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## Public Sees Nuclear Energy as Important, Survey Finds

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NEI's survey of opinions toward nuclear energy was conducted from Sept. 21 to Oct. 1, 2016, with a nationally representative sample of 1,000 adults. The margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Bisconti Research, Inc., conducted the survey with Quest Global Research. The survey continues the Nuclear Energy Institute's 33-year public opinion tracking program, which provides analysis of long-term trends.<sup>1</sup>

### **Favorability to Nuclear Energy and New Plants is Steady**

Among the public at large, 65 percent favor nuclear energy and 32 percent oppose, with 25 percent strongly in favor, 40 percent somewhat in favor, 20 percent somewhat opposed, 12 percent strongly opposed, and four percent unable to answer. In NEI's Fall 2015 survey, 64 percent reported favorability toward nuclear energy, with 26 percent strongly in favor.

On the subject of license renewal and new plants, the survey found:

- Eighty percent support license renewal of nuclear power plants that continue to meet federal safety standards.
- Seventy-one percent also support preparing now so that new nuclear power plants could be built if needed in the next decade.
- Fifty-five percent of the general public believe the U.S. should definitely build more nuclear power plants.
- Seventy-three percent of the public believe that "as countries around the world build new nuclear power plants, it is important for the U.S. nuclear industry to continue to play a leading role in world markets."

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<sup>1</sup> The NEI survey methodology has evolved: landline only 1983 through 2013; landline and cell phone 2014 and 2015; and landline, cellphone, and online panel respondents in 2016. See favorability trend graph on page 5.

<http://www.nei.org/Master-Document-Folder/Backgrounders/Reports-And-Studies/Questionnaire-for-Public-Opinion-Survey,-Fall-2016>

## **Respondents See Nuclear Energy as Important for the Future, with Mixed Views on Safety**

The public sees nuclear energy as important for the future but has mixed views about the safety of the technology:

- Seventy-five percent of the general public believes that nuclear energy will be important in meeting the nation’s electricity needs in the years ahead.
- Forty-five percent of the public believes that nuclear energy’s importance will increase in the years ahead. Fewer believe nuclear energy’s importance will decrease—17 percent of the public.
- On a 7-point scale rating the safety of nuclear power plants, 57 percent of the public gave a high rating versus 23 percent who gave a low rating.
- Sixty-eight percent of the public agrees that nuclear power plants operating in the United States are safe and secure.

