



# Consumer Attitudes Towards Fuel Economy: 2020 Survey Results

Nationally representative phone and internet survey  
Prepared by CR Survey Research Department and Advocacy Division

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**Table of Contents**

Introduction	3
Highlights	3
Fuel Economy: Interest and Importance	4
Fuel Economy: Policies and Expectations	7
Purchase Plans: COVID-19 impact	8
Methodology	9

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### INTRODUCTION

This nationally representative survey of 3,879 adults residing in the U.S. was conducted by phone and internet from July 29 through August 12 of 2020. Most questions were asked of those who plan to purchase or lease a vehicle in the next two years, 1,735 Americans. A couple of policy questions were asked of the full sample of 3,879. Interviews were offered in English and Spanish.

The purpose was to understand American attitudes towards fuel economy, particularly among prospective vehicle buyers (those who intend to purchase or lease a vehicle within the next two years).



### HIGHLIGHTS

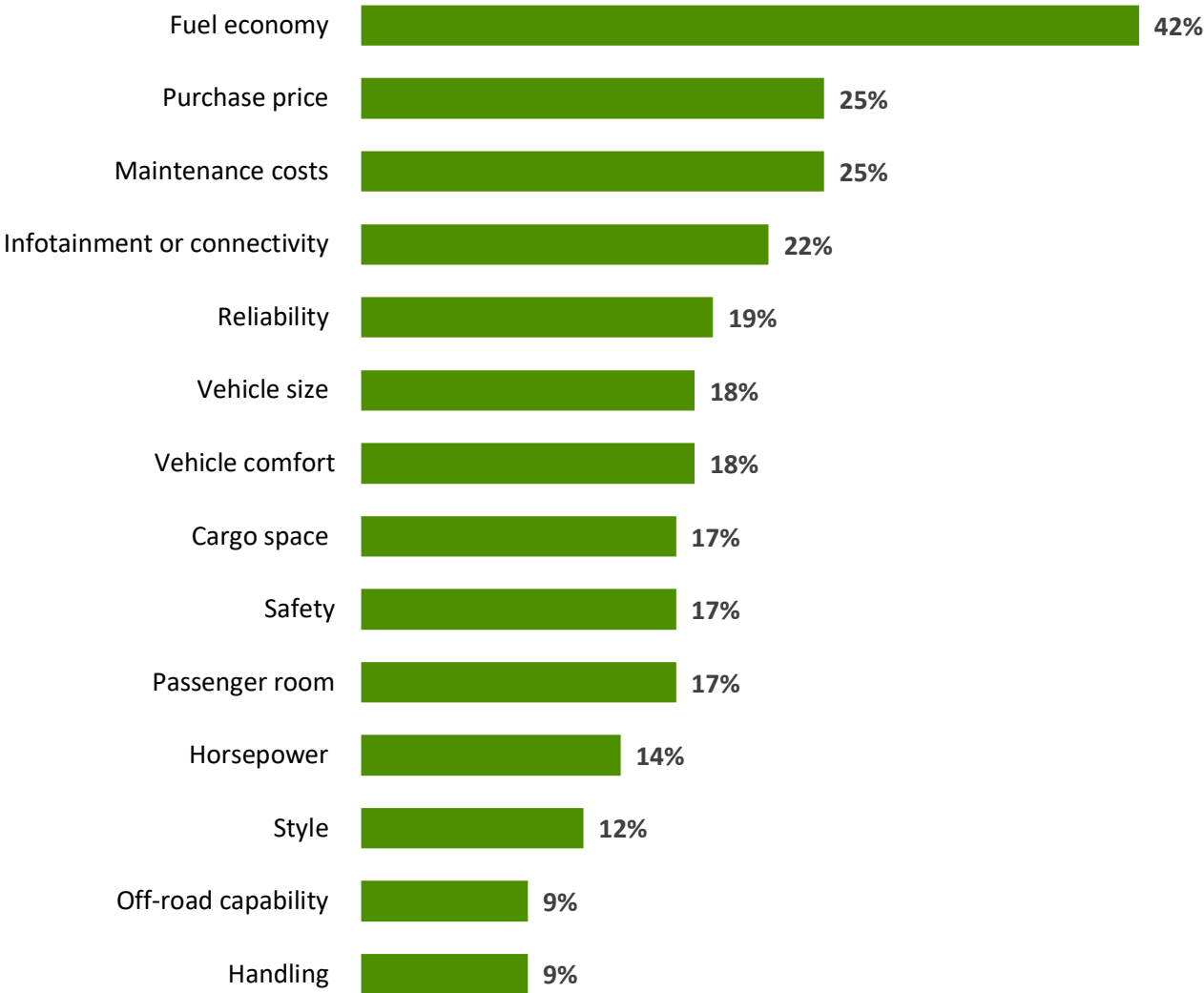
- **ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT:** Prospective buyers who currently have a vehicle most commonly selected fuel economy as one of the attributes of their vehicle that has the most room for improvement (42%); the next-highest selections were purchase price (25%) and maintenance costs (25%).
- **IMPORTANCE OF FUEL ECONOMY TO VEHICLE SELECTION:** 64% of Americans who are planning to buy or lease a vehicle within the next two years say that fuel economy is 'extremely important' or 'very important' to them when considering what vehicle to get next. Only 6% say it is 'not very important' or 'not important at all.'
- **EXPECTATIONS OF AUTOMAKERS:** More than 7 in 10 Americans 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that:
  - automakers should continue to improve fuel economy for all vehicle types;
  - automakers have a responsibility to consumers to improve gas mileage; and
  - each new generation of vehicles available on the market is expected to be more fuel-efficient than the last.

