

Poll: Sacramento Residents Concerned about Environment and Support Water Conservation, Dam Construction, and Housing Controls in Flood-Prone Areas

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Sacramento has become one of the fastest growing regions in California, and the area has witnessed exceptional growth in new home construction as people relocate from the Bay Area and other expensive coastal communities in search of affordable housing. The Sacramento region, as part of the Central Valley, is also responsible for the delivery of fresh water to two-thirds of people in California. Although these homes and the water supply are supposed to be protected by levees, they are, in fact, very vulnerable. Weakened by age related deterioration and design defects, these levees could be breached by a major earthquake, a strong flood, or rising ocean levels resulting from global warming. Many communities and much of our drinking water are imperiled by natural disasters, and the devastation could easily surpass the damage sustained by the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Many have argued that global warming could have serious effects on our lives, including rising sea levels, more frequent heat waves, droughts, wild fires, or floods. The State of California has vowed to address global climate change with the legislature's passage of the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, the stated goal of which is to reduce man-made green house gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2010. What do Sacramento residents think about environmental issues such as global warming, water scarcity, and housing development in flood-prone areas? More importantly, what actions do they support to address these concerns?

According to the data from *The 2007 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region*, Sacramento residents are extremely concerned about our environment. Seventy-four percent of the residents think that the threat of global warming to California's economy and quality of life is very serious (48%) or somewhat serious (26%). Sixty-five percent believe that if we fail to take strong action immediately, we may experience a major ecological catastrophe in the future. However, an overwhelming majority also recognize that the balance of nature is delicate (77%) and when humans interfere with nature it often leads to disastrous consequences (79%), so our actions must therefore be carefully planned.

What actions should be undertaken by residents of the state and the Sacramento region to address our environmental concerns? Eighty-six percent of Sacramento-area residents support water conservation measures as one way to address the dwindling water supply. Eighty-eight percent believe local governments in the region should restrict the construction of new homes in areas without adequate flood protection.

Since dams can be used to control flooding, store water, and generate electricity, the Auburn Dam (46%) and the other two dam construction projects recently proposed for Northern California by Governor Schwarzenegger (44%) also receive moderate support. Endorsement of these three dams is limited not because there is strong opposition (21% oppose the Governor's proposal and 24% oppose the Auburn Dam) but because many residents have not yet formed a firm opinion (20% don't know about the Governor's proposal and 19% don't know about the Auburn Dam) or they have not heard about the three dams (15% for Governor's dams and 11% for the Auburn Dam). If our analysis were to focus exclusively on those residents who have heard about these three dams, support increases to over fifty percent for all three projects (52%).

There is, however, a negative relationship between belief in the threat of global warming and support for the three dams. Those who think global warming is very serious are the least likely to support the construction of the Auburn Dam (39%) and the two dams proposed by the Governor (39%), whereas those who think the threat of global warming is not serious are most likely to endorse the building of the dams (73% support the Governor's dams and 74% the Auburn Dam).

These are some of the results from *The 2007 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region*, conducted from February 17 to March 8, 2007, by the Institute for Social Research (ISR), California State University, Sacramento.

More than 70 percent think global warming threatens California's economy and quality of life

Most residents in the Sacramento region are aware of the threat posed by global warming to the economy and quality of life in California, with 74 percent stating such a threat is very serious (48%) or somewhat serious (26%). Only 20 percent believe the threat is not too serious (10%) or not serious at all (10%). Six percent claim they are unaware of the seriousness of this issue.

Concern over global warming doesn't vary considerably among the general public in the region. More than two thirds of residents think global warming threatens the future of the state regardless of factors such as length of residence in the region, household income, gender, or race.

Apprehension about the threat of global warming differs somewhat along county lines. Residents in Yolo County (82%) are more concerned about global warming than people in El Dorado County (61%). The biggest differences, however, exist among registered voters in the region. Just over half the Republicans (52%) view global warming as a serious problem and 40 percent don't think it is a serious issue. In sharp contrast, 88 percent of Democrats and 82 percent of other voters express concern over the threat of global warming.

“How serious of a threat is global warming to the economy and quality of life for California's future: very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious?”

