

# Are Warning Labels on Unhealthy Foods a Good Idea?

**S**ince 1980, obesity rates have doubled in at least 73 countries, and a big culprit, according to most experts, is the increased consumption of highly processed foods. Public health officials have zeroed in on a new tactic to fight these alarming trends: the use of warning labels on foods with high levels of sugar, salt, or fat.

Chile mandated putting warning labels on unhealthy foods in 2016; Peru, Uruguay, and Israel have followed in the years since, and other countries are considering the idea. Should the United States adopt this approach? A food policy expert and an analyst at a libertarian\* think tank face off.



**YES** Have you ever picked up a snack that looked healthy and then realized it contains as much sugar as a Snickers? The way food is packaged has a big influence on what customers buy. And currently a lot of that packaging encourages people to buy food that contributes to diet-related diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, that are among the leading causes of death in the U.S.

Requiring front-of-package warning labels indicating that a food or drink is high in sugar, salt, fat, or calories provides a clear and easy way for consumers to avoid products that contribute to poor health. Warning labels also address misleading marketing tactics. Companies conduct extensive research to determine what to put on packages to increase sales, and the messages and claims chosen seem to be designed to confuse rather than inform.

Nutrition-related claims and marketing messages—for example, that something is “all natural” or “organic”—are often placed on products that don’t deliver the nutrition and healthfulness they seem to promise. These claims make

**Warning labels discourage people from buying unhealthy foods.**

people think that a product is beneficial to a healthy diet, when in reality, it might be something that should be consumed infrequently or not at all. Warning labels can cut through the clutter that masks unhealthy ingredients in food and drinks.

Simply put, warning labels work. Research shows that front-of-package warning labels are helpful in identifying foods and beverages that are high in sugar, salt, fat, or calories, and they discourage people from purchasing such products. Just 18 months after Chile’s adoption of warning labels in 2016, there was a 25 percent drop in sugary drink purchases. Since

Chile took action, more than a dozen other countries have enacted or are considering food warning labels.

How can consumers make informed choices if food and beverage packages are designed to sell products, not inform the public? Warning labels are a promising policy action that puts our health ahead of companies’ profits. We deserve that. •

**—FRANCES FLEMING-NILICI**  
The Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity



**NO** Obesity is a serious public health problem. But putting warning labels on unhealthy foods like candy and soda is not the solution.

We already know these foods eaten to excess make us unhealthy. We've never had more information about our food, with calorie counts, nutrition labels, and abundant advice about what we should and shouldn't eat from doctors and nutrition experts. We don't need the government trying to influence our food choices.

Warning labels exist purely to stigmatize products and the people who consume them. They don't give consumers information, merely the judgment that they're making the "wrong choice." These labels imply that calories from some sources are worse than others. It's true that too many calories from chocolate can cause obesity, but so can calories from any source. If sodas or candy have warning labels, so should pasta, bread, bacon, steak, and just about everything else.

Besides, warning labels for food don't work. Consider

**We don't need the government trying to influence our food choices.**

what happened in Chile, which introduced food warning labels in 2016. One study claimed it cut soda consumption dramatically. But that wasn't what happened. The study's conclusion was based on a model of what researchers thought would've happened to soda consumption

without the labels. In reality, calorie consumption barely budged, and Chile's obesity rate in 2019 was the same as when the labels were introduced—34.4 percent.

In the United States, soda consumption has been declining for more than 20 years since it hit a peak in 1998. It wasn't government warnings that were responsible for this decline. It was caused by consumers reacting to information that soda is unhealthy and freely choosing to drink less of it.

Food warning labels won't work, and they are a bad idea. They are a stepping stone for politicians to control more of your choices and limit your freedom. •

**—GUY BENTLEY**  
Reason Foundation

# Is Political Polling Dead?

**T**he 2020 election didn't go as pollsters predicted. Democrat Joe Biden did pull off a strong Electoral College victory, but he did it with razor thin wins in a handful of key swing states, not by the larger margins expected. Overall, polls vastly underestimated Donald Trump's support, just as they did in the 2016 election that he wasn't projected to win. Those and other recent miscues have led to a re-examination of the political polling industry, with some critics saying that the rise of cellphones and caller ID, in particular, have made it difficult for pollsters to reach a broad selection of voters. A public policy professor and a director of research at a major polling company face off about whether political polling is done for.

**YES** Political polling is a zombie: It walks amongst us, trying to eat our brains, and we should kill it.

Polls that attempt to show which candidate is ahead in a campaign or who is likely to win should be ignored. Polls get it right sometimes, but even when election polls are accurate, they produce no public benefit and may indeed harm our democratic system. So let's drive a stake into political polling's heart.

