



The state of water opinion

Western regional research briefing

Water Hub at Climate Nexus

Communications support for the water movement

- Media and public opinion research
- Tools and training
- Press and digital strategy
- Messaging
- Hands on help with writing, design + pitching

Focused in the Western U.S., but we do some national work.



The team



**Briget
Arndell**

Communications
Associate



**Jessica
Jewell**

Director of Digital



**Nicole
Lampe**

Managing Director



**Sade
Moore**

Communications
Associate



**Sarah
Bucci**

Director of Strategic
Communications

Plan for this hour

- How polling can inform our work as communicators
 - Relationship between polling and media
- What does the latest research say?
 - Current concerns
 - Solutions voters support
 - Insights re: framing and messaging
- Discussion/Q&A





How can polling inform our work?

How do we use polling



Relationship between media + polling



Public opinion is changeable!

But, core values tend to remain the same:

Primary Values

- Responsibility to care for self + family
- Personal liberty
- Work
- Spirituality
- Honesty/Integrity
- Fairness/Equality

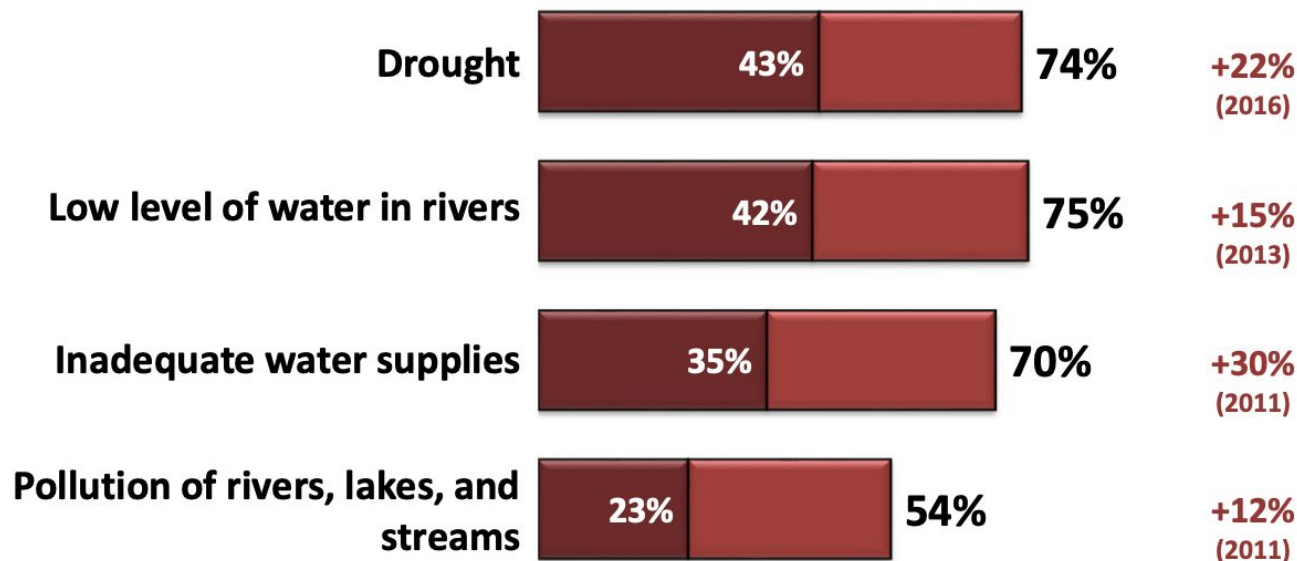


Look how far we've come on climate



Source: Yale Program
on Climate Change
Communication

Western water worries also rising



Source: State of the Rockies, Colorado College

What voters are reading/hearing

'Our own survival is at stake': Arizona is using up its groundwater, researchers warn

First-ever water cuts declared for Colorado River in historic drought

A Colorado town nearly ran out of drinking water. Experts say it's a window into the future.

Study finds Western megadrought is the worst in 1,200 years

Public concern → policy progress



President Biden ✓

@POTUS

🇺🇸 United States government official

We're finally going to get rid of our nation's dangerous lead pipes thanks to this infrastructure deal.

Every kid in this country will be able to turn on the tap and drink clean water.

12:30 PM · Nov 7, 2021 · The White House

When there's a gap in public awareness, communications can help close it!



