

November 1, 2012

CHICAGO COUNCIL SURVEYS

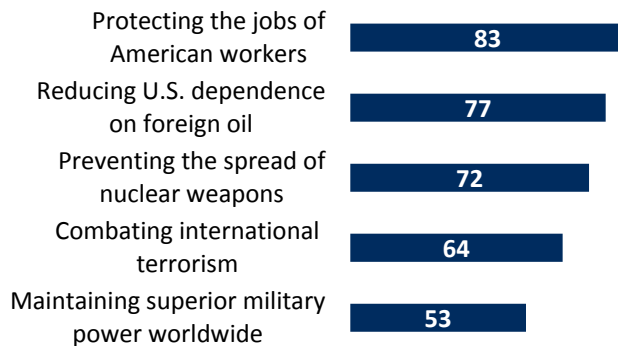
## Americans Rate Energy Independence Second Only to Jobs in Foreign Policy Priorities

*On the campaign trail and during the debates, both presidential candidates have called for increased U.S. energy production to create less reliance on foreign oil. One of the key differences discussed is the role the government should play in subsidizing energy production. For their part, a majority of Americans across the political spectrum favor tax incentives for businesses to encourage the use of alternative energy supplies, increasing the number of nuclear power plants, and increasing requirements for fuel-efficient vehicles, even if it means higher car prices. But the public draws the line at personally paying more in taxes on fuel to encourage energy independence.*

### Reducing U.S. Dependence on Foreign Oil Tops Nuclear Proliferation, Terrorism

The 2012 *Chicago Council Survey* finds that nearly eight in ten Americans believe reducing U.S. dependency on foreign oil should be a “very important” foreign policy goal of the U.S., second only to protecting the jobs of American workers. Energy independence is seen as very important by more Americans than preventing nuclear proliferation, combating international terrorism, and maintaining superior military power worldwide (Fig. 1).

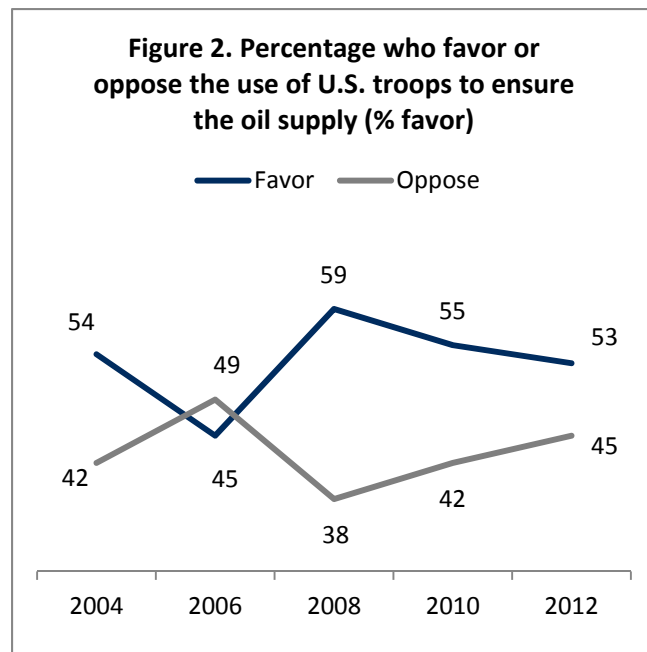
**Figure 1. Percentage who think each of the following should be a “very important” foreign policy goal of the United States:**



