

Costs, the Economy, and Renewable Energy

Message Testing Study – Findings and Takeaways

Summary

GoodPower's Good Data Lab conducted a study to assess messaging about energy costs, the economic benefits of renewable energy, and how to effectively build support for renewables. A survey was conducted with 2,712 U.S. adults in March 2026. Overall, results indicate that personal cost saving messages are the most persuasive reason to support renewable energy with people across partisanship while health benefits are also convincing, particularly for liberals and moderates.

Key Findings

[See Full Report for More]

- **Energy Bills are an Important Concern**
 - Electricity bills were a top three cost-related concern, even higher than housing costs. This suggests that electricity costs are a key part of the cost of living crisis for people.
 - Participants placed the most responsibility for rising energy costs on utility companies' profits and increased energy demand from large energy users like data centers. Liberals placed a lot of blame on Republican politicians unlike moderates and conservatives.
- **Energy should be Low Cost and Reliable:** An energy source being low-cost and reliable were the top priorities for participants followed by creating little air and water pollution. Being fast to build and American-made were the lowest priorities.
- **Cost Savings Leads Support for Renewable Energy:** Participants across political views consistently chose personal cost savings, health, and price stability as the most convincing reasons to support renewable energy.
 - Reliability and job creation were moderately convincing.
 - Climate change was a top reason for liberals to support renewable energy but only somewhat convincing for moderates and much less for conservatives.
- **Partisan Messaging:** Messaging about Democrats' plans to boost clean energy and lower costs increased people's approval of Congressional Democrats while messaging about Republicans voting against renewable energy lowered people's approval of Congressional Republicans.
- **No Relative Advantage for Specific Terms:** Using specific words and phrases (i.e. low-cost vs. most affordable vs. cheapest) appear to have little effect on attitudes towards renewable energy.

INSIGHTS AND GUIDANCE

- **Messages Resonate Best with Personal Impacts:** Focus messaging about renewables on the impacts to people's lives through lower and stable energy costs, and protecting their health. Broader economic and energy-system benefits are less persuasive but could be incorporated into broader messages.
- **Accountability Decreases Support for Republicans:** Increased blame for higher energy costs on Republicans as voters learned that Republicans in Congress gutted investments in renewable energy and are putting profits of utility and data center companies over consumers.
- **Explicit Mentions of Action Increase Support for Democrats:** Opportunity to boost support for Democrats through messaging about their plan to increase affordable renewable energy which will lower energy energy costs and protect public health.
- **Climate:** Climate change messaging is persuasive for some audiences, especially liberals.
- **Broader Message Frames Matter More than Specific Words:** Different words (i.e. lowest cost, affordable, and cheapest) can be used to describe renewables while referring to "people" and "families" (rather than ratepayers) resonates more with liberals and doesn't dissuade others.

Costs, the Economy, and Renewable Energy

Message Testing Study – Full Report

Study Design

A sample of 2,712 U.S. adults approximating nationally representative proportions for age, gender, and political views as well as a mix of racial identities completed the study in March 2026 from an online panel provided by Prolific. Full details about the sample can be found in the Appendix. Participants were asked a series of questions related to renewable energy, the economy, and costs. In a portion of the study, respondents picked the most and least convincing reasons to support renewable energy (a MaxDiff analysis was then later used to rank the reasons). Additionally, a series of A/B split questions was used to test the efficacy of different phrases and frames.

Findings

Concerns about Cost and Energy

Food was the top cost concern for participants but electricity bills are in the top three, even higher than housing costs. This suggests that electricity costs are a prominent concern for most people and a salient issue, especially when linked with other aspects of the high cost of living.

How concerned are you about the following costs increasing over the next year?

Estimated marginal means ordered by rating

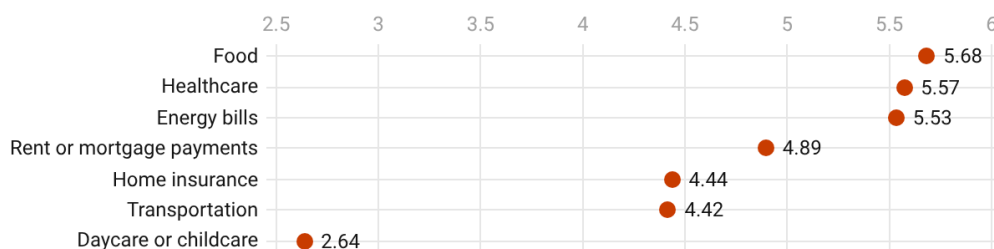


Chart: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

When asked to choose which of the costs they were most concerned about, food was most often chosen as people's top concern, followed by rent or mortgage payments, healthcare, and energy bills. Notably, housing costs rise to second when people have to pick their top concern while energy costs drop to fourth.

Which of the following costs are you most concerned about increasing over the next year?

Frequency of selection

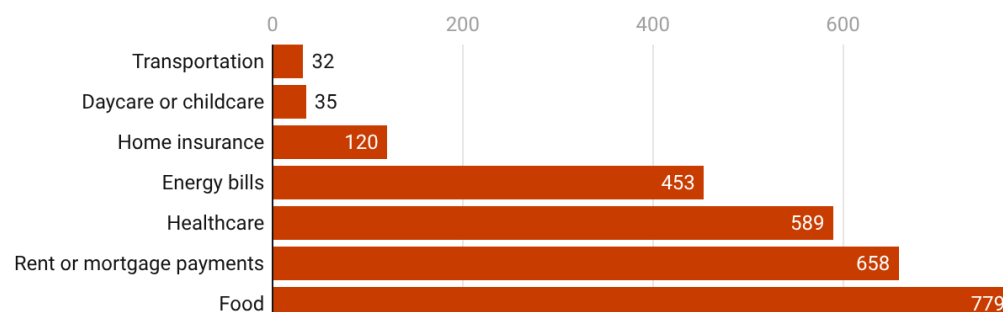


Chart: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

Note: This graph shows which cost participants picked as being the most concerned about while the previous graph shows participants level of concern for each type of cost.