Sacramento Region	
Serious (very and somewhat)	74%
Not (too and at all) serious	20
Don't know	6

Sacramento Region	
Very serious	48%
Somewhat serious	26
Not too serious	10
Not at all serious	10
Don't know	6

Comparison among People with Different Length of Residence in the Region

	6 Years or Less	7 to 19 Years	20 Years or Longer
Serious	81%	72%	72%
Not serious	12	21	22
Don't know	7	7	6

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$30,000	\$30,000 - Less than 100,000	\$100,000 Or More
Serious	79%	75%	69%
Not serious	15	20	26
Don't know	6	5	5

Comparison between White and Other Racial Groups

	White	Other Racial Groups
Very serious	72%	80%
Not serious	22	14
Don't know	6	6

Comparison between Men and Women

	Men	Women
Serious	67%	78%
Not serious	27	16
Don't know	6	6

Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region

	El Dorado County	Placer County	Sacramento County	Yolo County
Serious	61%	71%	75%	82%
Not serious	33	20	19	16
Don't know	6	9	6	2

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Serious	88%	52%	82%
Not serious	8	40	13
Don't know	4	8	5

Almost two-thirds agree with the statement that if things continue with their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe

The majority of residents (65%) think that a continuation of current environmental policies will result in an ecological catastrophe. Only 28 percent disagree with the statement, and 7 percent report they have no opinion.

Agreement that our present course of action may yield a major ecological catastrophe is stronger among women, non-whites, younger people, those who recently moved to the area, and those with lower incomes. In fact, more than seventy percent of those with household income lower than \$30,000 (77%), non-whites (77%), those who lived in the region six years or less (76%), people 40 or younger (71%), and women (71%) fear for our environmental future if we do not change our current direction.

Although public perception regarding the consequences of continuing current environmental policies differs by gender, race, income, age, and length of residence, those differences are less pronounced when we focus on registered voters in the region. Republicans, Democrats, and other voters express sharply differing views on this issue. At least 70 percent of Democrats (77%) and other voters (70%) feel pessimistic about the current course of action, whereas only 45 percent of Republicans share the same negative outlook. In fact, half the Republicans (50%) hold the opposite view.

“Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know what you think. If things continue with their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.”

	Sacramento Region
Agree	65%
Disagree	28
Don't know	7

	Sacramento Region
Strongly agree	24%
Agree	41
Disagree	23
Strongly disagree	5
Don't know	7

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$30,000	\$30,000 - Less than 100,000	\$100,000 Or More
Agree	77%	66%	57%
Disagree	15	28	41
Don't know	8	6	2

Comparison between White and Other Racial Groups

	White	Other Racial Groups
Agree	61%	77%
Disagree	32	19
Don't know	7	4

Comparison among People with Different Length of Residence in the Region

	6 Years or Less	7 to 19 Years	20 Years or Longer
Agree	76%	64%	63%
Disagree	18	30	31
Don't know	6	6	6

Comparison among People from Different Age Groups

	40 or Younger	41 to 64	65 or Plus
Agree	71%	67%	59%
Disagree	24	29	30
Don't know	5	4	11

Comparison between Men and Women

	Men	Women
Agree	57%	71%
Disagree	39	21
Don't know	4	8

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Agree	77%	45%	70%
Disagree	16	50	26
Don't know	7	5	4

Vast majority agree that the balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset

Over three-quarters of respondents (77%) feel that the balance of nature is easily upset: 26 percent strongly agree and 51 percent agree with the statement. Less than 20 percent (19%) report that they are in disagreement, and 4 percent claim they don't know.

The majority of respondents believe the balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset regardless of their demographic background. However, those who earned \$30,000 or less (86%) are more likely to agree with the statement than those earning over \$30,000 but less than \$100,000 (76%) and those earning \$100,000 or more (72%). Eighty percent of women agree compared to 71 percent of men.

The biggest gap, however, is among the registered voters, with a twenty-one percentage point difference between Democrats (84%) and Republicans (63%) who agree with the statement. Eighty-two percent of other voters also share this view.

**“Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know what you think.
The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset.”**

	Sacramento Region
Agree	77%
Disagree	19
Don't know	4

	Sacramento Region
Strongly agree	26%
Agree	51
Disagree	17
Strongly disagree	2
Don't know	4

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$30,000	\$30,000 - Less than 100,000	\$100,000 Or More
Agree	86%	76%	72%
Disagree	9	21	26
Don't know	5	3	2

Comparison between Men and Women

	Men	Women
Agree	71%	80%
Disagree	26	15
Don't know	3	5

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Agree	84%	63%	82%
Disagree	12	34	17
Don't know	4	3	1

Almost eighty percent agree with the statement that when humans interfere with nature it often leads to disastrous consequences

Overwhelming majorities of Sacramento region residents (79%) think that human interference with nature will lead to disastrous consequences, with 29 percent strongly agreeing and 50 percent agreeing. Only 18 percent disagree, and three percent say they don't know or have not yet formed an opinion.

