



DATA FOR **PROGRESS**



good energy  
collective

# Voters Support Community Ownership and Federal Investments in Advanced Nuclear Energy

July 2021

## Executive Summary

---

- ▶ **A majority of likely voters (57 percent)** agree communities, rather than state or private power companies, should have greater ownership over which energy sources power their area
- ▶ **Over two-thirds of voters (69 percent)** support the federal government prioritizing investments in energy technologies to help communities wield greater control over their energy mix
- ▶ **Nearly two-thirds of voters (63 percent)** agree that the federal government, rather than private investors, should lead federal energy innovation initiatives
- ▶ **A bipartisan majority of voters (65 percent)** would support replacing fossil fuel plants with 100 percent carbon pollution-free advanced nuclear energy
- ▶ **After learning more, voters across party lines view advanced nuclear more favorably and support more federal investments in next-generation nuclear**

## Introduction

---

In March 2021, President Biden introduced the American Jobs Plan, a landmark investment in America's infrastructure and electricity grid. This plan includes commitments to community-focused environmental justice and over \$100 billion in new federal energy innovation initiatives — a much-needed investment to catalyze research into clean energy technologies across our government. But these critical innovation investments have emerged as one of the likeliest components of the plan to get cut in pursuit of a “bipartisan” infrastructure bill that the White House is negotiating with congressional lawmakers.

Lawmakers would be unwise to cut these investments, which are both popular and essential for reaching net-zero carbon emissions. Data for Progress [polling on a progressive federal innovation agenda](#) has found that voters across party lines overwhelmingly back government investments in carbon pollution-free energy technologies, especially those that benefit disadvantaged and frontline communities. These [investments](#) are critical not only for research and development into new energy technologies, but also for commercializing and deploying them to start definitively addressing climate change.

To complement our polling on a broad progressive federal innovation agenda, Data for Progress partnered with researchers from the Good Energy Collective to understand public opinion toward one of the lesser-known but important energy technologies that will help us get to net-zero carbon emissions: advanced nuclear energy. Advanced reactors will look very different from the big nuclear power plants operating in the U.S. today. New designs vary but could be smaller, use novel fuels and coolants, produce less waste, include passive safety features, and be made in factories. The business and community engagement models could be quite novel, too. For example, communities could own and operate their own nuclear energy, similar to how some communities now pay for and manage their own renewable energy projects. Many people in the U.S. climate movement have justifiable reservations

about nuclear energy, stemming from the historical impacts of nuclear technologies on the health and safety of frontline communities. Suzy Hobbs Baker and Jessica Lovering, founders of the Good Energy Collective, are designing a clean energy future where advanced nuclear plays a critical role in reducing America's carbon emissions while advancing environmental justice and increasing community ownership of energy.

As part of a March 2021 national survey, Data for Progress sought to assess the attitudes of likely voters toward federal investments in advanced nuclear energy and community ownership of energy sources to continue helping policymakers understand voters' preferences and values for a future, low-carbon energy system. Since many voters do not know much about advanced nuclear energy, Data for Progress measured favorability and support for federal investments in advanced nuclear energy at the beginning of the survey without messaging, and again at the end after showing voters both positive messaging and commonly held concerns. Overall, we find that voters overwhelmingly support federal investments in low-carbon energy innovation — including advanced nuclear energy — and widely support measures to increase community ownership of energy resources.