Some issues we're working on:

- Groundwater
- Water access and affordability challenges
- Water-climate solutions
- Co-benefits of green infrastructure

TV is the go-to news source



... and there's not a ton of context in a 40-80 second story!



So, what does the polling say?

The research we reviewed



Private state polls:

- Walton Family Foundation CO and AZ, Sept. 2021
- Water Foundation CA, Oct. 2021
- Water Fdn/Thornburg Fdn NM, Dec. 2021

Public regional/national polls:

- Water Hub/Climate Nexus, Mar. 2021
- State of the Rockies, Feb. 2022
- Walton Family Foundation World Water Day, Mar. 2022

Voters worry about water safety and support increased investment



- 86% of voters nationwide say it's very/somewhat urgent to “provide access to clean, safe drinking water.”
- 54% of Western voters say “pollution of rivers, lakes and streams” is an extremely/very serious problem

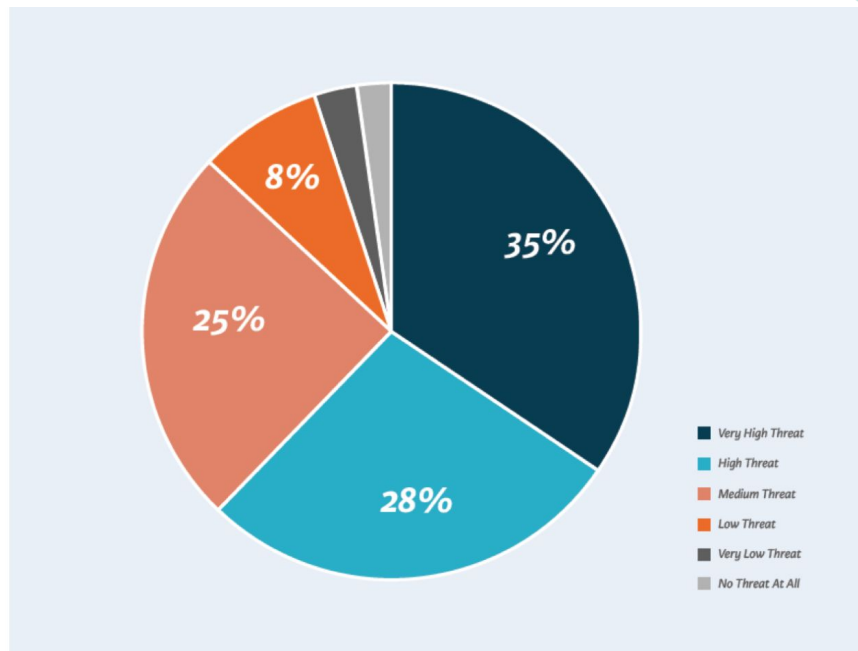
People are worried about our public plumbing

63% of voters see outdated public water systems as a threat to drinking water safety



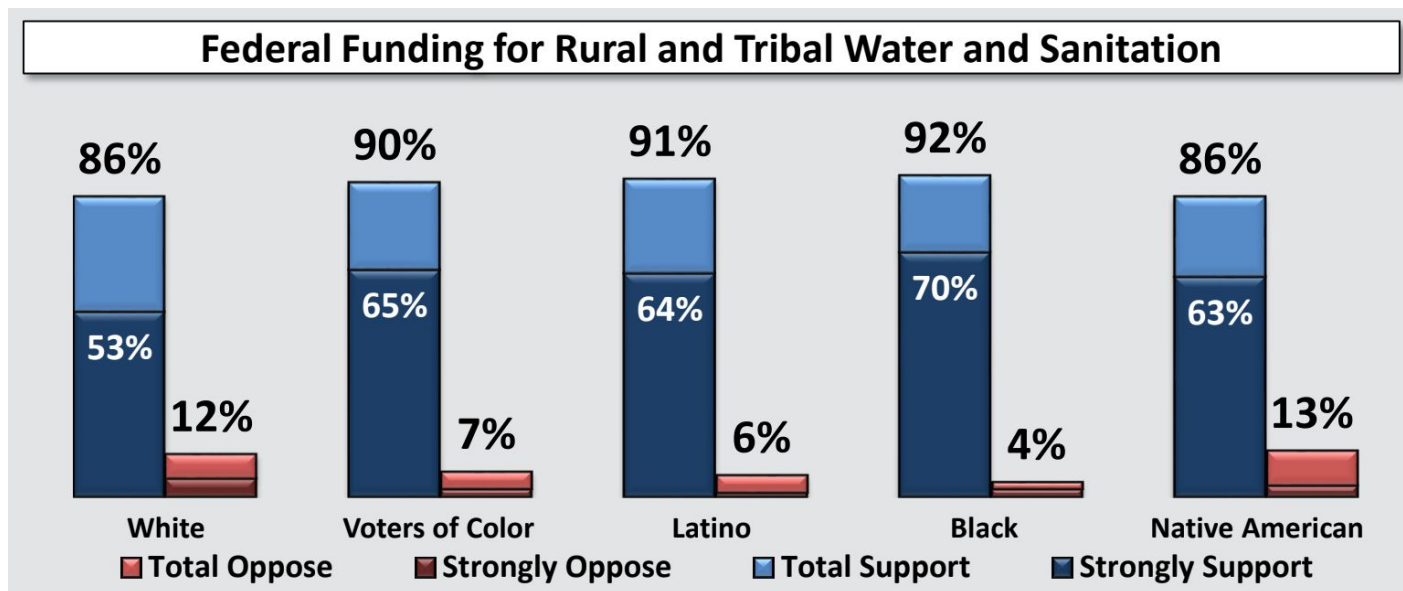
Due to weighting and rounding, percentages may not always add up to 100%