Although concurrence with this statement differs by gender, income, and county of residence, more than 70 percent of the region's residents think human interference with nature will result in disasters regardless of household income levels or gender and regardless whether they live in El Dorado (77%), Placer (75%), Sacramento (79%), or Yolo (88%) counties.

Among registered voters, Democrats (87%) and other voters (81%) are more likely to agree with this statement than Republicans (68%). However, even among Republicans, more than two-thirds (68%) feel that human interference with nature will lead to negative results.

“Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know what you think.

When humans interfere with nature it often leads to disastrous consequences.”

	Sacramento Region
Agree	79%
Disagree	18
Don't know	3

	Sacramento Region
Strongly agree	29%
Agree	50
Disagree	15
Strongly disagree	3
Don't know	3

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$30,000	\$30,000 - Less than 100,000	\$100,000 Or More
Agree	86%	82%	73%
Disagree	12	16	25
Don't know	2	2	2

Comparison between Men and Women

	Men	Women
Agree	72%	84%
Disagree	25	13
Don't know	3	3

Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region

	El Dorado County	Placer County	Sacramento County	Yolo County
Agree	77%	75%	79%	88%
Disagree	20	22	17	12
Don't know	3	3	4	0

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Agree	87%	68%	81%
Disagree	11	29	18
Don't know	2	3	1

An overwhelming majority support water conservation measures

Sacramento region residents (86%) strongly support the proposal to encourage implementation of additional water conservation measures in California with only 8 percent in disagreement and 6 percent saying they don't know. This proposal receives the endorsement of voters from all major political parties, more than 90 percent of Democrats (91%) and other voters (91%) and more than eighty percent of Republicans (82%). Support is substantial amongst those with higher incomes. A greater percentage of those who earn \$100,000 or more (91%) support water conservation more than the other income brackets (88% for those earning less than \$30,000 and 86% for those making over \$30,000 but less than \$100,000).

“Many proposals have been made to address flood and drought control, water management, and housing development in the region and the state. Please tell me whether you favor or oppose the following plans. What about encouraging the use of more water conservation measures in California - favor or oppose?”

	Sacramento Region
Favor	86%
Oppose	8
Don't know	6

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Favor	91%	82%	91%
Oppose	5	12	7
Don't know	4	6	2

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$30,000	\$30,000 - Less than 100,000	\$100,000 Or More
Favor	88%	86%	91%
Oppose	5	9	8
Don't know	7	5	1

Many support building the two dams proposed by the Governor

Forty-four percent of residents favor a recent proposal by Governor Schwarzenegger to build two more dams in Northern California. Twenty-one percent oppose the plan, 20 percent don't know, and fifteen percent have not heard about the proposal. Thus, support for this plan is limited not because people oppose it, but because more than one-third (35%) of the respondents either have not heard about it (15%) or have not formed a firm opinion yet (20%). Public awareness of the proposed dams is significant because our study shows that support increases to more than 50 percent (52%) when we focus our analysis on those who have heard about the projects.

Support for the Governor's dam proposal is strongest in El Dorado (58%) and Sacramento (54%) counties and among men (59%) and those with household incomes of \$100,000 or more (56%). Support is lowest in Yolo County (35%).

A divergent relationship exists between belief in the threat of global warming and support for the two dams. Those who think global warming is very serious are the least likely to support the construction of the two dams (39%), whereas those who believe global warming is not serious are the most likely to endorse the proposal (73%).

Among the registered voters, Republicans (66%) are more likely to support dam construction than Democrats (42%) and other voters (43%). Democrats (37%) are the most likely to oppose the plan, while Republicans (12%) are the least likely to do so.

“Many proposals have been made to address flood and drought control, water management, and housing development in the region and the state. Please tell me whether you favor or oppose the following plans. What about the recent proposal made by Governor Schwarzenegger to build two more dams in Northern California--favor or oppose?”

All Residents in the Sacramento Region	
Favor	44%
Oppose	21
Don't know	20
Have not heard about the proposal	15

All Residents Who Have Heard about the Proposal in the Sacramento Region	
Favor	52%
Oppose	25
Don't know	23

Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region

	El Dorado County	Placer County	Sacramento County	Yolo County
Favor	58%	51%	54%	35%
Oppose	23	24	25	34
Don't know	19	25	21	31

Comparison between Men and Women

	Men	Women
Favor	59%	47%
Oppose	23	26
Don't know	18	27

Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes

	Less than \$30,000	\$30,000 - Less than 100,000	\$100,000 Or More
Favor	47%	51%	56%
Oppose	28	25	29
Don't know	25	24	15

