



COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

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ENVIRONMENTAL  
STUDIES PROGRAM

# NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY

Prepared by *the polling company* for  
The Competitive Enterprise Institute

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PREPARED BY the polling company <sup>TM</sup>  
FOR THE COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From December 8 – 11, 1998, *the polling company* conducted a nationwide survey of attitudes on environmental policy of 1,000 registered voters nationwide. The results have a margin of error of +/- 3.1 % at 95 %.

- Approximately 70 percent of registered voters believe that state or local government would do a better at environmental protection than federal government;
- 68 percent believe that state or local government should have primary responsibility for protecting water quality in rivers, lakes and streams;
- 65 percent believe that state or local government should be most responsible for ensuring that communities are aware of the potential risks from industrial facilities;
- 74 percent believe that state and local governments should determine what air pollution control measures are used, and 36 percent believe that state and local governments should be allowed to “set their own air quality standards based on local needs” as well;
- 63 percent support compensation of landowners for the costs of environmental regulations that restrict the use of their land;
- 59 percent support the “private ownership, management and breeding endangered wildlife” to help conserve endangered species;
- 53 percent believe that journalists “blow things out of proportion” in their coverage of environmental issues.

These results are consistent with CEI’s 1996 National Survey of Attitudes on Environmental Policy. Both surveys found that most Americans support environmental protection *and* significant reform of existing environmental laws. *For most Americans, devolution, regulatory reform, and property rights are consistent with environmental protection.*

# COMPETITIVE ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

## NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY

### OVERVIEW

Over the past several years, numerous opinion surveys have documented widespread public support for environmental protection. Polls routinely find that over 70 percent of Americans characterize themselves as environmentalists or concerned about the environment. To date, however, there has been relatively little polling to determine which sets of policies Americans believe are most appropriate to address their environmental concerns.

In 1996, the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI) commissioned *the polling company* to perform a nationwide survey of 1,000 registered voters nationwide. This survey found both strong support for environmental protection, as well as broad support for decentralized, market-oriented environmental policies.

In December 1998, CEI commissioned a follow-up survey to evaluate whether these attitudes have changed of the past two years, and to assess the support for greater decentralization and the introduction of more market-oriented approaches to environmental policy. The poll was administered December 8-11, 1998 and has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

### HIGHLIGHTS

*Most Americans support environmental protection, but are not activists.* Nearly 70 percent of respondents consider themselves either “active environmentalists” or “concerned about the environment but not much of an activist,” opting for the latter description 52 percent to 17 percent. 26 percent consider themselves “neutral” on environmental issues, up from 16 percent in 1996. Contrary to common perceptions, older voters were more likely to define themselves as “active environmentalists” than younger voters.

*Environmental issues are of moderate importance to most voters.* While a majority of respondents claim that a candidate’s position on environmental issues is of moderate or high

importance to them, few registered voters (5 percent) rate environmental concerns as “the single most important problem facing the country.” On this scale, environmental concerns ranked eighth, behind crime/drugs (19 percent), taxes (8 percent), and education (8 percent). (By comparison, 8 percent identified President Clinton, and 3 percent identified impeachment or Ken Starr as the “most important problem.”) By a margin of 46 percent to 20 percent, voters believe that the Democratic Party does a better job at handling environmental issues than the Republican Party, but voters are split – 46 percent (excellent/good) to 40 percent (fair/poor) – on Vice President Al Gore’s performance on environmental issues.

*Most Americans support a greater role for state and local governments in environmental policy, and believe that state and local governments are better suited to addressing most environmental concerns.*

- 65 percent of those surveyed identify state or local government as the level of government that does the best job of addressing those issues that concern them.
- 66 percent think that the state or local government would be better at protecting the environment than the federal government. When it comes to “dealing with the environmental concerns in your community,” 75 percent say that state or local government would do a better job than the federal government.
- 68 percent believe that state or local government should have primary responsibility for protecting water quality in rivers, lakes and streams.
- 52 percent believe that state or local government should have primary responsibility for cleaning up hazardous waste sites and preventing their recurrence.
- 65 percent believe that state or local government should be most responsible for ensuring that communities are aware of the potential risks from industrial facilities.
- 74 percent of those surveyed believe that state and local governments should determine what air pollution control measures are used.