In 2016, poll after poll predicted that Hillary Clinton would easily become the 45th president. In fact, it was Donald Trump who won 30 states, 306 electoral votes, and the presidency. In swing state after swing state, the pollsters overestimated Clinton's support and minimized Trump's. The polls were off again in 2020. Even though Joe Biden won, as predicted, the polls vastly overestimated his support in all 18 states where the results were close.

Political polls are likely to be wrong for two big reasons. For polls to be accurate, they have to predict

who will actually vote, and they have to get these people to respond to the poll. Pollsters can't do either of these things well, and they're getting worse at both.

And what useful information do election polls actually provide? Does knowing who's up or down in the latest poll help voters make up their minds on whether, and for whom, to vote? No. Polls don't tell the public anything useful about whether a candidate is competent, wise, or benevolent, or whether their policies would benefit the public. But polls can influence public behavior, as voters flock to or flee from candidates based on their perceived popularity in a poll.

There's nothing harmful about choosing your favorite songs based on their perceived popularity (or, to hipsters, their lack of popularity). But polls are a terrible way to assess the candidates who, if elected, will decide matters of war and peace, poverty and prosperity. Bury them. •

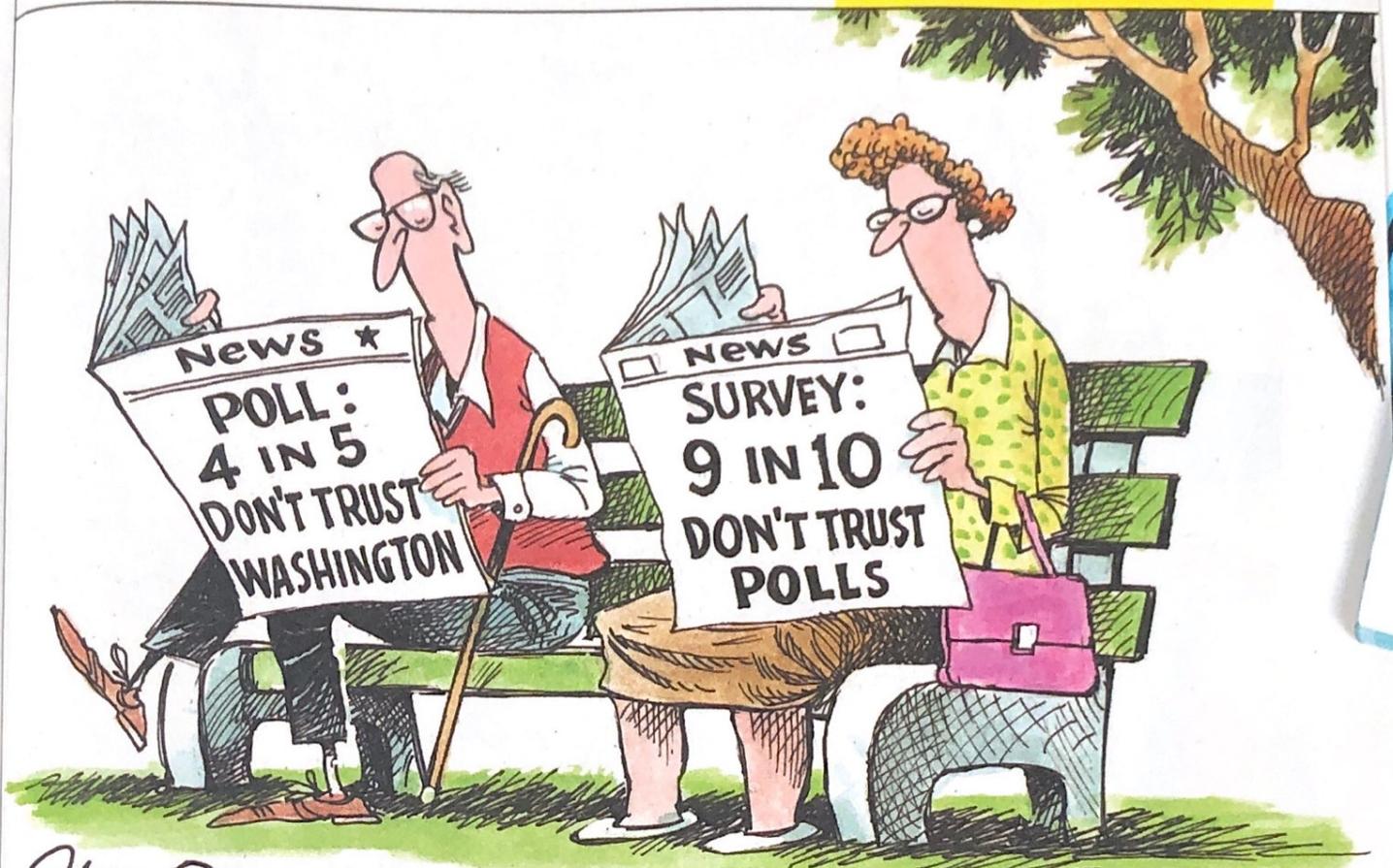
**-MARK ROM, Professor**

**McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University**

**Polls don't tell the public anything useful about political candidates.**



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**NO** Political polling will be with us for years to come because it's still reliable and needed.

