

Press Release

PolicyInteractive Research
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MOST OREGONIANS THINK WE SHOULD CONSUME LESS

“Our country would be a better place if we all consumed less” is a view widely held by Oregonians. So reports an Oregon based research project using scientific survey methods. Using four separate statewide opinion surveys and two sets of in-depth interviews, total agreement ranged from 74 percent to 87 percent while those who strongly agree approached 50 percent. The statewide surveys started in April 2008 with the fourth completed in April 2009. The detailed interviews were completed in late 2008.

The findings are particularly interesting to the researchers because agreement on the consumption question crosses traditional social or ideological divides. While citizens may be polarized on some environmental flash points, the issue of consumption may be an umbrella issue of agreement.

“For example, one survey showed 34% of Republicans think global warming threatens life on earth while 64% agree we’d be better off if we all consumed less; 45% of Christian conservatives agree global warming threatens life on earth while 67% think we’d be better off if we all consume less,” said the project director, Tom Bowerman. “Almost doubling the level of agreement, from minority agreement to a strong majority agreement suggests that environmentally friendly behaviors may exist for entirely non-environmental reasons.”

It appears Oregon isn’t unique in these findings. The Center for American Progress, a Washington D.C. think-tank, released results in March 2009 about key values in American politics. The single greatest agreement was “Americans should adopt a more sustainable lifestyle by conserving energy and buying fewer goods” which showed 80% total

Our country would be a better place if we all consumed less.

(w) PolicyInteractive08&09 MOE 4.9% (4% dk/na)

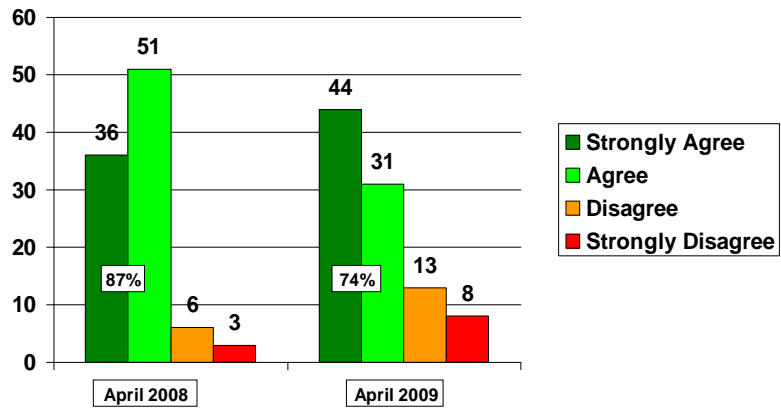


TABLE 1

The 40 ideas that shape American politics

Ranked by % total agreement (dark blue = progressive; light blue = conservative)

	Strongly agree (9-10)	Total agree (6-10)	Neutral (5)	Total disagree (0-4)	Strongly disagree (0-1)
1. Americans should adopt a more sustainable lifestyle by conserving energy and consuming fewer goods.	47	80	13	7	3

National Survey on Political Values & Issues, March 2009 survey of 1400 people www.americanprogress.org

agreement with 47% strongly agreeing. Another statement in that survey which was specific only to energy efficiency showing slightly lower agreement suggests that that consuming fewer goods was an important component of popular agreement.

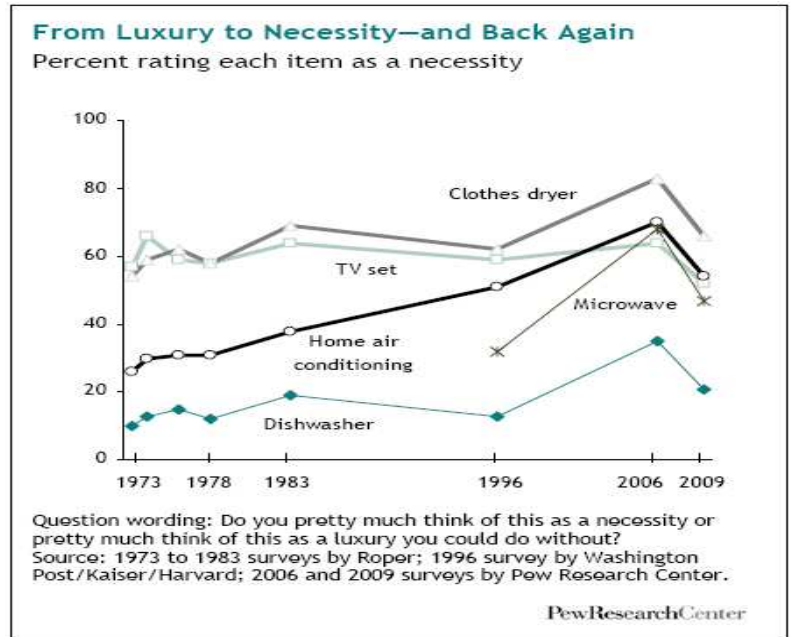
In another study, the Pew Research Center reported on April 23, 2009 that Americans are rethinking what they feel are “necessities” in their life. The Pew survey found that basic products and services like clothes dryers, TV sets, dish washers, microwave ovens, air conditioning and cable TV service have dropped by double digit percentages as perceived necessities. The necessity of owning a car dropped by 3%. This is the first time the since the periodic survey began in 1973 that significant declines have been detected.

In the Oregon research project, Bowerman says the public disposition to consume less emerged before the current economic downturn. This would suggest that the attitude toward lowering consumption isn’t a reaction to the current economy. “Our researchers have done dozens of personal interviews to better understand what people are thinking about consumption, and a fairly consistent view expressed by random Oregonians was we consume too much and we’d be better off consuming fewer goods. This poses some interesting issues for the way we think about our future, what seems to be important in our lives,” he said. “For example, we don’t see such strong support for addressing climate change specifically, but since consumption is a key component of greenhouse emissions, by tapping sentiment on consumption we indirectly address climate concern.”

The research project is continuing to examine how much people think the whole culture should reduce consumption and what actions individuals themselves are taking to reflect their own belief on the issue.

PolicyInteractive (PI) is an Oregon non-profit, non-partisan research organization that conducts surveys on social and political issues. PI explores policy pathways that enjoy broad public support. Operating within the Institute for Sustainability Education and Ethics, PI consults with advisory panels consisting of experts in public policy, survey research and the social sciences. PI’s staff are Project Director Tom Bowerman, University of Oregon doctoral students Ezra Markowitz and Matthew Clement, and Sam Porter, Ph.D.

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