

Press Release: PPIC

Nearly All Say They Have Cut Water Use—Half of Likely Voters Support Water Bond As Concern About Economy Eases, Water Worries Rise

SAN FRANCISCO, March 26, 2014—A record-high share of Californians say the supply of water is a big problem in their part of the state, and nearly all residents say they have reduced their water use in response to the drought. These are among the key findings in a statewide survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), with funding from The James Irvine Foundation.

Asked about the supply of water in their area, 55 percent of residents say it is a big problem (20% somewhat of a problem, 23% not much of a problem). In contrast, 44 percent of Californians expressed this view in December 2009, during another drought. Today, majorities across regions characterize their area's water supply as a big problem, with residents in the Central Valley (65%) most likely to do so (55% Orange/San Diego, 54% Inland Empire, 52% San Francisco Bay Area, 51% Los Angeles). Most (60%) also say the water supply in their area will be inadequate 10 years from now.

Almost all Californians (92%) say they and their families have done a lot (57%) or a little (35%) to reduce water use in response to the drought. Central Valley residents (68%) are most likely to say they have done a lot (58% Inland Empire, 54% Los Angeles, 53% San Francisco Bay Area and Orange/San Diego).

Residents' increasing concern about water is evident when they are asked to name the most important issue facing Californians. While jobs and the economy (32%) is still the most frequently mentioned, the share of residents who choose it has dropped 13 points in the last year (45% March 2013). The share naming water and drought as most important has grown 13 points (15% today, 2% March 2013).

Californians today are more likely than they were a year ago to favor an \$11.1 billion bond for state water projects. As the legislature continues to discuss the measure—now on the November ballot—60 percent of adults and 50 percent of likely voters say they would vote yes. Last March, 44 percent of adults and 42 percent of likely voters said they would vote yes. Today, when those who oppose the bond are asked how they would vote if the amount were lower, support rises (69% adults, 59% likely voters). A slim majority of adults (52%) and 44 percent of likely voters say it is very important that voters pass the bond.

"The percentage of Californians saying that water supply is big problem in their region has reached a new high," said Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. "Nearly all state residents say that they are doing something to reduce water use as a response to this historic drought, while support for an \$11.1 billion state water bond hovers at around 50 percent among likely voters."

Slim Majority of Adults Favor High-speed Rail—Likely Voters Less Supportive

Californians were asked about another big project: a high-speed rail system. In 2008, voters passed a \$10 billion state bond for its planning and construction. Today, when read a description

of the system and its \$68 billion price tag, 53 percent favor it and 42 percent oppose it. Likely voters are less supportive (45% favor, 50% oppose). Majorities in the San Francisco Bay Area (63%), Central Valley (57%), Orange/San Diego (54%), and Los Angeles (52%) are in favor. Inland Empire residents are divided (45% favor, 46% oppose). When opponents of high-speed rail are asked how they would feel if the cost were lower, support rises (69% adults, 60% likely voters). Asked about high-speed rail's importance, 35 percent of adults and 29 percent of likely voters say it is very important to the future quality of life and state's economic vitality.

Legalize Marijuana? Slim Majority of Likely Voters Say Yes

As proponents of marijuana legalization consider putting the issue on the ballot again, Californians are divided. Half of adults (49%) say marijuana should be legal, and 47 percent say it should be illegal. A slim majority of likely voters (53%) favor legalization (44% oppose). Last September, a slim majority of adults (52%) said for the first time that marijuana should be legal and 60 percent of likely voters said so. Today, majorities of independents (60%) and Democrats (57%) favor legalization, while 62 percent of Republicans oppose it. Most blacks (63%) and whites (57%) favor legalization, while most Latinos (60%) oppose it. Asians are split (44% yes, 48% no). Younger Californians are much more likely than adults age 35 or older to say marijuana should be legal (64% 18 to 34, 39% 35 to 54, 47% 55 and older).

Brown's Job Approval Slips, Obama's Remains Near Record Low

Three months before the primary, 49 percent of adults and 52 percent of likely voters approve of the way Governor Jerry Brown is handling his job. This is somewhat lower than his record-high job approval in January (58% adults, 60% likely voters). It is similar to his job approval rating last March (49% adults, 48% likely voters). When primary likely voters are asked how they would vote in the governor's race, 47 percent choose Brown and 10 percent choose Republican Tim Donnelly. Fewer support Republicans Andrew Blount (2%) or Neel Kashkari (2%)—the other candidates included in the survey—while 3 percent name someone else and 36 percent are undecided.

The legislature's approval rating (36%) has also slipped among adults since January (42%). Among likely voters, it is similar to January (32% today, 33% January).