In 1935, when George Gallup started the polling company that bears his name, he focused on political polling because of his deep interest in discovering "the will of the people." How did the American public think President Franklin D. Roosevelt was doing his job? Did they favor laws to outlaw child labor? Is government spending on welfare too high or too low?

Questions like those are still critical today. And it should never be far from our minds that the Declaration of Independence makes it clear that governments derive "their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Polling is an essential way to monitor that consent—in other words, whether government is serving the people. And it's still the only way to do this accurately and objectively. Without polling, leaders are reduced to relying on anecdotal and subjective information. Today, that could include social media, which is known for amplifying extreme views rather than reflecting public opinion in its true form.

**Polling tells us whether government is serving the people.**

Political polling also has a bright future because it works. The basic science of randomly selecting Americans to be polled remains a powerful method for knowing what the public thinks within a margin of error of plus or minus a few percentage points. Reputable polls mostly achieve this by contacting respondents by telephone (both cellphone and landline). Although reaching people has become more difficult, polls still achieve random samples that are reflective of society as a whole. Election polls have the added complication of needing to predict who will vote, and, as we saw in 2020, they aren't always spot on. But election pollsters have a track record of learning from their mistakes, and I'm confident they will use the problems that arose in 2020 to improve.

At a time when Americans are divided and trust in information is in decline, there has never been a more important time for the public to have faith in the science of polling to dispassionately document the will of the people. •

—LYDIA SAAD

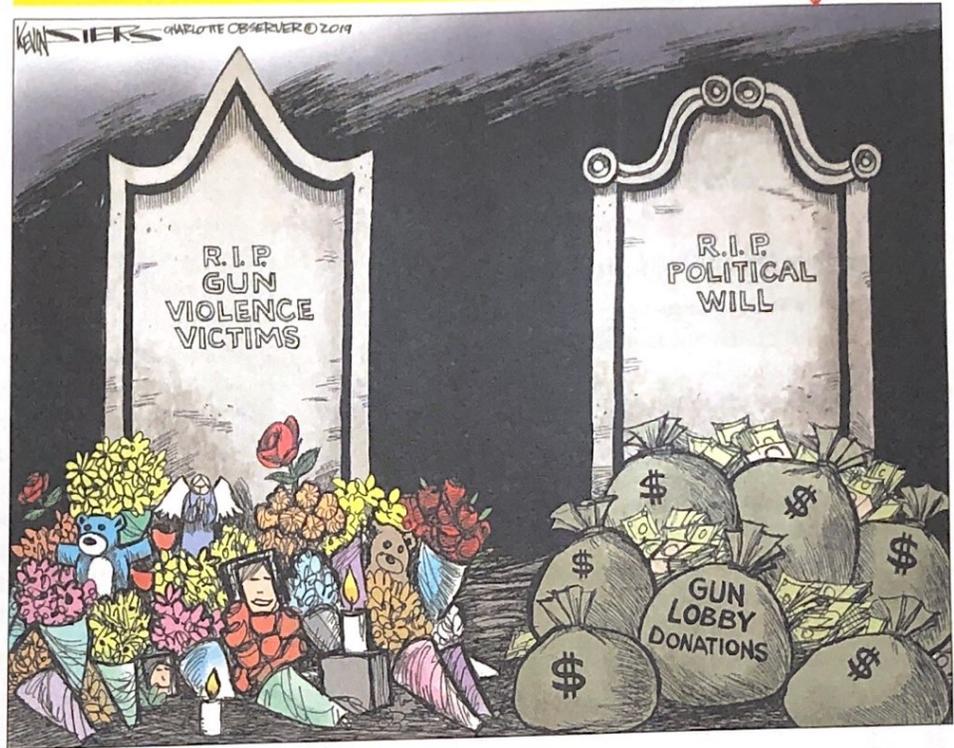
Director of U.S. Social Research, Gallup

DAVE GRANLUND/POLITICALCARTOONS.COM

# Do We Need Stricter

**O**n August 3, a 21-year-old armed with an AK-47 rifle walked into a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, and started shooting. He killed 22 people and injured more than two dozen others. Hours later, a man in Dayton, Ohio, killed 9 people and wounded at least 27 with an AR-15 pistol modified so it could fire 41 rounds in less than a minute. Both weapons were purchased legally. The back-to-back mass shootings stunned the nation and prompted new questions about whether the United States needs tougher federal gun laws. Representatives from a gun control group and a gun rights group face off about whether that's a good idea.

