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Heat: 3 in 4 Californians say climate change is contributing to the state's extreme weather events

Beachgoers flock to the beach south of the pier in Huntington Beach, Calif., Friday, June 30, 2023. (Jeff Gritchen/The Orange County Register via AP)



New poll shows big support for offshore wind farms, desalination, renewable energy requirements

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With a heat wave approaching that could send inland temperatures soaring this weekend to more than 105 degrees, a new poll shows Californians' concerns are rising about climate change and its connections to extreme weather.

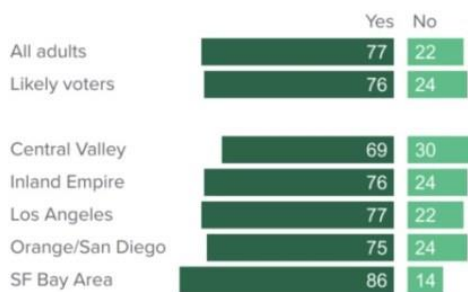
Overall, 77% of California adults and 76% of likely voters say climate change has contributed to the state's recent extreme weather events — which include severe droughts, record heat waves, wildfires and destructive winter storms — according to [a survey released Wednesday](#) by the Public Policy Institute of California, a non-partisan research organization in San Francisco.

Support is lukewarm — just 45% — for Gov. Gavin Newsom's ban on the sale of new gasoline-burning cars statewide by 2035. But roughly 7 in 10 Californians support building offshore wind farms and desalination plants along the state's coastline, and taking further steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, including supporting an existing law that requires 100% of the state's electricity to come from renewable or carbon-free sources by 2045, the poll found.

"People are connecting the dots between what's happening with the weather and what's happening with climate change in a way they haven't before," said Mark Baldassare, statewide survey director at PPIC. "Most people in California see a connection. They have been impacted and they are worried about the future."

Three-quarters of California adults say that climate change has been related to the state's recent extreme weather, according to a PPIC survey released Wednesday July 12, 2023. (Image: PPIC)

An overwhelming majority say climate change has contributed to the state's recent extreme weather events



California has endured a decade of extreme weather.

The state has suffered through major drought conditions during eight of the past 12 years — from 2012 to 2016, and again from 2020 to 2022.

All seven of the seven largest wildfires in California's recorded history have happened in the past five years, burning millions of acres in Wine Country, the Santa Cruz Mountains, the Lake Tahoe area, the southern Sierra and other parts of the state.

The most devastating, the Camp Fire in 2018, killed 85 people and leveled the town of Paradise in Butte County — making it the deadliest wildfire anywhere in the United States since 1918.

Massive atmospheric river storms, which scientists say are made stronger by warmer water because of higher rates of evaporation, hammered the state in 2017, causing the failure of the spillway at Oroville Dam and \$100 million flood damage to downtown San Jose. This winter, similar storms ended the latest drought but wrecked coastal areas including Capitola Village, and caused flooding across the state.

This week's coming heat wave is a reminder of similar heat waves last year.

The mercury hit 118 degrees in Calistoga on Sept. 7, the hottest temperature ever recorded in the nine-county Bay Area. Death Valley-like temperatures of 117 at Travis Air Force Base near Fairfield, 116 in Livermore and 109 in San Jose also set records that week. The heat stressed the state's power grid as air conditioning use spiked.

The current Western-wide heat wave threatens to break the all-time record of 18 for most consecutive days in Phoenix above 110 degrees. And forecasters say Las Vegas could hit 118 degrees on Sunday. Canada has broken all-time records for wildfires this year. And water temperatures in the Florida Keys this week hit an unprecedented 95 degrees.

This past month was the hottest June recorded on Earth since modern temperature records began in 1850. Scientists say reducing the burning of fossil fuels like coal, natural gas and oil can ease the severity of climate change, although some is already inevitable.

A jet arrives at sunset at Sky Harbor International Airport, Monday, July 10, 2023, in Phoenix. Phoenix is the epicenter of what may turn out to be an unprecedented extreme heat wave around the Southwest. The high temperature in the desert city has been at least 110 degrees for 11 consecutive days. Eighteen days was the longest stretch, according to the National Weather Service.

(AP Photo/Matt York) Matt York/Associated Press

“Temperatures have increased globally to a point where we do get a modest daily spike in temperature, it’s essentially the hottest temperature we’ve ever observed,” said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA. “This is something we are going to be seeing repeatedly over and over again for the rest of our lives.”



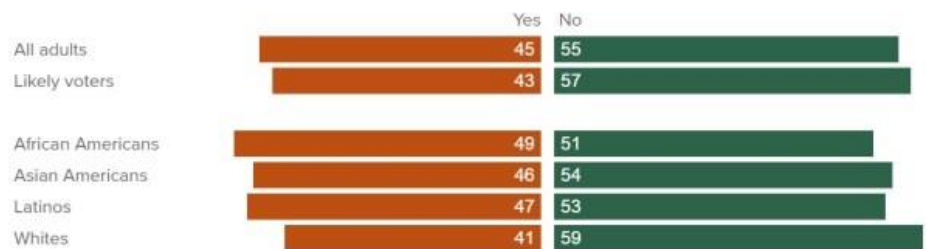
In Wednesday’s PPIC poll, 45% of adults said they have been personally affected in the past two years by an extreme weather event. Residents of the Inland Empire (53%), the Bay Area (51%), and the Central Valley (51%) were more likely than people in Los Angeles (38%) and Orange and San Diego counties (30%) to say that.

A strong majority — 66% — said they oppose new offshore oil drilling in California. Meanwhile, 83% said they support construction of offshore wind farms and desalination plants — including majorities of Democrats, independents and Republicans.

An oil industry-backed measure to overturn a 2022 state law banning new oil and gas wells near homes, schools and hospitals will be on the November 2024 ballot. The poll showed 64% of likely voters would support keeping the law and 36% would overturn it.

Nearly half of California adults say that they have been affected by extreme weather events where they live in the last two years, according to a PPIC survey released July 12, 2023. (Image: PPIC)

More than four in ten say they have personally been affected by an extreme weather event where they live in the past two years



But as green as California voters are, they are reluctant to pay more for greener energy. Only 43% of likely voters said they are willing to pay higher prices for electricity from renewable sources like solar or wind energy than conventional energy. More Democrats (55%) said that than independents (39%) or Republicans (21%).

The PPIC survey of 1,724 adults was taken between June 7 and 29. Larry Gerston, a professor emeritus of political science at San Jose State University, said Californians have voted strongly in favor of environmental issues for decades. Expanding renewable energy is a winning issue for leaders like Newsom, he noted. But the political challenge is how to reduce emissions without major financial impacts on average voters.

“People are gung ho about the big issues — fixing the world — but when it comes time to affecting their wallets, you usually start to see a drop off,” Gerson said. “And these issues have huge political repercussions.”

FILE — Wind turbines stand in fields near Palm Springs, Calif, March 22, 2023. Electricity generated from renewables surpassed coal in the United States for the first time in 2022, the U.S. Energy Information Administration announced Monday, March 27, 2023. (AP Photo/Ashley Landis, File) Ashley Landis/Associated Press

