

## Drought angst shrivels Californians' views of state

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Despite an improving economy and burgeoning budget surplus, California's worsening drought is stirring fresh anxieties about the direction of the Golden State.

A new poll shows Californians' perceptions of the state have soured in recent months as Gov. Jerry Brown and others imposed new conservation mandates.

"It's what everybody is talking about," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the Field Poll. "Voters are very worried about the water situation and what implications it will have on everything from their own lives, to future growth and development to the overall economy."

The percentage of voters who believe the state is on the right track is down 10 percentage points from February, even as its fiscal outlook continues to improve with revenue running billions of dollars ahead of estimates.

While roughly the same percentage believes the state is off on the wrong track, the number of people with no opinion more than doubled in that time to 20 percent. Uncertainty is typically interpreted as a negative, DiCamillo said.

"That's a concern, and it's a troubling thing as you think about California and its future," he said.

Last month, Brown ordered a 25 percent reduction in urban water use, and a survey last week found that nearly two-thirds of the state supports mandatory curtailments. Two-thirds characterized the shortage as "extremely serious," signaling an even higher level of angst than during the punishing drought of 1977.

Asked to identify his most pressing concerns, poll respondent Robert Brooks, an out-of-work consultant, led his three-item list with water and the drought, followed by government land-use policies and the state prison system.

Brooks, 55 of Olivehurst, said reservoir capacity has not begun to keep pace with the population. He attributes that to poor planning on the part of leaders.

"This state does not plan any farther than its nose," said Brooks, who is not affiliated with a political party. "It sees things only in the short term."

Consternation over the current situation demands an even more forceful approach from the governor, Brooks said.

"Instead of asking the Legislature" to support various solutions, he said, "Brown needs to publicly demand it. He has nothing to lose. He is in his last term."

Other respondents drew connections to the state's bone-dry landscape and the economy, though those fears may be misplaced, if not premature. California's agricultural economy has been [surprisingly buoyant](#), with farm employment and gross revenue from crops actually increasing last year.

Separately, a [recent report](#) by the state's nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office found that in the short term the drought would have negligible effects on the economy or government revenue.

"That being said, we acknowledge the drought as a risk factor for the state's economy, especially if its effects worsen or are prolonged," the report states.

That's stoking suspicions across the political and geographical spectrum, though Republicans and inland county

residents are more pessimistic.

The poll found Democrats by a 2-to-1 ratio (56 percent to 28 percent), continue to harbor a positive assessment of the state's direction. But that's a decline from February, when 73 percent of Democrats said the state was charting a correct course and 16 percent said it was off on the wrong track.

Among Republicans, 58 percent believe things are heading in the wrong direction and 22 percent see a brighter path forward.

Julie Baker, a 56-year-old teacher from Bakersfield, blamed the situation in part on misplaced priorities, particularly at the behest of environmental interests. A Republican, she said Sacramento "wants to divert water to save a little smelt," a reference to the endangered fish that are a symbol of the state's water woes.

Meanwhile, despite the current climate, Brown's job performance numbers have not suffered, and nearly match his record in his second stint as governor. Republicans' approval of the Democrat, at 37 percent, far exceeds the marks given to Brown's GOP predecessor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, in September 2010.

Brown, in his fourth and final term, stood at 27 percent with GOP voters three months ago, DiCamillo noted.

"Usually, Democratic governors are going to get in the 20s (with Republicans) if they are doing reasonably well," he said. "To get into the mid-30s, and high 30s, is remarkable, especially in today's highly partisan world."

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