U.S. needs to reduce fossil-fuel dependence, but parties disagree about how to do it
26 March 2020, by Mary Keck

2050, conservatives, moderates and liberals all have a shared hope for a decarbonized future mix in which we primarily rely on renewable energy sources and far less on fossil fuels," Attari said. "But participants differ in their level of support for the policies to get there."

The study found that liberal participants have stronger support than conservatives for energy policies that would decarbonize the American energy system, such as a carbon fee or funding the development of renewable energy sources. Conservatives, meanwhile, show less opposition than liberals for more fossil-fuel-friendly policies like the construction of oil pipelines or reducing subsidies for renewable energy.

Complicating the issue is a lack of understanding of the American energy system today.

"People tend to underestimate the amount of natural gas and oil we use in the United States, while overestimating the contribution of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power," Attari said. "Reliance on coal is slightly overestimated, in part because we believe people are less aware about recent declines in the use of coal."

The study also recorded the participants' views on the importance of climate change as a national problem.

Thirty-four percent of respondents said that access to quality health care is the most important problem facing the United States today, with climate change and the economy as the second- and third-biggest challenges respectively.

"When we asked participants about the future, though, we saw dramatically different results,"
Miniard said. "More than 60 percent of participants foresee climate change as the biggest problem facing the world in the future."

That trend in data suggests that climate change is potentially unique among voting issues, Miniard said, in that it is perceived to be an issue that will be increasingly important for the world in coming years.


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