

Opposition to Nuclear Power Spikes

Americans by a 2-1 margin oppose building more nuclear power plants in the United States, an 11-point spike in opposition from a few years ago.

In the aftermath of Japan's nuclear plant crisis, 64 percent in this ABC News/Washington Post poll oppose new nuclear plant construction, vs. 33 percent support, and "strong" opposition now far outstrips strong support, 47-20 percent. Opposition is up from 53 percent in a 2008 poll, and strong opposition is up even more, by 24 points.

The results reflect the significant challenges facing the nuclear power industry, which had been reaching for greater acceptance on the basis of factors including high oil prices, environmental concerns prompted by the Gulf oil spill a year ago and efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Opposition is not merely a not-in-my-back-yard phenomenon. The survey, conducted for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds that 67 percent of Americans oppose construction of a nuclear plant within 50 miles of their home – not significantly different than the number who oppose it regardless of location.

Resistance is bipartisan, with majorities of Democrats, Republicans and independents alike opposed to new nuclear plant construction. Still there are differences among groups; opposition is higher among Democrats (75 percent, vs. 59 percent of Republicans and independents combined), women (73 percent, vs. 53 percent of men) and liberals (74 percent, vs. 60 percent of moderates and conservatives).

Support for building more nuclear plants has fluctuated in the past, showing sensitivity to nuclear crises. Starting at 61 percent in the mid-1970s, support fell sharply after the Three Mile Island accident in 1979 and bottomed out at just 19 percent in May 1986 as the Chernobyl crisis (which began 25 years ago next week) unfolded.

SAFE? – Most Americans do not flatly say that nuclear power is unsafe; indeed 53 percent say it's safe overall, 11 points above the immediate post-Chernobyl level. But just 23 percent see it as "very safe," which apparently is what's needed to sustain public support.

Indeed perceptions of safety dramatically affect support for new nuclear plants. Among people who think nuclear power plants are very safe, 84 percent favor building new ones. But that falls to 33 percent of those who just think it's only somewhat safe. And those who think it's unsafe are nearly unanimous (93 percent) in their opposition.

In another measure, 42 percent say the crisis in Japan has made them less confident in the safety of nuclear power overall; 51 percent say it's had no effect. This, too, ties in closely with support

for construction: Among those who are less confident now, 84 percent oppose building new plants. Among those whose opinions haven't changed, opposition falls to 48 percent.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone April 14-17, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y, with sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

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ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

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Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1-22 previously released.

23-24 held for release.

25. (HALF SAMPLE) On another subject: In general, would you favor or oppose building more nuclear power plants at this time? Do you favor/oppose this strongly or somewhat?

	----- Favor -----			----- Oppose -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
4/17/11	33	20	13	64	17	47	3
7/28/08	44	25	19	53	30	23	3
6/5/05	34	17	17	64	27	37	2
6/3/01	42	19	22	52	20	32	6
4/22/01	37	17	20	59	27	33	4
3/26/90	22	NA	NA	76	NA	NA	2
5/19/86	19			78			3
4/30/86	28			68			4
1/16/85	26			67			6
4/12/83	27			65			8
11/10/80*	47			47			6
5/22/79	52			42			6
4/15/79	44			43			13
4/9/79	47			45			8
4/5/79	52			42			6
7/18/76	61	"	"	22	"	"	17

*1980 to 1979: ABC News/Harris surveys; 1976, Harris.

Compare to: To address the country's energy needs, would you support or oppose action by the federal government to build more nuclear power plants? Do you support/oppose that strongly, or not strongly?

	----- Support -----			----- Oppose -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Not strongly	NET	Not strongly	Strongly	
6/6/10	49	36	13	46	16	30	5
8/17/09	52	36	16	46	15	30	2
6/3/01	46	29	17	51	15	36	3

26. (HALF SAMPLE) On another subject: Would you favor or oppose building a nuclear power plant within 50 miles of your home? Do you favor/oppose this strongly or somewhat?

	----- Favor -----			----- Oppose -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
4/17/11	30	15	15	67	7	59	3
8/17/09*	35	NA	NA	63	NA	NA	2
6/5/5	34	"	"	64	"	"	2

*8/17/09 and previous asked only of those who support nuclear power in general, then netted.

27. Do you think nuclear power plants generally are a safe source of energy or not? (IF SAFE/NOT): Is that very safe/unsafe or somewhat safe/unsafe?

	----- Safe -----			----- Unsafe -----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Very	opinion
4/17/11	53	23	30	43	15	28	4
5/19/86	42	11	31	53	27	26	5

28. You may have heard about the problems at a pair of nuclear power plants in Japan. Has this incident made you (more) confident in the safety of nuclear power plants in the United States, (less) confident, or has it not affected your confidence one way or the other?

	More	Less	Not affected	No opinion
4/17/11	6	42	51	1

29-31 held for release.

32-36 previously released.

END