points since then among both Republicans and Democrats, there continues to be a sizable partisan divide in these opinions: 81% of Republicans favor allowing more offshore oil and gas drilling in U.S. waters, compared with 54% of independents and 46% of Democrats.

### Increased Support for More Offshore Drilling



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 17-20, 2011. PEW27a.

## Wide Partisan Gaps over Other Policies

Opinions about other energy policies have changed little since last fall. These views also continue to be deeply divided along partisan lines. While 81% of Democrats and 79% of independents favor increased federal funding for research on wind, solar and hydrogen technology, far fewer Republicans agree (59%).

There also are substantial differences in opinions about spending more on mass transit systems: 72% of Democrats and 64% of independents favor this policy, compared with 46% of Republicans. In both cases, the partisan differences are relatively recent. In 2006, comparable percentages of Republicans, Democrats and independents favored these policies. (*For more, see “Little Change in Opinions about Global Warming, Oct. 27, 2010.”*)

## About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted March 17-20, 2011 among a national sample of 1,004 adults 18 years of age or older living in the continental United States (673 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 331 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 144 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see: <http://people-press.org/methodology/detailed>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2010 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

<b>Group</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Plus or minus ...</b>
Total sample	1004	4.0 percentage points
Republicans	265	7.5 percentage points
Democrats	307	7.0 percentage points
Independents	341	6.5 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

## About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

Andrew Kohut, Director  
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research  
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors  
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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER NEWS INTEREST INDEX  
MARCH 17-20, 2011 OMNIBUS  
FINAL TOPLINE  
N=1,004**

**PEW.1 THROUGH PEW.26 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**

**ASK ALL:**

PEW.27 As I read some possible government policies to address America's energy supply, tell me whether you would favor or oppose each. First, would you favor or oppose the government **[INSERT FIRST ITEM, RANDOMIZE; OBSERVE FORM SPLITS]**? Would you favor or oppose the government **[INSERT NEXT ITEM]**?

		<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>(VOL.) DK/Ref</u>
a.	Allowing more offshore oil and gas drilling in U.S. waters			
	March 17-20, 2011	57	37	6
	October 13-18, 2010	51	41	7
	June 16-20, 2010	44	52	4
	May 6-9, 2010	54	38	8
	February 3-9, 2010	63	31	6
	April 14-21, 2009	68	27	5
	September, 2008	67	28	5
b.	Promoting the increased use of nuclear power			
	March 17-20, 2011	39	52	8
	October 13-18, 2010	45	44	11
	June 16-20, 2010	47	47	6
	May 6-9, 2010	45	44	11
	February 3-9, 2010	52	41	7
	April 14-21, 2009	45	48	7
	September, 2008	50	43	7
	Late February, 2008	44	48	8
	February, 2006	44	49	7
	Mid-September, 2005	39	53	8
c.	Increasing federal funding for research on wind, solar and hydrogen technology			
	March 17-20, 2011	74	21	5
	October 13-18, 2010	74	21	6
	June 16-20, 2010	75	21	3
	May 6-9, 2010	73	22	5
	February 3-9, 2010	78	17	5
	April 14-21, 2009	82	15	3
	September, 2008	82	14	4
	Late February, 2008	81	14	5
	February, 2006	82	14	4
d.	Providing tax incentives for those who buy hybrid or electric cars, trucks and SUVs			
	March 17-20, 2011	58	35	7
	Oct 13-18, 2010	60	34	7
e.	Spending more on subway, rail and bus systems			
	March 27-20, 2011	61	34	6
	Oct 13-18, 2010	63	29	8
	Jun 16-20, 2010	64	31	5
	May 6-9, 2010	65	28	7
	Feb 3-9, 2010	70	25	4
	Apr 14-21, 2009	70	25	5
	Late-February, 2008	72	23	5



**PEW.27 CONTINUED**

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>DK/Ref</u>
February, 2006	68	26	6
Mid-September, 2005	68	27	5

**(VOL.)****ASK ALL:**

PEW.28 In your opinion, are nuclear power plants in the United States designed to be safer than the ones in Japan, less safe, or about as safe?

**TREND FOR COMPARISON:*****Soviet Union***

Mar 17-20 <u>2011</u>		<i>ABC/Wash. Post</i> <u>May 1986<sup>1</sup></u>	<i>ABC News</i> <u>April 1986</u>
24	Safer	55	62
10	Less safe	2	3
53	About as safe	35	26
1	None are safe at all <b>(VOL.)</b>	2	3
12	Don't know/Refused <b>(VOL.)</b>	6	7

<sup>1</sup> In both 1986 surveys question read: "In your opinion are nuclear power plants in the United States safer than the ones in the Soviet Union, less safe, or about as safe?"