**TWO VIEWS** on gun control by different political cartoonists



**YES** On the same weekend that back-to-back mass shootings in El Paso and Dayton killed 31 people, more than 50 people were shot in various incidents in Chicago.

In fact, according to federal statistics, gun violence in America takes the lives of 100 people and injures 210 more every single day. The only way to stop this epidemic is to enact stronger gun laws.

Currently, one in five guns are sold without a background check. For example, some websites make it possible for individual buyers and sellers to connect, and sales like that can legally happen without a background check. A federal law requiring expanded background checks for gun sales would help stop this. Polls show that more than 90 percent of Americans—including gun owners—support expanded background checks.

Many mass shootings are carried out with assault-style weapons capable of inflicting widespread damage. According to a recent Quinnipiac poll, two-thirds of Americans support a ban on assault weapons, similar to the one that was in place

**The only way to stop this epidemic of gun violence is to enact stronger gun laws.**

from 1994 to 2004, and we should pass one. We also need a ban on high-capacity magazines, which allow shooters to fire more bullets without reloading. And so-called “extreme risk” laws, which allow the removal of firearms from individuals who show signs they might harm themselves or others, would also help reduce gun deaths.

Strong gun laws work. California, with some of the strongest gun laws in the country, has cut its gun deaths in half. But strong state laws are undermined by weak laws in neighboring states. The assault weapon used at a shooting in Gilroy, California,

in July, was legally purchased in Nevada, a state with weaker gun laws. We need tougher federal laws.

It must become harder for those intent on doing harm to get their hands on any gun, let alone the most deadly weapons of war, which don't belong on our streets at all. With lives at stake every day in America, we must demand that those elected to represent us pass stronger laws to protect us. •

—DYLAN ARYA

Policy and Research Associate, Brady\*

# Gun Laws?

BRANCO Constitution.com  
©2017



**NO** Susan Gonzalez hated guns. She wanted them banned. Then one day in 1997, two masked men broke into her home in Florida. As with most crimes, police could not get there in time to prevent the home invasion. Thankfully, her husband had a gun in the house—despite her objections. Susan grabbed the gun, pulled the trigger, and ended the threat to their lives.

That horrendous attack changed her views on gun control. She credits the gun in their home with saving their lives, and she now carries a gun concealed. She doesn't want to ever become a victim.

The media usually doesn't report these kinds of stories. But according to a 2013 federal report, guns are used several thousand times a day by good people to thwart criminal attacks. Consider how law-abiding gun owners have used their firearms to even stop mass murders from taking place in recent years: Last October, a father used his concealed handgun to stop a potential mass shooting in a McDonald's in Birmingham, Alabama. That same month, a shopper outside a Kroger supermarket in

Louisville, Kentucky, used his gun to stop a racist gunman. In 2016, a firefighter used his concealed weapon to stop a shooter who had already wounded a teacher and two students in a South Carolina elementary school.

We don't need more gun control because no matter what laws get passed, criminals will still get firearms. Or they will use some other tool to kill—such as the man who used a truck to run over and murder 86 people in a 2016 terrorist attack in France.

Gun restrictions only keep honest people from using the best available tool to defend themselves. Such was the case with Kate Nixon of Virginia Beach. She wanted to carry a gun for protection. But the gun control laws in her city prevented her from bringing a gun to work, and she was murdered this past May by the very man against whom she was trying to defend herself.

Guns save lives. But restrictions on firearms keep good people from protecting themselves. •

—ERICH PRATT

Senior Vice President, Gun Owners of America

Debate

A charging station  
at a mall in Springfield, Virginia



# Is America Ready for Electric Cars?

**G**eneral Motors, one of the world's largest car manufacturers, announced in January that it plans to produce only zero-emissions vehicles by 2035. That means a huge shift from gas-powered engines to electric motors. GM's announcement, which comes as the new Biden administration is looking for ways to ramp up the fight against climate change, is likely to put pressure on competing automakers to make similar commitments. Indeed, Volvo declared in March that it plans to sell only electric vehicles by 2030. But is a nation long accustomed to gas-guzzling cars and trucks ready to plug in instead? An electric car advocate and an economist face off about whether the electric car's time has arrived.

**YES** Do Americans want cars that are faster, more environmentally friendly, and cheaper to maintain? Of course. How about cars that are quieter and more comfortable? Definitely. That means America is ready for electric cars.

Before electric cars were introduced into the American market about 10 years ago, they were ridiculed as oversized snail-paced golf carts. They're actually pretty powerful and incredibly reliable. They're also fun. In fact, no mass-produced gas car can rival the acceleration of an electric car. The newest Tesla goes from 0 to 60 in under 2 seconds.

Electric cars are better for the environment. Gas cars emit toxins produced by burning gasoline; those toxins pollute the air we all breathe. Electric cars produce no emissions. To be fair, power plants that generate our electricity do create some pollution and carbon emissions. But every year, those levels drop as the electrical grid becomes more reliant on renewable energy like solar and wind power. So an electric car actually becomes more

**Electric cars are environmentally friendly and cheaper over the long term.**

environmentally friendly every year that passes.

