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## IGS Poll

### Title

Release #2022-10: Majorities see the state's changing climate as serious health and safety threats

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/73c708p0>

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### Publication Date

2022-04-19



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Release #2022-10

Tuesday, April 19, 2022

## **Majorities see the state's changing climate as serious health and safety threats.**

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*  
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Californians believe the state's changing climate now represents a serious health threat. According to the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* a two-thirds majority describes both extreme heat (64%) and air pollution in their area (63%) as serious threats to their own and their family's health and safety. Voters residing in the state's interior are more likely than others to consider these threats "very serious."

The poll finds broad support for two environmental policies that have been or currently are under consideration in the state. To reduce the wildfire threat, a three-to-one majority (65% to 23%) favors a proposal to restrict new housing construction in high fire risk areas. Support is broad-based and spans all major regions of the state.

There is also majority support for the recently enacted law requiring residents to compost their food waste to reduce the amount of pollution in landfills, with 68% of Californians favoring the new law compared to just 24% who are opposed.

Another matter with long term environmental consequences relates to nuclear power, which voters now appear to be reconsidering. The poll finds more voters now in support of building more nuclear power plants (44%) than oppose it (37%), although 19% aren't sure. These findings contrast with consistently strong opposition to the building of more nuclear plants in statewide polls in the years following the nuclear power plant accident at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania in 1979.

Voters may also be reconsidering the current plans to shut down in 2025 its only operating nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon, with more voters now opposed to closing the plant (39%) than favoring its closure (33%), although 28% are undecided.

Co-Director Eric Schickler offered this observation, "The poll's findings suggest that growing concerns about the impact of climate change are leading Californians to

reconsider some of their long-held policy views about nuclear power as a potential energy source, although considerable uncertainty persists among many voters.”

**Two in three Californians describe extreme heat as a serious health threat**

Two-thirds of voters (64%) believe extreme heat poses a serious threat to their and their family’s health and safety, 33% of whom describe the threat as “very serious.”

There are wide partisan differences in opinions about the seriousness of the threat, with eight in ten Democrats believing the threat is serious, compared to just 35% among Republicans. Latinos, lower income voters and residents of the state’s inland counties, especially those in the San Joaquin Valley and Inland Empire, are also more likely than other voters to consider extreme heat as a “very serious” health threat.

<b>Table 1</b>				
<b>How serious a threat is <i>extreme heat</i> to the health and safety of you and your family? (among California registered voters)</b>				
	<b>Very serious %</b>	<b>Somewhat serious %</b>	<b>Not serious %</b>	<b>No opinion %</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>2</b>
<b><u>Area</u></b>				
Coastal counties	30	33	35	2
Inland counties	38	28	32	2
<b><u>Region</u></b>				
Los Angeles County	31	33	33	3
San Diego County	23	34	42	1
Orange County	24	29	45	2
Inland Empire	38	26	34	2
Central Coast	26	37	35	2
San Joaquin Valley	42	27	30	1
Sacramento/North Valley	35	29	33	3
San Francisco Bay Area	35	34	30	1
North Coast/Sierras	28	29	38	5
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>				
Democrats	43	36	19	2
Republicans	14	21	64	1
No Party Preference/others	31	33	34	2
<b><u>Race/ethnicity</u></b>				
White non-Hispanic	29	30	39	2
Latino	41	33	24	2
Asian /Pacific Islander	28	35	34	3
Black	38	24	33	5
<b><u>Annual household income</u></b>				
Less than \$40,000	40	32	25	3
\$40,000-\$99,999	33	31	34	2
\$100,000 -\$199,999	28	30	40	2
\$200,000 or more	28	31	40	1

**Many Californians also view the air pollution in their area as a serious health threat**

Large proportions of Californians also rate the air pollution as a health threat. Statewide 63% say the level of air pollution where they live poses a serious threat to their family’s health and safety, with 29% describing the threat as “very serious.”

Democrats and Republicans again hold very different views about this, with greater than three in four Democrats saying the air pollution where they live is a serious health threat, while only about one in three Republicans feel this way. Voters in the state’s inland counties, and especially those living in the San Joaquin Valley region, are more likely than voters elsewhere to term the threat “very serious.” The state’s Latinos, Blacks and lower income residents are also more likely to say this.