*Americans do not support heavy-handed federal efforts to control “urban sprawl.” Most Americans would prefer that state and local governments address this issue, and oppose limitations on their housing and transportation choices.*

- “Urban sprawl” is a major concern to only 23 percent of Americans, and a minor concern to 44 percent of Americans.
- 67 percent of Americans want state or local governments to address “urban sprawl” in those communities where it is concern. 11 percent want no government involvement whatsoever to address “urban sprawl,” while only 8 percent thought that the federal government should be the primary actor in dealing with this issue.
- 55 percent agree that people should be allowed to choose for themselves the size and location of their homes to fit their families’ needs. Only 39 percent want controls on the size of new housing developments to protect farmland and open space.

- 73 percent agree that people should be able to decide for themselves which type of transportation best fits their needs and lifestyle. Only 23 percent want government controls on transportation to reduce congestion and protect the environment.

*Most Americans support private property rights and more Americans support market-based or incentive-driven conservation strategies over the preservation of existing regulations.*

- 63 percent of those surveyed support compensation “when environmental regulations prevent landowners from using their property.”
- 37 percent favor replacing federal land-use regulation to protect wetlands with incentives for restoration and conservation; 29 percent favor a similar policy for endangered species; only 15 percent support the continuation of uncompensated regulation for either program.
- 59 percent support the “private ownership, management and breeding endangered wildlife” to help conserve endangered species. Only 33 percent oppose private management for placing economic concerns ahead of species protection.

*Americans oppose the use of tax dollars to fund international family planning efforts or that support environmental lobbying.*

- 62 percent think that the United States should not provide birth control, abortions and other population control methods as part of its international environmental policy funding. 59 percent say that birth control and other population control methods should not be part of its environmental policy funding.
- 58 percent oppose giving groups that lobby Congress on environmental issues money from the federal government. A plurality, 42 percent, agree that environmental groups should not receive federal tax dollars to support their efforts.

*Americans have concerns about media coverage of environmental issues.*

- A minority of Americans, only 19 percent, believe that the media accurately portray risks to the environment without blowing things out of proportion.
- A small majority of Americans, 53 percent, believe that the media blows things out of proportion in its coverage of environmental issues.
- A plurality of voters (46 percent) claim that the media provide “some” balanced and useful information about global warming. Three times as many voters claim that media reports about global warming are likely to be biased (30 percent), than believe that they contain “a great deal” of balanced information (10 percent).

*Most Americans support regulatory reform to restore accountability to the regulatory process.*

- 76 percent of Americans support requiring Congress to approve new regulations before they may take effect.
- 83 percent support “major reforms” (52 percent) or moves to “completely overhaul” (31 percent) of the role of government over the next ten years.

*There is not strong support for federal “community right-to-know” requirements which require industrial facilities to provide information to communities. There is, however, support for community-based requirements.*

- 59 percent of those polled said that merely listing chemicals released into the environment by nearby industrial facilities (as federal law requires) does not help them understand the impacts of such releases and that they would prefer information that helps them better understand the *actual* health impact of such releases on themselves and their families; and they want to know how to respond should an accidental release occur.
- 65 percent contend if government is involved in providing such information, the information should come from local (38 percent) or state government (27 percent).
- 49 percent think local government (30 percent) and local groups, including civic organizations and local environmental groups (19 percent) are best able to provide accurate information about public health risks posed by industrial facilities in their communities. An equal amount trust facility plant managers (14 percent) to provide accurate information as trust national environmental groups (14 percent). Only 8 percent think that the federal government is most suited to provide accurate information.

*There is no clear support for an United Nations global warming treaty, but most Americans believe that such a treaty could impose substantial costs.*

- While majority of voters (56 percent) believe that greenhouse gas emissions are responsible for making the planet warmer, a majority of voters (52 percent) prefers that the government *not* pass new laws and regulations addressing global warming until a scientific consensus is reached that the phenomenon does, in fact, exist. Only 36 percent support action in the face of uncertainty.
- 57 percent of women, age 18-44 oppose enacting global warming regulations until there is a scientific consensus, compared with only 43 percent of men in that age bracket.
- A majority of Americans (55 percent) tends to believe that the Kyoto treaty will be economically damaging, but opinions are not well formed or intensely held.
- By more than a 2:1 ratio, Americans believe that the treaty could raise gas prices and limit our use of automobiles (61 percent to 29 percent) and that the Kyoto Protocol will hurt the poorest Americans by increasing utility and fuel costs (66 percent to 25 percent).

