



October 13, 2023

**TO:** Interested parties

**FROM:** Trenton Marlar & Robin Pressman, [Embold Research](#)

**RE:** Results of a nationwide survey of rural Americans about renewable energy projects in their community

Embold Research, in partnership with Tigercomm, surveyed 2,645 rural Americans nationwide from August 9-16, 2023.<sup>1</sup> The survey examined rural Americans' support for renewable energy projects in their community as well as perceptions of their community and the country's renewable energy transition, more generally.

## The State of Rural America

**Rural communities are seen as lacking economic opportunities and many residents are concerned about the cost of energy.** Only around one in four rural residents evaluate the availability of good jobs in their communities as “excellent” or “good” and perceptions of the opportunities for young people in these communities are even worse (47% “poor”). In addition to lacking economic opportunities, many rural Americans are struggling to make ends meet – only one in five of rural residents rate the cost of living in their community as “excellent” or “good”. The cost of energy is a key driver behind the lack of affordability in these communities with less than 20% of rural residents rating the availability of low-cost energy as “excellent” or “good”. While the economic situation in these communities is bleak, a majority of rural residents rate the quality of life and sense of communities in these areas of the country as “excellent” or “good”.

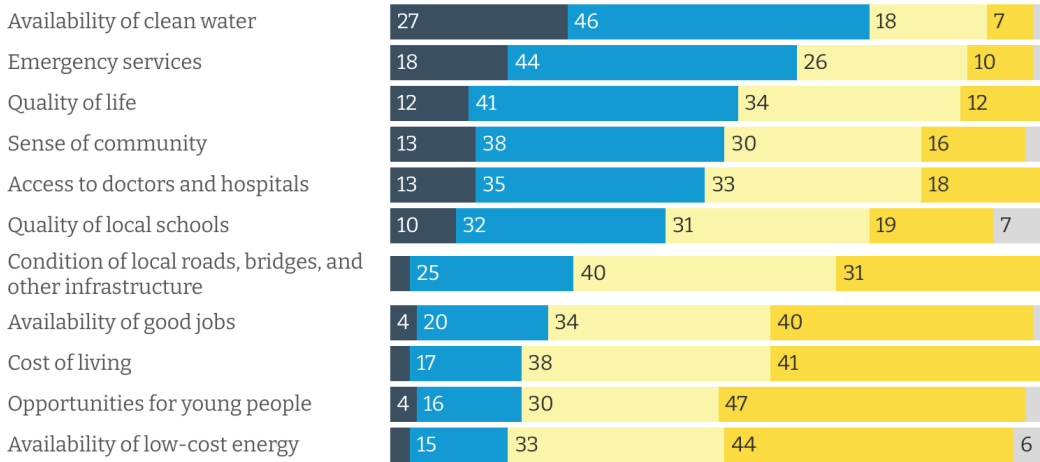
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<sup>1</sup>Polling was conducted online from August 9-16, 2023. Using Dynamic Online Sampling to attain a representative sample, Embold Research polled 2,645 rural Americans nationwide. Post-stratification was performed on age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, and 2020 presidential vote. The Modeled Margin of Error is +/- 2.1%. You can see a full methodology statement [here](#), which complies with the requirements of AAPOR's Transparency Initiative. Members of the Transparency Initiative disclose all relevant details about our research, with the principle that the public should be able to evaluate and understand research-based findings, in order to instill and restore public confidence in survey results.

## Evaluations of Rural America

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● Excellent ● Good ● Fair ● Poor ● Not sure



Q: How would you rate each of the following in your local community?

## Perceptions of the Renewable Energy Transition

**A majority of rural Americans believe that climate change is happening (56%).**

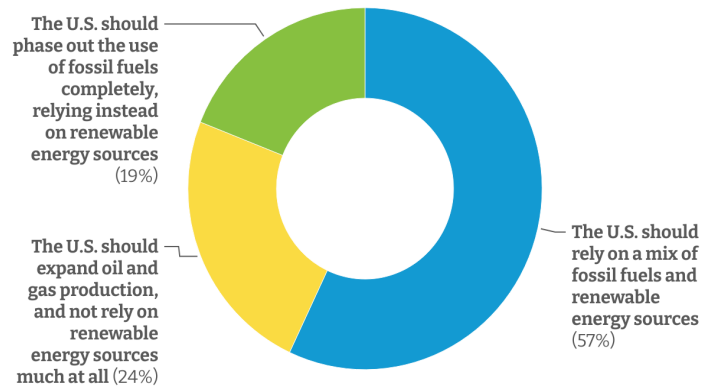
However, one in three rural residents do not believe that climate change is occurring, while around 10% are “not sure”. Among those who believe in climate change or are “not sure” whether it is occurring, two thirds believe it is (or will be) a serious threat to them. Overall, more than one third of rural Americans believe that climate change poses a serious threat to them or their way of life (37%).

