

Informing the Debate

Michigan Attitudes Toward Renewable Energy



Authors
Timothy M. Komarek,
Stephen B. Harsh,
and Lynn L. Hamilton

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Institute for Public Policy
and Social Research

Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University

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Timothy M. Komarek
Michigan State University

Stephen B. Harsh
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MICHIGAN STATE
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Overview

Spiraling energy prices, the threat of climate change and continued dependence on foreign fuel sources have put comprehensive energy policy reform in the political spotlight. Renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, geothermal and biofuel technologies play a central role in the debate. Renewable energy sources can help ease rising energy prices associated with the world oil, coal and natural gas markets. Increasing the supply of domestic renewable energy ensures a more diversified energy supply and less reliance on foreign fuels. Renewable energy development is also a critical component of most climate change policy recommendations, because of its smaller carbon footprint as compared to its fossil fuel counterparts.

The energy policy debate is taking place at both the state and federal levels. Michigan has lagged behind many states in the U.S. in developing alternative energy policies. Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia have passed laws creating renewable portfolio standards, which require a percentage of electricity to come from renewable sources. Michigan's political climate is evolving toward renewable energy. State lawmakers, led by Governor Jennifer Granholm, have recently intensified their commitment to renewable energy. In 2007 Governor Granholm was one of nine governors to sign the Midwestern Regional Greenhouse Gas Reduction Accord, which will create targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and encourage the use of renewable energy. This follows the lead of California, which passed legislation to come into near-compliance with the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement requiring significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions. Governor Granholm has also included the alternative energy industry as a key aspect of the state's comprehensive economic plan. Michigan lawmakers have worked to provide incentives to encourage the use of renewable technologies and are nearing completion of legislation on a renewable portfolio standard as well as new net metering rules. This briefing paper provides data examining public opinion concerning renewable energy policy for the state of Michigan.

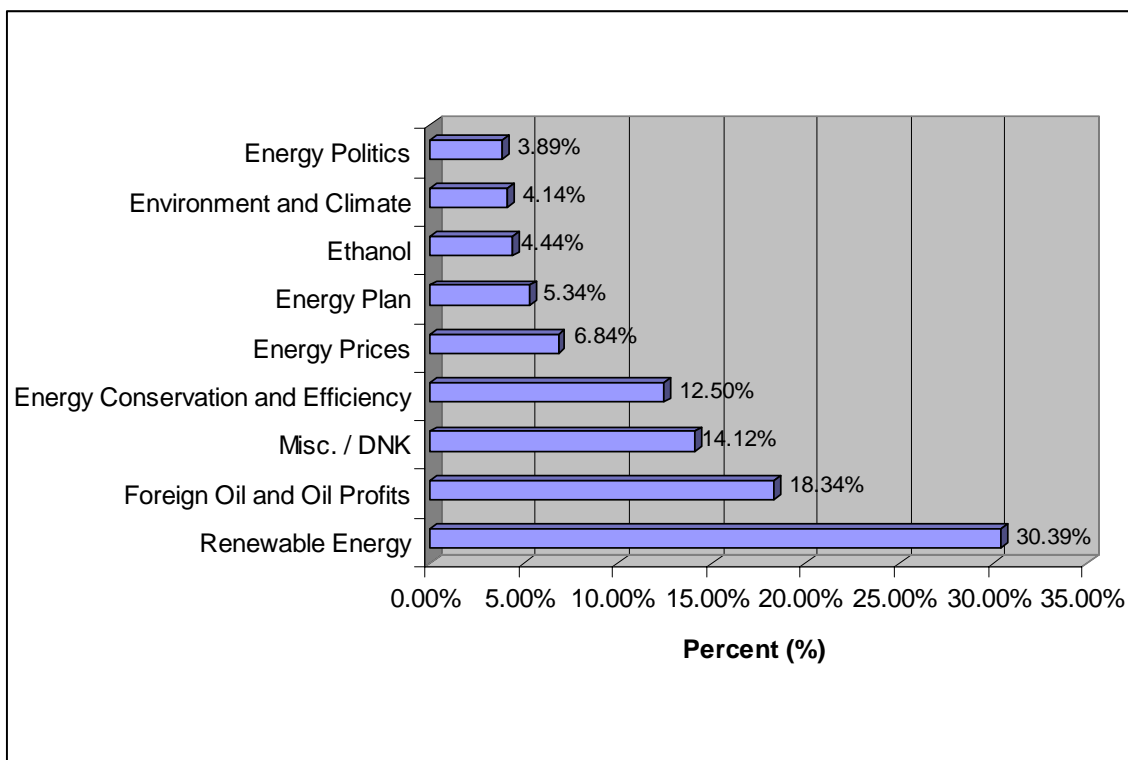
Survey

This report is based on data from the 47th State of the State Survey, conducted between January and March 2008 through the Institute of Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University. The survey involved 1012 telephone interviews with Michigan adults and focused on renewable energy and energy efficiency. The survey is based on a stratified random sample of the state population by region, and adjusted by weights to be representative of the entire Michigan adult population. The methodology resulted in a margin of sampling error of +/- 3%. Each telephone survey was approximately 20 minutes in length, including several minutes for core demographic questions.

Key Findings

As seen in Figure 1, more than 30% of Michigan residents think that renewable energy is the most important energy policy facing the United States today. Renewable energy policy often falls under a broader umbrella related to climate change and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Almost half of Michigan residents think policies related to climate change such as protecting the environment, energy conservation and efficiency, along with renewable energy, are the direction U.S. policy should be heading in the future.

