

The United States has the world's largest nuclear power program, with 103 plants supplying about 20% of the country's electricity.

But no new plant has been ordered in the USA in a quarter of a century. Today, a growing need for affordable, reliable, and emission-free electricity is reawakening interest in nuclear energy. (See box on next page.)

Where does US public opinion stand on nuclear's future?

National public opinion surveys sponsored by Nuclear Energy Institute (NEI) have tracked changes in public opinion on nuclear energy issues for 21 years, providing "snapshots" over time of where the public stands. The surveys are conducted by telephone with nationally representative samples of 1,000 US adults and have a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points.

The latest survey, conducted 16-18 April 2004 by Bisconti Research with NOP World, found that 65%

Nuclear Snapshots



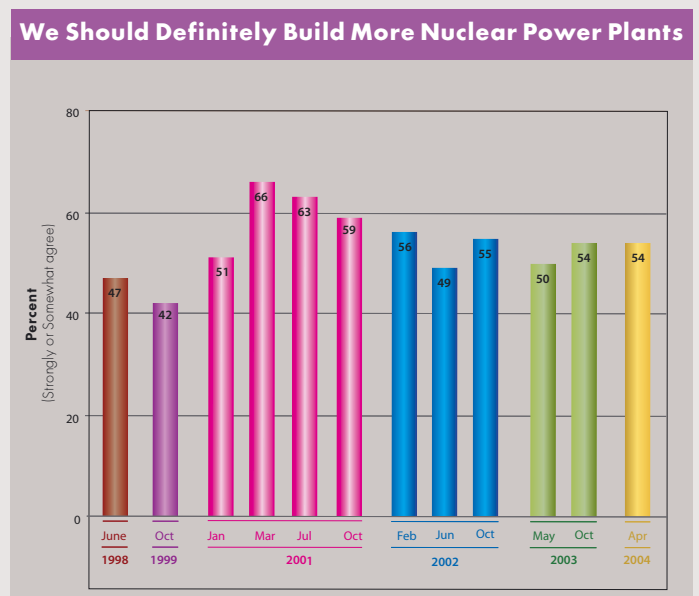
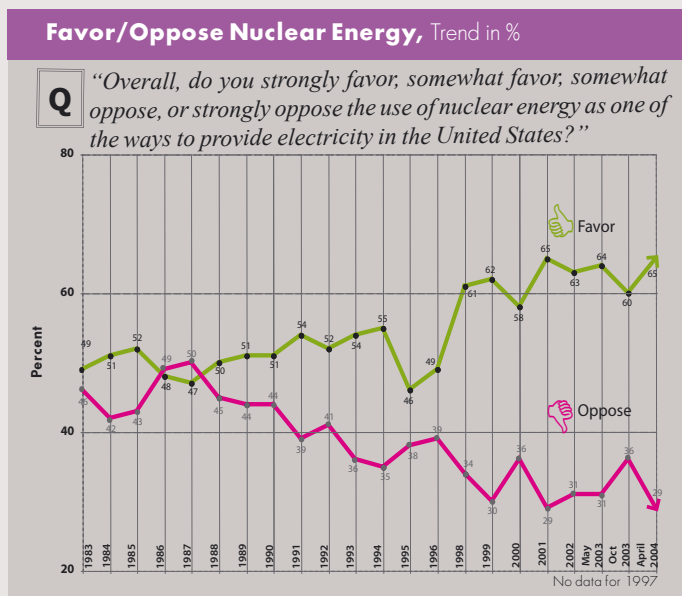
Perceptions of energy needs drive public opinion on the USA's nuclear future

by Ann Stouffer Bisconti

favor the use of nuclear energy — a record high. Also, 64% of Americans now say that it would be acceptable to add a new nuclear power plant at the site of the nearest operating nuclear power plants, up from 57% in October 2003.

These positive changes are closely linked to perceptions of the need for nuclear energy. Focus groups for NEI indicate that electricity reliability is a leading consumer concern, especially in the context of instability in the Middle East region; a major blackout in the US that affected the northeast and midwest in August 2003; and the rising cost and supply volatility of natural gas.