Electric cars are cheaper to own over the long term. In most of the U.S., the electricity needed to charge your car costs the equivalent of gasoline at about \$1 a gallon. And you never need to go to a gas station; you just plug it in at home and charge while you sleep. Electric cars require almost

no maintenance: no smog checks, no oil changes. Even brakes last longer since regenerative braking, which puts energy back into the battery as the car slows down, reduces wear on brakes.

And finally, why are electric cars more comfortable and quieter? With no pistons banging back and forth, there's

no vibration—and no engine noise.

Most people focus on the environmental case for electric cars—and it is undeniable. But if you simply like good, efficient cars or don't like the smell of gasoline on your fingers, you'll agree that electric cars are the best choice. The moment for electric cars has arrived. •

—MARC GELLER  
Director, Electric Auto Association



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**The Chevrolet Bolt,**  
an electric car made by GM

## ELECTRIC CARS BY THE NUMBERS

**4.8 million**

NUMBER of electric vehicles  
in use worldwide in 2019.

SOURCE: STATISTA

**2.6%**

PERCENTAGE of all car sales worldwide  
that were electric vehicles in 2019.

SOURCE: GLOBAL EV OUTLOOK, JUNE 2020

**263,802**

NUMBER of publicly available fast electric vehicle  
chargers worldwide in 2019, up from 312 in 2010.

SOURCE: STATISTA

**NO** Electric cars, which are powered by rechargeable batteries, may be the wave of the future, but for the next decade or so they'll remain expensive niche products that won't dominate the U.S. marketplace.

Part of that has to do with how Americans use their vehicles. In 1903, more electric vehicles were sold than any other type. But they were being used for short pleasure drives, not work. Today, Americans buy more pickup trucks than four-door sedans. If you're looking for a heavy vehicle that's meant to haul things long distances, a gas-powered motor is better suited to that than an electric one.

Most of today's electric cars need recharging every 200 miles or so. For most people, that makes them practical only for short local trips. But Americans want to buy a car that's also good for vacations and hauling things from Home Depot. It's likely to be the end of the decade before better and cheaper batteries allow that to happen.

Electric vehicle proponents also underestimate the scale

**Electric cars will remain a niche product for the next decade or so.**

of shifting the car industry from gas to electric. In 2021, manufacturers around the world will make more than 750 models and sell nearly 100 million new vehicles. But in the U.S., 98 percent of them will still be powered by gas engines. Even when improved batteries make electric cars cost-effective, converting hundreds of models to electric

will take a couple decades. For example, more than a ton of lithium is needed to produce car batteries for 100 electric vehicles. We'll need more lithium mines and specialized refineries, but opening a new mine can take a dozen years. It will therefore be the 2030s before the global supply chain can produce

enough batteries for electric cars to dominate gas-powered vehicles.

There's no doubt that electric cars have potential. But they're still in their infancy. They remain too expensive and impractical for most American consumers, and it will take a decade at least for that to change. •

—**MICHAEL SMITKA**, Professor Emeritus of Economics  
Washington and Lee University

# Is a Green New Deal a Good Idea?

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**W**hen President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, the U.S. was in the depths of the Great Depression. A quarter of Americans were unemployed, there were long lines of hungry people at soup kitchens, and people were desperate. Roosevelt immediately began enacting a series of government programs designed to help Americans and get the economy moving again. The programs were collectively known as the New Deal.

Now, some lawmakers are saying that the threat of climate change demands a similar scope of intervention and investment. They're calling their initiative a Green New Deal. But not everyone thinks this is the right thing to do. Two senators debate whether the nation should adopt a Green New Deal.



Young people in Brooklyn, New York, demonstrate in favor of a Green New Deal.



Coal miners protest in Washington, D.C., outside the Environmental Protection Agency.

**YES** A bold plan to transform our global energy system away from fossil fuels is not only a moral imperative for a livable planet, it's an opportunity to build a more just and equitable world.

This is the thinking behind the Green New Deal, an approach to tackling climate change that invests in working people and uproots historical injustices. This vision draws on the spirit of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's successful program to end the Great Depression, curb income inequality, and create a more humane society with a strong middle class.

A Green New Deal would make massive public investments in our infrastructure: energy-efficient buildings, a modern energy grid, a green transportation system, and the rapid deployment of wind, solar, and other renewable energy technologies across the country, all manufactured right here in the United States.

A Green New Deal would create millions of family-sustaining, unionized jobs with benefits. It would also protect communities vulnerable

## A Green New Deal is a moral imperative—and an opportunity to build a more just world.

to climate change and provide the working people in the fossil fuel industry with training and guaranteed employment opportunities in the green economy.

