

THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFICIT

Survey on American Attitudes on the Environment

May 2004

Yale University School of Forestry & Environmental Studies



GLOBAL STRATEGY GROUP
WWW.GLOBALSTRATEGYGROUP.COM

NEW YORK
895 BROADWAY, 5TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10003
212.260.8813 Fax 212.260.9058

WASHINGTON DC
4445 WILLARD AVENUE, SUITE 1040
CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815
301.951.5200 FAX 301.951.7040

CONNECTICUT
P.O. Box 260960
HARTFORD, CT 06126
860.348.0585 Fax 860.348.0402

THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFICIT

Survey on American Attitudes on the Environment

The Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies survey of 1000 adults nationwide shows Americans are seriously concerned about the country's environmental health, and want more attention paid to environmental problems. A wide majority of voters say a candidate's stance on the environment will be a factor in how they decide to vote in November. Voters – especially younger voters – want the candidates for President to talk more about their plans for the environment.

While the country is profoundly divided when it comes to national politics, Americans of all political persuasions are as troubled by the problems of air pollution and toxic contamination of soil and water as they are by the much higher-profile issues of jobs and the cost of gas. The environment rates as one of the top three challenges facing the United States in the decades ahead. There is also a new environmental concern in post-September 11th America – specifically bio-terrorism and the security of the country's food and water supply.

KEY FINDINGS

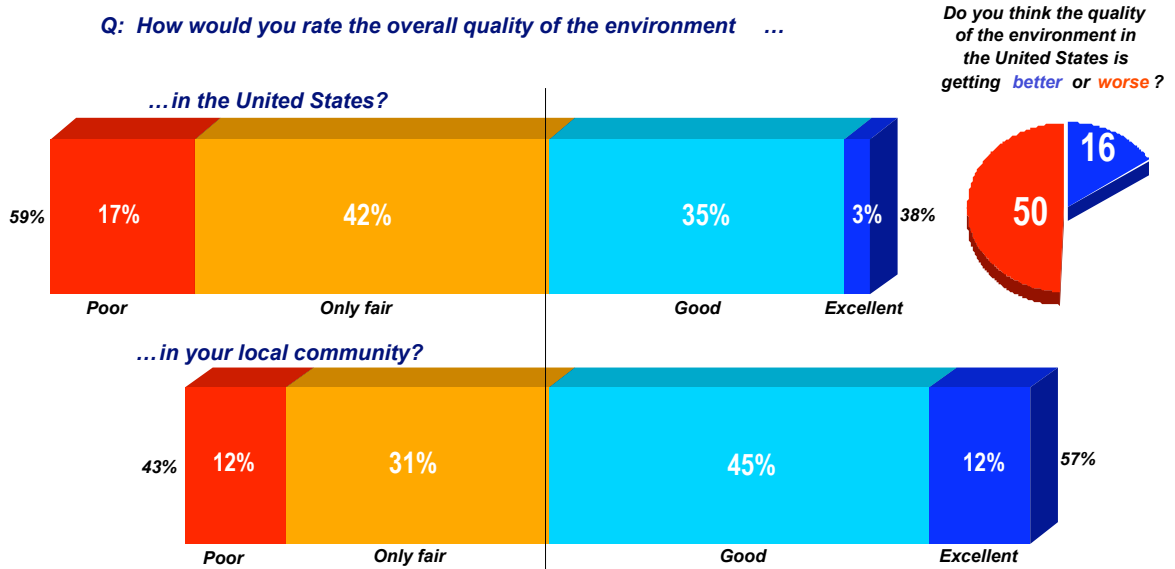
The environment ranks among Americans' top concerns for the future

- Environment is mentioned as frequently as terrorism as “the most important problem in the United States in the next twenty years.”
 - One in ten (9%) Americans say environment will be the most important issue, as many that believe terrorism (10%) will be the country’s most important problem.
 - The top-ranking concern is jobs and the economy, cited by 17% of Americans.

A majority of Americans rate the country’s environment as fair or poor

- Three out of five (59%) Americans rate the quality of the country’s environment overall as “only fair” or “poor.” Just 3% say America’s environment is “excellent.”
 - Women (63%) are more likely than are men (55%) to rate the quality of the country’s environment as fair or poor.

