

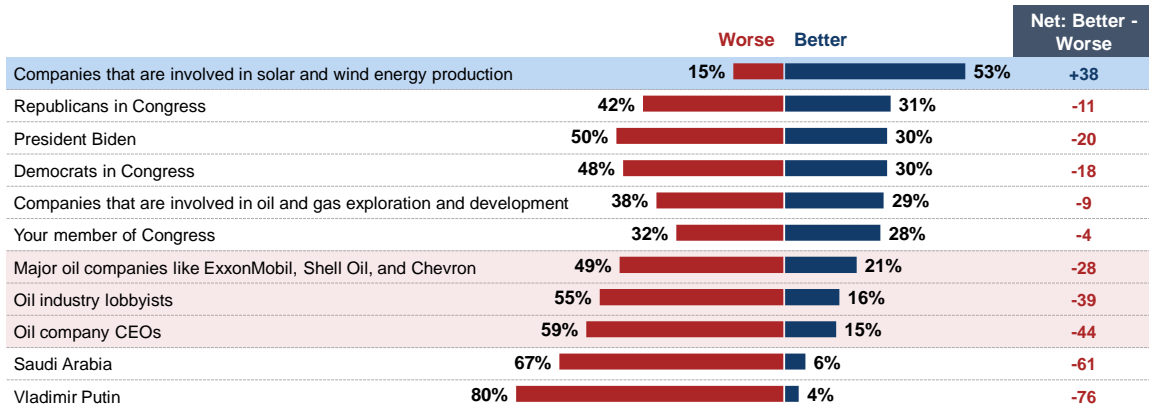
TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: May 9, 2023
RE: Americans' Attitudes about and Messaging on Gas Prices

A new national survey* finds that **Democrats and progressives have the high ground in a policy debate of what to do about high energy prices.** Americans see Big Oil as a Big Problem, and they put a priority on policy actions that will stop price gouging and profiteering by the oil industry CEOs. These and other key findings from this survey are outlined below.

1) Clean energy companies are the only entity that the public sees as playing a positive role in energy prices at the moment. Despite gas prices being down from their peak late last year, 69% say that gas prices continue to be at least somewhat of a problem for them. They assess blame on multiple players for this, but majorities say that oil industry lobbyists (55%) and oil company CEOs (59%) are making things worse. (The only other entities that draw the ire of the majority of the public are Saudi Arabia and Vladimir Putin.)

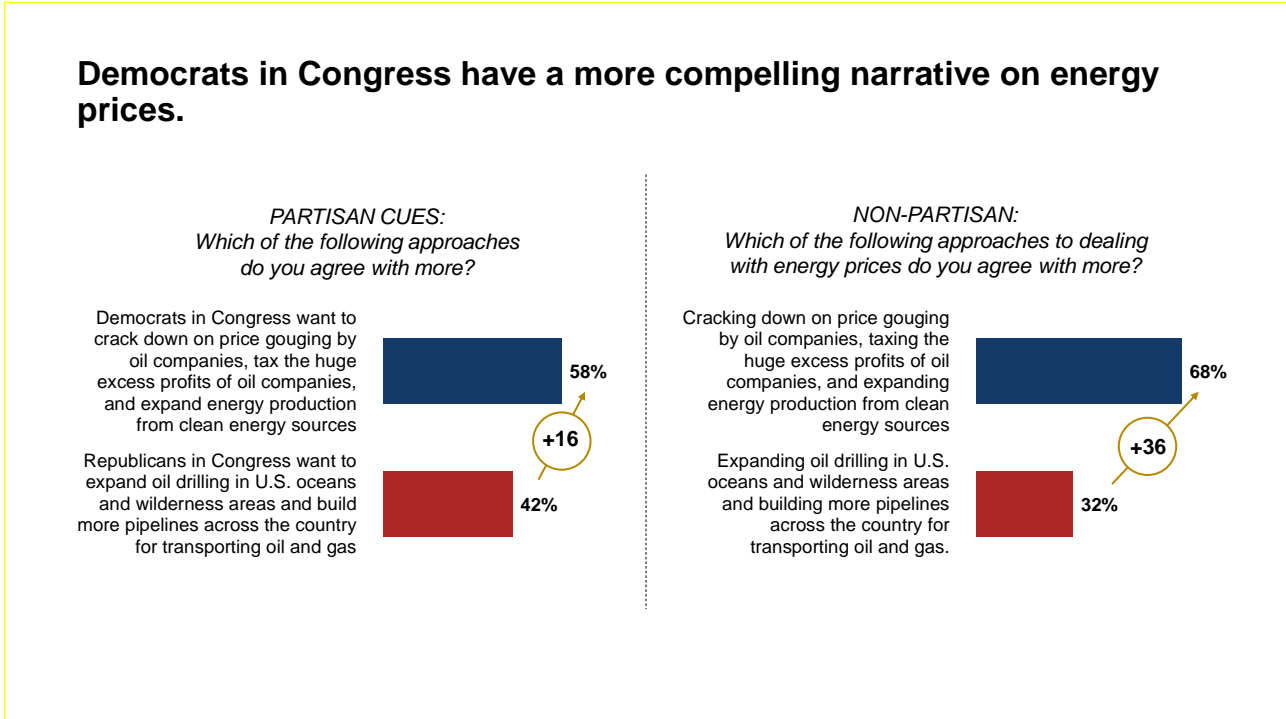
Clean energy producers are playing a positive role on energy prices; oil interests are seen as among the most detrimental.