**Rural Americans are skeptical of renewable energy’s ability to meet the country’s energy needs and believe the U.S. should rely on a mix of energy sources.**

A majority of rural residents believe that renewable energy sources will never be able to meet 100% of the country’s energy needs (54%). This skepticism around renewable energy’s capabilities contributes to many rural Americans believing the country should continue to rely on fossil fuels. Nearly three

### U.S. Energy Source Preferences

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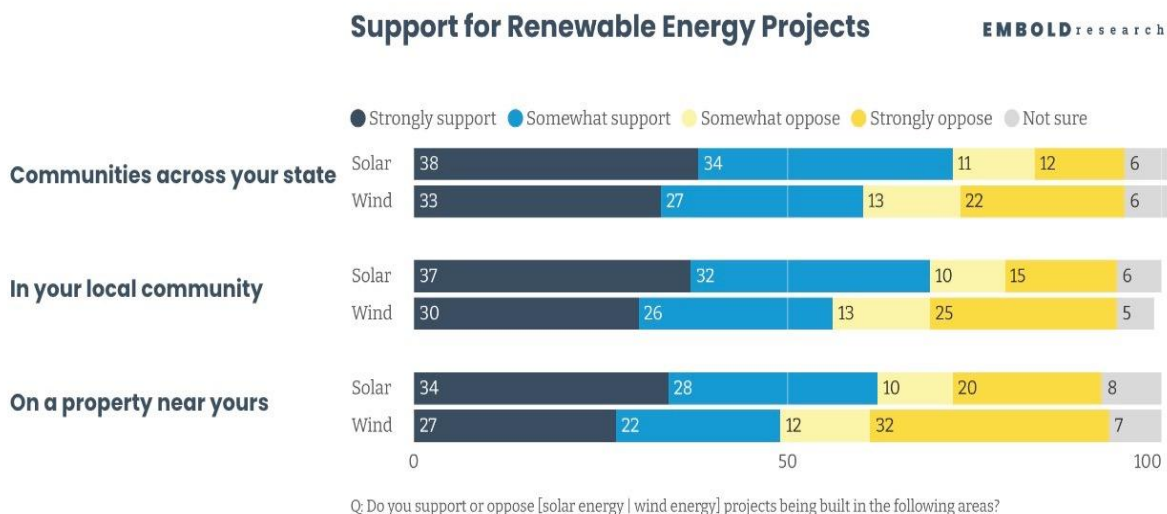
Q: Which of the following comes closest to describing your opinion?

in five rural residents think that the country should rely on a mix of fossil fuels *and* renewable energy sources (57%), while one in four think the U.S. should focus its efforts on expanding oil and gas production. In contrast, around one in five rural residents think the country should phase out the use of fossil fuels in favor of renewable energy sources (19%).

**Nearly all rural Americans believe the country’s energy transition will have an impact on their community, but a large majority believe the transition will have some negative impacts.** Just over 40% of rural residents believe the energy transition will have a negative impact on their community, while another 41% believe the energy transition will have both positive and negative impacts on their community. Relatively few rural residents, however, believe the energy transition’s impact on their community will be positive overall (16%).

## Support for Renewable Energy in Rural Communities

**Support for both solar and wind energy projects built in rural communities outweighs opposition.** Overall, rural residents express a preference for solar energy projects (69% total support) over wind energy projects (56%) being built in their communities. When considering renewable energy projects being built on a neighboring property, however, support for both solar (62% total support) and wind projects (49%) drops by seven percentage-points.



Support for a renewable energy project being built in their community is highest among women, younger residents, people of color, and those living in small towns (compared to more rural areas). Politically, support is highest among Democrats and Independents while Republicans are split in their support, with self-identified MAGA Republicans much less supportive than non-MAGA Republicans.