## Voters Support Increasing Community Ownership of Energy Sources

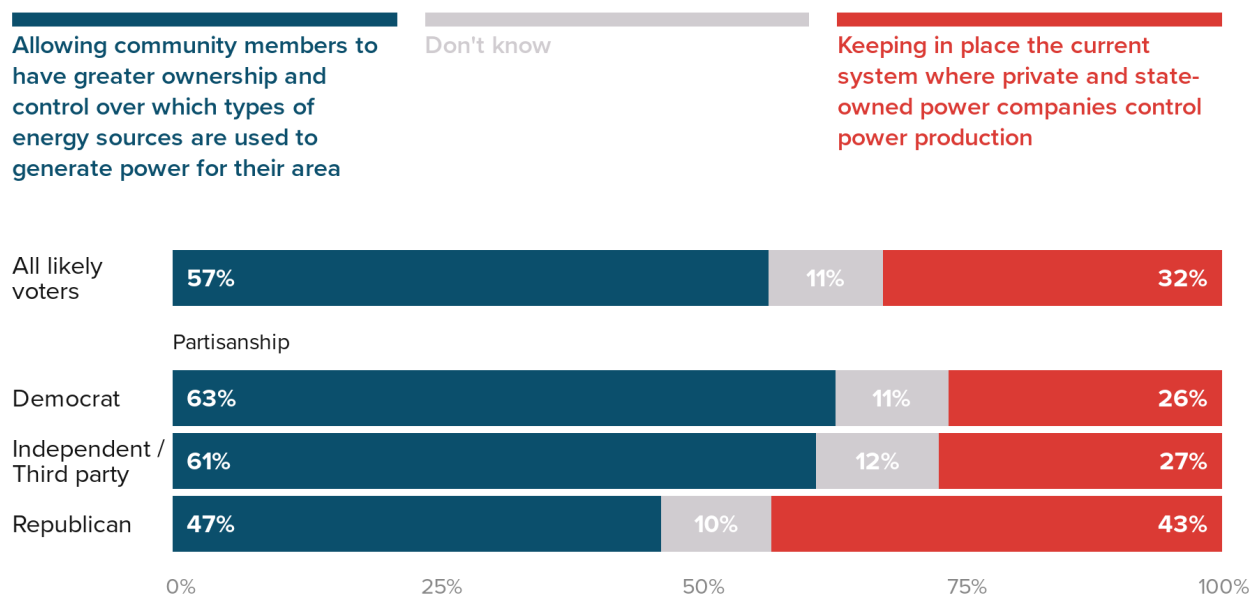
---

Initially, we asked voters how much they have heard about a variety of different renewables, fossil fuels, and other carbon pollution-free energy sources, including advanced nuclear energy. Next, we asked voters if they viewed those energy sources favorably or unfavorably. We then asked voters whether they supported or opposed federal investments in researching and developing advanced nuclear energy, without providing any additional information. After these initial questions, voters answered a series of questions about their preferences regarding ownership of energy sources and federal energy innovation initiatives.

A majority of voters (57 percent) prefer that community members have greater ownership and control over which types of energy sources are used to generate power in their area, while only 32 percent of voters prefer to keep in place the current system in which private and state-owned power companies control production. Support for community ownership of energy sources is bipartisan: A majority of Democrats (63 percent) and Independents (61 percent), as well as a plurality of Republicans (47 percent), prefer that communities, rather than state or private entities, have a stronger influence over local energy mixes.

## A Majority of Voters Support Greater Community Ownership over Their Energy Sources

Which of the following approaches to energy production do you prefer:



March 19–21, 2021 survey of 1,270 likely voters

Y5C8nF

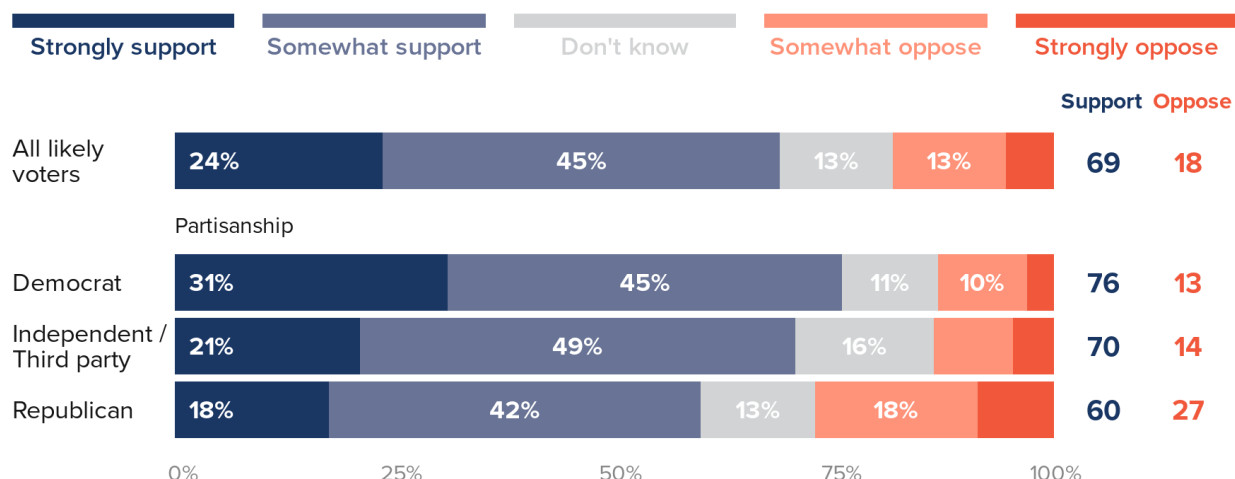
good energy  
collective

DATA FOR PROGRESS

Similarly, more than two-thirds of voters (69 percent) support the federal government prioritizing investments in developing technologies that will allow communities to have greater ownership over the energy sources that power their areas. Again, support is broadly bipartisan. A majority of Democrats (76 percent), Independents (70 percent), and Republicans (60 percent) all agree that the potential for community ownership should be a priority in federal funding decisions.

## Voters Support the Government Prioritizing Investments in Energy Technologies That Lead to Greater Community Ownership

Do you support or oppose the federal government prioritizing investments in developing technologies that will allow communities to have greater ownership over the energy sources that power their areas?



March 19–21, 2021 survey of 1,270 likely voters

Y5C8nF



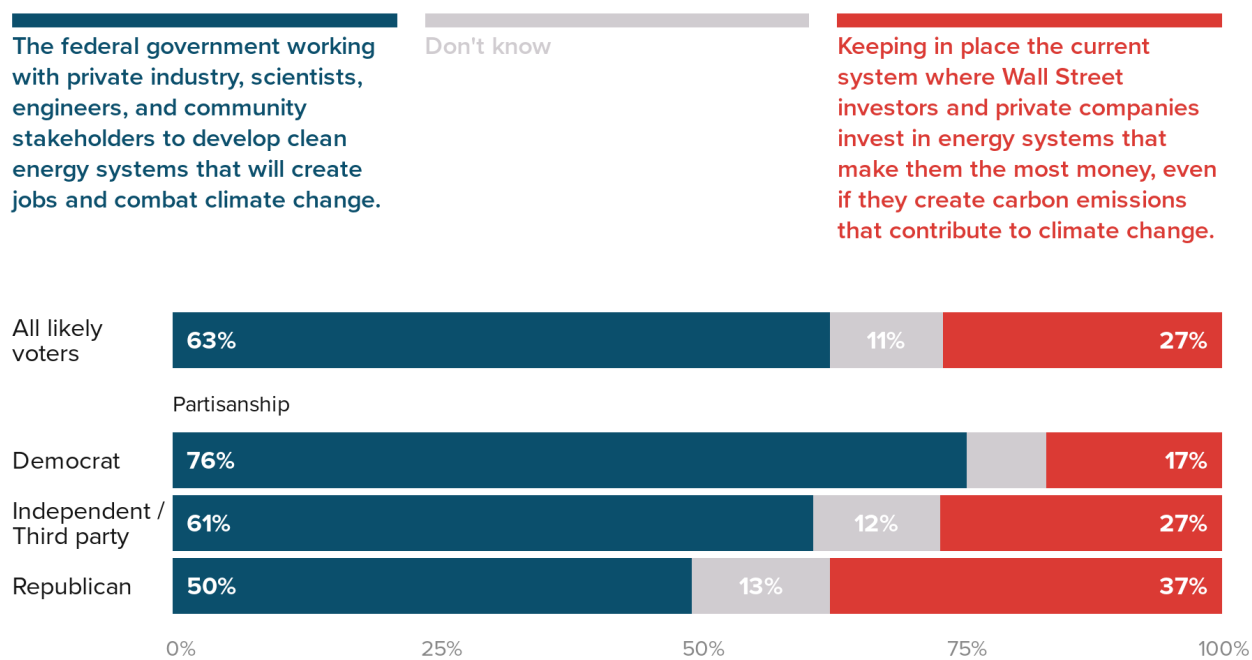
DATA FOR PROGRESS



Voters across party lines are also in agreement that the federal government — not Wall Street — should lead energy innovation initiatives. Nearly two-thirds of all voters (63 percent), including over three-quarters of Democrats (76 percent), a majority of Independents (61 percent), and a plurality of Republicans (50 percent), agree that the federal government should work in tandem with private industry, scientists, engineers, and community stakeholders to develop clean energy systems rather than leave it to the private sector to invest in energy projects that benefit their bottom line.

## Voters Want the Government — Not Wall Street — Leading Energy Innovation Initiatives

Which of the following approaches to energy production do you prefer:



March 19–21, 2021 survey of 1,270 likely voters

Y5C8nF

good energy  
collective

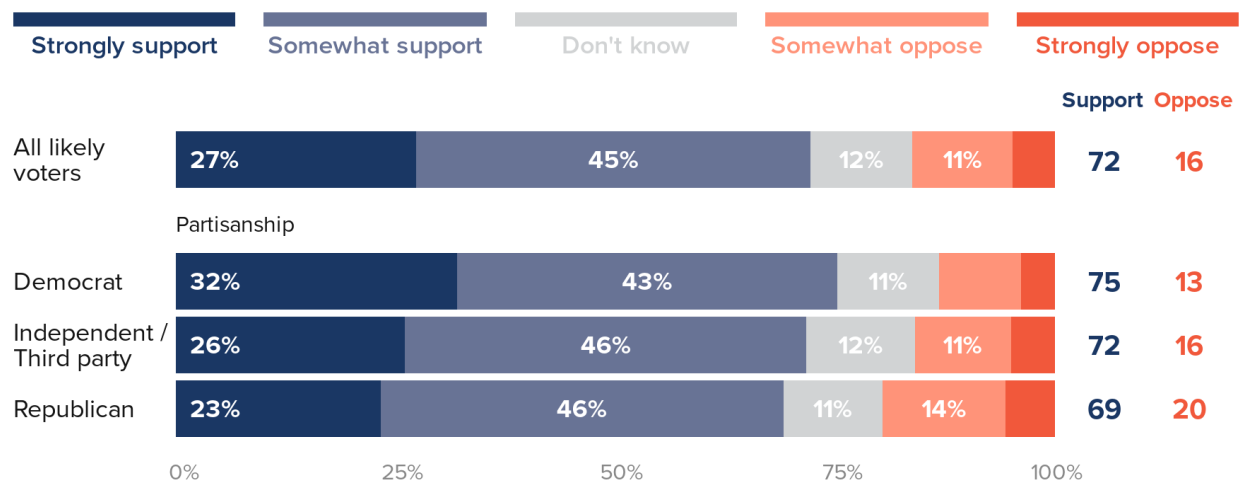
DATA FOR PROGRESS

# Voters Support Investments in Next-Generation Nuclear Energy, Especially to Replace Fossil Fuel Plants

When voters learn about the potential benefits advanced nuclear could provide over existing reactors or fossil fuels, support for federal investment jumps. With this additional positive information, nearly three-quarters of all voters (72 percent) support federal investments in advanced nuclear power — an increase of 16-points from the beginning of the poll. Again, support is strongly bipartisan, and opposition is minimal. Democrats support investments in advanced nuclear energy by a 62-percentage-point margin, Independents by a 56-point margin, and Republicans by a 49-point margin.

## A Majority of Voters Support Federal Investments in Next-Generation Nuclear Power

Would you support or oppose federal investments in new advanced nuclear technologies that are safer, cheaper, and more efficient than previous generations of nuclear power and generate 100% carbon pollution-free energy?



March 19–21, 2021 survey of 1,270 likely voters

Y5C8nF



DATA FOR PROGRESS

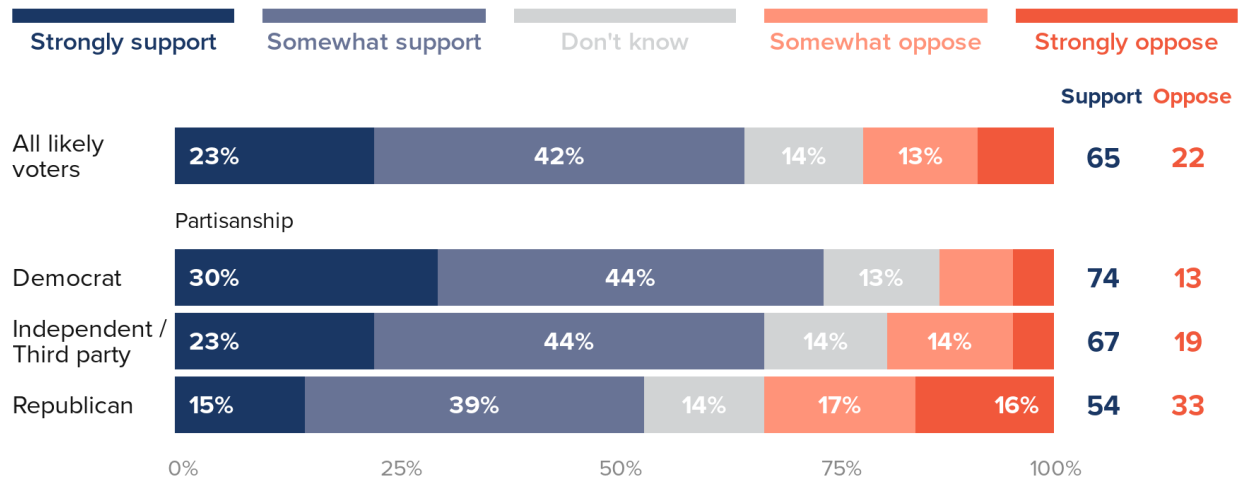
Voters also clearly support replacing fossil fuel-fired power plants with cleaner advanced nuclear reactors. Nearly two-thirds of all voters (65 percent) — including a majority of Democrats (74 percent), Independents (67 percent), and Republicans (54 percent) — would support replacing fossil fuel plants with 100 percent carbon pollution-free advanced nuclear energy.



This professional rendering from sustainable design firm Gensler envisions a transit hub powered by an advanced, small modular reactor. Source: Gensler (2017), accessed from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/thirdwaythinktank/37875482732/in/album-72157665372889289/>.

## Voters Support Replacing Fossil Fuel Plants with Advanced Nuclear Plants

Would you support or oppose replacing power plants that use fossil fuels like coal and natural gas with advanced nuclear power plants that generate 100% carbon pollution-free energy?



March 19–21, 2021 survey of 1,270 likely voters

Y5C8nF

good energy  
collective

DATA FOR PROGRESS

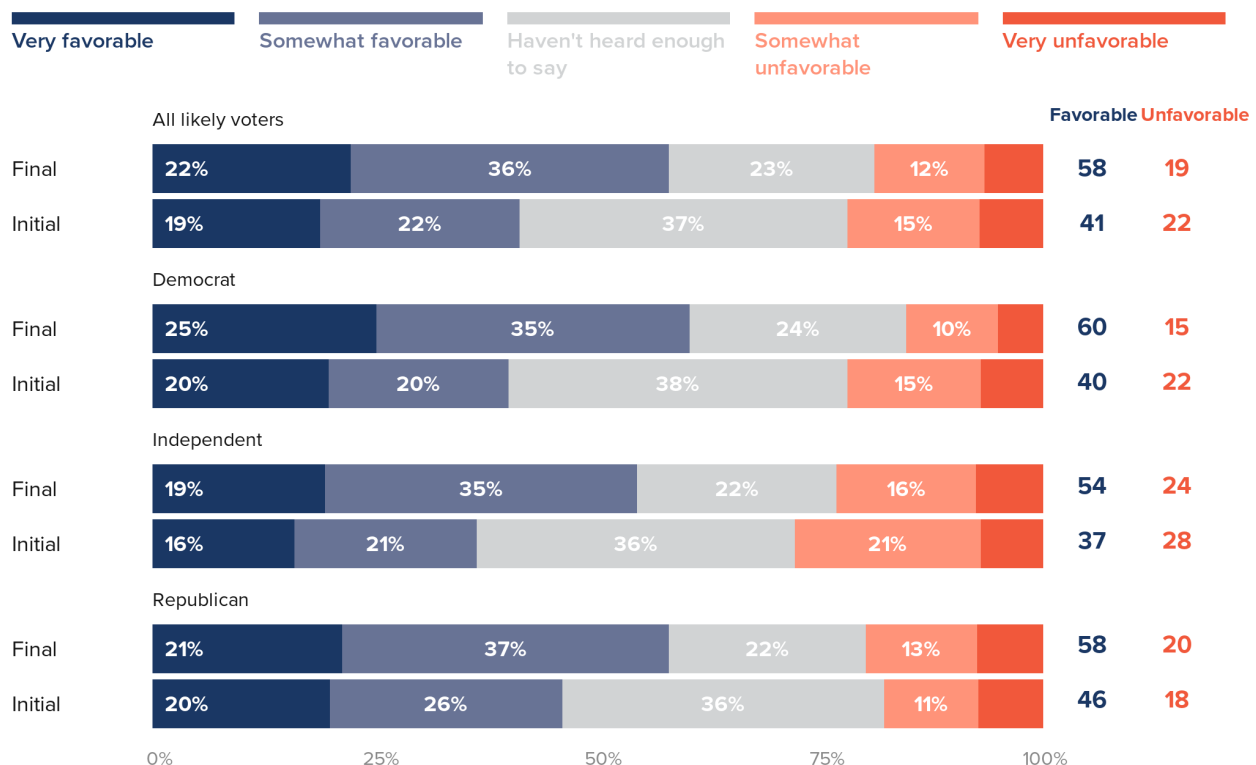


# After Learning More, Voters View Advanced Nuclear More Favorably and Support Federal Investments in Nuclear Innovation

At the end of the survey, we again asked voters if they have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of advanced nuclear energy and whether they support or oppose federal investments in researching and developing advanced nuclear energy. After voters learned more information and were exposed both to positive messaging and common concerns about nuclear energy, the favorability of advanced nuclear energy improved significantly among voters across party lines. Overall, favorability improved 17-points, from 41 percent to 58 percent. This increase was consistent across partisan groups: Favorability improved 20-points among Democrats, 17-points among Independents, and 12-points among Republicans.

## After Learning More, Voters Across Party Lines View Advanced Nuclear More Favorably

Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of advanced nuclear energy?