Most Americans rate the country’s environment as only fair or poor. Just 3 per cent rate it as “excellent.”



- Republicans are far more likely than are Democrats and Independents to believe that the quality of the environment in the United States is excellent or good.
 - Fully 55% of Republicans give a positive rating to the country’s environment, while just 42% say it is only fair or poor.
 - Democrats and Independents are twice as likely to say the country’s environment is fair or poor (66%) than to say it is excellent or good (32%).

- Americans are not at all optimistic about the immediate future of the environment. Just 16% say that the quality of the environment in the United States is getting better, while 50% say it is getting worse.
 - More than half (54%) of younger Americans – those under the age of 45 – say the country’s environment is getting worse, compared to just 12% who say it is getting better.
 - Even among those 45 years of age or older, 45% believe that the country’s environment is getting worse, while just one in five (20%) think the quality of the environment is getting better.

- Just under half (44%) of Americans label themselves as “environmentalist.”
 - Half of Democrats (51%) and Independents (50%) say they are environmentalists.
 - More than one in three (35%) Republicans describe themselves as environmentalists.
 - Even 44% of sport utility vehicle (S.U.V.) owners identify themselves as environmentalists.

- The differences between self-described “environmentalists” and Americans who do *not* consider themselves to be environmentalists are relatively minor.
 - Environmentalists are only slightly more likely than the population generally to rate the country’s environment as fair or poor – 63% compared to 59%.
 - Environmentalists and non-environmentalists are nearly identical in their perceptions of whether the country’s environment is getting better or worse. Among environmentalists, 52% say the country’s environment is getting worse, 15% say it is getting better, and 30% say it is staying about the same.
 - Among Americans who do not consider themselves to be environmentalists, 48% say the environment is getting worse, 16% say it is getting better, and 34% say it is staying about the same.

**Democrats and Independents alike want action on the environment –
but so do significant numbers of Republicans**

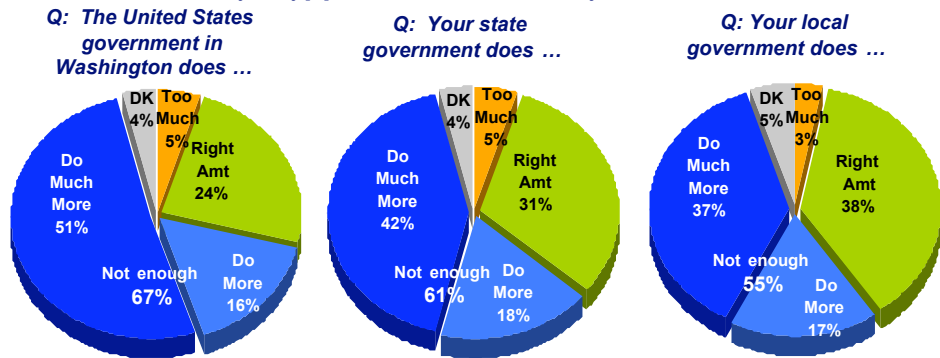
- When it comes to the environment, Democrats and Independents share views on the environment are in many ways statistically identical, are more concerned about the future of the country’s environment than are Republican voters.
 - Among Democrats and Independents, 57% say the environment in the United States is getting worse, compared to 33% of Republicans who say this.
 - Just 8% of Democrats say the country’s environment is getting better, compared to 13% of Independents and 29% of Republicans who believe the environment is headed in the right direction.

There is a wide gap between the action Americans want done for the environment and what America’s politicians are delivering

- Fully two-thirds (67%) of Americans say the United States government does not do enough about the environment and should do more.
 - Women (70%) are even more likely than men (62%) to say that the federal government needs to do more for the environment.
 - The overwhelming majority of Democrats (80%) and Independents (75%) believe the U.S. government is not doing enough for the environment and should do more. Even 41% of Republicans say the federal government should be doing more.
 - Among seniors, 45% say the United States government in Washington should do “much more” for the environment. This is compared to over half (53%) of younger Americans, and 51% of Americans overall.