*Among Registered Voters in the U.S.
N = 1,624 February 26 - March 7, 2021*



Source: Water Hub/Climate Nexus national poll

Strong support for funding rural/tribal water needs



Source: State of the Rockies, Colorado College

Water investments for the win!

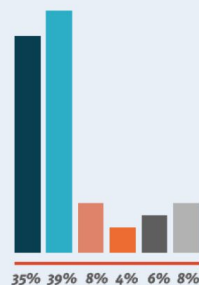
Q: Do you think increasing federal spending on water infrastructure would have a positive or negative impact on each of the following, or would it have no impact either way?



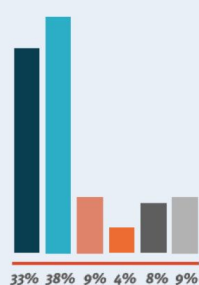
Due to weighting and rounding, percentages may not always add up to 100%

Among Registered Voters in the U.S.

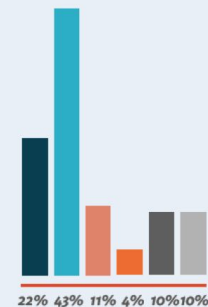
N = 1,624 February 26 - March 7, 2021



Public health



U.S. Environment



Jobs in the U.S.



Source: Water Hub/Climate Nexus national poll

Water supply worries are rising



....*especially in the West*

- 73% of voters nationwide are concerned about climate-driven water scarcity.
- 27% said their state will definitely or probably not have enough water to meet its needs in 100 yrs.
 - That number was 53% in AZ and 55% in CO!

The idea of water scarcity remains abstract for most people



Voters support solutions!

- 85% of voters agree it's urgent to protect rivers, lakes and streams
- 90% of voters said it's important to practice water conservation
 - 84% said it's important for states to invest in conservation

NOTE: Language matters!

- 48% of voters said it's very important to “ensure sustainable use”
- 62% said it's very important to “practice conservation.”

People tend to think of individual conservation first

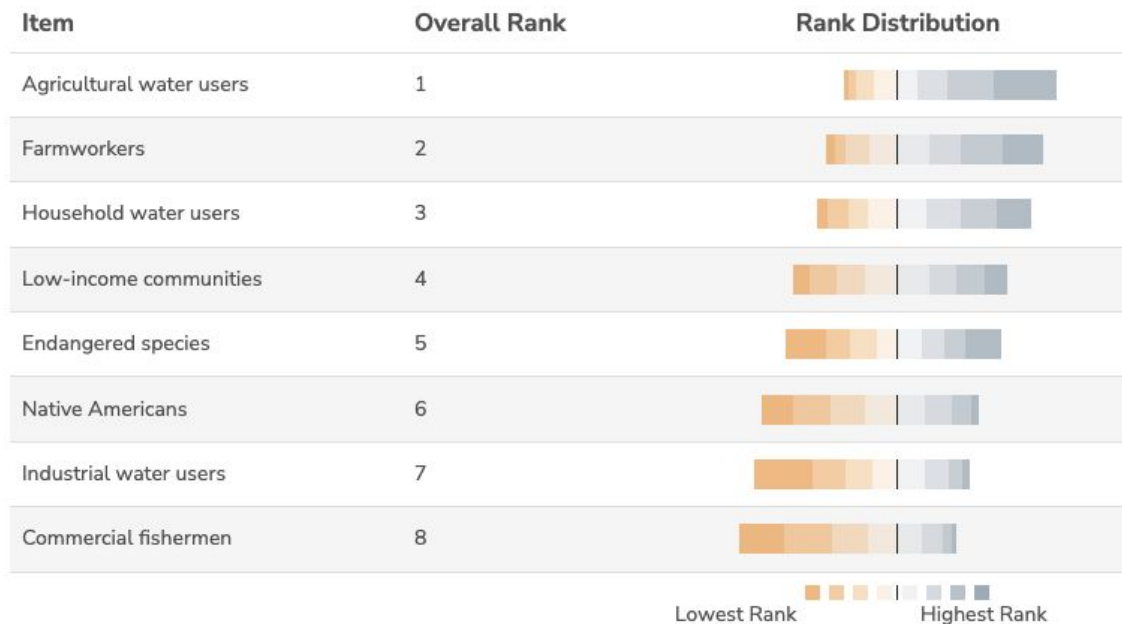


**SAVE OUR
WATER**

Most voters don't know where our water goes

- In CA, just 47% of voters correctly identified agriculture as the biggest water user in the state.
 - In NM, the number was 26%!
- Nationally, half of voters think it's “about right” that 70% of our water goes to farming.

Californians want to protect farmers from drought impacts



Source: Water
Hub California
poll

These California Latino farmers have built success. Can it survive for their children?

“It’s been a great journey for me, up until now,” says Joe Del Bosque about the successful 2,000-acre family farm he’s built. The future for him and others looks increasingly uncertain.



Farmers are seen as good stewards



- CO and AZ voters see individuals + corporations as bigger contributors to dwindling supply than ag users.
- Nationwide, voters trust farmers and ranchers to use water responsibly more than businesses or individuals.

Roadmap moment!

- Framing farmers as the bad guy is not a winning strategy
- Instead, we can focus on problems with our food system (like industrialization/corporatization) and lift up examples of water-wise farming.



In Wine Country, one radical farmer is growing an unexpected heirloom crop: wheat

Mai Nguyen's rare grains have become a coveted ingredient for California bakers, brewers and distillers



Esther Mobley

Feb. 7, 2022 | Updated: Feb. 7, 2022 3 p.m.



Media briefing with TAC Farm



Natural solutions poll well



- 74% of voters nationwide believe the most effective climate solutions “work for nature and people together.”
- 76% of voters nationwide support the use of natural infrastructure to address climate change.
 - 83% support protecting floodplains
 - 82% support restoring wetlands
 - 80% support shoring up coastal and river communities

Good news on groundwater

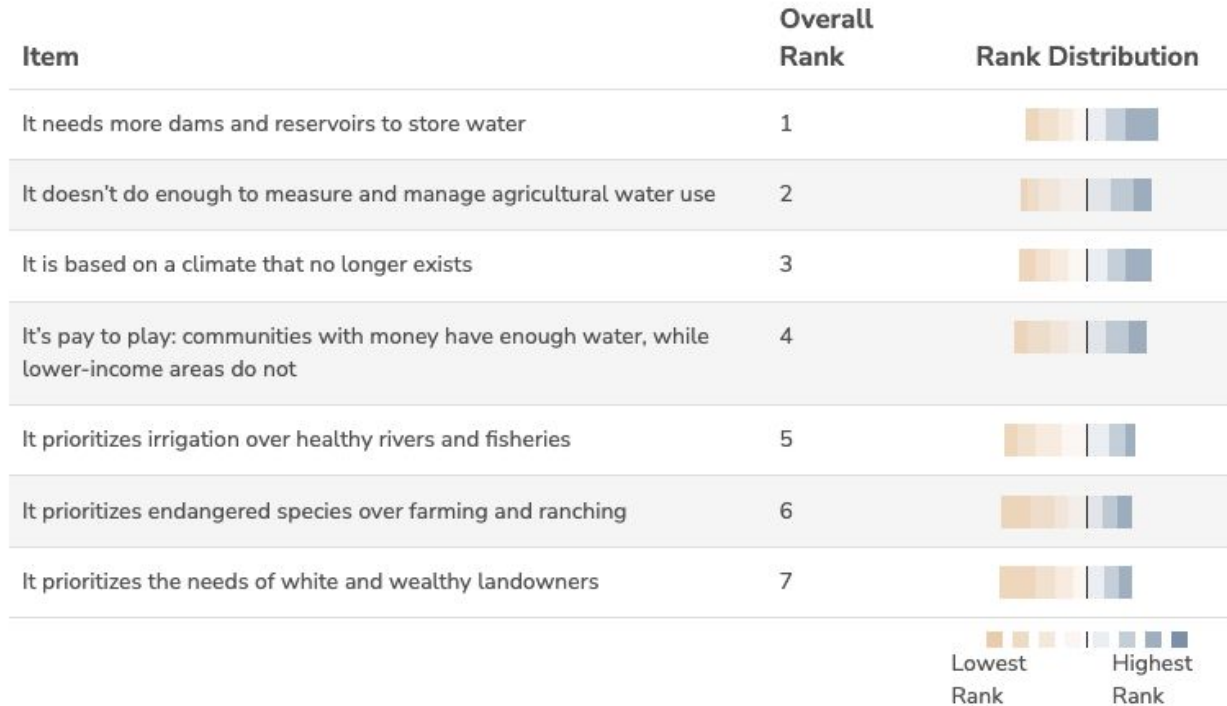
- 83% of voters nationwide agree we should protect groundwater.
- In NM, 60% of voters support more monitoring and regulation
- In CA, 59% of people said the state should protect or replenish groundwater reserves.

A word on support for solutions



- Generally, voters like the idea of stretching current supplies.
 - 81% of Western voters prefer “using our current water supply more wisely through conservation + recycling” over “increased diversions.”
- But, the push for new dams and reservoirs is landing with some audiences.

Concerns re: California's water system



Source: Water
Hub California poll

Roadmap moment!

- We need to offer solutions that address the perceived problem: in this case, the concern is “there’s not enough water to go around.”
- In California, we saw an industry-funded ballot measure called “More Water Now” focused on desalination.



Untapped Savings

21ST CENTURY SOLUTIONS
FOR A SUSTAINABLE WATER
SUPPLY FOR CALIFORNIA

Every year, California uses

**6 MILLION
ACRE-FEET**

more water than our rivers and
aquifers can sustainably provide

Every year, California
could save up to

**14 MILLION
ACRE-FEET**

of water to close this gap



That's enough water to irrigate
all of the orchards, nuts, berries, vineyards,
tomatoes, lettuces, rice, and vegetables grown
in California, with water left over.

Agricultural Efficiency: 5.6-6.6 MILLION ACRE-FEET

- Use smart irrigation scheduling to ensure crops are watered when they most need it
- Use deficit irrigation to limit water use at drought-tolerant growth stages
- Expand efficient drip and sprinkler irrigation technology

Water Reuse: 1.2-1.8 MILLION ACRE-FEET

- Use recycled water to irrigate landscapes and crops
- Install graywater systems to water lawns and flush toilets in homes and businesses
- Recharge groundwater with recycled water

Stormwater Capture: 0.4-0.6 MILLION ACRE-FEET

- Install rainwater barrels and cisterns at homes and businesses
- Recharge groundwater with stormwater runoff

Urban Efficiency: 2.9-5.2 MILLION ACRE-FEET

- Replace unneeded turf grass with native and drought-tolerant plants
- Accelerate replacement of inefficient plumbing fixtures and appliances
- Find and fix water leakage in buildings and under streets
- Operate cooling towers more efficiently in factories and office buildings



Get the Drought Series Fact Sheets at:
www.nrdc.org/water/ca-water-supply-solutions.asp
www.pacinst.org/publication/ca-water-supply-solutions

* 1 Million Acre-Feet is generally enough to supply
2 million families for 1 year (until we all become more efficient)

In summary

- Voters are worried about water safety and supply
- They want action, and support increased investment
- Public health tends to rank as a top concern/motivator, followed by food/farming, and healthy rivers, lakes and streams

Thoughts? Questions?