<b>Table 2</b>				
<b>How serious a threat is <i>air pollution</i> in your area to the health and safety of you and your family? (among California registered voters)</b>				
	<b>Very serious</b>	<b>Somewhat serious</b>	<b>Not serious</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>8</b>
<b><u>Area</u></b>				
Coastal counties	27	37	33	3
Inland counties	33	30	35	2
<b><u>Region</u></b>				
Los Angeles County	35	39	23	3
San Diego County	20	30	47	3
Orange County	20	37	40	2
Inland Empire	30	32	35	3
Central Coast	18	33	46	3
San Joaquin Valley	49	27	22	2
Sacramento/North Valley	23	31	45	1
San Francisco Bay Area	28	38	32	2
North Coast/Sierras	13	22	63	2
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>				
Democrats	38	38	22	2
Republicans	11	24	61	4
No Party Preference/others	29	37	30	4
<b><u>Race/ethnicity</u></b>				
White non-Hispanic	21	35	42	2
Latino	41	32	22	5
Asian /Pacific Islander	28	39	29	4
Black	44	35	18	3
<b><u>Annual household income</u></b>				
Less than \$40,000	37	34	25	4
\$40,000-\$99,999	32	32	23	3
\$100,000 -\$199,999	23	35	40	2
\$200,000 or more	22	39	38	1

**Majority support for restricting new housing in high-risk wildfire areas**

In an effort to reduce the wildfire threat to residents, majorities of voters across the state support imposing restrictions on the building of new housing in high-risk wildfire areas. Statewide 65% favor this proposal, while just 23% are opposed. Majorities of voters in all major regions of the state are supportive, with voters in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area displaying the strongest support (74%).

Registered Democrats are far more likely than the state’s Republican voters to back this proposal.

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**Table 3**  
**Do you support or oppose the state imposing restrictions on the building of new housing in high-risk wildfire areas (among California registered voters)**

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	<b>Support</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>12</b>
<b><u>Region</u></b>			
Los Angeles County	64	22	14
San Diego County	66	23	11
Orange County	62	28	10
Inland Empire	63	25	12
Central Coast	65	23	12
San Joaquin Valley	58	28	14
Sacramento/North Valley	60	28	12
San Francisco Bay Area	74	16	10
North Coast/Sierras	53	35	12
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>			
Democrats	77	14	9
Republicans	44	38	18
No Party Preference/others	63	25	12

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**Strong support for the state’s new composting law**

The state recently passed a new law mandating the composting of all food waste in an effort to reduce pollution in its landfills. The law requires individuals to separate out their food waste from other trash when taking out the garbage. When asked about this, voters voice strong support for the new law, with 68% in favor and 24% opposed.

Majorities of voters across all major regions of the state back the law. Democrats are the segment of voters displaying the most support, favoring the law nearly eight to one, although two in three non-partisans also back the law. On the other hand, Republican voters are about evenly divided.

**Table 4**  
**Do you support or oppose the new state law requiring the composting**  
**of all food waster to reduce pollution from landfills**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Support</b> %	<b>Oppose</b> %	<b>No opinion</b> %
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>8</b>
<b><u>Region</u></b>			
Los Angeles County	73	19	8
San Diego County	65	25	10
Orange County	61	31	8
Inland Empire	62	28	10
Central Coast	65	27	8
San Joaquin Valley	63	31	6
Sacramento/North Valley	57	36	7
San Francisco Bay Area	78	17	5
North Coast/Sierras	70	28	2
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>			
Democrat	82	11	7
Republican	42	48	10
No Party Preference/other	67	26	7

**More Californians now support than oppose building more nuclear power plants**

The idea of building more nuclear power plants in the state has long been a highly contentious issue, especially in the aftermath of the 1979 accident at the Three Mile Island power plant in Pennsylvania. Yet opposition has abated in recent years as more have come to view nuclear power as a more palatable alternative than building new power plants that burn hydrocarbon fuels.

The current poll finds more voters favoring (44%) than opposing (37%) the building more nuclear power plants in the state, although another 19% are undecided. This contrasts with consistently strong opposition to the building of more nuclear plants in the state in polls taken throughout the 1980's and into the early 1990's.

Republican voters back the idea of building more nuclear power plants by three to one, while Democrats and non-partisan voters are more divided but lean in different directions. Among Democrats, more voters oppose the idea 46% to 34%, while among No Party Preference voters, more are supportive (46% to 34%).

**Table 5**  
**Trend of public opinion about building more nuclear power plants in California**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Support (Agree)</b> %	<b>Oppose (Disagree)</b> %	<b>Not sure/ No opinion</b> %
<b>Total registered voters - 2022</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>19</b>
2008	50	41	9
1990	38	56	6
1984	33	61	6
1980	41	53	6
1979	37	55	8
1978	51	44	5
1977	63	24	13
1976	69	19	12
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>			
Democrat	34	46	20
Republican	62	21	17
No Party Preference/other	46	34	20

*Note: 2022 wording: "Do you support or oppose building more nuclear power plants in California."  
 Prior surveys were conducted by The Field Poll, with results reported in release #2277 July 17, 2008 by Field Research Corporation. It asked voters whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "The building of more nuclear power plants should be allowed in California."*

**Voters may also be reconsidering whether the state should go ahead with its plans to close the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant**

California is currently scheduled to shut down the operations of the nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon located on the state's Central Coast in the year 2025. When asked about this, one in three voters (33%) back the idea of closing the plant, but a somewhat larger proportion (39%) are opposed. An extremely large proportion of the electorate (28%), however, are undecided.