Factors Contributing to Rising Energy Costs

People believed there were two primary causes of rising energy costs: utility companies' prioritizing profits and the increased energy demand generated by large-scale energy users like data centers. More technical issues, like outdated systems and infrastructure, were seen as less important factors. Republican politicians' opposition to renewable energy incentives had the lowest average rating as a perceived contributor to rising prices. This suggests the public does not understand how blocking renewables can limit progress on energy prices, pointing to an opportunity to increase public awareness and establish greater accountability for legislative actions.

How much do you think the following factors are contributing to rising energy costs:

Estimated marginal means ordered by rating

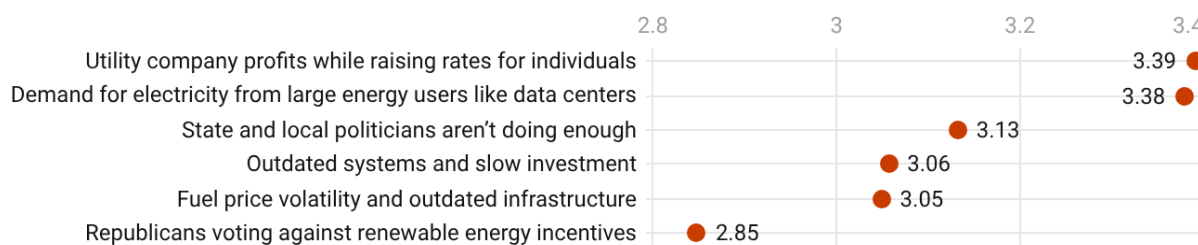


Chart: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

However, beliefs about the causes of rising energy costs varied across political ideology. Compared to liberals and moderates, conservatives placed less blame on each of the factors for rising energy costs (see appendix for full breakdown of factor ratings by ideology). Liberals placed the most blame on Republicans voting against renewable energy.

Although large energy users like data centers are increasingly blamed for rising energy costs, people’s concern about data centers (64% are “Somewhat” or “Very” concerned on average) does not differ when providing them with information about how renewable energy can meet data center energy needs and help keep the burden of increased demand off of households. This suggests additional research is needed to understand the messaging potential of presenting renewable energy as a way to alleviate data centers being a cost burden on households.

What People Want from an Energy Source

When asked to rank the most important aspects of an energy source, people most commonly ranked low-cost first, followed by it being reliable and having little associated air or water pollution. Reducing carbon emissions was ranked moderately, whereas American-made and fast to build were the lowest ranked overall.

What are the most important aspects of an energy source?

Average ranking of items, with highest preference (closest to 1) at the top

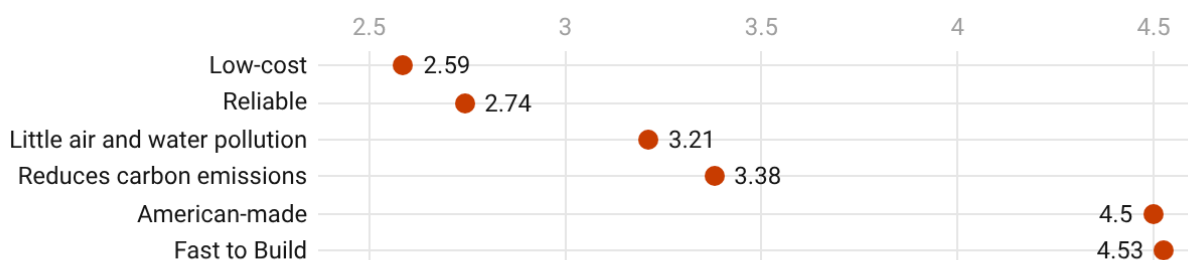


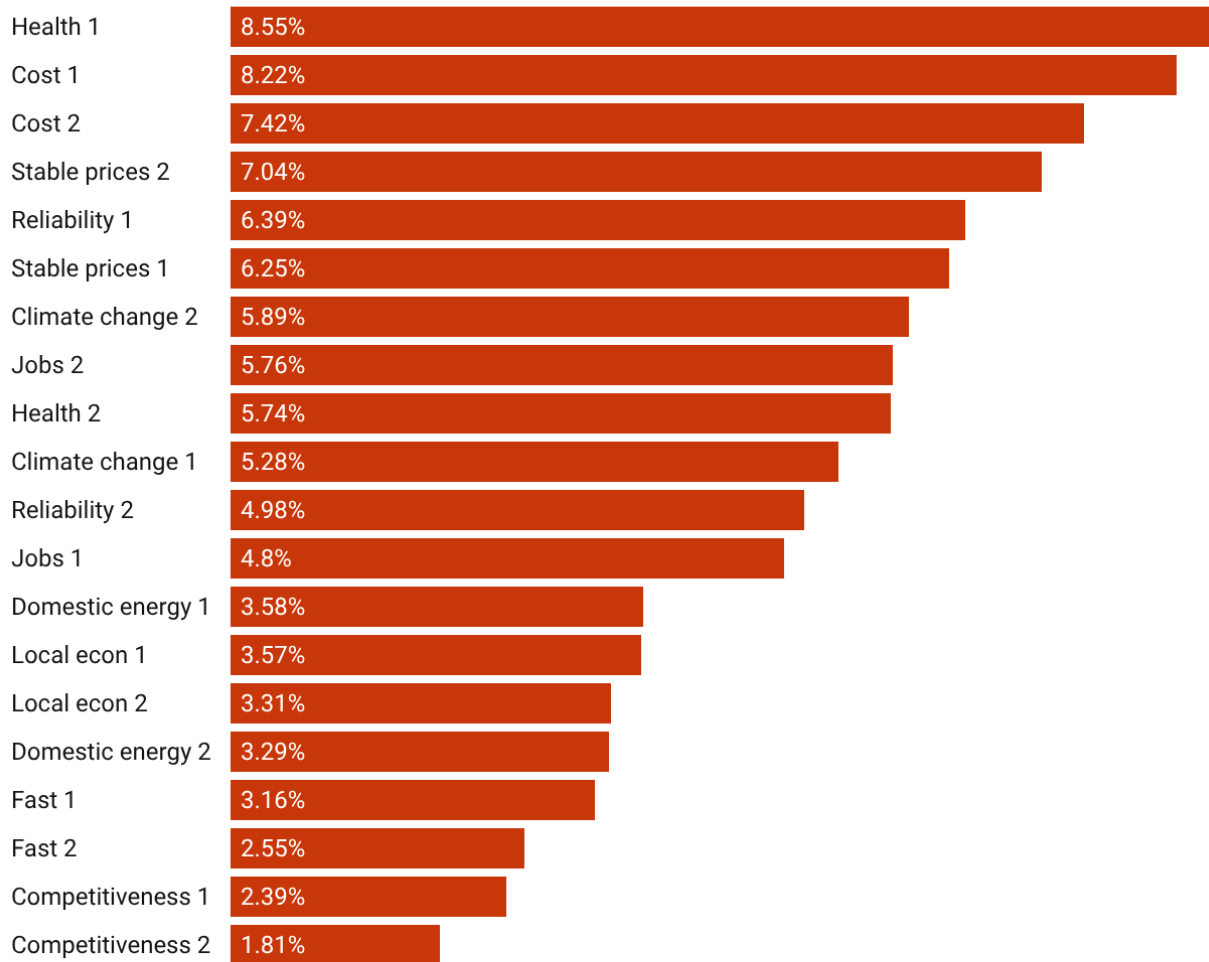
Chart: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

Moderates and conservatives ranked low-cost as the most important aspect of an energy source, and liberals ranked it as second-most important behind reducing carbon emissions. Notably, American-made energy is important for conservatives, who ranked it third behind low-cost and reliable.

Messaging - Convincing Reasons to Support Renewable Energy

Personal cost savings and protecting public health were the most convincing reasons to support renewable energy. Respondents were asked to select the most and least convincing reasons to support renewable energy from a series of messages that included two versions of 10 different frames for a total of 20 messages (see *appendix for full message text*).

Reason to Support Renewables - Full Sample



Results of MaxDiff question rating most and least convincing reason to support renewable energy.

Source: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

See appendix for full text of the messages

Messages about personal energy cost savings and stable prices for consumers were three of the top five, indicating that impacts to people's own finances is a leading message. A health message was the top performing, it was most frequently selected as the most convincing, which suggests that health benefits are also an effective message but less consistently than costs.

Personal cost savings were a more convincing argument than broader economic benefits. Thus, it's important to make the personal connections to ratepayers and households clear, rather than more abstract economic impacts. Messages about job creation were moderately persuasive but consistently lower than household costs and prices. Local economic development and revenue was

even less convincing than job creation. Still, job creation and generating local revenue could potentially be combined with frames about personal affordability to be effective.

Messages about increasing reliability of the electrical grid were fairly effective, one version that mentioned extreme weather was the fifth most convincing, and much more so than renewables being fast to deploy. These findings suggest that framing renewable energy as quick to build is not particularly persuasive on its own, although it could be more effective when presented in a broader context of rapid demand growth necessitating bringing new power to the grid quickly in order to stabilize prices.

While climate change was not one of the top five messages, it did perform reasonably well as both message versions were in the top half of the most convincing messages. Additionally, participants found the grid reliability message that named extreme weather more persuasive than a version that did not.

Notably, themes of global competitiveness including competition with China, and promoting energy security were not very persuasive. Competitiveness messages were the least convincing. While messages about building domestic energy supplies and security were slightly more persuasive, they were still in the bottom half of messages.

Partisan Differences in Messaging

Table 1: Top 3 Convincing Message Themes by Political Ideology

All	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Health	Costs	Costs	Health
Costs	Stable prices	Health	Climate change
Stable prices	Jobs	Stable prices	Costs

Table 2: Bottom 3 Convincing Message Themes by Political Ideology

All	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Competitiveness	Competitiveness	Competitiveness	Competitiveness
Fast	Climate change	Fast	Domestic energy
Domestic energy	Fast	Domestic energy	Fast

There were some substantial differences in the persuasiveness of messaging frames across political ideology (Table 1 & 2; see *appendix for graphs with full rankings by ideology*). Most notably, climate change and health are the most convincing reasons to support renewables for liberals followed by costs and reliability. However for conservatives, health was not a top message and costs (both

savings and stability) were the most convincing along with job creation. Moderates were similar to the full sample, with costs and one health message among the most convincing. This suggests that cost messaging is effective across political ideology while health and climate change messaging is particularly effective for liberal audiences. Job creation messaging is also more effective for conservatives.