Fully two-thirds of Americans want the United States government to do more for the Environment

Q: Do you think [the United States government in Washington / your state government / your local government] does too much, about the right amount, or not enough for the environment?
 IF NOT ENOUGH, ASK: Would you say [] should do much more or just somewhat more for the environment?



Not enough – should do more:

	US Government	State Government	Local Government	
Total	67	61	55	Total
Men	62	55	52	Men
Women	71	66	57	Women
Dem	80	68	64	Dem
Ind	75	68	60	Ind
Rep	41	42	37	Rep

When Americans view environmental issues through a political lens, the issue becomes even more polarized by party, with Independents lining up with Democrats

- Fully 62% of Americans believe that President George W. Bush does not do enough for the environment, and half say that President Bush should do “much more.”
 - Wide majorities of Democrats (83%) and Independents (71%) believe that President Bush should do more for the environment.
 - Even 30% of Republicans believe that the President is not doing enough for the environment.

The environment promises to be an issue in November, but voters want to hear more from the candidates on the subject

- Americans broadly think that the candidates for President are not talking enough about the environment. Fully 56% say that the candidates should talk more about their plans for the environment.
 - More than one third (37%) of Americans, including 45% of Democrats, 42% of Independents, and 23% of Republicans want the candidates for President to talk *much more* about their plans for the environment.
- Fully 85% of registered voters (including 82% of Republican voters, 85% of Independents and 90% of Democratic voters) say that a candidate’s stance on the environment will be at least a minor factor when they decide for whom they will vote for President.
 - Among voters under the age of 45, 40% say a candidate’s stance on the environment will be a major factor when they are deciding how to vote in November. Slightly fewer voters 45 and over, 30%, say the environment will be a major factor in their decision.

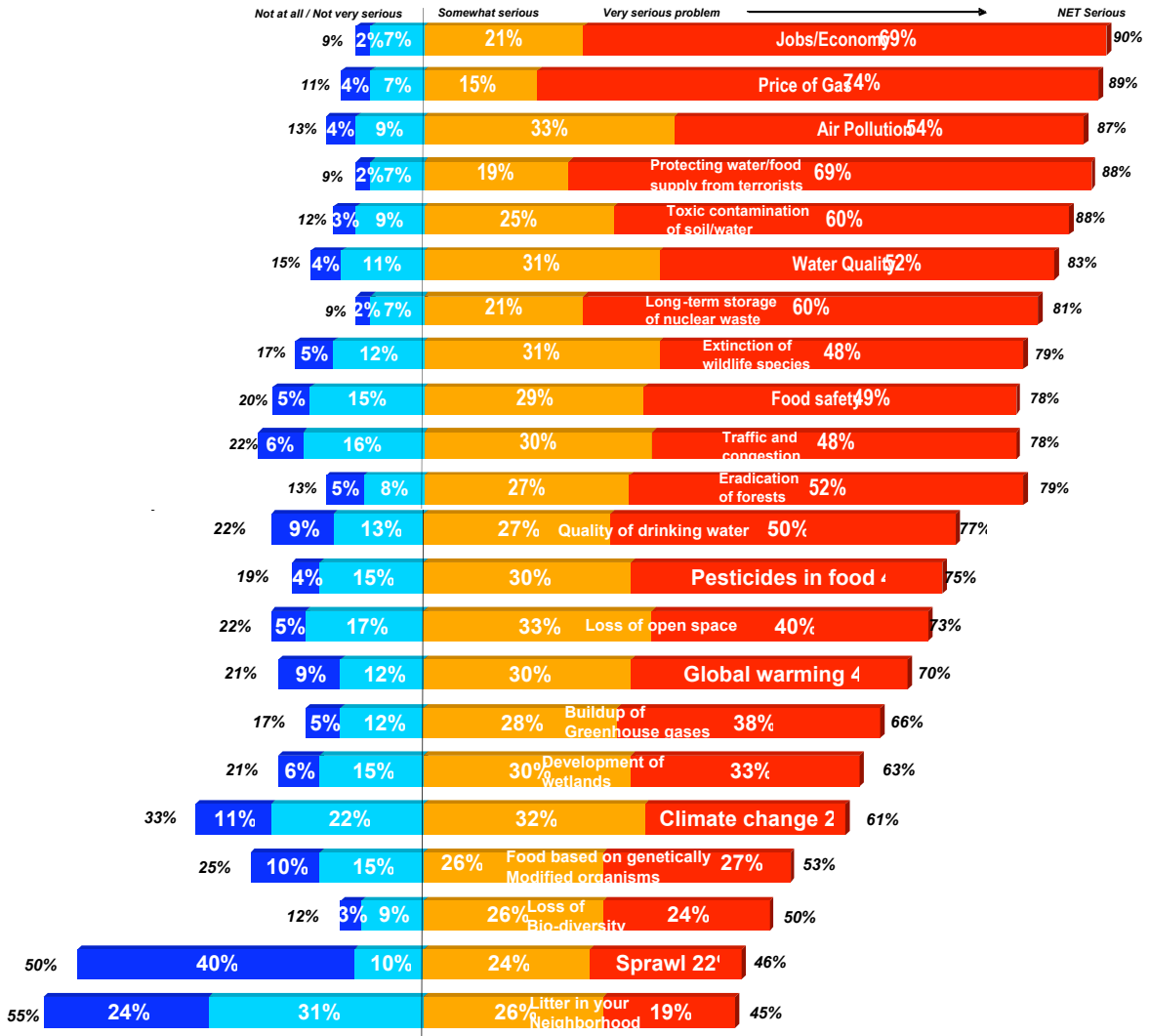
- More than one in three (35%) Americans say they do not trust President George W. Bush “at all” as a source of information about the environment. About one in four (24%) say they do not trust Senator John Kerry at all.
 - While 26% of Americans say they trust President Bush “a lot” as a source of information about environmental issues, just 12% say they trust Senator Kerry a lot.