*Most Americans have limited knowledge about federal automobile fuel economy standards, but more information about the safety impacts of such standards could reduce support for these standards.*

- Americans are relatively unfamiliar with federal fuel economy standards for automobiles, with a modest majority claiming to be not very familiar or not at all familiar (53 percent) with federal fuel economy standards.
- Voters are fairly evenly split (44 percent support, 40 percent oppose) between supporting and opposing federal fuel economy standards after learning that they limit the availability of large, crashworthy cars. After learning about the cost in human life, 39 percent of the supporters of the standards are inclined to change their position.

## CONCLUSIONS

These results are consistent with CEI's 1996 National Survey of Attitudes on Environmental Policy. Both surveys found that most Americans support environmental protection *and* significant reform of existing environmental laws. For most Americans, devolution, regulatory reform, and property rights are consistent with environmental protection. For most Americans, there is nothing anti-environment about alternative approaches to environmental policy.

The challenge to those who wish to advance environmental policy reform is to articulate a vision for the future of environmental policy that marries the public's concern for environmental protection with the preference for policy-making close to home. The American people do not accept the conventional wisdom that only centralized, federal regulation is capable of ensuring environmental protection. For most Americans, extensive federal bureaucracies are not necessary to advance environmental protection, and there is nothing anti-environment about pursuing environmental reform.

# NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SURVEY

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## SURVEY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this national survey of registered voters is to measure the attitudes of the electorate on a variety of public policy issues relating to the proper role of government and environmental regulations.

## SURVEY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Competitive Enterprise Institute commissioned the polling company <sup>TM</sup> to conduct a national survey of 1,000 registered voters. This survey was fielded from December 8 - 11, 1998 with a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) phone facility. The margin of error for this survey is  $\pm 3.1\%$  at the 95% confidence level.

The sample was drawn utilizing a Random Digit-Dialing (RDD) method with the phone numbers generated by a computer to insure that every registered voter in the nation with a telephone had a equal chance to be surveyed in proportion to their representation in the population.

This proportionate to probability sample of 1,000 actual voters was compared against 1998 voter registration information for each state. The number of male to female respondents as well as the number of samples selected from each state were controlled to insure that an accurate and representative number of each demographic group was surveyed.

## the polling company <sup>TM</sup>

the polling company <sup>TM</sup> is a public opinion research and consulting firm based in Washington D.C. with offices in San Francisco, California. The authors of this survey, Kellyanne Fitzpatrick and Jason Booms, are the President and Director of Research, respectively, of the polling company <sup>TM</sup>. Both have extensive experience in the fields of quantitative and qualitative research, politics and public policy analysis.



## KEY FINDINGS

- The environment is not a top tier issue for most voters. Only 5% cite environmental concerns as the single most important problem facing the county. The same number (5%) say that “protecting the environment” should be the most important priority for their Member of Congress in 1999.
- Most registered voters (83%) support “major reforms” (52%) or moves to “completely overhaul” (31%) of the role of government over the next ten years.
- 65% of voters say that state government (35%) or local government (30%) does the best job of handling the issues that matter most to them.
- Only 16% of the electorate think of themselves as “active environmentalists.”
- 28% think that a candidate’s position on the environment is of “high importance” to them in deciding how to vote.
- By a 46% - 20% margin, voters think that the Democrats do a better job than the Republicans when it comes to handling environmental issues.
- The electorate is divided on Vice President Al Gore’s ability when it comes to environmental issues. 46% give him an excellent or good rating while 40% say he has done a fair or poor job. 13% say he has done a poor job while only 9% think that he has done an excellent job in this area.
- 66% of Americans think that the state or local government would be better at protecting the environment than the federal government. When it comes to “dealing with the environmental concerns in your community,” 75% say that state or local government would do a better job than the federal government.
- 45% of voters say that the state government should have the primary responsibility for protecting water quality. When the focus is shifted to “cleaning up hazardous waste sites and preventing their recurrence,” 35% of voters select state government while another 35% choose the federal government.
- 38% support an air quality standard regime that allows state and local governments to decide which measures should be used to meet federal government standards. 36% support relegating the role of the federal government to a strictly advisory capacity.