Messages about global competitiveness including references to China were among the least convincing across political ideology, even among conservatives. Developing domestic energy sources performed better with conservatives than liberals and moderates, but still was 8th or 10th among conservatives out of the twenty messages tested.

Addressing climate change was a highly convincing reason for liberals to support renewable energy, indicating that reducing carbon emissions is a major reason they support wind and solar. Climate change was still somewhat convincing for moderates, the messages were in the top 10 and above other frames like local economic development and domestic energy production. But it was one of the least convincing message frames for conservatives.

Approval of Political Parties

Describing Democrats' plan to address energy costs with renewable energy (versus giving no description) had a large (nearly 50%) increase in people's approval of how Congressional Democrats are handling energy costs (66.7% strongly/somewhat approve vs. 18.3%). These findings suggest that people don't currently have a favorable view of Democrats on energy issues, but even providing them a little bit of information about Democrats' agenda can be highly persuasive. In another test, highlighting that Republicans voted against renewable energy and blocked an opportunity to lower energy costs (versus giving no description) increased people's disapproval of Congressional Republicans' handling of energy costs by 12% (72.6% strongly/somewhat disapprove vs. 60.6%).

Importantly, these findings held regardless of people's political ideology, with those who read the descriptions having higher approval of Democrats and lower approval of Republicans than those who did not. In other words, messaging was able to increase Republicans approval of Democrats and increase disapproval of politicians from their own party.

These findings point to the effectiveness of raising awareness of and accountability for how Republican opposition to renewables can delay progress on energy prices as well as Democrats' having a plan to address rising energy costs.

Testing Terminology

We found no differences in people's support for renewables based on word choice—low cost vs. most affordable vs. cheapest—in a brief description of how renewables can meet rising energy demand. This suggests that subtle word choices about affordability do not alone influence people's support for

renewables. More research is needed to understand if word choice matters when used in broader messaging strategies or different contexts.

We also found no differences between using the phrases “people so individuals and families” versus “ratepayers so customers” on agreement that policymakers should prioritize stable and affordable electricity costs to ensure people don’t bear the burden of upgrading the grid and rising demand. Liberals did have higher agreement for “people so individuals and families” than “ratepayers so customers”, however there were no differences for moderates and conservatives.

Takeaways and Next Steps

This study provides some evidence that cost and health-framed messages about renewable energy are broadly effective. Some of our key takeaways can be found below:

Lead with the personal impacts of renewable energy development – cost savings and protecting health.

Cost savings messages were consistently the most persuasive and performed well across political and demographic groups. Connecting renewable energy development to people’s own pocketbooks and the health of their family is convincing and more compelling than broader economic benefits like jobs and tax revenue. Lowering costs and ensuring stable prices are also similarly convincing when tied to people’s own bills. Messaging about global competitiveness was not persuasive, even with conservatives, and boosting domestic energy was also not especially persuasive. People want to know how their own lives, whether their personal finances or health, will be impacted – not abstract issues about the global economy.

With utility company profits and growing demand from data centers shouldering the blame for rising energy prices, highlight policies for accountability.

Utility and data center companies are seen as the key drivers of rising energy costs which creates an opportunity for populist messaging that juxtaposes company profits with consumers struggling with the rising cost of living. Policies to hold utility companies and large-energy users like data centers accountable are likely to be compelling for broad audiences. Importantly, people across political views see these two actors as the main culprits which suggests an opportunity to frame Republicans as favoring big corporations over regular people and Democrats as having a plan to reign in these actors.

Talk about Democrats’ plan to lower energy costs and expand renewables in contrast to Republicans blocking renewable energy.

Communicating partisan policy stances effectively increases approval and disapproval of how congressional Democrats and Republicans are handling energy costs. Highlighting Democrats’ plan to lower energy costs can substantially increase their approval. Because these shifts occur across

political ideologies, broad communication of these stances is recommended particularly because few people seem aware that Democrats have a proactive energy agenda.

Tailor messages to specific audiences.

While some messages, like cost savings, resonate broadly, there are important differences that can be leveraged for targeted communications. Climate change, pollution, and health are prominent concerns for liberals. Thus, talking about renewables as a climate solution and lowering carbon emissions is important for this audience and mobilizing base supporters. Moderates also find health-framed messages convincing reasons to support renewable energy, and this angle may be helpful for bringing them into the conversation. Conservatives do care more about domestic energy production and job creation, but still these are not more persuasive than personal cost savings.

Specific words and phrases matter less than broader message frames.

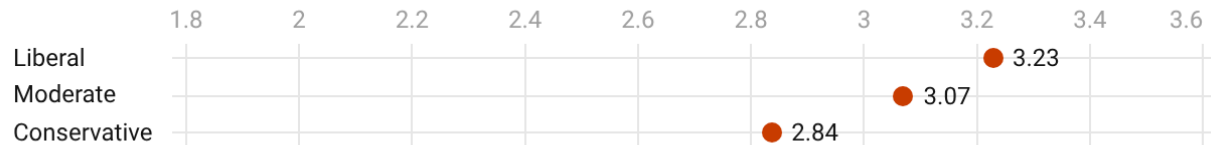
We found no major difference in using terms like lowest cost vs. most affordable vs. cheapest or individuals and families vs. ratepayers and customers. Referring to “people” and “families” can be more effective with liberals though. Overall this suggests that subtle changes in terminology do not make or break messages about renewable energy, and it is choices of broader framings that can be persuasive on people’s support for renewables.

