

Poll on climate change: Most Californians consider it a serious threat

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Field Poll shows that 64 percent of California voters believe there is sufficient evidence of global warming to justify action. (Paul Sakuma / AP file photo)

Despite mounting political divisions over the issue, nearly two-thirds of Californians continue to consider global warming a serious threat that needs to be addressed - and they still strongly back a 2006 state law aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emissions, according to a new Field Poll.

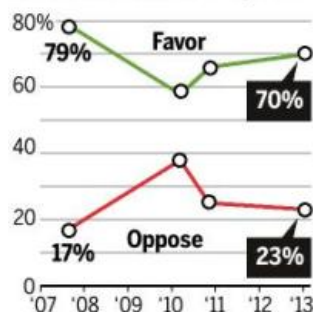
The poll shows that 64 percent of California voters believe there is sufficient evidence of global warming to justify action, and 70 percent are behind the law requiring the state to reduce the emissions to 1990 levels over the next decade.

At the same time, the poll reveals that overall voter concern about global warming

has diminished since Field posed the same questions in 2007, when 76 percent of Californians responded that global warming required either "immediate action" or "some action."

Support for global warming bill

Californians' views on AB 32, which calls for a 17 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the next 10 years:



Source: Field Poll survey of 834 registered state voters, conducted Feb. 5-17; margin of error +/- 3.5 percentage points
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The shifting sentiment appears connected to the roiling, partisan debate that has unfolded in recent years over climate change and its perceived threat to the environment. The Field Poll found Republicans in particular were much less inclined now than in 2007 to believe that action is needed -- 56 percent then, compared with 37 percent now.

Similarly, there is less support for AB 32, the greenhouse gas emissions law, than in 2007. But support appears to be bouncing back from a dip in 2010, when the economy was still struggling and an effort to derail the law failed at the ballot box. In the 2007 poll, 79 percent of the state's voters backed AB 32, pushed through the year before by then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican who made it a legislative priority.

Mark DiCamillo, the Field Poll's director, said the more recent surge in support for the law is most likely related to the improving economy.

Overall, the poll found California voters do not think much of either the state or federal government's response to climate change. Sixty-two percent of the state's voters disapprove of the federal government's handling of the issue, while nearly half consider the state's response inadequate.

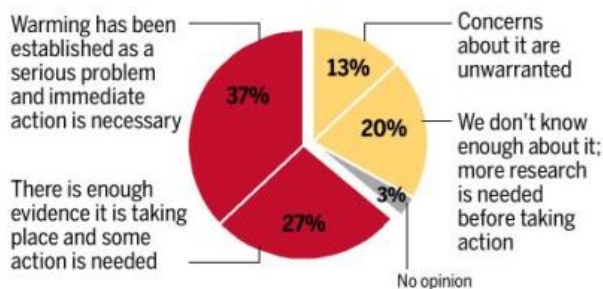
The poll, which surveyed 834 registered voters, was taken Feb. 5-21. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

Kathryn Phillips, executive director of the Sierra Club in California, said she was pleased with the solid support among Californians for taking action on global warming.

She noted that President Barack Obama of late has raised the issue "overtly" -- and "that helps."

Californians back action on warming

Sixty-four percent of Californians believe action is needed to fight global warming, a new Field Poll has found.



Breakdown by party and education

Party	Serious/immediate action needed	Some action needed	More research needed	Concerns not warranted
Democrats	54%	25%	13%	5%
Republicans	12	25	30	29
No party/other	37	34	20	8
Education				
High school or less	27	22	30	14
Some college	31	33	21	13
College graduate	41	30	15	11
Postgraduate work	50	21	15	13

Note: "No opinion" not shown

Source: Field Poll survey of 834 registered voters in California, conducted Feb. 5-17; margin of error +/- 3.5 percentage points

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"Also, we have been unfortunately seeing some real weather impacts that are linked to climate change," she said, alluding to Superstorm Sandy and the severe drought hitting Midwestern and Plains states.

Field Poll respondent Linda Harris, a registered Democrat from Hayward, is among the majority worried about the global warming problem and thinks that government isn't doing enough in response. And fellow Democrat Debra Estrin of San Jose feels the same way.

"We need to make some changes," Estrin said. "The future kind of goes by pretty fast."

The poll found that Democrats, independent voters, those under age 40, the college-educated and Bay Area residents were more likely to believe action needs to be taken against global warming. Republicans, seniors, Central Valley residents and those with no more than a high-school education tended to think otherwise.

"We just have so many things to worry about now. Enough stands in the way of getting back on our feet," said conservative Republican Doris Beninger, 83, of Cupertino.

Klaus Jaeger, a physicist from Saratoga and a registered Republican, was more down the middle on the issue. He supports the greenhouse gas law because he believes there is global warming. But he is convinced government is not providing the answers.

"I one-hundred percent agree there is global warming going on," he said. "But we don't know what the cause is. And overall, they aren't doing enough. That's clear."