

TO: NRDC and Earthjustice
FROM: Hart Research Associates and Meeting Street Research
DATE: November 20, 2018
RE: Key Findings from a National Survey on Arctic Drilling

From October 10 to 15, 2018, Hart Research Associates (D), in partnership with Meeting Street Research (R), conducted an online survey in the Lower 48 states among 1,000 registered voters about attitudes toward drilling in America's Arctic. The survey shows high baseline opposition to drilling and uncovered key messaging themes that can be customized for varying audiences. This memorandum outlines the survey's key findings and provides recommendations for communicating about the issue of Arctic drilling.

Benchmark Environmental Attitudes for Context

At a high level, the current outlook toward energy and the environment lends itself well to opposition to Arctic drilling.

- Respondents favor moving toward a renewable energy future, not continuing reliance on fossil fuels—61% of respondents say that it would be better for America's energy future to invest in renewable energy sources, compared with just 8% who prefer traditional energy sources and 31% who say both are equally important. Renewable energy sources garner strong support across the partisan spectrum as 76% of Democrats, 59% of independents, and 45% of Republicans prefer focusing our energy future on renewables.
- Similarly, drilling in the Arctic is deeply unpopular among residents. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of respondents have a favorable reaction to allowing oil drilling and extraction in America's Arctic Ocean, America's Western Arctic, and America's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, while 48% are unfavorable to this—a net favorability of -20 points. This places Arctic drilling near the bottom of a list of other unpopular drilling proposals which include allowing drilling off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the United States (-3 favorable), expanding natural gas drilling and fracking (-13 favorable), and expanding drilling on U.S. public lands (-34 favorable).
- Importantly, the intensity of this issue is on the anti-drilling side: 52% of respondents overall say that drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic is important to them personally, but this increases to 67% among respondents who are unfavorable. By comparison, just 48% of those who favor Arctic drilling say the issue is important to them.
- Encouragingly, residents instinctively understand the negative effects of Arctic drilling. Majorities of respondents express that drilling in the Arctic will have a negative effect on Alaska wildlife (75% negative effect), the environment (69% negative effect), Native Alaskans (66% negative effect),

climate change (59% negative effect), and wildlife in the lower 48 (56% negative effect).

- While good baseline opposition to Arctic drilling and increased use of fossil fuels exists, investigating the specific effects of Arctic drilling exposes a few points of caution. In particular, three perceived positive drilling effects shine through—U.S. energy security (57% positive effect), the U.S. economy (67% positive effect), and U.S. job growth (68% positive effect). In particular the positive effects on the economy and energy security resonate with Republicans:
 - 86% of Republicans say that Arctic drilling will have a positive effect on the economy (compared with 65% of independents, and 50% of Democrats);
 - 87% of Republicans say that Arctic drilling will have a positive effect on U.S. job growth (compared with 68% of independents and 52% of Democrats); and
 - 77% of Republicans say that Arctic drilling will have a positive effect on U.S. energy security (compared with 55% of independents and 40% of Democrats).

Attitudes about Arctic Geographies

We tested attitudes toward three specific areas of the Arctic—the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Western Arctic, and the Arctic Ocean—and while ANWR gets a small boost, respondents largely view these geographies on equal levels.

- A strong majority (58%) of respondents say they view each area of the Arctic the same way and that each is equally important to protect from drilling, compared with 29% who say that they view these areas of the Arctic differently and that some are more important than others to protect. The anti-drilling base—those who say they are unfavorable to Arctic drilling—are particularly apt to view these three areas similarly: 78% say the areas are equally important to protect from drilling.
- This 29% who view these areas differently expresses a clear preference: four in five members of this group say that ANWR is the most important to protect from drilling.
- At the beginning of the survey we asked residents to rate their favorability to drilling in each geography. Consistent with respondents' views on equal importance of protection, drilling in each area (though especially the Refuge) is rejected. But once respondents read a detailed description of each geography, differences largely disappear.

	Favorability toward Arctic Drilling					
	Uninformed Ask			Informed Ask		
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Diff	Favorable	Unfavorable	Diff
	%	%	+/-	%	%	+/-
ANWR	23	55	-32	28	72	-44
Arctic Ocean	35	44	-9	29	71	-42
Western Arctic	35	41	-6	32	68	-36

Findings on Messaging

In this survey we explored preferences to messaging on a broad level (core themes and values) as well as a more targeted level (detailed supporting statements with specific images and evidence). It is important to note that the research was not designed to identify a single “winning” message that trumps all others; rather, the goal was to understand if and how we might appeal to varying audiences with different messaging variations. As outlined below, we were successful in achieving that goal.

We did find that, among the six broad messaging themes related to drilling in the Arctic we tested, **the most unifying theme across the board is protecting wildlife and endangered species by maintaining ecosystems and habitats.** At the same time, there is substantial opportunity to tailor additional messaging to specific audiences; a summary of the findings within top message frames and nuances of how we can modify messages to different target audiences follows.

- **THEME: Protecting Wildlife**—51% say this is a top reason to protect the Arctic from drilling, including 50% of Democrats, 48% of independents, and 52% of Republicans.
 - *Most persuasive message*: respondents, especially Republicans, choose a simple message focused on threatened animals and habitats. Language respondents find particularly compelling is bolded:

“The Arctic is home to dozens of imperiled species, including the Arctic fox, polar bears, caribou, and beluga whales. Over half a billion birds from 200 species make their summer home in the wildlife refuge. Drilling in the Arctic would disrupt the habitats of these animals, threaten their food sources, and leave many at risk of extinction. We should focus on preserving these species and biological diversity, not exploiting their environment for dirty energy.”
 - *Additional points*: Wildlife messaging focused on global disruption, including ecological consequences and migration patterns, performs strongly specifically among Democrats.