Appendix

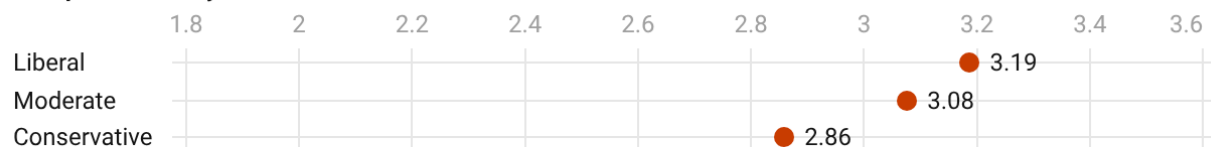
How much do you think the following factors are contributing to rising energy costs:

Estimated marginal means

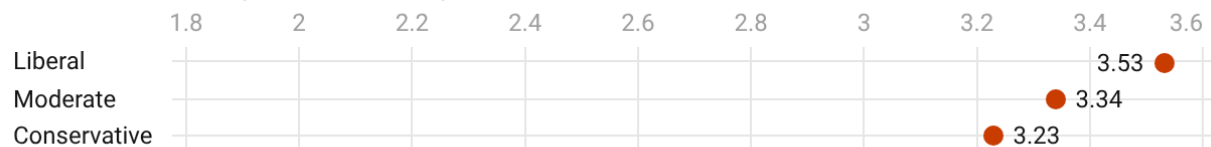
Outdated systems and slow investment



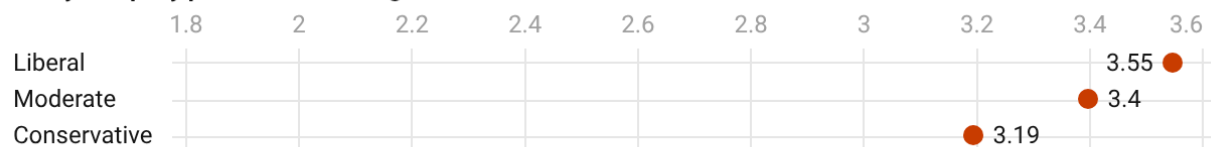
Fuel price volatility and outdated infrastructure



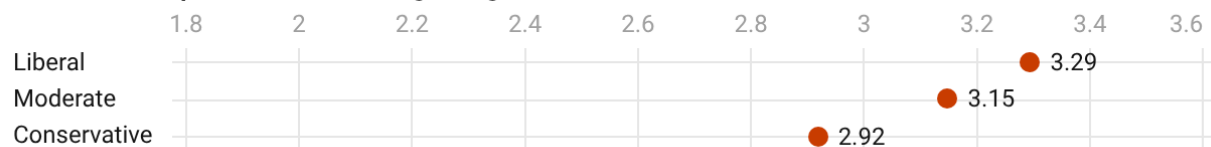
Demand for electricity from large energy users like data centers



Utility company profits while raising rates for individuals



State and local politicians aren't doing enough



Republicans voting against renewable energy incentives

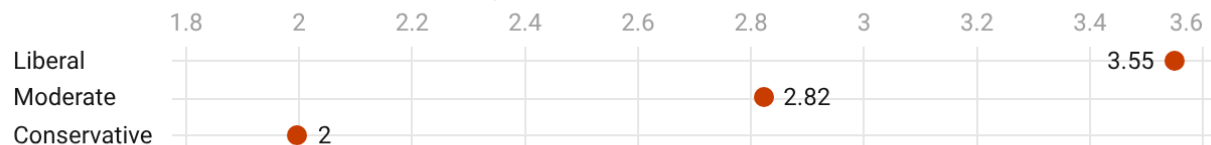
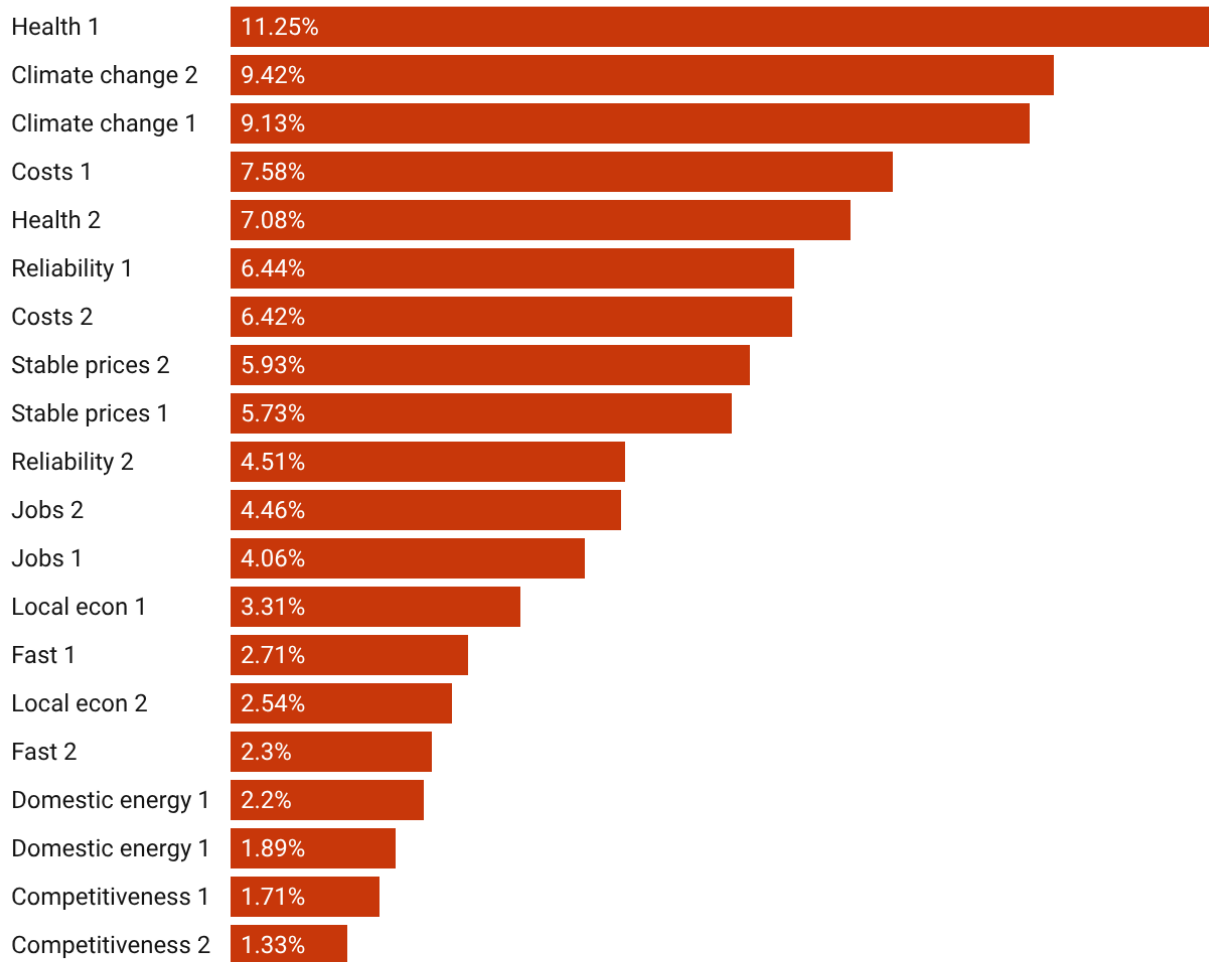