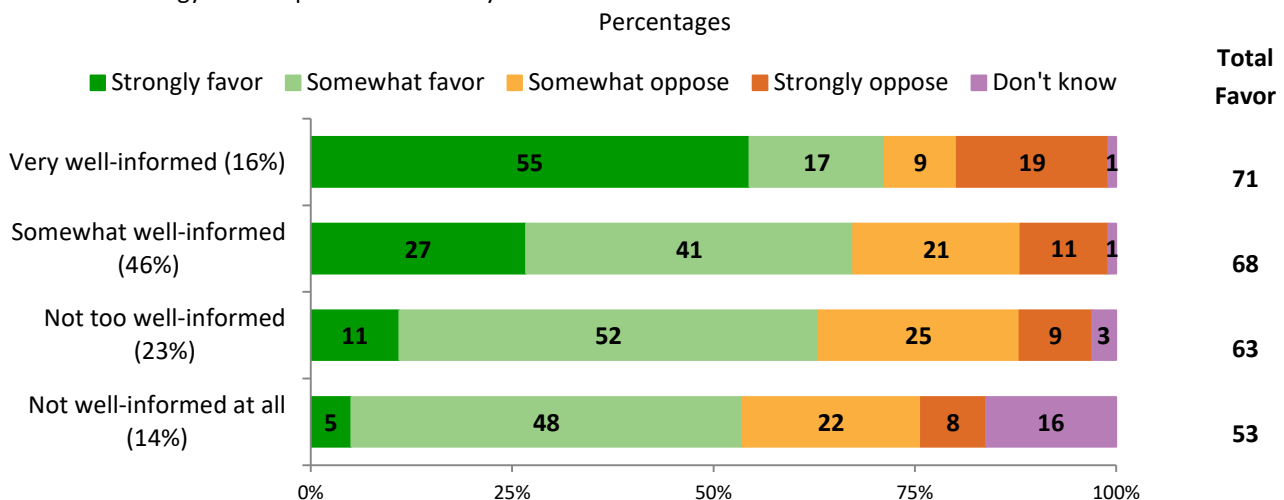
### **More Informed, More Favorable**

A small minority of the U.S. public feels very well-informed about nuclear energy. In this survey, 16 percent feel very well-informed, 46 percent somewhat well-informed, 23 percent feel not too well-informed, and 14 percent feel not well-informed at all.

Favorability to nuclear energy is closely correlated with the degree to which people feel informed about the topic. The more informed people feel, the more they favor nuclear energy.

### **Favorability to Nuclear Energy, by Level of Feeling Informed about Nuclear Energy**

“Do you feel very well-informed, somewhat well-informed, not too well-informed, or not well-informed at all about nuclear energy used to produce electricity?”



Among those who feel very well-informed about nuclear energy, nearly three times as many strongly favor nuclear energy (55 percent) as strongly oppose (19 percent). That imbalance is significant,

because people who feel very well-informed on an issue usually hold their view more firmly and express them with greater confidence.

The degree of feeling informed is also associated closely with perceived benefits of nuclear energy. For example:

- Percent associate nuclear energy a lot with clean air: 58 percent of those who feel very well-informed, 52 percent of those who feel somewhat well-informed, 38 percent of those who feel not too well-informed, and 24 percent of those who don't feel at all well-informed about nuclear energy.
- Percent associate nuclear energy a lot with climate change solution: 47 percent of those who feel very well-informed, 37 percent of those who feel somewhat well-informed, 26 percent of those who feel not too well-informed, and 24 percent of those who don't feel at all well-informed about nuclear energy.

In addition, those who have heard or read about these benefits over the past year are more likely to link those benefits with nuclear energy. For example, 60 percent of those who heard or read something about nuclear energy's clean air benefits over the past year associate nuclear energy a lot with clean air, compared with just 31 percent of those who had not heard this information.

### **Knowing Nuclear Energy's Distinct Role Changes Attitudes**

The survey found continued 95-percent consensus that it's important to maintain a diversity of energy sources. Most, 82 percent, agree that "we should take advantage of all zero-carbon energy sources, including nuclear, hydro and renewable energy, to produce the electricity we need while limiting greenhouse gas emissions"; 47 percent strongly agree, compared with only five percent who strongly disagree.

However, previous NEI surveys revealed that many Americans are unaware of nuclear energy's role in the zero-carbon electricity mix: Of the two leading considerations for electricity production the public values most – reliable electricity and clean air – nuclear energy provides them both, and in large quantities.

To understand the effect of new information about this distinct role, the 2016 survey asked (after measuring basic attitudes):

*Nuclear energy produces 62% of zero-carbon electricity in the United States. And given that nuclear energy is the only electricity source that provides **both** clean air **and** continuous 24-7 electricity, do you think nuclear energy should be very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all in the future?*

The impact of this information about nuclear energy's leading role in a zero-carbon electricity mix is striking: 84 percent said that nuclear energy should be important in the future, including 63 percent of those who initially opposed nuclear energy and 39 percent who initially strongly opposed nuclear energy.

## Observations

The survey continues to find limited public awareness about nuclear energy and powerful impact of learning about nuclear energy's distinct role for offering the two most valued considerations in electricity production, reliable electricity and clean air.

**Trend 1983-2016: Annual Averages Until 2016**  
**Percent Who Favor and Oppose Nuclear Energy**

“Overall, do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the use of nuclear energy as one of the ways to provide electricity in the United States?”