### FUEL ECONOMY: Interest and Importance

Except for a few questions on policy, which will be clearly labeled, all questions in this survey were asked of Americans who plan to purchase or lease a vehicle sometime within the next two years. In this report, we refer to these people as “prospective vehicle buyers.”

We asked prospective vehicle buyers *who currently have a vehicle* which three attributes of their current vehicle have the most room for improvement. Fuel economy was mentioned by far the most frequently.

Thinking about your current vehicle, which three attributes have the most room for improvement?



Base: Respondents planning to buy or lease a vehicle within the next two years. Some responses abbreviated.

**Consumer Attitudes Towards Fuel Economy: 2020 Survey Results**

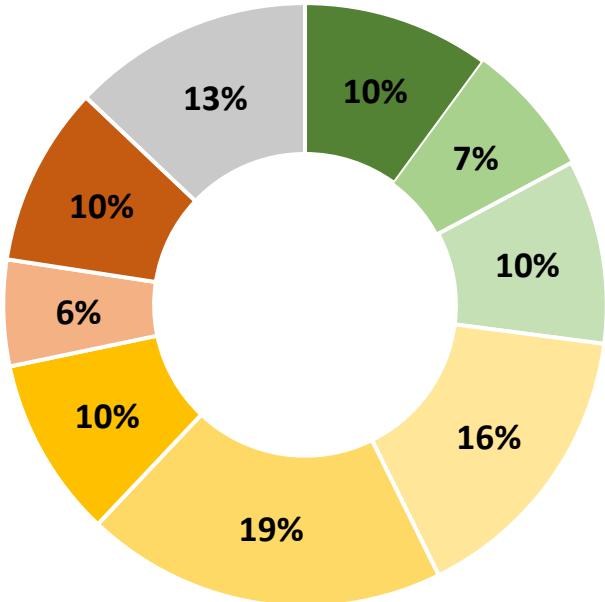
We asked prospective buyers how quickly fuel savings would have to offset a higher purchase price for them to be willing to pay extra for a more fuel-efficient vehicle.

Because there are both financial and environmental incentives for greater fuel efficiency, we included an option for "I would be willing to pay extra for a more fuel-efficient vehicle regardless of whether I would make the money back in fuel cost savings." This proved to be the third-most common response (13%).

Overall, 42% of prospective buyers say they would need to make up the cost in one year or less. The median response (excluding people who said they'd spend more "regardless") was a little more than a year.

**How quickly would fuel savings have to offset a higher purchase price for you to be willing to pay extra for a more fuel-efficient vehicle?**

- Within the first month
- One month to less than three months
- Three months to less than six months
- Six months to less than one year
- One year to less than two years
- Two years to less than three years
- Three years to less than five years
- Over the lifetime of the vehicle
- I would be willing to pay extra for a more fuel-efficient vehicle regardless of whether I would make the money back in fuel cost savings