- The price of gasoline and the issues of jobs and the economy get a lot of attention from the news media, but Americans view protecting the country’s water and food supply from terrorists as just as serious a problem.
 - Fully 87% of Americans rate protecting the country’s water and food supply from terrorist attack as a very serious problem.
 - Protecting the country’s water and food supply from a bio-terror attack is rated a serious problem by 91% of seniors, 92% of Republicans, 86% of Democrats and 84% of Independents.

- Americans care most about issues that they understand in concrete and specific terms. For instance, they take traffic and congestion very seriously, but when the same problem is described as “sprawl,” fewer Americans rate it as a serious problem.
 - Traffic and congestion is rated by 48% of Americans as a very serious problem, and by 78% as at least a somewhat serious problem.
 - “Sprawl” is rated by just 22% as a very serious problem, and by 47% as at least a somewhat serious problem.
 - “Extinction of wildlife species” is a far more serious concern than “loss of bio-diversity.” While three out of four (78%) Americans say extinction of wildlife species is a serious problem, just 50% say loss of bio-diversity is.

Top Concerns

Now I am going to read you a few issues, and I would like you to tell me how serious a problem you think it is.

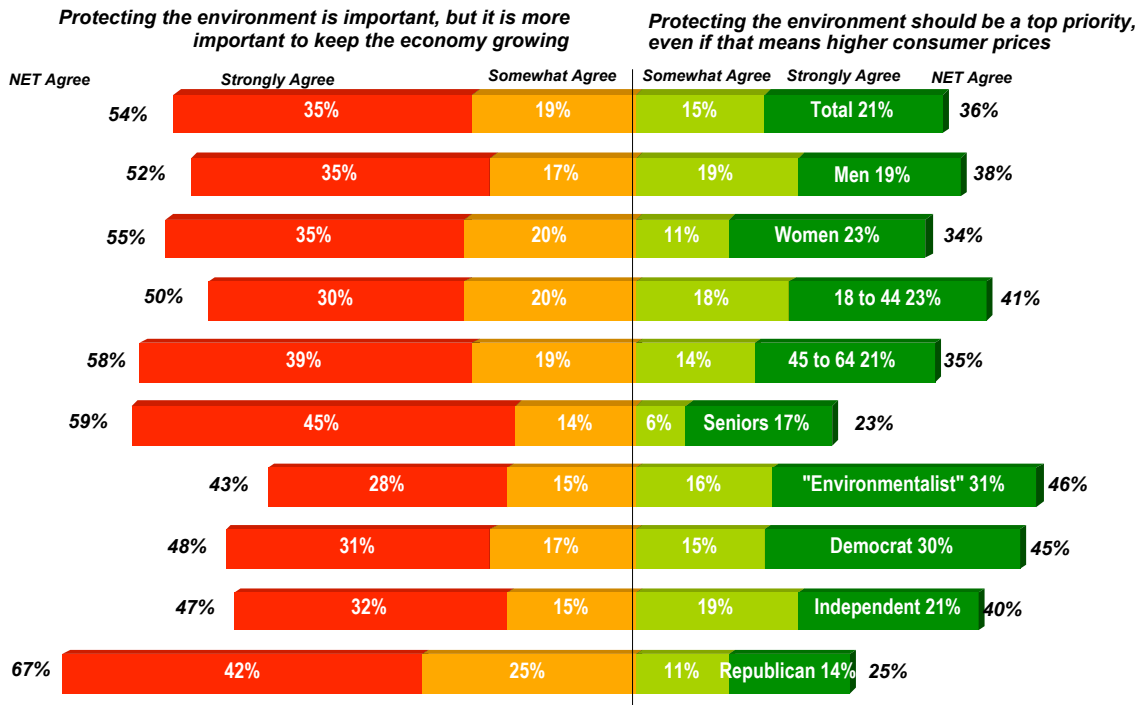


People are of two minds when it comes to trade-offs between environment and the economy

- While there is broad-based support for action on the environment, voters have to weigh the economic costs and their concerns about taxes. Most clearly, economic trade-offs dampen enthusiasm for protecting the environment.
 - When forced to choose between protecting the environment and maintaining a strong economy, a majority (54%) of Americans choose to keep the economy growing. 36% say that protecting the environment should be a top priority, even if that means higher consumer prices.
- Even in a time of economic uncertainty, a significant number of Republicans are willing Americans to choose the environment over the economy.
 - While two out of three (67%) Republicans say it is more important to keep the economy growing than to protect the environment, fully 25% of GOP voters say that the environment should be the top priority.
 - Democrats and Independents have similar views on the importance of the environment, and are more closely split on this question. Nearly half (45%) of Democrats and 40% of Independents say protecting the environment is the top priority, while 48% of Democrats and 47% of Independents say it is more important to keep the economy growing.
 - Even self-described environmentalists are torn between protecting the environment and keeping the economy growing. 46% of environmentalists choose the environment, while 43% say it is more important to keep the economy growing.