# Doubts & Concerns over Renewable Energy Projects

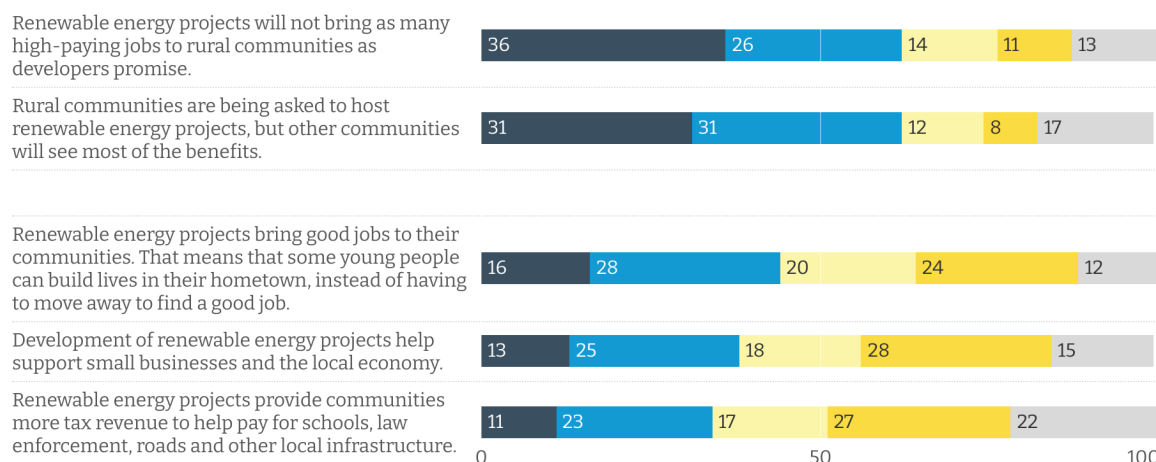
**Despite majority support for renewable energy projects in rural communities, rural Americans are skeptical that their communities will see many economic benefits.**

Over 60% of rural residents agree that “renewable energy projects will not bring as many high-paying jobs to rural communities as developers promise” (62%). When considering tax revenue, a plurality of rural residents do not believe that their community will receive additional tax revenue if their community had a renewable energy project (44% total disagree) and nearly one in four are ‘not sure’ (22%). Despite being asked to host the renewable energy project, three in five rural Americans believe that other communities will be the primary beneficiaries of these projects.

## Perceptions of the Local Benefits of Renewable Projects

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● Strongly agree ● Somewhat agree ● Somewhat disagree ● Strongly disagree ● Not sure



Q: Do you agree or disagree with the following:

**In addition to skepticism around the economic benefits of a renewable energy project in their community, rural Americans are concerned about renewable energy’s ability to consistently meet their energy needs and the loss of farmland.**

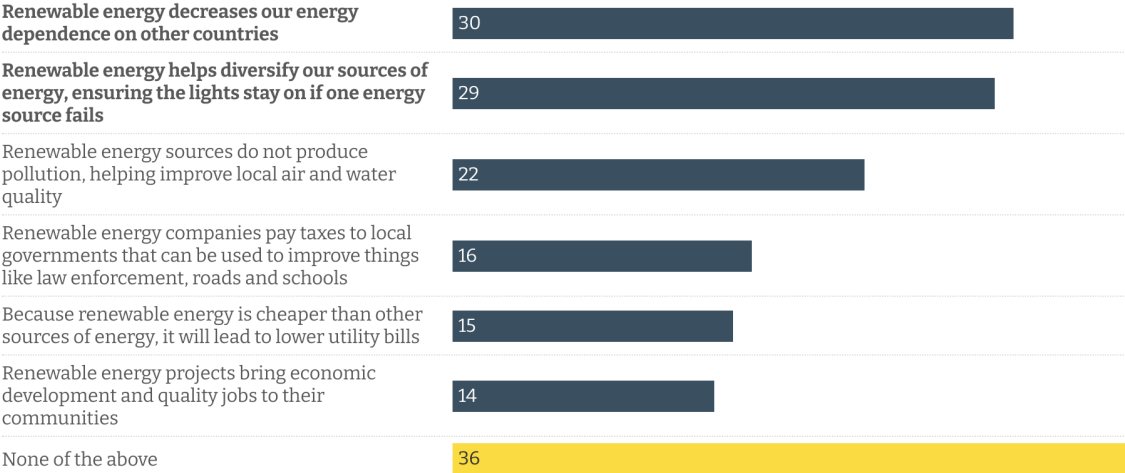
The top concern about renewable energy among rural residents is the perception that it simply cannot meet the current demand for energy (41%). Similarly, around one fourth rural residents are concerned about renewable energy’s reliability due to changes in the weather (23%). One quarter of rural Americans are also concerned about the loss of farmland in their community due to a renewable energy project. Importantly, misinformation spread by renewable energy opponents around the supposed adverse effects of solar and wind farms on health is not a widely held concern by rural Americans (5%).

# Building Support for Renewable Energy

**Rural Americans see renewable energy as a path to strengthening our national security.** Rural residents believe that decreasing foreign energy dependence (30%) and diversifying our energy sources (29%) are the most compelling argument for a renewable energy project in their community. Additionally, one in five rural residents indicate that improvements to local air and water quality is a compelling reason for their community to host a renewable energy project. Relatively few rural residents, however, see potential economic benefits of renewable energy projects as convincing arguments.

## Messaging that is Effective with Rural Residents

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Q: What do you think are the best arguments for renewable energy projects in your community? Select up to two.