Opinions again divide on party lines, with Republicans solidly opposed to closing the plant (63% to 14%), while Democrats favor shutting it down 45% to 25%, although three in ten (30%) have no opinion. No Party Preference voters oppose the closure of Diablo Canyon 42% to 29%, but another 29% are undecided.

<b>Table 6</b>			
<b>Do you favor or oppose moving ahead with the state's planned closure of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant in 2025 (among California registered voters)</b>			
	<b>Favor closure</b>	<b>Oppose closure</b>	<b>Not sure/No opinion</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>
<b><u>Region</u></b>			
Los Angeles County	36	33	31
San Diego County	32	40	28
Orange County	32	38	30
Inland Empire	31	40	29
Central Coast	36	38	26
San Joaquin Valley	30	43	27
Sacramento/North Valley	29	43	28
San Francisco Bay Area	33	41	26
North Coast/Sierras	37	45	18
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>			
Democrat	45	25	30
Republican	14	63	23
No Party Preference/other	29	42	29

**Voters divided about establishing new limits on agriculture's use of water**

Even in the face of an ongoing drought, Californians are divided when asked whether the state should place new limits on agriculture's use of water. Slightly less than half of the voters polled (47%) favored this proposal, but nearly as many (42%) were opposed.

There are significant regional differences in opinions about this, with majorities of voters in the state's two major urban centers, Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area, in favor while majorities of the voters in the state's Central Valley regions opposed.

There are also clear partisan differences in views about the state imposing more restrictions on agriculture's use of water, with 63% of Democrats backing the idea, compared to just 20% among Republicans. Non-partisans are about evenly divided.



<b>Table 7</b>			
<b>Do you favor or oppose the state establishing new limits on agriculture's use of water?</b>			
<b>(among California registered voters)</b>			
	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>11</b>
<b><u>Region</u></b>			
Los Angeles County	51	36	13
San Diego County	43	46	11
Orange County	42	47	11
Inland Empire	43	46	11
Central Coast	49	41	10
San Joaquin Valley	35	58	7
Sacramento/North Valley	39	52	9
San Francisco Bay Area	57	33	10
North Coast/Sierras	44	50	6
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>			
Democrat	63	26	11
Republican	20	72	8
No Party Preference/other	45	43	12

The poll also finds that voters seriously underestimate the amount of water that agriculture consumes as a share of the total water used by Californians. State voters on average believe farmers consume less than half (45%) of the state's overall water use, when in fact farmers and agriculture consume nearly 80% of the total.

### **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 March 29-April 5, 2022, among 8,676 California registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

Email invitations were distributed 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.

The current poll also included an oversampling of registered voters in the City of Los Angeles to enable the poll to examine specific issues of interest to voters in that City and to the *Times*. After the completion of data collection, the results were weighted to realign the Los Angeles City sample to its actual share of the statewide voter population.

Samples of registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California and were derived from information contained on the official voter registration rolls. Prior to the distribution of emails, the overall sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, voters' email addresses and all other personally identifiable information were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample of registered voters to population characteristics.

The sampling error associated with the results from the survey are difficult to calculate precisely because of sample stratification and the 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**

In recent years California has experienced more days of extreme heat than in the past. How serious a threat do you feel extreme heat in your area poses to the health and safety of you and your family?

Over the past several years many parts of California have had to deal with the threat of wildfires. Has your household been directly affected by any of the state’s recent wildfires, such as by your having had to evacuate your home, or having had your electric power turned off for an extended period, or having an insurance company cancel your homeowners’ insurance, or having had any other direct impact?

Due to the growing threat of wildfires in California, do you support or oppose the state imposing restrictions on building new housing in high-risk wildfire areas?

Recently the state of California passed a new law requiring the composting of all food waste, in part to reduce pollution from landfills. This requires individuals to separate out their food waste from other waste products when taking out the garbage. Do you support or oppose the state’s new food waste composting law?

How serious a threat do you feel air pollution in your area poses to the health and safety of you and your family?

California is currently planning to shut down the operations of the nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon in 2025. Do you favor or oppose this planned shutdown?

Do you support or oppose building more nuclear power plants in California?

**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, which is disseminated widely, 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 more information about IGS or this poll, please visit <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.