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Three in four Californians report experiencing recent periods of extreme heat. Support for policies aimed at minimizing its impact.

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

According to the latest statewide *Berkeley IGS Poll*, three-quarters of California voters (77%) say they have recently experienced periods of extreme heat in the area where they live, and 21% say they have been impacted a great deal. Voters in the Inland Empire and the Central Valley are the areas of the state where the largest majorities report experiencing extreme heat where they live.

Among residents living in affected areas voters offer only mixed assessments of the job that their own local community has been doing in providing residents with opportunities for relief from the heat, with 26% rating their community as doing an excellent or good job, 23% fair, and 23% poor or very poor.

In addition, half of the state's voters (50%) say they lack confidence in California's ability to provide steady, reliable electric power during extended heat waves, compared to 47% express some confidence.

By a three-to-one-margin (67% to 22%) Californians support the idea of the state establishing cooling standards for residential properties similar to the heating standards currently in place for residences that would require air conditioners or other equipment to keep indoor temperatures from rising to unsafe levels.

A similar large majority (70%) supports a proposal now circulating in the U.S. Congress to broaden federal disaster relief laws to include extreme heat as another form of natural disaster along with hurricanes, fires, landslides, drought, and high water.

Support for both proposals is broad-based and receive majority support among voters across all major regions of the state. However, Republicans offer more divided opinions when it comes to expanding government involvement on these matters, whereas Democrats are overwhelmingly supportive.

These findings come from the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed online August 24-29, 2023 among 6,030 California registered voters in English and Spanish.

IGS co-director Eric Schickler offered this comment, “The more regular occurrence of extreme heat across much of the state creates new policy expectations for elected officials – more residents will expect their state and local governments to be prepared to help out as these events become the “new normal.”

Three in four Californians have experienced recent periods of extreme heat

Greater than three in four California voters (77%) report that they have recently experienced periods of extreme heat in the area where they live. This includes majorities in each major region of the state, although those living in the Inland Empire (93%), Sacramento/North Valley (87%), and San Joaquin Valley (86%) are the most likely to report this.

When voters who report having experienced periods of extreme heat were asked the extent to which their families were impacted by the heat, 21% report that their and their family were impacted a great deal, while another 31% were impacted some. More than one in four of those living in the Inland Empire, Sacramento/North Valley, San Joaquin Valley, and Los Angeles County regions report having been impacted a great deal.

Table 1
Extent to which residents have experienced periods of extreme heat where they live (among California registered voters)

	Had recent experiences with extreme heat %	<i>Impacted family . . .</i>		
		<i>A great deal</i> %	<i>Some</i> %	<i>A little/not at all</i> %
Total statewide	77	21	31	25
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	77	26	34	17
San Diego County	69	18	29	22
Orange County	68	15	23	30
Inland Empire	93	26	38	29
Central Coast	58	7	27	24
San Joaquin Valley	86	28	27	31
Sacramento/North Valley	87	30	35	22
San Francisco Bay Area	72	14	32	26
North Coast/Sierras	69	23	23	23

Voters give only mixed ratings to the job that community has been doing in providing residents with opportunities for relief from the heat

Voters who have experienced periods of extreme heat offer only mixed ratings to their communities when asked how well they have responded to the heat by providing residents with opportunities for relief. One in four (26%) rate their community as doing an excellent or good job, 23% give their community a fair rating, while another 23% say their community has been doing a poor or very poor job.

There is not a lot of variation in voter assessments on a regional basis, although voters in the Sacramento/North Valley are slightly more likely than voters living elsewhere to rate their communities positively rather than negatively (+14) in providing residents with opportunities for relief from the heat.

Table 2
How those experiencing extreme heat rate the job their community has been doing
in providing residents with opportunities to get relief from the heat
(among California registered voters)

	Excellent/ good %	Fair %	Poor/ very poor %	No opinion %
Total statewide	26	23	23	28
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	21	24	25	30
San Diego County	27	24	25	24
Orange County	19	27	21	33
Inland Empire	29	19	24	28
Central Coast	26	18	20	36
San Joaquin Valley	30	26	26	18
Sacramento/North Valley	33	24	19	23
San Francisco Bay Area	28	21	29	32
North Coast/Sierras	34	15	24	27

Half of the state’s voters lack confidence in California’s ability to provide reliable electric power during extended heat waves

Half of the state’s voters (50%) say they are not confident that California can provide steady, reliable electric power during extended heat waves. This compares to 47% who are confident.

Slightly more voters living in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Orange counties express confidence in the state’s ability to provide reliable electric power during periods of extreme heat than elsewhere, while voters living in the San Joaquin Valley and North Coast/Sierras regions express the least confidence.