Environment vs. the Economy

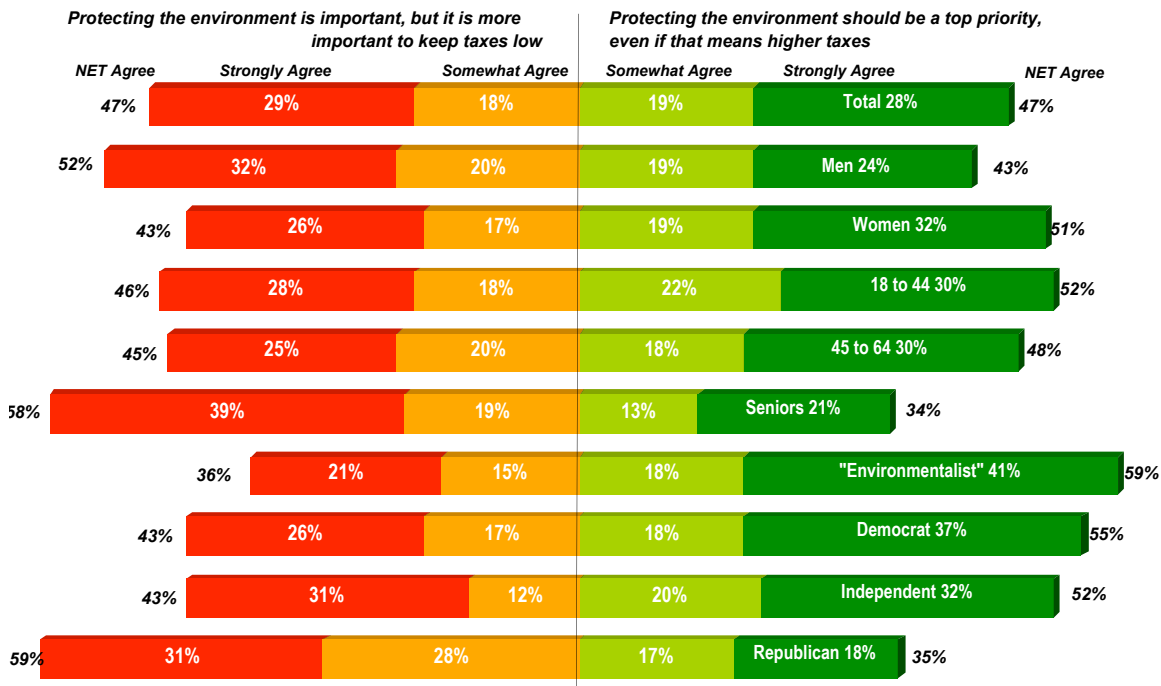
Q: I am going to read you two pairs of statements.
I want you to tell me which of the two statements comes closest to your opinion



- Americans are evenly divided, 47% to 47% on the question of whether protecting the environment or keeping taxes low should be a higher priority.
 - Majorities of Democrats (51%) and Independent votes (51%) believe protecting the environment is more important than keeping taxes low. 43% of Democrats and Independents believe it is more important to keep taxes down.
 - Among Republicans, 59% say keeping taxes low should be a higher priority, while 35% say protecting the environment should be a top priority, even if that means higher taxes.

Environment vs. Taxes

Q: I am going to read you two pairs of statements. I want you to tell me which of the two statements comes closest to your opinion



- Younger voters are significantly more sympathetic to higher taxes to protect the environment than are seniors. Among Americans 65 years of age and older, just 34% say protecting the environment should be a top priority, even if it means higher taxes, while 58% of seniors believe it is more important to keep taxes low.
- More Americans believe that strong environmental regulations and standards are good for the economy than to believe that they “get in the way” of growing the economy and “cost this country jobs.”
 - Fully 60% of Americans, including 68% of Democrats, 64% of Independents and a plurality (46%) of Republicans, agree that environmental regulations and standards are good for the economy “because they can prevent environmental disasters that can cost taxpayers and businesses billions of dollars.”
 - Just 32% of Americans agree more with the statement that “strong environmental regulations get in the way of growing the economy and cost this country jobs.”

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted on behalf of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies by Global Strategy Group from April 26 to May 3, 2004.

- The survey was conducted using professional phone interviewers.
- The nationwide sample was drawn from a random digit dial (RDD) process.
- Respondents were screened on the basis of age, i.e., to be over the age of 18.
- The survey has an overall margin of error of $\pm 3.1\%$ at the 95% confidence level. That is, if the same survey were conducted among similar respondents, the results would fall within the range of $\pm 3.1\%$ in 19 out of 20 cases.
- Interview quotas were set by region based on 2000 Census data, and are defined as follows:

WEST 15% California, Washington (State), Oregon

MOUNTAIN 10% Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming

MIDWEST 20% Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

SOUTH 33% Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia

NORTHEAST 22% Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia



GLOBAL STRATEGY GROUP
WWW.GLOBALSTRATEGYGROUP.COM

NEW YORK
895 BROADWAY, 5TH FLOOR
NEW YORK, NY 10003
212.260.8813 Fax 212.260.9058

WASHINGTON DC
4445 WILLARD AVENUE, SUITE 1040
CHEVY CHASE, MARYLAND 20815
301.951.5200 FAX 301.951.7040

CONNECTICUT
P.O. Box 260960
HARTFORD, CT 06126
860.348.0585 Fax 860.348.0402