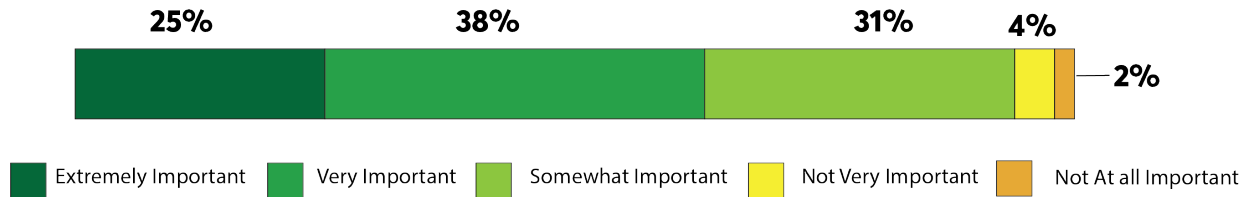


Base: Respondents planning to buy or lease a vehicle within the next two years.  
 Note: Due to rounding, figures sum to more than 100%.

## Consumer Attitudes Towards Fuel Economy: 2020 Survey Results

We asked prospective car buyers/lesers how important fuel economy is to them when considering what vehicle to purchase or lease. Sixty-four percent said it was 'extremely important' or 'very important.' Six percent said it was 'not very important' or 'not at all important.'

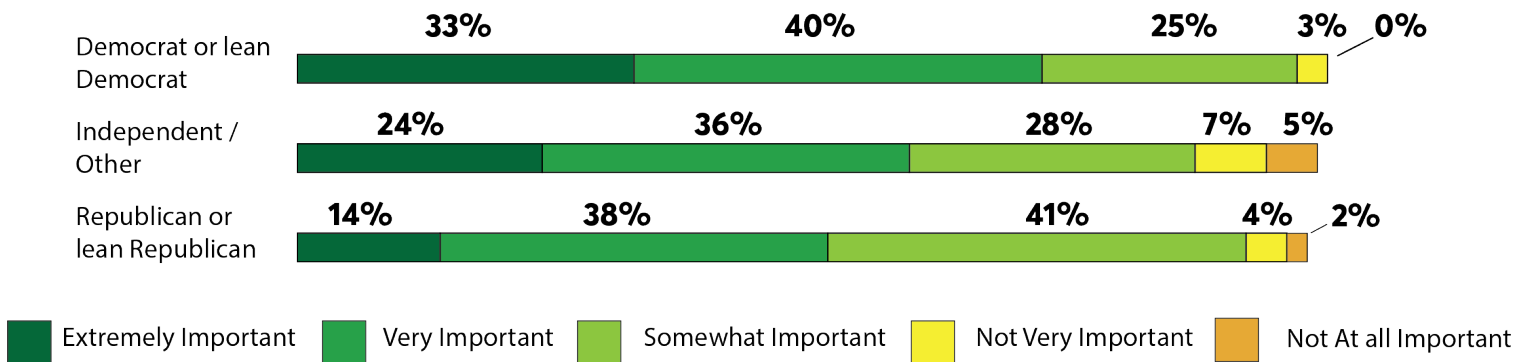
How important is fuel economy to you when considering what vehicle to purchase or lease?



Base: Respondents planning to buy or lease a vehicle within the next two years.

The survey found that Democratic or Democratic-leaning prospective car buyers value fuel economy slightly more than Republican or Republican-leaning prospective buyers. Regardless of political leaning or affiliation, a majority of prospective vehicle buyers say fuel economy will be important when choosing their next vehicle to purchase or lease: 72% of Democrats say fuel economy is 'extremely important' or 'very important' when choosing their vehicle, as do 60% of Independents, and 53% of Republicans.

How important is fuel economy to you when considering what vehicle to purchase or lease?