Are the following people/groups making things better or worse for consumers when it comes to energy prices?



* A national online survey among 1,200 registered voters; conducted April 10-15, 2023 on behalf of Fossil Free Media, League of Conservation Voters, and Climate Power. Credibility interval is ±3.1 percentage points.

2) Democrats in Congress have the stronger narrative on energy costs and solutions. When survey respondents are presented with the positions of each party in Congress on energy costs, they side heavily with the Democratic position—both when it is not labeled as such AND when it is.



Independents overwhelmingly side with the Democratic position—69% when it is labeled as such and 74% when it is not.

3) Specifically, the public favors several policy solutions to lower energy prices, with ending oil companies’ price gouging and passing a windfall profits tax both extremely popular. Fully nine in 10 Americans (89%) support leaders cracking down on oil and gas companies that engage in price gouging—including 65% who *strongly* support this. Moreover, 76% support passing a tax on the excess profits made by oil and gas companies. And high regard for clean energy is evident here as well, with 84% supporting increasing the amount of energy produced from clean energy. Notably, large majorities across the partisan spectrum support each of these three actions, including more than 80% of Republicans, independents, and Democrats who say leaders should crack down on price gouging by oil companies.

4) Americans also want to put an end to taxpayer giveaways to fossil fuel companies. Two in three survey respondents (66%) say they disapprove of the federal government giving tax breaks and subsidies to oil and gas companies; 59% disapprove of subsidies for coal companies. Alternately, fully 78% approve of subsidies and tax breaks for wind and solar energy companies. As with the potential legislative steps noted above, there is substantial cross-partisan agreement when it comes to energy subsidies—majorities of Republicans, independents, and Democrats disapprove of subsidies for oil and gas companies, while large majorities of each group approve of them for clean energy companies.

5) Messaging on energy costs should lean into the public's pre-existing anger over price gouging and government handouts to highly profitable big oil companies. The strongest-testing criticisms of big oil companies are:

- **[PROFITS AND BUYBACKS]** Big oil companies made over \$400 billion in profits in 2022, a new record for the industry. Exxon alone made over \$55 billion in profits last year. All while Big oil CEOs pocketed hundreds of millions in pay. But instead of giving people relief by lowering gas prices, they passed the profits on to their shareholders with stock buybacks and dividends.
- **[PRICE GOUGING]** CEOs of big oil companies are using worldwide inflation and Russia's invasion of Ukraine as excuses to increase their prices and keep them high. While U.S. consumers and the rest of the world are suffering from decreased oil and gas supplies, the oil company CEOs are jacking up their prices to increase profits.
- **[SUBSIDIES]** Big oil companies have been getting tens of billions of dollars in subsidies from taxpayers for decades. But when inflation is soaring and the American people most need relief, these companies make it worse. In fact, they intentionally keep their prices high.

6) In characterizing clean energy opponents' positions, it is most effective to depict their action (or inaction) as prioritizing the profits of their Big Oil donors over protections for regular Americans. The focus here should be on the efforts of members of Congress to block or strip away oversight that protects Americans' health and safety. The recent train derailment in Ohio is a salient and compelling illustration of this.

- **[DONORS OVER SAFETY]** The train derailment in Ohio is just the latest example of disasters that happen when big industry gets its way. Republicans in Congress are weakening environmental and public health protections to please their big oil company donors, while the rest of us pay the cost.
- **[LOOSENING OVERSIGHT]** Republicans in Congress go out of their way to protect the interests of big oil companies, usually at the expense of everyday Americans. They block any efforts to require oil drilling operations to be safe for workers and the environment; they fight to continue giving away taxpayer money to these hugely profitable companies; and they refuse to hold oil companies accountable when there is a giant spill due to a company cutting corners.