



To: Nature Protection and Pollution Control Experts

From: Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

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Re: A Snapshot of Americans' Environmental Voting and Civic Habits

Although most Americans recognize that nature protection and pollution control are legitimate political issues, relatively few cast their vote on that basis. As a political issue, the environment has been the domain of a small minority of civic-minded Americans – citizens who have high educations and the confidence to attend hearings and write or call elected officials -- actions that most citizens find daunting. These citizens have clout, but there aren't enough of them to swing most elections.

To achieve success on election night, environmental leaders must develop positions that have appeal beyond the ranks of this highly-educated, civic elite. They should present those positions using many the same words – [accountability](#), [responsibility](#), [family](#), [healthy](#), [safe](#), etc... -- that candidates use to describe other issues at stake in elections.

I base these conclusions on the results of 18 social and public opinion research studies released between 1997 and 2006. The key excerpts from these polls are included in this memo. For hyperlinks to the original documents, point your browser to:

<http://del.icio.us/waterwordsthatwork/votingactivismsummary>

Each of these studies explores Americans' voting and civic habits in a slightly different way, but certain patterns do emerge. If you plucked ten eligible voters at random off the street and asked them about their activities, here's what you might expect to hear:

- Eight of them would say that candidates' environmental positions are at least a minor factor in determining how they will vote in 2008.
- But in fact, only six of them voted in the 2004 election.
- Four of them would say that they were disappointed with the level of debate about the environment in the last election.
- Two or three of them would report that they have attended a public hearing or other event where environmental issues were discussed.
- One or two of them would report that they have written a government official about an issue they think of as "environmental."
- One of them would report that they have called or visited a government official about an issue they think is at least partially environmental. This individual might also say that the environment is the single most important issue to them in elections.

	U.S. Voter Turnout Up in 2004. Census Bureau Reports	PPIC Statewide Survey Californians and the Environment 2006	Nationwide Opinion Survey of Hunters and Anglers on Global Warming	Key Findings and Analysis from Research Conducted on Behalf of the Nicholas Institute	Yale Environmental Deficit 2004
Year	2006	2006	2006	2005	2004
Scope	National	California	Hunters and anglers nationwide	National	National
90%+					
80%+		Candidates' positions on the environment, including "marine and coastal issues" are "very important" (48%) or "somewhat important" (40%)			"...say a candidate's stance on the environment will be at least a minor factor when they decide for whom they will vote for President." (85%)
70%+					
60%+	Voted in the 2004 presidential election (64%)		Support candidate who favprs "strong laws" on global warming (64%)		
50%+					
40%+		Candidates' positions on the environment, including "marine and coastal issues" are "very important" (48%)			
30%+					
20%+				"Contacted an elected official, written a letter to the editor or attended a public meeting regarding an environmental issue" (25%)	
				Recall a time "when a candidate's position on any environmentl issue was one of the two or three most important reasons you either voted for or against that candidate." (22%)	
10%+				Say the environment "is the most important issue to me personally" when voting (10%)	
0 - 10%					



	Religion and the Environment: Polls Show Strong Backing for Environment Across Religious Faiths	KEY FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL VOTER SURVEY ON CONSERVATION	Minnesota Report Card on Environmental Literacy	Pennsylvania Public Mind 2004	Gallup Poll 2003
Year	2004	2004	2004	2004	2003
Scope	National	National	Minnesota	Pennsylvania	National
90%+					
80%+			"Candidate's record or stance on protecting the environment" was "somewhat important" (52%) or "very important" in 2002. (29%)		
70%+		When making a voting decision, issues involving "water quality, lakes, natural areas, rivers, or beaches, neighborhood parks, and wildlife habitat" are "very" or "somewhat" important (79%)			
60%+					
50%+	In making a decision about who to vote for, "the issue of the environment" is "very important" (53%)				
40%+		"More than four in ten voters nationally indicate they have 'voted for a candidate because of their support for the environment'"		"More likely to vote for an environmental candidate" (41%)	
30%+					"Voted for or worked for candidates because of their position on environmental issues" in the past year. (30%)
20%+			"Candidate's record or stance on protecting the environment" was "very important" in 2002. (29%)		
10%+					"Contacted a public official about an environmental issue" in the past year (15%)
0 - 10%					

	PPIC Statewide Survey: Special Survey on Californians and the Environment	PPIC Statewide Survey Special Survey on Land Use	PPIC Special Survey on Californians and the Environment	Princeton Survey Research Associates	Gallup Poll (as reported in Sustainable Motivation: Attitudinal and Behavioral Drivers for Action)
Year	2002	2002	2000	2000	2000
Scope	California	California	California	National	National
90%+					
80%+	The "candidate's positions on environmental issues" are very important (39%) or somewhat important (38%) "in determining your vote."		Candidates' positions on "population growth, land use, and environmental issues" are "very important" (41%) or "somewhat important" (43%)		
70%+				Environmental issues are "very important" (32%) or "somewhat important" (41%) in "determining your vote for major political offices."	
60%+					
50%+					
40%+		Voted on a land use or development initiative on the local ballot (47%) Signed a petition concerning a local land use or development issue (41%)	Candidates' positions on "population growth, land use, and environmental issues" are "very important" (41%)		
30%+	Have "been personally involved in environmental issues in your city or community by taking steps such as attending public meetings, signing petitions, or writing letters to local officials" "a lot" (7%) or "sometimes (29%) The "candidate's positions on environmental issues" are very important (39%) "in determining your vote."	"Attended a meeting organized by local residents about a local land use and development issue" (31%)		Environmental issues are "very important" (32%) in "determining your vote for major political offices."	Signed a relevant petition (precise % unavailable)
20%+					Attended a relevant meeting, voted for a candidate on their environmental position (precise % unavailable)
10%+					Contacted a public official, complained to a business about their product or policy (precise % unavailable)
0 - 10%	Have "been personally involved in environmental issues in your city or community by taking steps such as attending public meetings, signing petitions, or writing letters to local officials" a lot. (7%)				Traded stocks on environment record of a company (precise % unavailable)

	Communicating About Oceans: Results of a National Survey	A Needs Assessment for Environmental Education in Florida	Pennsylvania Environmental Readiness for the 21st Century
Year	1999	1998	1997
Scope	National	Florida	Pennsylvania
90%+			
80%+			
70%+			"Frequently" (35%) or "Sometimes" (38%) "consider a candidates environmental voting record"
60%+			
50%+			
40%+			"More likely to vote for an enviornmental candidate" (41%)
30%+	Believe it is "very effective" to "write e-mail or telephone an elected official about the importance of laws to protect the oceans." (30%)		"Frequently" (35%) "consider a candidates environmental voting record"
20%+		"Attended a public hearing held by a local public official about a local land use or development issue" (27%)	
10%+	"Attended a meeting concerning environmental issues" (15%) "Wrote a letter in support of environmental issues" (11%)	"Written or e-mailed a local public official about a local land use or development issue" (18%)	
0 - 10%	"Called or visited a government official to discuss an environmental issue" (8%)		