Previously, support for nuclear energy — and for building more nuclear power plants — peaked after energy problems in California were widely reported in 2001. Support for building more nuclear power plants increased again after the August 2003 blackout, especially in those areas that were affected, the northeast and midwest. Between May and October 2003, acceptability of building new nuclear reactors at the nearest existing nuclear plant sites rose 18 percentage points in the northeast (40%



to 58%) and 11 percentage points in the midwest (55% to 66%).

On other measures, 54% in April 2004 said that new nuclear plants *definitely* should be built to provide future electricity supply, 69% were in favor of keeping the option to build more nuclear power plants in the future, and 82% supported license renewal for nuclear power plants that continue to meet government safety standards.

The April survey also found that 74% agreed that government and electric companies should work together to develop state-of-the-art nuclear power plants that can be built to meet new electricity demand. This question was asked for the first time in April to assess support in principle for current provisions in US energy legislation that would promote public-private partnerships.

Perceptions of the safety of nuclear power plants continue to be much more favorable than in the 1980s and early 1990s. Sixty percent rated nuclear power plant safety high, and 19% rated safety low. A dramatic shift in perceptions of safety in the past decade (from 34% in 1984 to 60% today) corresponds with meas-

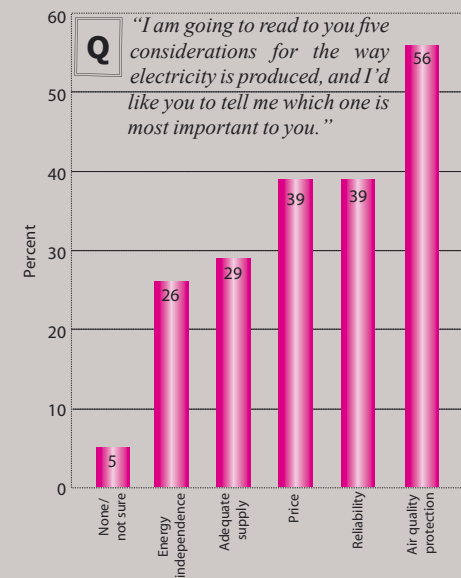
urable improvements in plant performance and efficiency.

Also, perceptions of the nearest nuclear power plant were quite favorable: reliable (82%), safe (73%), and clean (70%). However, residual ambivalence is seen in the fact that 38% still feel uneasy with the nearest plant. Also, the public is divided about equally as to whether the nearest plant is good or bad for the environment.

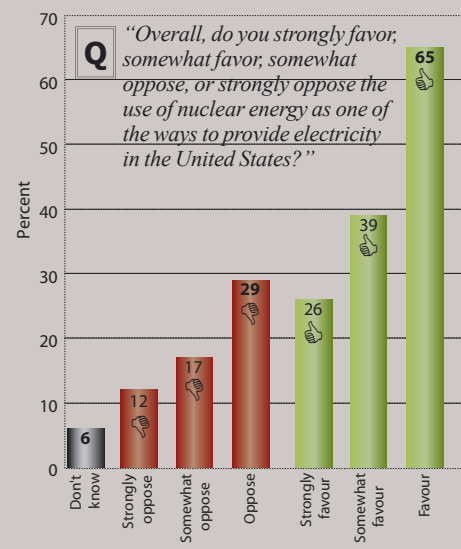
One of the greatest challenges to the nuclear energy enterprise is to increase awareness of the environmental benefits of nuclear energy. Only 27% rated nuclear energy "one of the best" sources of electricity for air quality protection. However, of five considerations in the way electricity is produced — reliability, price, adequate supply, energy independence, and air quality protection — air quality protection was rated most important.

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Most Important Considerations for the Way Electricity is Produced



Favorability to the Use of Nuclear Energy



Advancing the Nuclear Option

In April 2004, three consortia of global energy partners were formed to test the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission's new process to obtain a combined construction and operating license for advanced nuclear power plants. The con-

sortia include a total of 19 leading energy companies and reactor vendors from the US, Japan, France, and Canada. No commitment is being made to build a nuclear unit at this time.

The new streamlined licensing process was established in 1992 by the US Congress and includes *putting pub-*

lic participation at the front end of the process where it is most meaningful. Successfully testing the process can reduce some business uncertainty for companies interested in building new nuclear plants.

The consortia plan to complete the licensing application and submit it to the NRC in 2008.