

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

Field Research Corporation

601 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94108-2814
(415) 392-5763 FAX: (415) 434-2541
EMAIL: fieldpoll@field.com
www.field.com/fieldpollonline

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NEARLY ALL VOTERS DESCRIBE STATE'S WATER SHORTAGE AS SERIOUS. MOST BELIEVE AGRICULTURAL USERS CAN REDUCE ITS WATER USE BY CHANGING CROPS AND USING WATER MORE EFFICIENTLY. VOLUNTARY CUTBACKS SUPPORTED OVER MANDATORY RATIONING.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Nearly all California voters (88%) believe the state is undergoing a serious water shortage. However, there is no clear consensus about whether the situation is due more to a lack of water storage and supply facilities in the state, or users not using existing supplies efficiently enough. Statewide, 27% cite the former, 37% the latter and another 24% say both are equally responsible.

By a 54% to 30% margin most Californians believe agricultural users, who currently consume about three-quarters of the state's fresh water supply, can reduce its water use without creating real hardships by changing crops and using water more efficiently. The average (median) amount that voters feel agricultural users could save by taking these measures is 10%.

Voters are divided when asked whether the state should be allowed to bypass existing environmental regulations protecting fish and the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento-San Joaquin river delta region if residents or farmers face serious shortages during dry years. Currently 49% agree that the state should be allowed to bypass these regulations at such times, while 44% disagree.

Voters currently favor asking users to voluntarily cut back their water use by 20% over imposing mandatory water rationing greater than two to one (67% to 27%) as a way to reduce water use.

These are the main findings from the latest statewide *Field Poll* dealing with the state's water situation, completed in early April among 1,000 registered voters throughout California.

Nearly all voters describe the state’s current water shortage as serious

About nine in ten voters (88%) believe the state is undergoing a serious water shortage. This includes 60% who term the situation extremely serious and 28% who feel it is somewhat serious. Another 10% do not believe the water situation is serious.

Voters’ current high level of concern is similar to what was observed by *The Field Poll* in 1977 when the state was in the midst of an earlier drought. At that time 87% of voters described the state’s water situation as serious, although a slightly smaller proportion (51%) than today felt it was extremely serious.

Table 1			
Voter views of the perceived seriousness of the water shortage now and during past droughts (among California registered voters)			
	April 2014	July 1987	March 1977
<u>Is there a serious water shortage in CA?</u>			
Yes, serious shortage	<u>88%</u>	<u>55%</u>	<u>87%</u>
Extremely serious	60	16	51
Somewhat serious	28	39	36
Not a serious shortage	10	40	9
No opinion	2	5	4

No consensus about whether the current situation is due more to a lack of storage and supply facilities or the inefficient use of existing water supplies

There is no clear consensus among California voters about whether the state’s current situation is due more to not having enough water storage and supply facilities or users not using existing supplies efficiently. A plurality of voters (37%) believes the situation is due more to users not using existing supplies efficiently. This compares to 27% who think it is because the state does not have enough storage and supply facilities. Another one in four (24%) volunteer that both factors are equally responsible.

There are pronounced regional differences of opinion about this. Voters in the Central Valley are more likely than voters elsewhere to blame a lack of adequate water storage and supply facilities in the state. In most other parts of the state pluralities of voters think the inefficient use of water is more responsible for the current situation.

Table 2				
Is the reason California has a water shortage due more to not having enough water storage and supply facilities or users not using existing supplies efficiently enough? (among registered voters)				
	Users not using existing supplies efficiently	Not enough water storage and supply facilities	Both (volunteered)	No opinion
Total statewide	37%	27	24	12
Region				
Los Angeles County	42%	26	20	12
South Coast	41%	28	23	8
Other Southern California	40%	24	20	16
Central Valley	22%	37	30	11
San Francisco Bay Area	38%	20	26	16
Other Northern California*	27%	32	28	13

* Small sample size.

Most think agricultural users can reduce their water use by changing crops and using water more efficiently

By a 54% to 30% margin most voters believe the state’s agricultural users, who presently consume about three-quarters of the state's fresh water supply, can reduce their water use without creating real hardships by changing crops and using water more efficiently.

This view is held by majorities in Los Angeles County (57%), the San Francisco Bay Area (55%), the South Coast (51%) and across other parts of Southern California (61%). Pluralities of voters in the Central Valley (45%) and in other parts of Northern California (43%) also feel this way.

The average (median) amount that voters feel agricultural users could save by changing crops and using existing supplies more efficiently is 10%.

Table 3			
Can the state's agricultural users reduce the amount of water they use by changing crops and using water more efficiently without creating real hardships? (among registered voters)			
	Yes	No	Don't know
Total statewide	54%	30	16
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	57%	28	15
South Coast	51%	32	17
Other Southern California	61%	26	13
Central Valley	45%	38	17
San Francisco Bay Area	55%	28	17
Other Northern California*	43%	33	24

* Small sample size.