Many low-income Americans and people of color live in communities that have unsafe drinking water and dangerously polluted air. A Green New Deal would prioritize infrastructure repairs to fix this. It's not a radical idea to suggest that clean drinking water and clean air should be the right of all Americans regardless of their income or the color of their skin.

According to scientists, we have a little more than a decade to make these major changes to avoid irreversible climate destruction. We can't afford not to pursue a Green New Deal. The good news is that there are no technological obstacles to achieving this—only political ones.

Young people are demanding that their elected officials act urgently to tackle climate change, as the overwhelming scientific evidence tells us we must. Let's bring people together. Let's transform our economy. Let's save the planet.

—SENATOR BERNIE SANDERS, Independent of Vermont



Senator Sanders is running as a Democratic candidate for president in 2020.

**NO** Earth's climate is changing, and the global community has a responsibility to address it. But there are three basic reasons why the proposed Green New Deal isn't the way to do it: The plan is unrealistic, it will cost too much for average Americans, and it won't achieve its goal.

At the heart of the plan is a mandate to switch to 100 percent renewable fuels within a decade. We should continue to increase our use of renewables, but essentially outlawing fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas isn't a mistake, it's impossible. Three out of five U.S. homes depend on these fossil fuels for their power. In 2017, wind and solar power generated just under 8 percent of America's electricity. There's no way we can go from 8 percent to 100 percent in 10 years.

Because the fossil fuels most Americans now depend on are abundant in the U.S., they're relatively cheap. By requiring us to abandon these inexpensive fuel sources, the Green New Deal would make household energy bills jump by as much as \$3,800 a year—a spike working families can't afford. The plan would also require

the national construction of a massive new infrastructure to support the shift to all renewable energy. Taxpayers would end up footing the bill for this.

## The Green New Deal is unrealistic and will cost too much for average Americans.

Even if Americans were willing to pay, the deal wouldn't achieve their climate change goals. In 2017, America generated 13 percent of global carbon emissions. China and India produced 33 percent. Until these nations make changes, global emissions will climb regardless of what the United States does.

We should focus on what is working: innovation. American scientists are making significant progress on two new clean-energy developments. The first is advanced nuclear power generation, and the second is capturing carbon emissions and finding new uses for them. We must continue to support these technologies and deploy them around the world.

The Green New Deal isn't the answer. Let's instead make America's energy as clean as possible today, while investing in promising innovations for tomorrow.

—SENATOR JOHN BARRASSO, Republican of Wyoming



Senator Barrasso is chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

# Is It Time to Eliminate the Penny?

**T**he U.S. Mint produced more than 7 billion pennies in 2019, each one costing 1.99 cents to make. Because so many pennies drop out of circulation, the government mints more pennies than nickels, dimes, and quarters combined. Pennies are made mostly of zinc, and zinc is expensive. The tab for producing all those pennies came to more than \$145 million for 2019. Now with more shoppers staying home or wanting to avoid touching cash during the pandemic, there's been a shortage of coins recently. And that has renewed debate over whether the U.S. should follow countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which have done away with their one-cent coins. An economist and the head of a group funded by the zinc industry face off.



**PENNIES BY THE NUMBERS**

**7.3 billion**  
NUMBER of pennies produced in 2019

**1.99 cents**  
COST to produce one penny

**1857**  
YEAR when the U.S. last eliminated a coin, the half-cent

SOURCES: COINBASE.NET; THE NEW YORK TIMES



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**Making pennies**  
at the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia

**YES** I recently spotted a penny on the sidewalk. Unlike most people, I picked it up, because I hate litter. And that's exactly the problem with pennies: They're worth so little that they've become litter. It's not worth our time to use them. It costs about 2 cents to mint a penny, so the government loses money by producing them. However, even if minting costs were zero, it would still be time to eliminate pennies, because our time is valuable and pennies waste time. The median wage in the U.S. is about \$19 per hour, so it takes only two seconds for a typical worker to earn one cent. But using a penny generally adds more than two seconds to the average retail transaction. Suppose that you're waiting in line to make a purchase with three people ahead of you. The first one decides to pay in cash and either pokes around for a penny or receives one in change. Using the penny has wasted the time of five people (including the clerk). This scene is repeated many times each day. Each instance is pretty inconsequential, but with time valued at the median

**Pennies are so worthless that they've become litter and aren't worth our time.**

wage and pennies being used in about half of the roughly 60 billion annual cash transactions in the U.S., a delay of only two seconds adds up to a loss of about \$600 million per year. Won't customers end up paying more if we eliminate the penny and round cash register totals like \$1.99 up to \$2? When I analyzed nearly 200,000 convenience store transactions, I discovered that the number of times customers' bills would be rounded upward is almost exactly equal to the frequency with which they'd be rounded downward. While individual items' prices often end in nine, cash register totals don't—because people buy multiple items and must pay taxes. Finally, there's a strong green argument for eliminating pennies. More than 6 billion pennies disappear each year, either lost or thrown away. That's nearly 17,000 tons of metal that's needlessly mined and smelted each year, harming the environment in the process. It's time to let the penny go. •