Figure 1: Most Important Energy Policy



Michigan residents have a variety of reasons for their support of renewable energy but economic issues regarding energy policy are the most important. Renewable energy has been widely publicized throughout the state not only for its environmental appeal, but also for its potential to stimulate the economy. The renewable energy industry has promoted manufacturing and employment opportunities for Michigan in the wind, solar and biofuels sectors. Table 1 provides some insight about the economic importance of energy policy to Michigan citizens. Over 95% of respondents thought that job creation

was a very important factor in future energy policy. This speaks to the reality of Michigan’s slow economy, especially the declining manufacturing base. The impact of rising energy prices on consumers’ pocket books also significantly influences the public’s perception of future energy policy, as 71.6% of respondents indicated that energy costs are a very important aspect of energy policy.

It is also interesting to note in Table 1 that Michigan residents are most concerned with policies that have direct economic implications within their state and on their bank accounts. Results show that residents have the highest proportion of “very important” responses for local impacts such as 95.4% for job creation and 71.6% for energy costs. While environmental reasons rank as “very important” for 62.4% of respondents, they place third behind the more tangible economic issues of jobs and energy prices. The international issue of climate change is “very important” to just under half of the Michigan population.

Table 1

Importance of Future Energy Policy				
	Very Important	Somewhat Im-	Not Very	Not At All
Climate Change	49.7%	30.9%	10.5%	8.8%
Environment	62.4%	30.4%	6.1%	1.1%
Energy Costs	71.6%	25.5%	2.0%	0.9%
Creating Jobs	95.4%	3.5%	0.8%	0.2%

The public opinion is very supportive of state legislation concerning renewable energy.

Table 2 shows that 84.9% of Michigan residents think the state legislature should pass laws to encourage the use of renewable energy.

Table 2

Support for Renewable Energy Laws		
Yes	No	DK/Refused
84.9%	9.9%	5.1%

Demographic characteristics play an important role in further understanding the differing views on renewable energy legislation. Both age and political ideology show significant variation and pronounced trends concerning renewable energy laws. Table 3

shows that younger residents are more willing to support renewable energy than their older counterparts. More than 95% of residents 19-24 years old support legislation compared to just under 80% of residents over age 50. However, there is strong support for renewable energy at all age levels. Table 4 illustrates the trend among people with different political ideologies. Politically conservative residents, especially the 13.8% who characterize themselves as “very conservative,” are less likely to support renewable energy legislation while liberals are almost universally in favor of it. Again, it should be noted that a strong majority across all political ideologies show support for renewable energy laws in Michigan...even the most conservative group are 65.1% in favor of such policies.

On the other hand, some seemingly key demographics showed little variability. Race, sex, geographic location, and most notably income level have only minor differences in regard to their level of support.

Table 3: Support of Renewable Energy Laws by Age of Respondent

Support for Renewable Energy Laws			
Age	Yes	No	DK/Refused
19 - 29 Yrs	95.20%	4.10%	0.80%
30 - 49 Yrs	84.40%	7.80%	7.70%
50 + Yrs	79.70%	16%	4.30%

Table 4: Support of Renewable Energy Laws by Political Ideology

Degree Liberal-Conservative	Laws Renewable Energy			
	YES	NO	DK/ RE-FUSED	
	Very conservative	65.1%	29.7%	5.1%
	Somewhat conservative	84.6%	9.7%	5.6%
	Lean conservative	88.2%	10.1%	1.7%
	Middle	89.0%	2.7%	8.3%
	Lean liberal	91.0%	5.8%	3.2%
	Somewhat liberal	94.7%	3.6%	1.7%
	Very liberal	93.5%	3.4%	3.1%

Michigan residents still support renewable energy laws even with an increased cost to their monthly energy bills. No one is certain of the impact of renewable energy development on Michiganders’ energy bills. Previously, 71.6% of residents stated that energy costs are a “very important” part of future legislation. However, most residents are supportive of additional costs when they are associated with renewable development. Table 5 shows that of the 84.9% of residents who supported state renewable energy laws, a strong majority would be willing to pay anywhere from \$5 to \$25 more per month to support renewable energy development. More than 75% of respondents would support a \$5 per month increase in their energy bill, and more than two-thirds would still support legislation if it increased their monthly energy bill by \$25.

Table 5: Willingness to Pay for Renewable Energy Legislation

Support for Renewable Energy Laws		
Price (\$)	Yes (%)	No (%)
\$5	76.4%	23.6%
\$10	78.1%	21.9%
\$20	70.0%	30.0%
\$25	68.3%	31.7%

Concluding Remarks

Overall, Michigan residents support legislation promoting renewable energy within the state. Primary reasons include potential job creation, the easing of future energy prices and mitigating climate change. Renewable energy legislation is generally accepted among most demographic groups, but differences exist across the age categories and political ideology of the population. Residents still support political action even when faced with potential increases to their energy bills. This signals a high level of public approval for current and future legislation for promoting renewable energy within the state.

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Institute for Public Policy
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College of Social Science
Michigan State University
321 Berkey Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824-1111
Phone:517-355-6672 Fax:517-432-1544
Web: www.ippsr.msu.edu
Email: ippsr-action@ssc.msu.edu

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