Comparison among People with Different Perceptions of the Threat of Global Warming

	Very Serious	Somewhat Serious	Not Serious
Favor	39%	58%	73%
Oppose	37	15	14
Don't know	24	27	13

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Favor	42%	66%	43%
Oppose	37	12	27
Don't know	21	22	30

Many also endorse the Auburn Dam

Forty-six percent of residents favor building the Auburn Dam, while 24 percent oppose it. Nineteen percent don't know, and 11 percent have not heard about it. Accordingly, support for this dam is limited because 30 percent of the respondents either have not heard about it (11%) or have not formed a firm opinion yet (19%). If we focus our study on those who have heard about this dam, support increases to more than 50 percent (52%).

Support for the Auburn Dam is highest in El Dorado County (60%), among those who are 65 or older (61%), among those who have lived in the region 20 or more years (56%), and among men (54%). Support is lowest among those who have recently moved to the region (36%) and in Yolo County (38%).

However, a divergent relationship exists between belief in the threat of global warming and the support for the Auburn Dam. Those who think global warming is very serious are the least likely to support it (39%), whereas those who believe global warming is not serious are the most likely to express support for the Auburn dam (74%).

Among registered voters, Republicans (68%) are more likely to support this dam than Democrats (43%) and other voters (39%). Democrats (38%) are the most likely to oppose this dam, while Republicans (15%) are the least likely to do so.

Moreover, eighty-two percent of those who favor the Governor’s proposal to build two more dams also support the Auburn Dam, and 77 percent who oppose the Governor’s dam plan also oppose building the Auburn Dam. The reverse is also true. Eighty percent of those who favor the Auburn Dam also support Governor’s proposal to build two more dams, whereas 72 percent who oppose the Auburn Dam also object to the Governor’s dam proposal.

“Many proposals have been made to address flood and drought control, water management, and housing development in the region and the state. Please tell me whether you favor or oppose the following plans. What about building the Auburn Dam--favor or oppose?”

All Residents in the Sacramento Region	
Favor	46%
Oppose	24
Don’t know	19
Have not heard about the proposal	11

All Residents Who Have Heard about the Auburn Dam in the Sacramento Region	
Favor	52%
Oppose	27
Don’t know	21

Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region

	El Dorado County	Placer County	Sacramento County	Yolo County
Favor	60%	52%	52%	38%
Oppose	25	31	25	34
Don’t know	15	17	23	28

Comparison among People from Different Age Groups

	40 or Younger	41 to 64	65 or Plus
Agree	43%	50%	61%
Disagree	25	30	24
Don't know	32	20	15

Comparison among People with Different Length of Residence in the Region

	6 Years or Less	7 to 19 Years	20 Years or Longer
Favor	36%	49%	56%
Oppose	28	27	27
Don't know	36	24	17

Comparison between Men and Women

	Men	Women
Favor	54%	49%
Oppose	29	26
Don't know	17	25

Comparison among People with Different Perceptions of the Threat of Global Warming

	Very Serious	Somewhat Serious	Not Serious
Favor	39%	56%	74%
Oppose	39	19	15
Don't know	22	25	11

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Favor	43%	68%	39%
Oppose	38	15	34
Don't know	19	17	27

Comparison among People with Different Levels of Support for the Governor's Two Dams

	Favor the Two Dams	Oppose the Two Dams	Don't Know
Favor the Auburn Dam	82%	15%	29%
Oppose	6	77	18
Don't know	12	8	53

Comparison among People with Different Levels of Support for the Auburn Dam

	Favor the Auburn Dam	Oppose the Auburn Dam	Don't Know
Favor the two dams	80%	12%	31%
Oppose	7	72	10
Don't know	13	16	59

Majority of area residents familiar with the Auburn Dam support dam construction

From its inception in the 1960s to the present day, The Auburn Dam project has sparked fierce debate. Construction on the dam started in 1967, and by 1979, all the foundation work was completed. However, in 1979, strong opposition to the dam's location forced the Federal government to halt the whole project.

Today, public awareness of the project varies, with a small number of people (19%) very familiar with the dam and its debate. Forty-four percent are somewhat familiar, 33 percent are not at all familiar, and four percent have not heard about it. Majority of the area residents who are very (53%) or somewhat (61%) familiar with the Auburn Dam and its debate support the dam, while only one-third (35%) of those who are not familiar endorse the project.

The same pattern holds true for the Governor's dam proposal. Majority of Sacramento people who are very (55%) or somewhat (58%) familiar with the Auburn Dam debates support the Governor's plan to build two more dams in Northern California, compared to only 41 percent of those who are not familiar. Thus, our data suggest that as people become more informed about dams, they may be more inclined to support dam construction in the state.