Note: When asked what percentage of the water agricultural users could save, the average (median) amount reported was 10%.

Divided views about whether the state should be allowed to bypass existing environmental regulations during dry years

The current poll included a question posed by *The Field Poll* during an earlier water shortage in 1987. It asked voters whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: “In dry years the state should be allowed to bypass environmental regulations protecting fish and the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento-San Joaquin river delta region if residents or farmers face serious shortages.”

Then as now voters are divided about whether the state should be allowed to implement this policy change. In the current survey, 49% agree the state should be given the authority to bypass environmental regulations at such times, but 44% disagree. In 1987 voter opinions about this were divided 47% to 47%.

Voters in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area are more likely than voters elsewhere to object to allowing the state to bypass environmental regulations in dry years (58% disagree vs. 36% agree). By contrast, voters in the Central Valley agree nearly two-to-one that the state should be given this authority (62% agree to 32% disagree).

Table 4
Agree/Disagree: "In dry years, the state should be allowed to bypass environmental regulations protecting fish and the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento-San Joaquin river delta region, if residents or farmers face serious shortages."
(among registered voters)

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
Total statewide – April 2014	49%	44	7
July 1987	47%	47	6
<u>Region (April 2014)</u>			
Los Angeles County	49%	41	10
South Coast	58%	36	6
Other Southern California	46%	49	5
Central Valley	62%	32	6
San Francisco Bay Area	36%	58	6
Other Northern California*	45%	41	14

* Small sample size.

Voluntary cutbacks favored over mandatory water rationing more than two to one

When voters are asked whether the state and other major water providers should impose mandatory water rationing or ask users to voluntarily cut back on their water use by 20%, voluntary cutbacks are endorsed more than two to one (67% to 27%).

This view does not vary much among voters in different regions of the state.

Table 5
Should the state and other major water providers require mandatory water rationing or ask users to voluntarily cut back water use by 20%
(among registered voters)

	Voluntary cutbacks	Mandatory rationing	No opinion
Total statewide	67%	27	6
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	67%	27	6
South Coast	74%	19	7
Other Southern California	61%	32	7
Central Valley	66%	30	4
San Francisco Bay Area	65%	29	6
Other Northern California*	75%	22	3

* Small sample size.

Information About The Survey

Methodological Details

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* completed March 18-April 5, 2014 among a random sample of 1,000 registered voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone using live interviewers working from Field Research Corporation's central location telephone interviewing facilities in San Diego. Up to six attempts were made to reach, screen and interview each randomly selected voter from the state's registered voter rolls on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

Interviewing was completed on either a voter's cell phone or a regular landline phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. In this survey about 59% of all voters were contacted on their cell phone, while 41% were contacted on a regular landline phone. After the completion of interviewing, the overall registered voter sample was weighted to demographic, geographic and party registration characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size as well as the percentage distribution being examined. The maximum sampling error for results from the overall sample is +/- 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The maximum sampling error is based on results in the middle of the response distribution (i.e., percentages at or near 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (those closer to 10% or 90%) have a smaller margin of error. There are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of the survey sought to minimize these other possible sources of error.

The Field Poll was established in 1947 as *The California Poll* by Mervin Field, who is still an active advisor. The *Poll* has operated continuously since then as an independent, non-partisan survey of California public opinion. The *Poll* receives annual funding from media subscribers of *The Field Poll*, from several California foundations, and the University of California and California State University systems, who receive the data files from each *Field Poll* survey shortly after its completion for teaching and secondary research purposes.

Questions Asked

As you understand it, does the state of California now have a water shortage? (IF YES, ASK:) How serious of a water shortage do you think California has – an extremely serious shortage, a somewhat serious shortage or a not too serious shortage?

(Do you think California's water shortage is) (If a serious water shortage were to occur, do you think it would be) due to the state not having enough water storage and supply facilities or because water users are not using existing water supplies efficiently enough?

There are basically three types of water users in California – agricultural users, residential users, and commercial/industrial users. Agricultural users consume about 75% of the state's total fresh water, while residential and commercial/industrial users combined consume about 25%. Do you think agricultural users can reduce the amount of water they use by changing crops or using water more efficiently without creating real hardships? (IF YES, ASK:) About what percentage of the water that agriculture now uses do you think it can save without creating real hardships?

Governor Brown and most major water providers in the state are calling for Californians to voluntarily cut back the amount of water they use by 20%. Others are calling for mandatory water rationing with fines or steep penalties for those who do not conserve? Which policy do you favor the state and other major water providers to be taking at this time – voluntary cut backs or mandatory water rationing?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: In dry years, the state should be allowed to bypass environmental regulations protecting fish and the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta region, if residents or farmers face serious shortages. Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly?