

## Half of Americans Believe Economic and Environmental Goals Are Aligned and We Do Not Need To Choose Between Them

*Two-thirds Believe Governments Should be Doing More to be Environmentally Conscious*

**ROCHESTER, N.Y. – February 24, 2009** – As the economic crisis continues, some other issues may be put on the back burner as the government focuses on getting the economy back on its feet. One such issue could be environmental conservation, but 46% of Americans say that the issue of environmental conservation is something that is more important to them personally than it was a few years ago while 47% say it is no more or less important. Just 7% of Americans say it is less important to them. Furthermore, most people do not believe the government needs to choose between the economy and the environment and that the government should be making more of an effort to be environmentally conscious.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll*®, conducted among 2,848 adults in the United States who were surveyed online by Harris Interactive between January 12 and 19, 2009.

Other findings from this survey include:

- Along with it being more important, there is also a sense that Americans are doing more regarding the environment as 45% say they are making more effort to be environmentally conscious than they were a year ago and half (51%) of Americans say they are making the same amount of effort;
- There are, not surprisingly, partisan differences in attitudes towards the environment. Three in five Democrats (59%) say environmental conservation is more important to them and 52% of Democrats are making more of an effort to be environmentally conscious. While 58% of Republicans say environmental conservation is no more or less important to them, just 29% say it is more important; and,
- When it comes to governments being more environmentally conscious, just over half of Americans say governments are making the same amount of effort as they were a year ago while one-third (35%) say they are making more of an effort. But, two-thirds of Americans (66%) believe governments should be making more of an effort than they were a year ago.

### **Economic Conditions versus the Environment**

One theory about environmental conservation has been that when the economy is not good, people do not care as much about environmental issues. When asked which is closer to their opinion, just over half of Americans (53%) say that with the economy weakening, governments should focus on economic growth and the environmental issues should become a secondary priority. Slightly over one-third of Americans (37%),

however, believe that environmental initiatives should remain as high a priority as the economy. Probably reflecting the economic conditions of their regions of the country, those in the Midwest (57%) and West (58%) are more likely to believe governments should focus on economic growth.

But, when asked to choose between the idea that environmental goals and economic goals are indeed in conflict and one must choose between them or the idea that these goals are often aligned and one does not have to choose, it seems there may not be a choice needed. Half of Americans (51%) believe economic and environmental goals are often aligned while 31% believe one must choose between these two goals. Reflecting the historic confusion on this issue, almost one in five Americans (18%) are not at all sure.

**So what?**

The economy is the country’s dominant issue and, listening to economists, it will not rebound any time soon. Prolonged and deep recession is the current phrase and even President Obama has said the American people are in for a long haul before things get better. As this continues, should environmental initiatives go by the wayside? The answer for the public is “no.” A majority of Americans believe that there is no conflict between addressing both our environmental and our economic goals.

**TABLE 1  
IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION**

“Would you say that environmental conservation is something that is becoming more important to you personally, less important or no more important that it was a few years ago?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Generation				Political Party		
		Echo Boomers (18-32)	Gen X (33-44)	Baby Boomers (45-63)	Matures (64+)	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
More important	46	49	44	45	44	29	59	47
No more or less important	47	46	50	46	47	58	38	46
Less important	7	5	6	8	10	13	3	7

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 2**  
**EFFORT TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS**

“Would you say that you are making more effort, less effort or about the same amount of effort to be environmentally conscious than you were a year ago?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Political Party		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%
More effort	45	36	52	49
Same amount of effort	51	58	46	49
Less effort	3	6	2	2

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 3**  
**GOVERNMENTS EFFORT TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS**

“Would you say that governments are making more effort, less effort or about the same amount of effort to be environmentally conscious than they were a year ago?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Political Party		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%
More effort	35	43	34	31
Same amount of effort	53	49	54	54
Less effort	12	9	13	15

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 4**  
**THE EFFORTS GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BE MAKING TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS**

“Would you say that governments should be making more effort, less effort or about the same amount of effort to be environmentally conscious than they were a year ago?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Political Party		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%
More effort	66	45	80	72
Same amount of effort	25	34	19	21
Less effort	10	21	2	7

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 5**  
**ECONOMIC GROWTH VERSUS ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES**

“Some people say that with the economy weakening, governments should focus on economic growth and that environmental initiatives should become a secondary priority. Other people say that environmental initiatives should remain as high a priority as the economy. Which is closer to your opinion?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Region				Political Party		
		East	Midwest	South	West	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Governments should focus on economic growth	53	47	57	49	58	68	49	44
Environmental initiatives should remain as high a priority as the economy	37	45	32	39	33	23	43	47
Not at all sure	10	7	11	11	9	9	7	9

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 6**  
**ECONOMIC VERSUS ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS**

“Some people say that environmental goals and economic goals are in conflict and that we have to choose between them in the decisions we make. Other people say that environmental goals are often aligned, and that you do not have to choose between them. Which is closer to your opinion?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Education				Political Party		
		HS or less	Some college	College grad	Post grad	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Environmental and economic goals are often aligned	51	44	52	58	69	41	56	58
Have to choose between environmental and economic goals	31	33	30	29	25	44	25	26
Not at all sure	18	23	18	12	6	14	18	16

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

## Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States January 12 and 19, 2009, among 2,848 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

***These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.***

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