Table 3
Level of confidence in California’s ability to provide steady, reliable
electric power during extended heat waves
(among California registered voters)

	Confident %	Not confident %	No opinion %
Total statewide	47	50	3
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	53	43	4
San Diego County	52	47	2
Orange County	51	45	3
Inland Empire	46	56	1
Central Coast	44	51	5
San Joaquin Valley	38	56	6
Sacramento/North Valley	42	56	2
San Francisco Bay Area	43	54	3
North Coast/Sierras	34	66	*

* less than ½ of 1%

Strong support for the state to establish cooling standards for residences

By a greater than three-to-one margin (67% to 22%) voters back the idea of the state setting cooling standards similar to the heating standards now mandated for residential properties which would require air conditioners or other equipment to keep indoor temperatures from rising to unsafe levels.

Support for this idea is broad-based and includes large majorities of voters in all regions of the state. However, when results are examined by party, Republican voters offer a mixed reaction to the idea of establishing state cooling standards, with 48% in favor and 42% opposed. By contrast, Democrats overwhelmingly back the idea, 81% to 11%.

Table 4
Views about whether the state should establish cooling standards for residences similar to the heating standards are currently in place (among California registered voters)

	Favor %	Oppose %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	67	22	11
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	72	18	10
San Diego County	63	26	10
Orange County	64	22	14
Inland Empire	70	22	8
Central Coast	61	27	12
San Joaquin Valley	70	20	10
Sacramento/North Valley	72	20	8
San Francisco Bay Area	63	24	13
North Coast/Sierras	54	33	13
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrat	81	11	8
Republican	48	42	10
No Party Preference/others	62	24	14

Broad-based support for broadening federal disaster relief laws to cover extreme heat

There is also strong support for a congressional proposal to broaden federal disaster relief laws to include extreme heat as another form of natural disaster along with hurricanes, fires, landslides, drought, and high water. Seven in ten Californians (70%) favor this idea, while only 19% are opposed.

Support is also broad-based and includes large majorities across all regions of the state. Yet here too reactions to the idea of broadening federal disaster relief laws to include extreme heat differ by party, with Republicans evenly divided on the matter (43% favor vs. 44% opposed), while Democrats are nearly unanimous in backing the idea (86% in favor vs. 6% opposed).

Table 5
Opinions of proposal to broaden federal disaster relief laws to cover extreme heat
(among California registered voters)

	Favor %	Oppose %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	70	19	11
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	74	14	12
San Diego County	71	20	9
Orange County	68	21	11
Inland Empire	67	22	11
Central Coast	64	26	10
San Joaquin Valley	66	24	10
Sacramento/North Valley	68	22	10
San Francisco Bay Area	75	15	10
North Coast/Sierras	61	21	18
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrat	86	6	8
Republican	43	44	13
No Party Preference/others	67	18	15

About the Survey

The findings in this report are based on a *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The poll was administered online in English and Spanish August 24-29, 2023 among 6,030 California registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The poll was conducted by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state’s registered voters. Each email invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by the University and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further email invitations.

Samples of California registered voters with email addresses were derived from information contained on the official voter registration rolls and provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, voters’ email addresses and all other personally identifiable information derived from the original voter listing were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, after the completion of data collection, post-stratification weights were applied to the survey data file to align the sample of registered voters to population characteristics of the registered voters statewide and within major regions of the state.

The sampling error associated with the survey results is difficult to calculate precisely because of sample stratification and post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that findings based on the overall sample of registered voters are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Question wording

Recently California has experienced periods of extreme heat. Have you experienced periods of extreme heat where you live?

(IF EXPERIENCED EXTREME HEAT WHERE YOU LIVE) To what extent have you or members of your immediate family been affected by the recent extreme heat waves – a great deal, some, a little, not at all?

(IF EXPERIENCED EXTREME HEAT WHERE YOU LIVE) How would you rate the job your local community is doing in providing residents with opportunities to get relief from the heat, such as by opening cooling centers – excellent, good, fair, poor, very poor?

Some members of Congress have proposed broadening laws that govern federal disaster relief to include extreme heat along with other types of major disasters, such as hurricanes, fires, landslides, drought, and high water. Do you favor or oppose this proposal?

How much confidence do you have in California’s ability to provide steady, reliable electric power during extended heat waves?

California law currently requires residential properties to have heat during cold weather. Do you favor or oppose the state setting similar cooling standards for residential properties that could require air conditioners or other equipment to keep indoor temperatures from rising to unsafe levels?

About the Institute of Governmental Studies

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication, and public service. A component of the University of California system’s flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS’s co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Associate Professor Cristina Mora.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion and generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.