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## IGS Poll

### Title

Release #2023-08: Many Californians report being personally impacted by last year's unusually heavy precipitation

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***Many Californians report being personally impacted by last year's unusually heavy precipitation.***

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Nearly a third of Californians say that the past year's unusually wet weather, which produced heavy rains, record snowfalls and flooding in some areas, impacted themselves or their families either "a great deal" (8%) or somewhat (23%).

In addition, a sizeable proportion (40%) of those who reported being impacted a great deal say they are very concerned that they may need to move out of their area due to the risk of similar weather occurrences in the near future.

Most voters (69%) are now expecting extreme swings in the state's weather to become more commonplace in the future due to climate change.

But partisan differences pervade the findings as Republicans are more apt to view the past year's extreme weather events as an outlier that are not likely to be repeated in the near future. Republicans also are less likely than Democrats to say that the extreme weather impacted their lives.

Despite the record setting precipitation levels experienced by many Californians over the past year, large majorities express caution about changing state water policies, with greater than eight in ten (81%) saying it is important for the state to continue to enforce its existing water conservation policies. Majorities of voters of all political stripes hold to this view, with a large majority of Democrats describing this as very important.

In addition, while the survey was conducted prior to the late May announcement that an agreement had been reached between the states of California, Arizona and Nevada to reduce the amounts of water deliveries they receive from the Colorado River, the poll did find that by a 60% to 15% endorsed the idea of reducing water deliveries from the Colorado.

These findings come from the latest Berkeley IGS Poll of California registered voters conducted online among 7,465 voters May 17-22 in English and Spanish.

Observed IGS Co-Director Eric Schickler, “The poll suggests that most California voters are taking the impact of extreme weather seriously and are concerned about the impact of climate change on their daily lives. Yet there are noteworthy partisan differences, with Republicans much less likely than Democrats to believe extreme weather is affecting their lives or that climate change is making extreme weather more common.”

**Many Californians report being personally impacted by the state’s recent unusually wet weather**

Nearly a third of voters across the state (31%) report that they or their families were personally impacted by the past year’s unusually heavy rains and snow and accompanying flooding. This includes 8% who say their family was impacted “a great deal” while 23% say they were affected “somewhat.”

The area of the state where this was most likely to be reported was by voters in the North Coast/Sierras region where 54% said they were being personally impacted. Voters in three other regions of the state – those in the Central Coast (41%), the San Francisco Bay Area (40%) and the Sacramento/North Valley region (39%) – also report being disproportionately impacted by the extreme weather.

Nearly three times as many registered Democrats (40%) as Republicans (16%) report being personally impacted by the extreme weather, with Republicans apparently more apt to downplay the impact of extreme weather on their lives.

**Table 1**  
**Personal impact of this year’s heavy rains, snow, and flooding where you live (among California registered voters)**

	<b>Impacted a great deal/some</b>	<i>Impacted a great deal</i>	<i>Impacted somewhat</i>	<b>Impacted a little/not at all</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>66</b>
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	28	9	19	68
San Diego County	29	6	23	58
Orange County	20	4	16	77
Inland Empire	22	6	16	74
Central Coast	41	11	30	58
San Joaquin Valley	24	4	20	70
Sacramento/North Valley	39	11	28	58
San Francisco Bay Area	40	9	31	59
North Coast/Sierras	54	15	39	47
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrat	40	9	31	58
Republican	16	4	12	80
No Party Preference/other	28	8	20	67

*(Differences between 100% and the sum of rows equal proportions with no opinion.)*

**Concerns about moving out of their area due to future weather events by those impacted a great deal by the past year’s weather**

A sizeable proportion (40%) of those who reported being impacted a great deal by the past year’s unusually wet weather say they are very concerned that they may need to move out of their area due to extreme weather events in the near future. While this only constitutes about 3% of all voters statewide, this still translates to over a half a million voters reporting high levels of concern about this.

Democrats are again more likely than Republicans to express higher levels of concern about the risks that future weather events could pose to their continuing to live in their own local area.

**Table 2**  
**Concerns about moving out of their area due future extreme weather events**  
**(among those voters who’ve been impacted “a great deal” by recent weather events)**

	<b>Impacted a great deal</b> %	<b>Very concerned</b> %	<b>Somewhat concerned</b> %	<b>Not concerned</b> %
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>31</b>
<u>Region*</u>				
Los Angeles County	9	28	30	42
Other Southern California	6	41	22	36
Northern California	10	48	28	19
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrat	9	51	16	30
Republican**	4	8	54	38
No Party Preference/other	8	32	36	31

*(Differences between 100% and the sum of the proportions concerned equal proportion with no opinion)*

*\* The regional findings have been combined into 3 regions because of small sample sizes.*

*\*\* small sample size*

**Seven in ten expect extreme swings in the state’s weather to become more commonplace in the future due to climate change**

A large majority of Californians (69%) say they expect the recent extreme swings in the state’s weather to become more commonplace in the future as a result of climate change. This compares to 19% who describe last year’s weather as unusual and not likely to be repeated again in the near future. Another 12% have no opinion.

Views on this are highly partisan with nearly all Democrats (91%) saying that because of climate change we should expect such extremes to become commonplace in the future, compared to only 28% of Republicans who feel this way.

**Table 3**  
**Views about recent extreme swings in the weather in California and**  
**expectations of these swings will likely occur in the future**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Likely to become more common- place due to climate change</b>	<b>Unusual/not likely to be repeated in near future</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
	%	%	%
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	75	16	9
San Diego County	65	25	10
Orange County	60	16	24
Inland Empire	61	23	16
Central Coast	58	28	14
San Joaquin Valley	58	29	13
Sacramento/North Valley	69	20	11
San Francisco Bay Area	79	11	10
North Coast/Sierras	62	32	6
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	91	5	4
Republicans	28	47	25
No party preference/other	66	20	14

**High importance attached to continuing existing water conservation policies**

Greater than eight in ten California voters (81%) believe it is important for the state to continue to enforce its existing water conservation policies despite the much greater levels of precipitation experienced last year. This includes 52% who say this very important and 29% who feel it is somewhat important. Just 15% consider this to be not too or not at all important.

While majorities of voters across all regions of the state and among voters of all parties say it's important to continue to enforce these water policies, Republicans are less likely to consider this very important, and nearly a third feel it is not important.

**Table 4**  
**Importance of continuing to enforce state water conservation policies for residential, commercial, and agricultural water users despite this year’s heavy rains**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	Very important %	Somewhat important %	Not too important %	Not at all important %
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	57	28	8	3
San Diego County	48	33	9	7
Orange County	44	32	13	9
Inland Empire	50	27	11	6
Central Coast	57	27	11	3
San Joaquin Valley	40	32	10	10
Sacramento/North Valley	45	33	13	6
San Francisco Bay Area	60	27	8	2
North Coast/Sierras	53	32	12	3
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	69	26	3	1
Republicans	25	36	22	12
No party preference/others	47	30	10	6

*Differences between 100% and the sum of each row’s percentages equal proportion with no opinion.*

**Californians approved of the idea of reducing water deliveries from the Colorado River prior to the recent multi-state pact to do so**

Voters in this survey were polled prior to the late May announcement that the states of California, Arizona and Nevada had agreed to make reductions to the amounts of water that they extract from the Colorado River. Even so, one of the survey’s questions asked voters whether they favored making no changes to water deliveries from the Colorado or whether they instead supported proposals aimed at making reductions to the water deliveries each state received from the Colorado. The results indicate that by a wide 60% to 15% Californians supported either of the two cutback proposals over not making any reductions to water deliveries from the Colorado at all.

Pluralities of voters of all political stripes supported making water delivery reductions from the Colorado River at the time the survey was conducted, although California Democrats were much more one-sided in their support than were the state’s Republicans.

**Table 5**  
**Voter views about whether water deliveries from the Colorado River should be reduced to the Western states and how they should be allocated (prior to recent water pact)**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Make no changes to water deliveries from the Colorado</b>	<b>Reduce water deliveries from the Colorado</b>	<i>Base reductions on historic water rights</i>	<i>Override historic rights/allocate cuts equally</i>	<b>No opinion</b>
	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>
<u>Region</u>					
Los Angeles County	15	60	38	22	25
San Diego County	16	58	37	21	26
Orange County	21	50	26	24	29
Inland Empire	14	62	35	27	24
Central Coast	10	70	38	32	20
San Joaquin Valley	14	57	32	25	29
Sacramento/North Valley	8	62	27	35	30
San Francisco Bay Area	11	62	34	28	27
North Coast/Sierras	12	57	34	23	31
<u>Party registration</u>					
Democrats	8	69	40	29	23
Republicans	22	47	28	19	31
No party preference/others	16	56	30	26	28

**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 May 17 - 22, 2023 among 7,465 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**

California has experienced some major swings in its weather over the past few years, from severe droughts to extremely heavy rains and snow. Which explanation better represents your opinion why this is occurring and your expectations of the future? (1) While the weather over the past few years has been unusual, it will not likely be repeated in the near future, (2) Because of climate change we should now expect these major swings in the weather to become more commonplace in the future.

To what extent have you and your family been affected by the heavy rains, snow and flooding that have occurred in the state this year – a great deal, somewhat, only a little, or not at all? **(If “a great deal”)** Are you concerned that in the next few years you may need to move from the area where you now live due to extreme weather events in the area

Despite this year’s unusually wet winter how important do you feel it is for the state to continue to enforce its water conservation policies and programs for residential, commercial, and agricultural water users in the coming years – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

The Colorado River, which supplies water to seven states, including Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, and California, has shrunk markedly over the past few years and its major reservoirs are at historically low levels. The following are three alternatives for dealing with this situation as recently presented in a federal government report. Which of these proposals do you favor the most? (1) Reduce water deliveries from the Colorado River to the states according to each state’s historic water rights, which have given priority to California’s Imperial Valley, (2) Override the historic water rights of users and reduce water deliveries so that future allocations from the Colorado River are divided equally among the states, (3) Maintain the status quo which would mean making no reductions to existing water deliveries from the Colorado River.

### **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>.