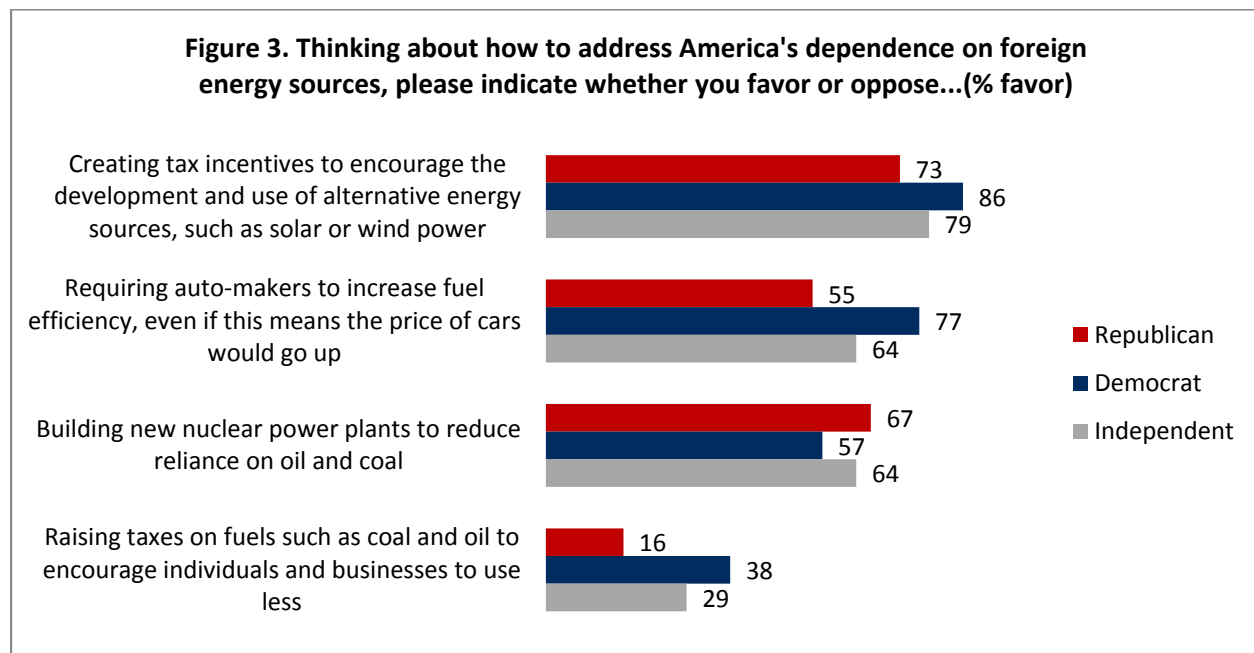
Reinforcing the public view of energy resources as a vital interest, a majority (53%) continue to support deploying U.S. soldiers to ensure the energy supply (Fig. 2). Support for the use of force to ensure energy supply has fluctuated over the past decade, but only in 2006 did it fall below a majority. When last asked in 2010, a majority of Americans rated U.S. dependence on foreign oil (62%) and disruption of the energy supply (54%) as critical threats to the vital interest of the United States.

## Majority Support Tax Breaks, Oppose Increasing Taxes on Gasoline or Electricity

When asked about various approaches to address U.S. dependence on foreign energy sources, eight in ten Americans favor creating tax incentives for businesses to encourage the development and use of alternative energy sources, such as solar or wind power (78%). About two in three also favor increasing fuel efficiency of American cars, even if it resulted in higher car prices (65%) and building new nuclear plants to reduce dependency on oil and coal (62%). On the other hand, a large majority of Americans (70%) oppose policy options that would require raising taxes on fossil fuels to incentivize individuals and businesses to use less coal and oil.



While Americans across the political spectrum tend to agree on these potential measures to reduce energy dependence, there are some interesting differences in degree. A higher percentage of Democrats than Republicans and Independents supports tax incentives, raising fuel efficiency requirements and raising taxes on fuel. But Republicans and Independents are more likely than Democrats to favor building new nuclear power plants to reduce reliance on oil and coal (Fig. 3).



### ***A Note on Methods***

This report is based on the results of The Chicago Council's 2012 biennial survey of public opinion conducted from May 25 to June 8, 2012. The survey probes American attitudes on a wide range of U.S. foreign policy issues. GFK Custom Research conducted the survey for The Chicago Council using a randomly selected sample of 1,877 adults age 18 and older from their large-scale, nationwide research panel. The panel is recruited using stratified random digit dialing (RDD) telephone sampling. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.8 percentage points. Some questions from the 2002 survey, denoted with an asterisk, are from telephone interviews.

The *2012 Chicago Council Survey* was made possible by the generous support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the United States-Japan Foundation. The full report on the *2012 Chicago Council Survey*, "Foreign Policy in the New Millennium," is available at [www.thechicagocouncil.org](http://www.thechicagocouncil.org).

For more information about the *2012 Chicago Council Survey*, please contact Dina Smeltz, senior fellow, Public Opinion and Global Affairs ([dsmeltz@thechicagocouncil.org](mailto:dsmeltz@thechicagocouncil.org); 312-821-6860) or Craig Kafura, senior program officer, Studies ([ckafura@thechicagocouncil.org](mailto:ckafura@thechicagocouncil.org); 312-821-7560). Research assistance for this brief was provided by Magdalena Lasota-Morales.