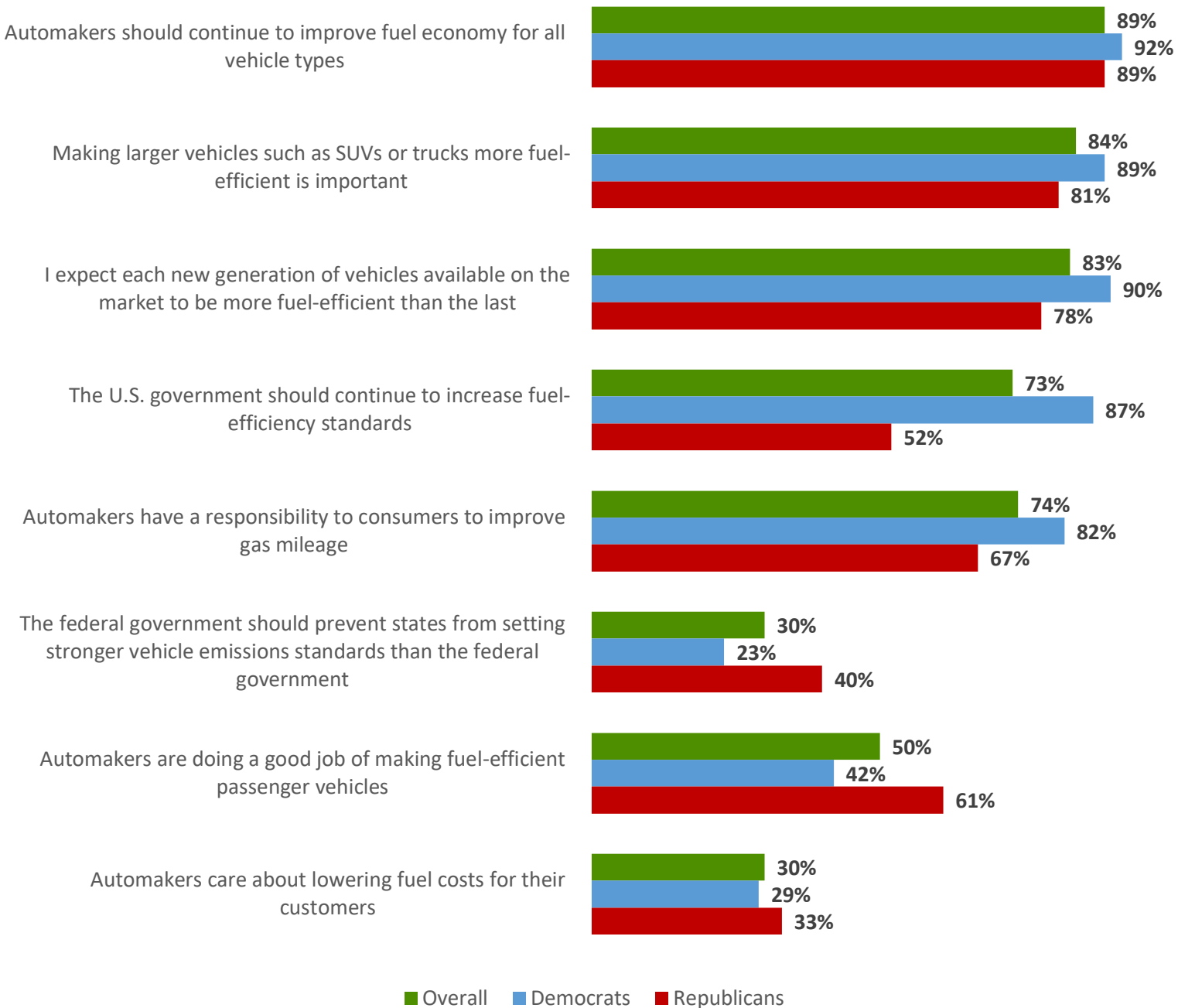
Base: Respondents planning to buy or lease a vehicle within the next two years.

Note: Due to rounding, some figures sum to more or less than 100%.

**FUEL ECONOMY: Policies and Expectations**

We asked all Americans, regardless of purchase plans, about agreement or disagreement with some beliefs and opinions related to fuel economy and related policies.

Percentage of Americans who Agree (Agree + Strongly Agree) with certain policies and attitudes related to fuel economy:

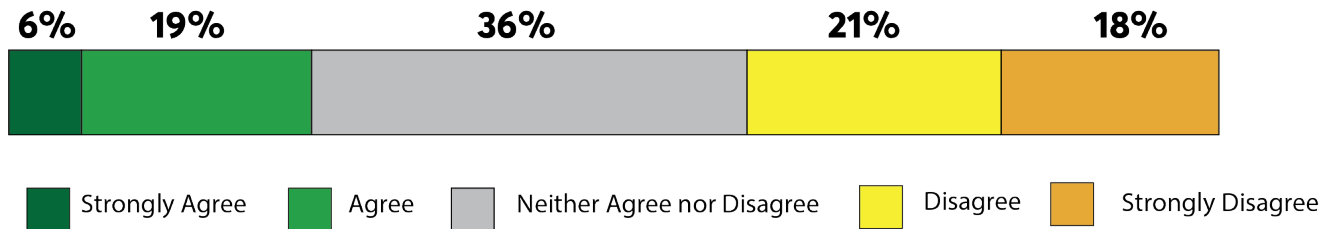


Base: All respondents.

## Consumer Attitudes Towards Fuel Economy: 2020 Survey Results

We also asked about a 2020 change to federal law that weakens the fleetwide federal fuel economy standards for automakers for passenger cars and light trucks.

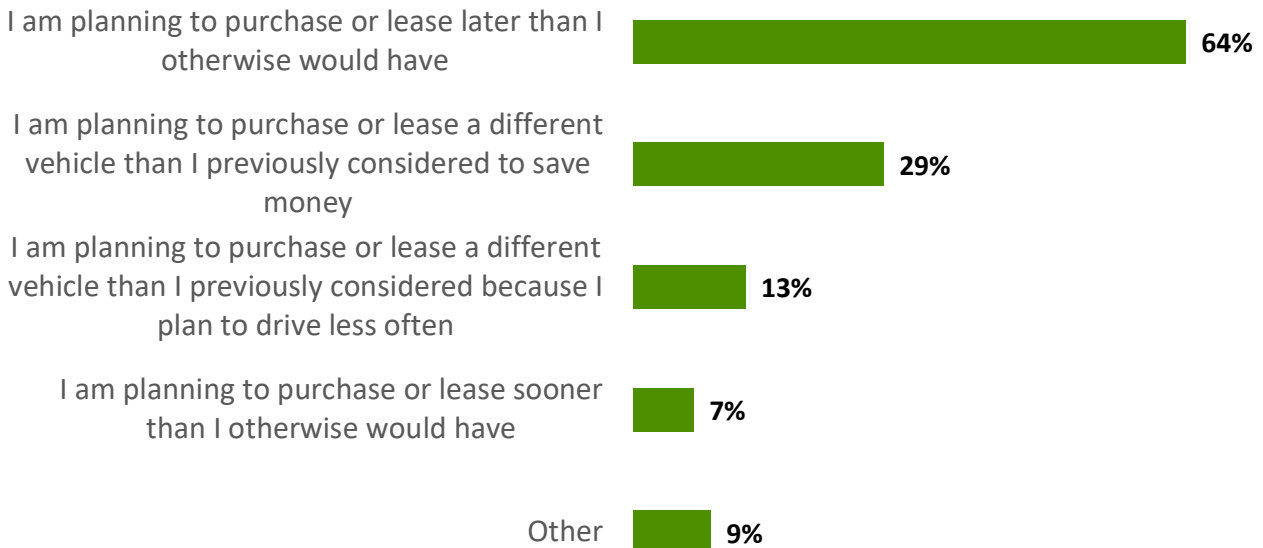
The U.S. government has recently reduced fuel economy improvement requirements for automakers. Standards will continue to go up, but by 1.5% per year instead of 5% per year. Do you agree or disagree with this change?



Base: All respondents.

## PURCHASE PLANS: COVID-19 Impact

Finally, we asked if the coronavirus pandemic has had any impact on prospective car buyers' decision of what vehicle to get or when to get it. A third (33%) of Americans planning to buy or lease a vehicle within the next two years said the pandemic has affected their plans in some way:



Base: Respondents who plan to buy or lease a vehicle within the next two years and say the coronavirus pandemic has affected their vehicle shopping plans.



### SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This nationally representative survey of 3,879 adults residing in the U.S. was conducted by phone (n=121) and internet (n=3,758) by NORC from July 29 through August 12, 2020. It was fielded through NORC's AmeriSpeak panel, a nationally representative probability-based panel, in both English (n=3,809) and Spanish (n=70). Questions not about policy were asked of the 1,735 Americans in that sample who plan to purchase or lease a vehicle in the next two years.

Panelists were initially offered the cash equivalent of \$2 for taking the survey. This was increased to \$5 on August 11 to boost engagement toward the end of the field period. These data were weighted to provide nationally representative estimates of the U.S. adult population based on sex, age, education, race/ethnicity, census region, housing tenure, and telephone status.

After weighting, the sample is:

- 45% female
- Median age of 43
- 25% have a household income of less than \$30,000 per year; 28% have an annual household income of \$30,000 to less than \$60,000; 25% have an annual household income of \$60,000 to less than \$100,000; and 23% have an annual household income of \$100,000 or more per year.
- 34% have a BA or above
- 64% are white, non-Hispanic