- Urban sprawl is a concern to 67% of Americans (44% minor concern, 23% major concern).
- In those communities where urban sprawl is a concern, 67% want local (39%) or state (28%) governments to address these concerns. Only 8% thought that the federal government should be the primary actor in dealing with urban sprawl.
- 55% agree that people should be allowed to choose for themselves the size and location of their homes to fit their families needs.
- 73% agree that people should be able to decide for themselves which type of transportation best fits their needs and lifestyle.
- 63% think that the federal government should compensate landowners for any resulting decline in the value of their land when environmental regulations prevent private landowners from using their property.
- 37% favor replacing federal land-use regulation to protect wetlands with incentives for restoration and conservation; 29% favor a similar policy for endangered species; only 15% support the continuation of uncompensated regulation for either program.
- 59% support allowing the private ownership, management, and breeding of endangered wildlife in their area.
- 58% oppose giving groups that lobby Congress on environmental issues money from the federal government. A plurality, 42%, agree that environmental groups should not receive federal tax dollars to support their efforts.
- 62% think that the United States should not provide birth control, abortions and other population control methods as part of its international environmental policy funding. 59% say that birth control and other population control methods should not be part of its environmental policy funding.
- A majority of voters (53%) believes that the media greatly exaggerate threats to the environment in order to tell a compelling story.
- Over three-quarters of voters (76%) agree that Congress should be required to approve regulations written by federal bureaucrats and administrators before they take effect.
- A majority of voters (59%) believe that merely listing the chemicals released by industrial plants does *not* help residents understand what impact these releases will have on them and their communities.

- A plurality (30%) believes that local government is best suited to providing citizens with timely, accurate information about the risks posed by chemical releases. Furthermore, 38% believe that local government should be most responsible for facilitating the accumulation of information about the risks posed by industrial chemical releases.
- Global warming is most frequently associated with temperature changes (25%), the destruction of the ozone layer (16%), and pollution in general (13%). Tellingly, the second most-common set of responses were “don’t know/ refused” (18%).
- A majority of voters (56%) agree that the emission of greenhouse gases is responsible for making the planet warmer, rejecting the notion that it is part of a much broader series of climatic changes.
- A plurality of voters (46%) claim that the media provide “some” balanced and useful information about global warming. Three times as many voters claim that media reports about global warming are likely to be biased (30%) than believe that they contain “a great deal” of balanced information (10%).
- A slight majority of voters (52%) prefers that the government *not* pass new laws and regulations addressing global warming until a scientific consensus is reached that the phenomenon does, in fact, exist.
- The public tends to believe that the Kyoto treaty will be economically damaging, but opinions are not well formed or intensely held. Furthermore, by more than a 2:1 ratio, they believe that the treaty could raise gas prices and limit our use of automobiles, and that higher gas and utility costs will harm the poorest Americans.
- Americans are relatively unfamiliar with CAFE standards, with a modest majority claiming to be not very familiar or not at all familiar (53%) with federal fuel economy standards.
- 51% of voters support federal fuel economy standards, but a quarter of the electorate does not know or has no opinion. Those voters who do express opinions tend not to hold them strongly (16% strong support).
- Voters are fairly evenly split (44% support, 40% oppose) between supporting and opposing CAFE standards after learning that they limit the availability of large, crashworthy cars. After learning about the cost in human life, 39% of the supporters of the standards are inclined to change their position.

## Most Important Problem/Top Priority

1. Generally speaking, in your opinion, what is the single most important problem facing the country, that is, the one that you, yourself, are most concerned about? (PRE-CODED RESPONSES — PUSH FOR A RESPONSE) (NOTE: IF RESPONSE IS "THE ECONOMY," "THE ENVIRONMENT" OR "CRIME," ASK THEM TO BE MORE SPECIFIC.)