- **THEME: Indigenous rights**—37% of respondents (including 38% of Democrats, 42% of independents, and 32% of Republicans) say that protecting the health and human rights of indigenous populations is a top reason to protect the Arctic from drilling, making this theme nearly as unifying as one focused on wildlife.

- *Most persuasive message*: focus on drilling's negative health consequences on indigenous communities.

"Drilling in the Arctic will pollute the air and water and can have serious negative health consequences, like higher cancer rates for the indigenous Alaskans who live in these areas. These communities are already suffering from health impacts such as respiratory problems associated with oil and gas extraction and processing, and have limited access to healthcare. It is not right to leave them vulnerable to major health problems while big oil and gas companies can pad their bottom lines."

- **THEME: Public lands and waters**—Republicans in particular find the importance of public lands and waters to be a compelling theme. Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents overall, including 40% of Republicans, say protecting public lands and waters is a top reason to protect the Arctic from drilling.

- *Most persuasive messages*: unlike most other themes tested, there is no single "winning" message within the public lands theme. Rather, different elements of this theme appeal to different groups:

Democrats and women prefer: "The Arctic is America's last intact wilderness, drilling will permanently alter it. We have a moral obligation to protect it."

Independents prefer: "The Arctic is an iconic American treasure."

Millennials and younger men prefer: "Drilling puts corporate interests over protecting pristine lands and is just a way for politicians to pay corporate interests back."

- **THEME: Climate and the environment**—Forty-three percent (43%) of residents overall say protecting the environment and avoiding accelerating climate change is an important reason to protect the Arctic from drilling, but this is driven heavily by Democrats—Republicans express far less interest in an environmental message.
 - *Most persuasive message*: when making a climate-focused case against Arctic drilling, it is by far most effective to pair climate language with effects on human health and wildlife:

“All of **our country’s ecosystems are connected**, and drilling in the Arctic will have effects across the United States. For example, migratory animals like songbirds and whales use the Arctic as feeding grounds and nurseries for their young—drilling directly threatens these species. And as the oil extracted is burned, it **will make climate change and all of the negative effects it has on our country—air pollution, stronger hurricanes, more severe** asthma attacks—even worse. Drilling in the Arctic doesn’t only harm Alaska, it **harms ALL Americans.**”
 - *Additional points*: though Republicans express less interest in climate themes, they respond somewhat to practical, non-climate-oriented environmental messaging that describes how the Arctic is a fragile environment, is difficult to clean up, and oil spills will alter it forever.
- **THEME: Energy security**—Though lower overall, energy security is a key theme for conservative audiences in terms of how they process the drilling debate. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of Republicans say that ensuring the United States has a strong and reliable energy future is a top reason to protect the Arctic from drilling, making it as important as the public land/waters theme to this audience.
 - *Talking about energy security with Republicans*: Republicans respond best to messaging that exposes the Arctic’s limited oil potential.

“Drilling in America’s Arctic does nothing to help ensure the United States’s energy security. Expert scientists, and even major energy companies like Shell, say the **Arctic has limited oil and gas potential**, and even if oil can be produced, it will take decades before it will reach consumers, ultimately leaving us reliant on oil from our adversaries in the Middle East, Russia, and China. Rather than drilling in the Arctic, **we need to choose renewable energy sources** like wind and solar, which provide reliable, clean energy that we can produce ourselves here in the United States.”

Indeed, despite being a less effective theme overall, making a case that Arctic drilling is bad for the country's energy security is an essential part of the conversation, especially with Republicans. Democrats are ambivalent about the effects Arctic drilling will have on energy security, but a majority of independents (55%) and a supermajority of Republicans (77%) believe the effect on energy security would be positive. Addressing this belief head on, and working to counter it, will be needed in order to make an effective case on the right.

The other caution that emerges from the survey relates to the idea of having a "reasonable balance" when it comes to Arctic drilling—the notion that we can drill in the Arctic reason *and still* protect the region's most vulnerable areas is a highly attractive one to Republicans (and even to about 30% of Democrats). In the survey we tested two ways to counter this idea; neither was overwhelmingly effective, but we get slightly more mileage with a response centered on wildlife and indigenous people than on one that focuses on the effects of climate change:

"There is no such thing as a reasonable balance in this arena, since these publicly owned areas of the Arctic are pristine wildlands, habitats for dozens of endangered species, and home to indigenous people who rely on the lands and waters. It is essential to protect ALL of America's Arctic from drilling or we will do irreparable harm to the area's environment and its people."

The Bottom Line

The burden of proof is on drilling proponents to make the case that drilling in the Arctic is a good idea, but they have a solid case to make by focusing on energy security and the idea that we can have our cake and eat it too by drilling in some Arctic areas while protecting others.

In order to counter these ideas and make the strongest possible argument against drilling, environmental groups and allies should focus messaging on:

- The damaging effects of drilling on threatened Arctic wildlife
- The damaging effects of drilling on indigenous people
- The idea that these are some of the last pristine, majestic public lands and waters in the United States
- The idea that drilling in the Arctic will actually harm our energy security by wasting time and resources on a crap-shoot energy source at the expense of further developing American renewable energy sources.
- The impact on climate change—This proves to be a strong motivator for Democrats and independents. However, it can also serve to "turn off" conservative audiences who might otherwise be convinced to side with anti-

drilling allies. Thus, climate messages should be used carefully and strategically, and are most effective when combined with another powerful talking point such as effects on health, wildlife, or extreme weather.