

Messages matter when it comes to renewable energy policy

How we talk about renewable energy policy can push US public opinion above or below majority support.

Based on Leah C. Stokes and Chris Warshaw. 2017. "Renewable energy policy design and framing influence public support in the United States." *Nature Energy* 2: 17017.

The Policy Problem

In the early 2000s, renewable portfolio standards (RPS) policies were adopted across red and blue states. These laws require a portion of the electricity mix to come from renewable sources by a given date. However, since 2011, there have been attempts to weaken, freeze or repeal these laws. Do repeal efforts reflect state-level public opinion? And under what conditions is there majority support for ambitious policies?

Key Findings

- Majorities in most states support renewable portfolio standard (RPS) policies
- Messages about air pollution benefits and electricity bill costs, jobs and pollution reductions all significantly shape public support for RPS policies
- How RPS legislation is designed and framed can push public opinion above or below majority support

What We Found

We find majority support for renewable energy standards in almost every state. When policy descriptions include air quality benefits and job creation, public support increases even further. Republicans, who have lower overall support for these policies,

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increase their support if Republican politicians take leadership roles in supporting proposed bills, and if messaging emphasizes air quality benefits. However, public opinion is sensitive to cost increases as low as US\$2 a month, emphasizing the importance of renewable energy policies using alternative revenue sources, not residential rates increases.

What We Did

Our estimates of state-level opinion about renewable energy policies are based on a question on a nationally representative sample of 56,200 Americans from the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Then, in August 2016 we surveyed 2,500 Americans and conducted a survey experiment to gauge how public attitudes vary according to the design and messaging of RPS bills.

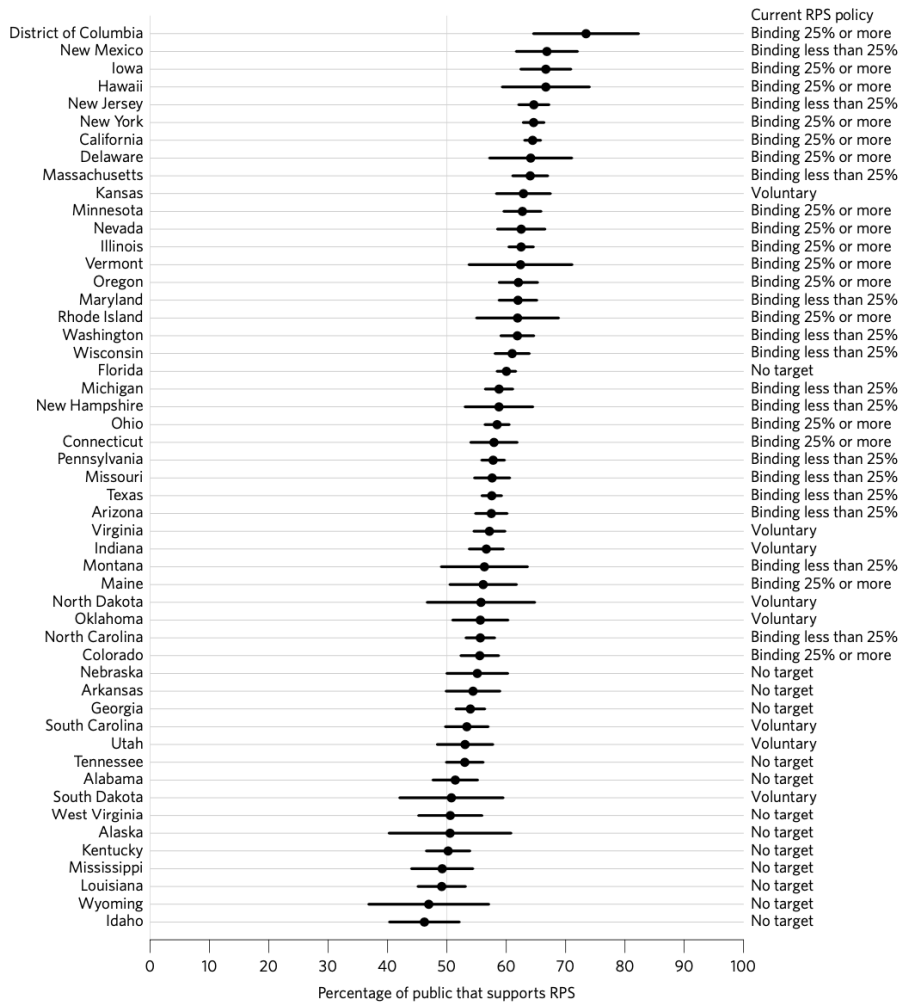


Figure: Support for renewable energy portfolio policies in each US state. The right axis indicates the current policy in each state.