—**ROBERT WHAPLES**  
Professor of Economics, Wake Forest University

**NO** More and more purchases are being made with credit and debit cards and other forms of cashless payment. At the same time, the cost of producing coins is increasing. So does it still make sense to keep the penny in circulation? The answer is a resounding yes. First and foremost, a low-denomination coin helps keep prices in check. Without the penny, transactions would have to be rounded to the nearest nickel. But that would make goods and services more expensive, as profit-maximizing businesses would round most prices up, which would hurt consumers every time they shop. Additionally, people in economically underserved and under-banked communities need the ability to make cash purchases. Many people with relatively low incomes (particularly the young, elderly, and members of minority groups) don't have access to credit cards, use cash more frequently, and tend to make more small cash purchases, including using the penny. It's also wrong to suggest that halting production of the penny would save the government money. Without

**Polls show that two-thirds of Americans want to keep the penny in circulation.**

pennies, we'll need to mint more nickels. How can the government save money when it costs almost a dime to make a nickel today? For those who don't want their pennies, please donate them to the many charities that collect them to raise money for important causes like hunger and cancer research. The Salvation Army, the Ronald McDonald House, and the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, for example, raise millions of dollars through penny drives. That's not small change. So can we do without the penny? Not if we want to keep inflation in check, protect America's hardworking families, and continue helping charities raise millions of dollars. Polls show that two-thirds of Americans want to keep the penny in circulation. In fact, public support for the penny has remained consistently high for decades. It's not just for sentimental reasons—people know keeping the penny makes good economic sense. •

—**MARK WELLER**  
Executive Director, Americans for Common Cents

# Should Covid Vaccines Be Mandatory?

**T**he toll of the Covid-19 pandemic has been devastating: Worldwide, about 2 million people have died from it, as of mid-January. That includes more than 380,000 people in the United States. But the one bright spot in pandemic news has been the development of vaccines. The United States approved two Covid vaccines in December and began giving them to vulnerable health care workers immediately. Additional vaccines are being tested and reviewed. These vaccines have the potential to end the pandemic—if enough people take them to stop the spread of the disease.

An epidemiologist and a health care policy researcher at a libertarian\* think tank face off about whether the government should require vaccination.

**VACCINES BY THE NUMBERS**

- 75%** MINIMUM PERCENTAGE of Americans that must be vaccinated in order to achieve herd immunity. SOURCE: DR. ANTHONY FAUCI
- 2** NUMBER of Covid-19 vaccines approved in the U.S. by mid-January.
- 13** NUMBER of vaccines the CDC recommends American children take by age 18 (not including annual flu vaccines). SOURCE: CDC

**YES** How will the Covid-19 pandemic end? The answer is surprisingly straightforward: when 60 to 80 percent of the population is immune. Globally, that's more than 4 billion people, including up to 262 million Americans. How do we get there? By making Covid-19 vaccination mandatory.

We have a powerful tool to achieve immunity: safe and effective vaccines. The vaccines now available have gone through clinical trials in tens of thousands of volunteers before approval by the Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. To control the spread of Covid-19, we need the majority of Americans to take a vaccine. This might not happen if vaccination is optional, like wearing masks was earlier in the pandemic.

Some argue that we should allow more and more people to become infected and acquire "natural" immunity. This is a terrible idea. Not only would that cause many more deaths and increased economic damage, but there is no proof that survivors will have lasting immunity.

**We have a powerful tool to achieve immunity: safe and effective vaccines.**

There is a legal precedent for mandating vaccination. In the early 1900s, Cambridge, Massachusetts, required public vaccination to control a devastating smallpox outbreak. One individual protested that vaccination was "a violation of liberty." The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled in 1905, in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, that "government is instituted for the common good, for the protection, safety, prosperity and happiness of the people" and that the state could intervene when "the safety of the general public may demand."

This principle applies to the current pandemic. Anyone who is not immune to Covid-19 is a threat to us all. There are rare individuals who cannot take vaccines for health reasons and should be exempt. However, for the rest of us, vaccination is a civic duty, and the government should make it mandatory. Let's roll up our sleeves and stop this pandemic together.

—**W. IAN LIPKIN**, Director, Center for Infection and Immunity, Columbia Univ. Mailman School of Public Health

\*A political philosophy advocating as little government intervention as possible in the lives of citizens

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In October, Katelyn Evans, 16, became the first teen in the U.S. to get an injection as part of a Covid-19 vaccine trial, at Cincinnati Children's Hospital.