“How familiar are you with the Auburn Dam or its debate, very familiar, somewhat familiar, or not at all familiar?”

	All Residents in the Sacramento Region
Very familiar	19%
Somewhat familiar	44
Not at all familiar	33
Have not heard about the proposal	4

Comparison among People with Different Levels of Familiarity of the Auburn Dam

	Very Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Not Familiar
Favor the Auburn Dam	53%	61%	35%
Oppose	45	28	13
Don't know	2	11	52

Comparison among People with Different Levels of Familiarity of the Auburn Dam

	Very Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Not Familiar
Favor the Governor's Dams	55%	58%	41%
Oppose	32	24	23
Don't know	13	18	36

Strong support for limiting new home construction in flood areas

An overwhelming majority of residents think local government should minimize flood risks in the region. Nearly nine out of ten area residents (88%) think local governments should limit the construction of new homes in places with inadequate flood protection. Only nine percent take the opposite position, and three percent have not yet formed an opinion. This is almost the same as a year ago (88% yes, 9% no, and 3% don't know in 2007 vs. 88% yes, 8% no, and 4% didn't know in 2006, Liu, Scott, and Bowerman 2006).

Very strong support for restricting growth in flood prone areas is shared by an overwhelming majority of the general public no matter which county they live in (95% in Yolo, 91% in El Dorado, 89% in Placer County, and 87% in Sacramento County), or whether they live in floodplain areas (89%) or not (89%). This plan is also endorsed by a vast majority of registered voters in the region regardless of whether they are Democrats (91%), Republicans (89%), or other voters (89%).

“Do you think local governments should limit the construction of new homes in places without adequate flood protection?”

Comparison between 2006 and 2007

	Sacramento Region (2007)	Sacramento Region (2006)
Yes	88%	88%
No	9	8
Don't know	3	4

Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region

	El Dorado County	Placer County	Sacramento County	Yolo County
Yes	91%	89%	87%	95%
No	9	10	9	3
Don't know	0	1	4	2

Comparison among People Living in Different Areas

	Live in Flood Areas	Not Live in Flood Areas	Don't Know
Yes	89%	89%	85%
No	9	9	9
Don't know	2	2	6

Comparison among Registered Voters

	Democrats	Republicans	Other Voters
Yes	91%	89%	89%
No	6	9	9
Don't know	3	2	2

Survey methods

The above results are based on our sixth annual survey, *The 2007 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region*¹. This study is a computer-assisted telephone interview of 1106 adult residents age 18 and older from randomly selected households in the Sacramento region which includes Sacramento, Yolo, Placer, and El Dorado counties. The objective of this project is to assess quality of life and public opinion in the Sacramento region regarding a wide range of important local and national issues.

More than 30 students conducted phone interviews in English and Spanish from February 17 to March 8, 2007, at the Institute for Social Research, California State University, Sacramento. Our sample is still quite representative of the four counties in the Sacramento region when compared with the 2000 U.S. Census (9% in the Census vs. 9.4% in the sample in Yolo County; 9% in the Census vs. 10.5% in the sample in El Dorado County, 14% in the Census vs. 19.2% in the sample in Placer County, and 68% residents in the Census vs. 60.9% in the sample in Sacramento County). The differences may reflect the changes in the population of the region. The margin of error for the survey is approximately ± 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The error for group comparisons in the Sacramento region would be higher than ± 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

This survey has compared the Sacramento region findings with those from other California regions, the state, and the nation. Data cited regarding the state and other California regions often comes from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) Statewide Surveys. Nationwide data often comes from Gallup polls. The environment questions are adopted from Dunlap, Liere, Mertig, and Jones (2000).

The College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies (SSIS), the Department of Sociology, the Office of Public Affairs, and the Office of Community Collaboration at

¹ This study was called Annual Survey of Public Opinion and Life Quality in the Sacramento Region before 2006.

California State University, Sacramento sponsored this project. Dr. Joseph Sheley has been actively involved in this project and offered significant contributions to the effort.

This research is directed by Amy Liu, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Institute for Social Research, California State University, Sacramento. Dr. Liu is an expert in public opinion polls, and has conducted over 20 surveys in the past nine years, including:

- 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, and 2002 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region
- Survey of Iowa Business about Eldercare and Eldercare Needs
- Story County Conservation Board Survey
- Grundy County Youth Needs Assessment

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Appendix I: The 2007 Annual Survey Research Team Members and Sponsors

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