Asked to rate their federal leaders, 52 percent of California adults and 49 percent of likely voters approve of President Barack Obama's job performance—similar to his ratings in January (53% adults, 46% likely voters) and to his record lows (51% among adults, last reached in December 2013; 46% among likely voters in January 2014). Congress' job approval rating has slipped 7 points since January among adults and is 19 percent today, similar to the record low of 18 percent last December. Approval among likely voters has fallen to single digits (9%), matching the record low first reached in December 2011.

Although the president and Congress averted another budget showdown or government shutdown, Californians remain critical of their federal leaders on fiscal issues. Asked how the president is handling the federal deficit and debt ceiling, 41 percent of adults approve, similar to his rating since last September (46% September, 42% December, 45% January). Among likely voters, 41 percent approve (43% September, 42% December, 40% January). The Republicans in

Congress get much poorer ratings for their handling of these issues: 21 percent of California adults and 15 percent of likely voters approve.

Large Majority of Uninsured Say They Will Get Health Coverage

With the enrollment period for the Affordable Care Act ending March 31, a strong majority (75%) of uninsured Californians say they will obtain insurance by the deadline and 21 percent say they will remain uninsured. With enrollment lagging among Latinos and younger Californians, strong majorities in these groups (74% Latinos, 77% residents ages 18 to 44) say that they plan to get insurance.

The health reform law continues to divide Californians, with 47 percent generally favorable and 45 percent generally unfavorable. Opinion is split among those who have health insurance (47% favorable, 45% unfavorable) and those who don't (49% favorable, 46% unfavorable). About a third of Californians (34%) say the law will be good for them and their families in the long run, a quarter (26%) say it will be bad, and about a third (36%) say it will make no difference.

Record-High Share of Adults Say Immigrants Benefit State

A record-high 65 percent of Californians say that immigrants are a benefit to the state because of their hard work and job skills rather than a burden because they use public services (27%). State residents are far less divided on this question than when PPIC first asked it in April 1998 (46% benefit, 42% burden). On immigration reform, an overwhelming majority of adults (86%) and likely voters (83%) favor providing a path to citizenship for immigrants in the U.S. illegally who meet certain requirements—including waiting a certain period of time, paying fines and back taxes, passing criminal background checks, and learning English. Even among Californians who say immigrants are a burden there is majority support (72%) for a path to citizenship.

Most Believe Gap Between Rich and Poor Is Growing

Three-quarters of residents (73%) say the gap between the rich and the poor in the nation is getting larger (21% stayed the same, 3% getting smaller). The share of likely voters who say it is growing is even larger (81%). Majorities across parties, regions, and demographic groups say the gap is getting larger. Notably, the share saying the gap is widening increases as income levels rise. How much opportunity is there to get ahead in today's economy? About half of adults (49%) say everyone has a fair chance in the long run, while 47 percent say it's mainly just a few people at the top who have a chance. Asked about the government's role in reducing the gap between rich and poor, 61 percent of adults say the government should do more. A third (33%) say this is not something the government should be doing.

"While Californians' views of the economy have improved, three in four say that the gap between rich and poor is growing and six in 10 want to the government to do more to reduce it," Baldassare said.

The survey examines opinions on the role of government in other areas:

- **Abortion.** A solid majority of adults (69%) say the government should not interfere with access to abortion, and about a quarter (26%) say government should pass more laws restricting its availability. Mainline Protestants (81%) and adults with no religion (88%) are more likely than Catholics (58%) and evangelical Protestants (50%) to say that government should not interfere with abortion access.
- **Environmental laws.** A majority (55%) say that stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost. Fewer (38%) say that this type of regulation costs too many jobs and hurts the economy.
- **Gun control.** A majority (56%) say the government does not do enough to regulate access to guns. Fewer (37%) say the government goes too far in restricting the rights of citizens to own guns.

More Key Findings

- **Half say tax system is fair, but majority say they pay too much**—page 9
While 50 percent of adults say the state and local tax system is at least moderately fair—a perception that is similar across income groups—a record-high 60 percent say they pay at least somewhat more than they should.
- **Solid majority favor raising income taxes on the wealthy**—page 10
Asked about raising specific types of state taxes, 63 percent of adults favor raising the top income tax rate paid by the wealthiest Californians. About half (51%) favor raising taxes for California corporations.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

[The PPIC Statewide Survey](#) was conducted with funding from The James Irvine Foundation. Findings are based on a telephone survey of 1,702 California adult residents interviewed on landlines and cell phones from March 11–18, 2014. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, according to respondents' preferences.

The sampling error, taking design effects from weighting into consideration, is ± 3.6 percent for all adults, ± 4 percent for the 1,380 registered voters, ± 4.5 percent for the 1,091 likely voters, and ± 4.7 percent for the 936 primary likely voters. For the 187 uninsured adults it is ± 9.7 percent. For more information on methodology, see page 25.

[Mark Baldassare](#) is president and CEO of PPIC, where he holds the Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Public Policy. He is founder of the PPIC Statewide Survey, which he has directed since 1998.

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