Chart: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

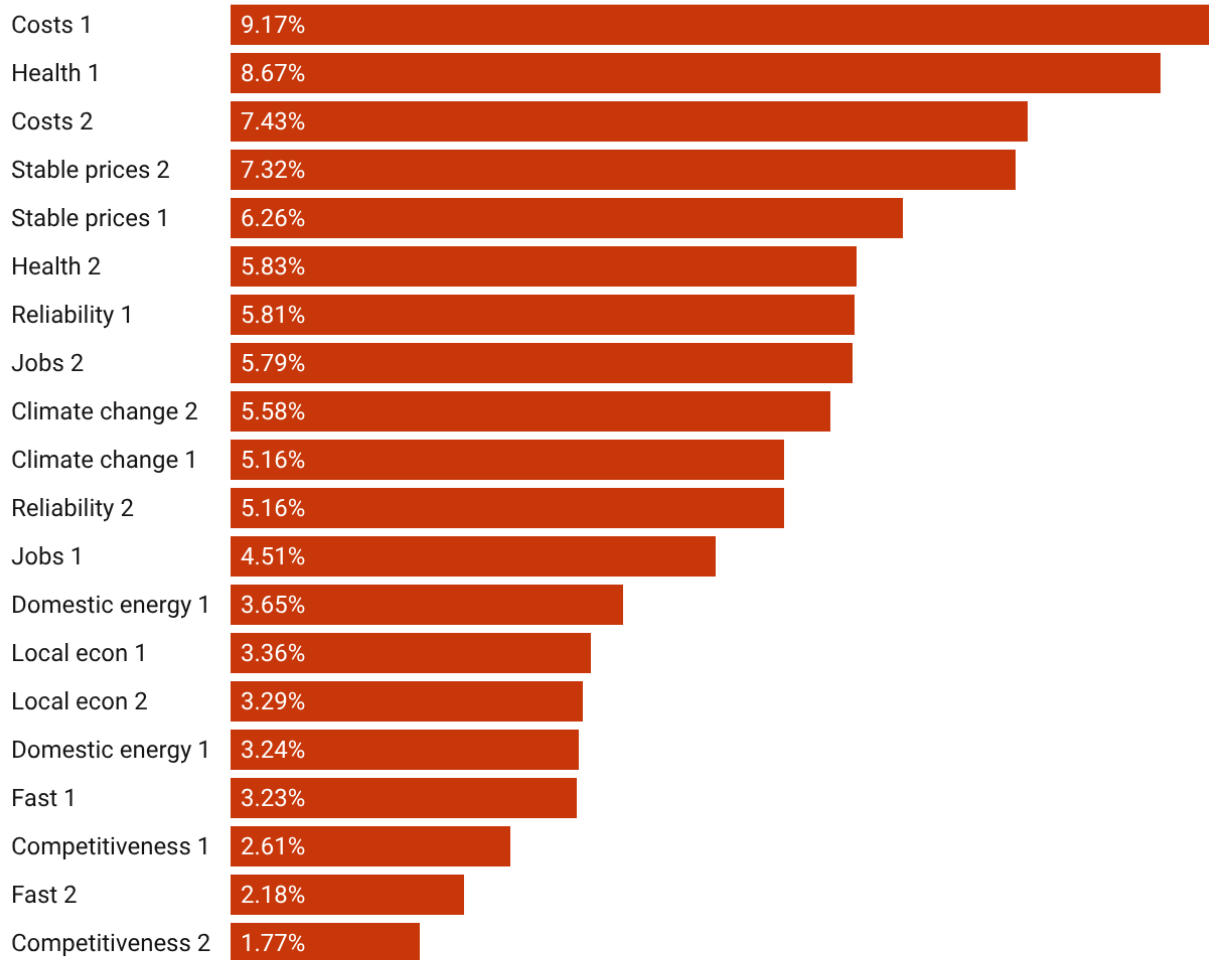
Reason to Support Renewables - Liberals



Results of MaxDiff question rating most and least convincing reason to support renewable energy, n=1077.