54%	<u>TOTAL SOCIAL</u>
19%	<u>CRIME/DRUGS</u>
6%	CRIME (NOT SPECIFIC)
6%	DRUGS/ DRUG ABUSE
3%	TEENAGE VIOLENCE/ GANGS
2%	CRIMINALS ON THE STREET/LAWS TOO WEAK
1%	UNSAFE STREETS/NEIGHBORHOODS
1%	GUNS/ RELATED VIOLENCE
8%	EDUCATION
6%	FAMILY VALUES
5%	SOCIAL SECURITY
4%	HEALTH CARE/HEALTH CARE REFORM
2%	RACIAL PROBLEMS
2%	ENVIRONMENT: CLEAN AIR/CLEAN WATER
1%	ABORTION (PRO-LIFE)
1%	MEDICARE
1%	HOUSING
1%	POOR ENVIRONMENT (GENERAL)
1%	ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (GENERAL)
1%	ENVIRONMENT: TOXIC WASTE
1%	WELFARE (TOO MUCH)
*	ABORTION (PRO-CHOICE)
*	AIDS
*	CANCER
*	ROADS/ INFRASTRUCTURE
*	ENVIRONMENT: ENDANGERED SPECIES
*	WELFARE (TOO LITTLE)
0%	MEDICAID
0%	ENVIRONMENT: PROPERTY RIGHTS
0%	AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/QUOTAS AND PREFERENCES
21%	<u>TOTAL ECONOMIC</u>
5%	POOR ECONOMY (NOT SPECIFIC)
5%	HIGH TAXES (GENERAL)
3%	UNEMPLOYMENT
2%	TAXES - OTHER
2%	TOO MUCH GOVERNMENT SPENDING/ WASTE
1%	HIGH PROPERTY TAXES
1%	BUDGET/ DEFICIT
*	HIGH SALES TAXES
18%	<u>TOTAL GOVERNMENT</u>
8%	PRESIDENT CLINTON
7%	POLITICIANS/GOVERNMENT
3%	KEN STARR/IMPEACHMENT
1%	CONGRESS
2%	<u>TOTAL NATIONAL SECURITY/DEFENSE</u>
1%	NATIONAL DEFENSE
1%	IRAQ/SADDAM HUSSEIN
*	TERRORISM
3%	OTHER (PUSH FOR RESPONSE)
2%	DON'T KNOW (VOLUNTEERED)
*	NO PROBLEMS (VOLUNTEERED)
0%	REFUSED (VOLUNTEERED)

2. Which of the following do you think should be the MOST important priority for your Member of Congress in 1999? (READ CHOICES) (ROTATE)

30% PRESERVE SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE  
17% CUT TAXES ON MIDDLE-CLASS FAMILIES  
12% FIGHT CRIME AND ILLEGAL DRUG USE  
12% PROMOTE TRADITIONAL FAMILY AND MORAL VALUES  
11% BALANCE THE BUDGET/CUT GOVERNMENT SPENDING  
8% COMBINATION/ALL OF THE ABOVE (VOLUNTEERED)  
5% PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT  
3% OTHER\_\_\_\_\_ (SPECIFY) (VOLUNTEERED)  
1% NONE OF THE ABOVE (VOLUNTEERED)  
1% DON'T KNOW (VOLUNTEERED)  
0% REFUSED (VOLUNTEERED)

*Role of Government*

3. Thinking for a moment about the government, which of the following statements comes closest to your view of what the role of government should be for the next ten years? (ROTATE AND ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE)

52% THE GOVERNMENT DOES NEED SOME MAJOR REFORMS,  
BUT NOT A COMPLETE OVERHAUL  
31% GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO BE COMPLETELY  
OVERHAULED AND REDUCED IN SIZE  
9% THE GOVERNMENT DOES THINGS ABOUT RIGHT AND  
DOES NOT NEED TO BE CHANGED  
5% GOVERNMENT DOES TOO LITTLE AND NEEDS TO BE  
EXPANDED  
2% DON'T KNOW (VOLUNTEERED)  
\* REFUSED (VOLUNTEERED)