**NO** With a dangerous disease circulating in the population, government's goal should be to reduce the amount of harm people do to each other. Vaccination can reduce such harms, but making Covid-19 vaccination mandatory would do more harm than good.

The United States can achieve "herd immunity" without resorting to mandates. There has already been a substantial uptick of trust in the vaccines. A recent poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation found the share of American adults willing to be vaccinated rose from 63 percent in September to 71 percent in December. That's close to the 75 to 85 percent that Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's top infectious disease expert, estimates we would need to achieve herd immunity. That increase was the result of persuasion—greater public awareness of the dangers of Covid-19 and more evidence about the vaccines' safety and efficacy—not mandates.

That same poll suggests most of the holdouts are also open to persuasion. Of the 27 percent who say they are

not currently willing to be vaccinated, only 37 percent say they don't trust vaccines in general. The most prevalent concerns among the unwilling relate to side effects and a desire to collect more data. That means that the best way to achieve herd immunity in the U.S. is to treat vaccine

skeptics like adults, give them truthful information, and let them decide.

In today's politically charged environment, a mandate could ironically make skeptics less willing to be vaccinated—or to comply with other pandemic-control measures. More than half of the vaccine holdouts already say

they don't trust the government. A mandate would make them even less trusting. It would also fuel the broader movement against vaccines by allowing activists to argue that the government knows it can't win the vaccine debate with persuasion alone. Ultimately, a vaccine mandate could inadvertently delay population immunity and increase the death toll from Covid-19.

—**MICHAEL CANNON**, Director of Health Policy Studies, the Cato Institute

# Should Humans Go to Mars?

A human mission to Mars once seemed the stuff of science fiction. But thanks to major advancements, reaching—and surviving on—the Red Planet could become a reality in our lifetime. NASA, the U.S. space agency, and several

private companies are already developing the technology to make such a trip possible. But while most experts agree that we'll one day be able to send humans to Mars, not all of them think we should. Two scientists weigh in.

**NASA's vision**  
for living quarters  
on the Red Planet

**YES** NASA has been sending robots to study and collect information about Mars since 1965. The findings have inspired scientists to continue asking important questions, such as: Did life once exist on Mars? Does it exist there today? Could humans eventually live on Mars? What can the planet tell us about Earth's past, present, and future?

Many scientists agree that only human explorers can answer these questions. Although robots have been extremely helpful in studying Mars—they discovered ice below the planet's surface—people will be even better.

For one thing, humans will be able to make quicker decisions, without having to rely on commands from scientists on Earth, like robots do. What can take a rover days and weeks to analyze, a person can study in just hours. Humans will also be able to move around the planet much faster. The Curiosity rover, which is currently exploring Mars, can only travel about the length of a football field in one day.

**Humans can move faster than robots and make quicker decisions.**

However, getting humans to Mars and keeping them safe will require advances in technology. Not only is Mars very far away, it also lacks breathable air, usable water, and protection from the sun. A round-trip to Mars would take about 18 months, and there isn't enough room on current spacecraft to carry all the food, water, and other items humans would need to survive. That's why NASA is looking for ways to utilize the Martian soil and water, as well as other resources.

Exploring space is beneficial for all of us. At NASA, we're confident that one day humans will be able to travel to Mars, live and work there, and return safely to Earth. It's just a matter of time. •

—JAMES GREEN  
Chief Scientist, NASA

**NO** It's important to explore Mars, and humans play a valuable role in that research. Though robotic spacecraft can do a lot, they lack the critical intuition, lifetime experience, and decision-making skills that humans have. But sending people to Mars for long periods of time would be extremely unsafe, and we shouldn't do it.

Space is a very hazardous place for humans. In particular, space radiation—especially galactic cosmic rays (GCRs)—is dangerous. GCRs are energetic particles that come from faraway exploding stars. Without the protection of a thick atmosphere like we have on Earth, these particles can cause cancer and even brain damage. The longer astronauts are in space, both traveling to Mars and on the surface of the planet, the more they're exposed to these particles and the more damage they're likely to experience.

**Sending people to Mars for long periods would be extremely unsafe.**

Luckily, there's a safer destination for humans in our solar system: Saturn's moon Titan. Located 745 million miles from Earth, it has a thick atmosphere that provides protection from dangerous radiation. Titan has many other

Earth-like qualities that could help us learn more about our home planet. Titan has lakes and seas, as well as wind, weather, and seasons similar to Earth's, and many resources that would enable humans to build a self-sustaining settlement.

Human exploration of any planet or moon beyond our own is likely to be far in the future. It's an enormous challenge to get humans safely to these destinations. We should take this giant scientific leap only when we are ready, and we shouldn't subject our brave astronauts—and the success of the missions—to undue risk. For these reasons and more, sending humans for long-duration missions to Mars would be unwise. •

—AMANDA R. HENDRIX  
Senior Scientist, Planetary Science Institute