March 19–21, 2021 survey of 1,270 likely voters

ca85Kf

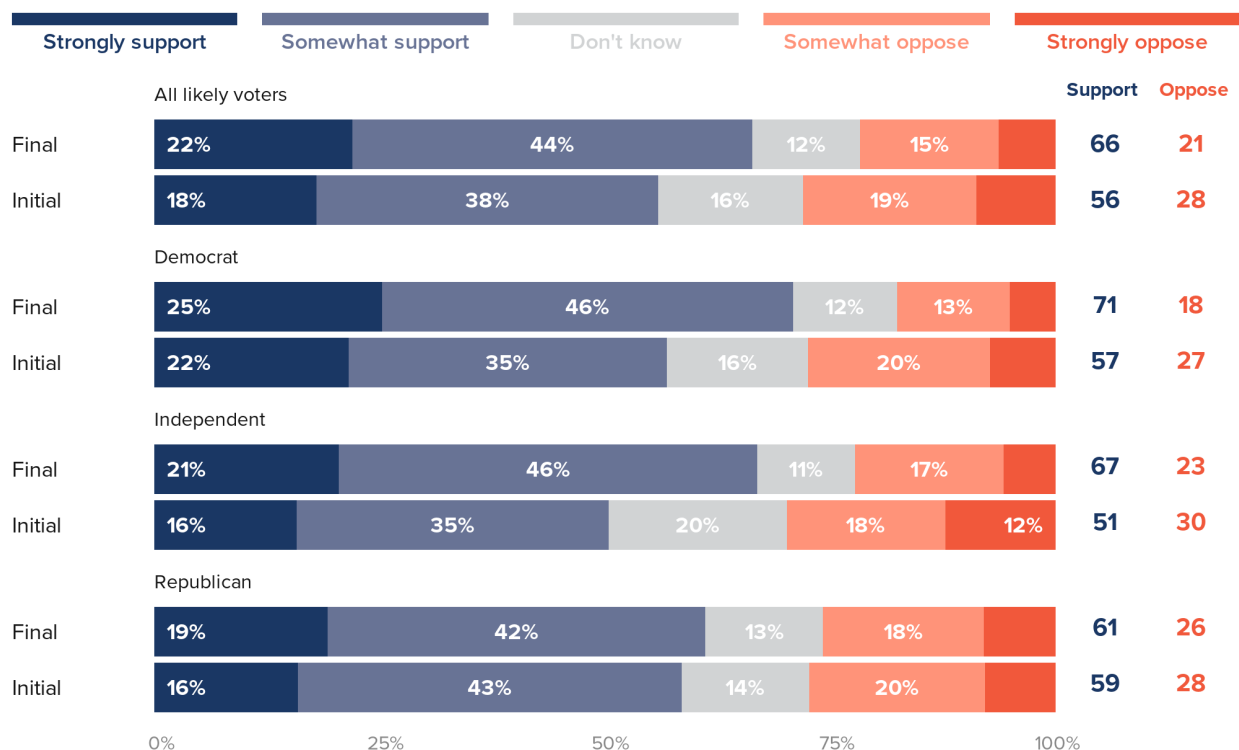
good energy collective

DATA FOR PROGRESS

Similarly, support for federal investments to research and develop advanced nuclear energy increased significantly among voters across party lines after additional information. Among all likely voters, support increased 15-points to 66 percent. Again, this increase was consistent across party lines. Support increased 14-points among Democrats, 16-points among Independents, and 12-points among Republicans.

## After Learning More, Voters Are More Supportive of Federal Investments in Advanced Nuclear

Do you support or oppose federal investments for researching and developing advanced nuclear energy?



March 19–21, 2021 survey of 1,270 likely voters

ckRqgr

good energy  
collective

DATA FOR PROGRESS

## Conclusion

---

While voters are still unfamiliar with advanced nuclear energy, they grow more favorable to it once they hear more about how it differs from existing nuclear energy. We find overwhelming bipartisan support for increasing community ownership of energy sources like nuclear and for ensuring the federal government, rather than Wall Street, leads energy innovation initiatives.

Given that most voters are either unfamiliar with advanced nuclear or possibly conflating it with existing nuclear energy, there is a significant opportunity to inform voters about how advanced nuclear energy can play a role in the clean energy transition. Progressive advanced nuclear energy advocates have a significant opportunity to shape the terms of debate and should tout the ways that next-generation nuclear will create cleaner, safer, and cheaper energy than previous generations. Moreover, the case for advanced nuclear energy should emphasize how next-generation nuclear energy could increase community ownership of energy sources and, with the right policies, begin to address systemic environmental injustices wrought by privately-owned energy sources. Finally, with broad bipartisan backing for federal innovation initiatives, lawmakers in Congress should feel emboldened to draw a red line that ensures that innovation is not stripped from the upcoming infrastructure bill.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

From March 19 to 21, 2021, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 1,270 likely voters nationally using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of likely voters by age, gender, education, race, and voting history. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error is  $\pm 3$  percentage points.