Source: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

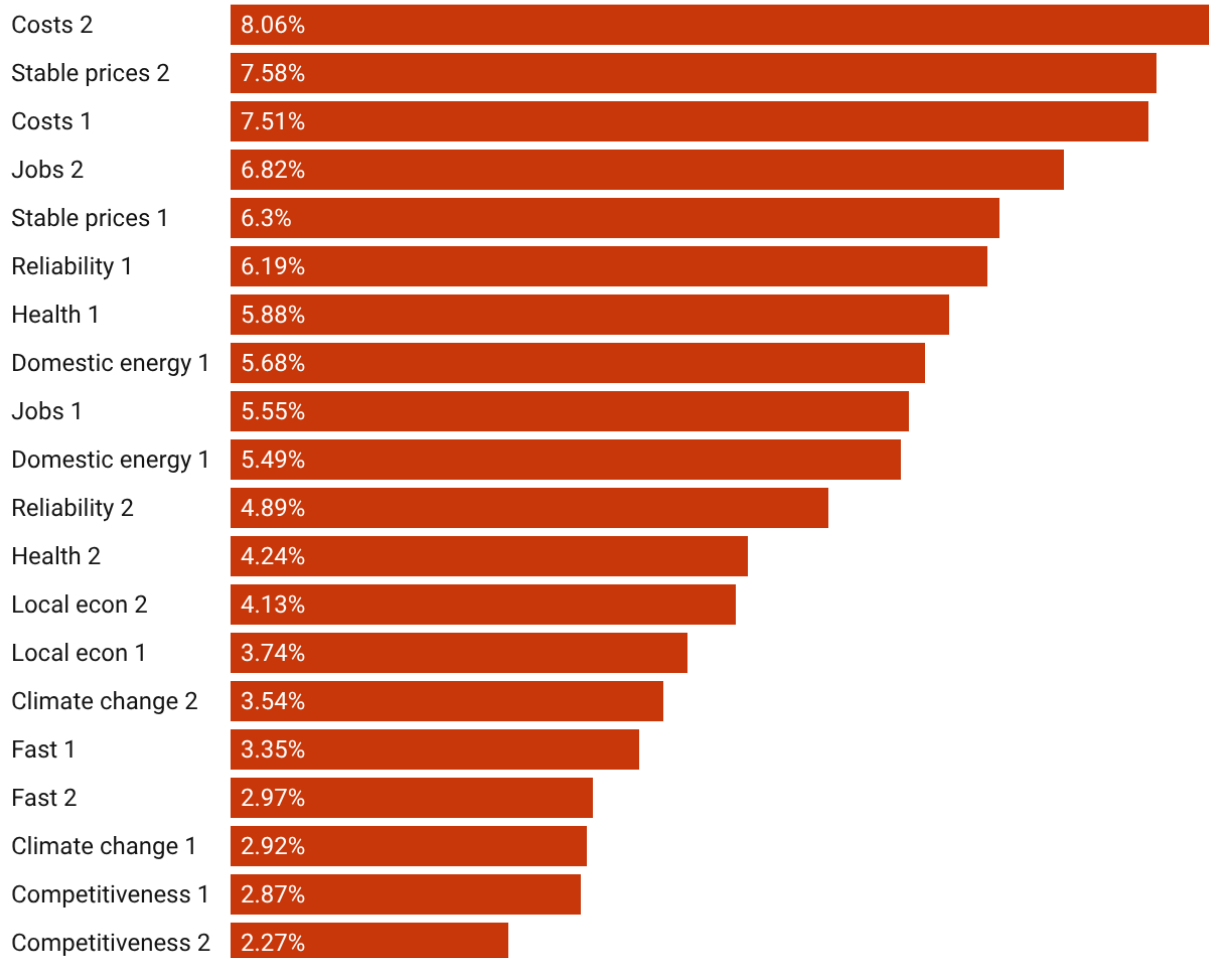
Reason to Support Renewables - Moderates



Results of MaxDiff question rating most and least convincing reason to support renewable energy, n=743.

Source: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

Reason to Support Renewables - Conservatives



Results of MaxDiff question rating most and least convincing reason to support renewable energy, n=872

Source: GoodPower • Created with Datawrapper

A/B Test Descriptives

	N	%
Renewable energy is often the most affordable and fastest energy to build in order to meet rising energy demand. How much do you support or oppose expanding renewable energy?	636	70.1
Renewable energy is often the cheapest and fastest energy to build in order to meet rising energy demand. How much do you support or oppose expanding renewable energy?	638	70.8
Renewable energy is often the lowest cost and fastest energy to build in order to meet rising energy demand. How much do you support or oppose expanding renewable energy?	650	72.0

Note. Ns and % for “Support” or “Strongly support”.

	<i>N</i>	%
Do you approve or disapprove of how Democrats in Congress are handling rising energy costs?	257	18.3
<i>Democrats have proposed legislation that shifts the U.S. approach to put affordability over profits by lowering energy bills and increasing energy reliability for American households through building more low-cost, reliable renewable energy.</i> Do you approve or disapprove of how Democrats in Congress are handling rising energy costs?	902	66.7
Note. Ns and % for “Somewhat” or “Strongly” approve.		

	<i>N</i>	%
Do you approve or disapprove of how Republicans in Congress are handling rising energy costs?	819	60.6
<i>Republicans in Congress voted against incentives for low-cost, reliable renewable energy, putting profits over affordability and blocking an opportunity to help lower energy bills.</i> Do you approve or disapprove of how Republicans in Congress are handling rising energy costs?	985	72.6
Note. Ns and % for “Somewhat” or “Strongly” disapprove.		

	<i>N</i>	%
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Policymakers should prioritize stable and affordable electricity costs for <i>people so individuals and families</i> don’t bear the burden of upgrading the grid and generating more energy.	1208	89.4
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Policymakers should prioritize stable and affordable electricity costs for <i>ratepayers so customers</i> don’t bear the burden of upgrading the grid and generating more energy.	1189	87.6
Note. Ns and % for “Agree” or “Strongly agree”.		

	<i>N</i>	%
How concerned are you that the growth of data centers will increase your energy bills?	569	63.1
<i>Data center companies could build new renewable energy sources to meet their energy needs.</i> How concerned are you that the growth of data centers will increase your energy bills?	600	66.4
Data center companies could build new renewable energy to meet their energy needs, <i>helping make sure households don’t bear the cost of increased demand.</i> How concerned are you that the growth of data centers will increase your energy bills?	574	63.6

Note. Ns and % for “Moderately” or “Very” concerned.

Demographics

Age	<i>N</i>	%
18-24 years	203	7.5
25-34 years	686	25.3
35-44 years	665	24.5
45-54 years	400	14.8
55-64 years	466	17.2
65+	291	10.7

Gender	<i>N</i>	%
Female	1364	50.3
Male	1314	48.5
Transgender	12	0.4
Other	15	0.6
Prefer not to say	7	0.3

Racial/Ethnic group	<i>N</i>	%
White	1780	66
Black	406	15.1
Hispanic or Latino/a	165	6.1
Asian or Pacific Islander	167	6.2
Middle Eastern	12	0.4
Native American	13	0.5
Two or more races	148	5.5
Other	6	0.2

Income	<i>N</i>	%
Less than \$30,000	385	14.2
\$30,000 to \$59,999	678	25.0
\$60,000 to \$99,999	742	27.4
\$100,000 to \$149,000	505	18.6
\$150,000 or higher	361	13.3
Prefer not to say	38	1.4

Level of Education	<i>N</i>	%
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Some high school, but no diploma	27	1.0
High School diploma or GED	367	13.5
Some college, but no degree	471	17.4
Associate's or technical degree	312	11.5
Bachelor's degree	1031	38.0
Graduate or professional degree	501	18.5
Prefer not to say	3	0.1

Employment Status	<i>N</i>	%
Employed and working full-time	1442	53.2
Employed and working part-time	488	18.0
Not employed and looking for work	222	8.2
Not employed but NOT looking for work	137	5.1
Retired	252	9.3
Disabled or not able to work	70	2.6
Something else	101	3.7

Urbanicity	<i>N</i>	%
Urban	709	26.2
Suburban	1491	55.1
Rural	495	18.3
Other	10	0.4

Home	<i>N</i>	%
Own	1525	56.2
Rent	1042	38.4
Other	145	5.4

Political Ideology	<i>N</i>	%
Very liberal	429	15.9
Liberal	648	24.0
Moderate	743	27.5
Conservative	668	24.7
Very conservative	204	7.6
Prefer not to say	10	0.4

Party Identification	<i>N</i>	%
Democrat	1029	37.9
Republican	849	31.1

Independent	799	29.5
Other	35	1.3

MaxDiff Message Frames

Theme	Message
Climate change 1	Building renewable energy can help address climate change by lowering the carbon pollution that causes it.
Climate change 2	Renewable energy means less carbon pollution—and fewer devastating hurricanes, wildfires, and heat waves threatening our communities.
Competitiveness 1	America needs renewable energy to remain competitive in the global economy and attract investments in cutting-edge industries.
Competitiveness 2	The U.S. needs to build more renewable energy to compete with China and be a global leader in technology and innovation.
Costs 1	One of the best ways to lower families' energy bills is to create more low-cost renewable energy.
Costs 2	Renewable energy means more money in your pocket every month with lower energy bills.
Domestic energy 1	Renewable energy is built right here in America with American workers and American materials, powering our communities with homegrown energy.
Domestic energy 1	Renewable energy is made here at home in the U.S. so we don't have to depend on foreign countries.
Fast 1	Renewable energy is the fastest type of energy to develop in order to meet growing demand, often taking just a few years to build.
Fast 2	With rising energy use, renewable energy projects are the quickest to build to meet the demand.
Health 1	Investing in renewable energy will reduce harmful air pollution, preventing illnesses and protecting the health of our families and communities.
Health 2	Renewable energy does not emit harmful pollution into the air, helping to make communities healthier.
Jobs 1	Building renewable energy means creating careers—from construction to maintenance, renewable energy puts people to work.
Jobs 2	Expanding renewable energy puts hundreds of thousands of people to work in good jobs.
Local econ 1	Renewable energy development means more money for local governments to invest

	in what matters most to our communities, like emergency services and schools.
Local econ 2	Renewable energy provides an economic opportunity for communities by creating revenue and driving investment.
Reliability 1	Adding renewable energy to the electric grid makes it stronger and more reliable, helping to prevent outages even after extreme weather events.
Reliability 2	Building renewable energy creates a stronger, more reliable electric grid that helps keep your lights on.
Stable prices 1	Building more renewable energy creates stable, long-term electricity prices.
Stable prices 2	Renewable energy helps keep electricity prices stable so families can plan their budgets.