

National voter poll on resilience, infrastructure and drinking water

October 2024

Consistent with past research, the Water Hub's October 2024 national poll found that voters strongly support investment in the nation's water and sewer systems, worry about drought, flooding, and contamination, and want the government to help communities prepare for extreme weather.¹ In this poll, we included a number of new questions around climate and disaster resilience and land and water conservation. You can access the full topline [here](#).

Key findings

- 89% of voters agree that access to safe, affordable water is a human right.
- **Water and sanitation top the list of voters' infrastructure priorities.** 63% say drinking water and sewer systems should be priorities for U.S. government spending, compared with 56% for renewable energy, 46% for roads, and 43% for flood defenses.
- **88% of voters are concerned about contamination of drinking water in the U.S.**, and the same number are concerned about the pollution of lakes and rivers.
- When asked about issues that threaten drinking water safety, voters are most concerned about lead pipes (88%), PFAS “forever chemicals” (88%), outdated infrastructure (87%) and agricultural pollution (87%).
- **82% of voters say the U.S. should protect more of its lands and waters**, and 84% favor a goal of protecting 30% by 2030.
- 78% are concerned about the impact of climate change on water in the U.S.²
- **More than 70% of voters across party lines say it is “extremely” or “very important” to invest in climate/disaster resilience.**

¹ This survey was conducted October 1-2, 2024, right on the heels of Hurricane Helene. It's likely the storm impacted people's views on climate resilience programs and policies (an [April 2025 CBS/YouGov Poll](#) found that experiencing or hearing about extreme weather can strengthen support for climate action). However, [Walton Family Foundation's April 2024 National Poll](#) showed numbers quite close to ours in terms of voter support for action on climate resilience.

² Overall levels of concern are similar — 79% of voters at least somewhat concerned — whether we asked about impact of climate change on the *safety of drinking water* or impact on water generally, but the intensity of concern is higher for voters when focused on the safety of drinking water.

Voters are worried about water supply and safety

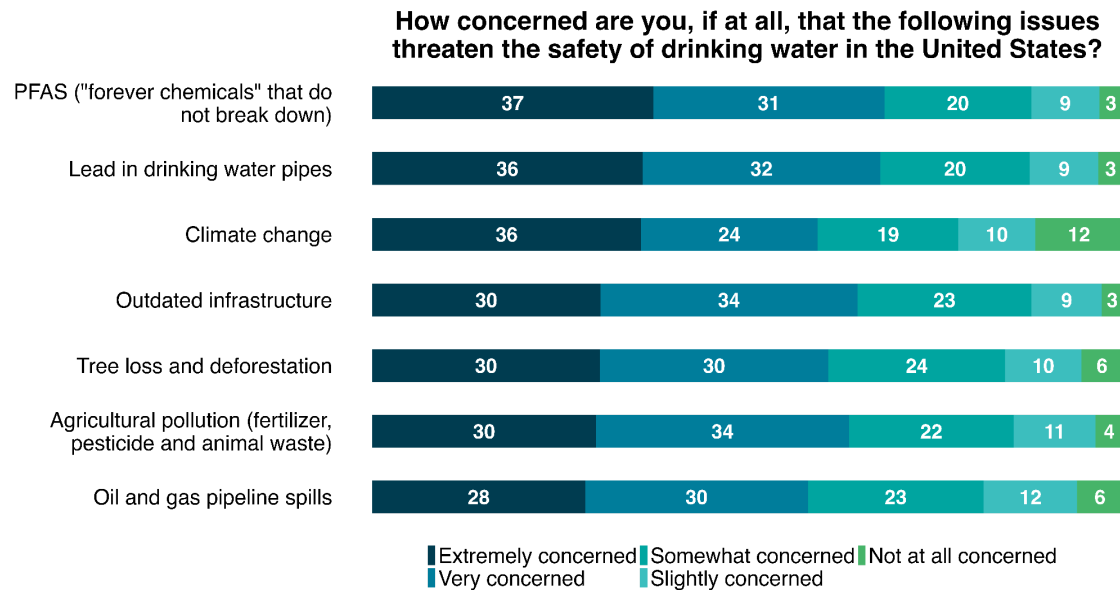
This poll was fielded when Hurricane Helene was making headlines across the country, in a year when [drought reached record levels](#) across the United States, several other hurricanes buffeted the coasts, and widespread flooding hit the Upper Midwest. So it's not surprising that voters expressed concern about shrinking rivers and reservoirs and flooding. When asked about a range of issues facing the U.S.:

- 84% of voters are concerned about declining lake, river and reservoir levels (58% extremely or very concerned).
- 83% are concerned about flooding (58% extremely or very concerned).
- 79% are concerned about drought (52% extremely or very concerned).

But, voters express even more worry about water safety than supply:

- 88% are concerned about drinking water contamination (67% extremely or very concerned).
- 88% are concerned about pollution of lakes and rivers (66% extremely or very concerned).

When we asked about issues that threaten drinking water safety in the U.S., PFAS and lead pipes topped the list of voter concerns (with 88% saying they are at least somewhat concerned). A similar number expressed concern about outdated infrastructure (87%) and agricultural pollution (86%). See below for the full breakdown.





Water remains a political winner

Drinking water has ranked as a top infrastructure priority in past Water Hub polls, and this year was no exception. **More voters say drinking water and sewage should be priorities for federal spending than energy, roads, housing, or internet:**

- 63% of voters say water and sewage should be priorities.
- 56% say renewable energy should be a priority.
- 54% say the electrical grid should be a priority.
- 51% say oil and gas pipelines should be a priority.
- 49% say new housing should be a priority.
- 46% say road networks should be a priority.
- 43% say flood defenses should be a priority.
- 31% say high speed broadband should be a priority.
- 29% say railroads should be a priority.
- 18% say airports should be a priority.

Furthermore, **the idea of investing in water and sewer systems polls well across parties with 67% of Democrats, 63% of Independents, and 60% of Republicans saying it should be a priority.** There is a wider spread on flood defenses, with 47% of Democrats, 45% of Independents and 37% of Republicans saying it should be a priority.

There is also broad consensus around the idea of safe and affordable water as a human right. 94% of Democrats, 87% of Independents and 82% of Republicans agree. Support for a national water affordability program varied more, but was supported by a strong majority across political parties: 90% of Democrats, 63% of Independents and 65% of Republicans support creating a permanent U.S. government program to help low-income families pay their water bills.

Conservation support strong across parties

In 2021, the Biden administration [set a goal](#) of conserving 30% of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. We wanted to understand where voters stand on this goal, and what arguments they find most compelling as reasons to protect more public lands and waters. Voters across the country (and across political parties) express strong support for increased protection, and understand that conservation connects to drinking water.

- 82% of voters say the U.S. should protect more of its lands and waters. This idea polls well across political parties (89% of Democrats, 84% of Independents, and 73% of Republicans agree).
- 84% favor a national goal of protecting at least 30% of U.S. lands, ocean areas and inland waters by 2030 (92% of Democrats, 77% of Independents, and 75% of Republicans).

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- **When asked about the most important reasons to protect more lands and waters, nearly twice as many voters chose “protecting the sources of drinking water” as “soaking up carbon to slow climate change,” “protecting communities from flooding, droughts and other disasters,” or “providing habitat for fish and wildlife.”**
 - Voters say they care a lot about candidates’ support for conservation, clean water and climate resilience:
 - 95% of voters say a candidate's support for funding and policies to protect clean water is important in determining how they will vote (75% extremely or very).
 - 95% say a candidate’s support for protecting forests, meadows and other natural areas is important (68% extremely or very).
 - 92% say a candidate's support for investments that help communities prepare for extreme weather is important (68% extremely or very).

Resilience resonates, but other terms may be clearer

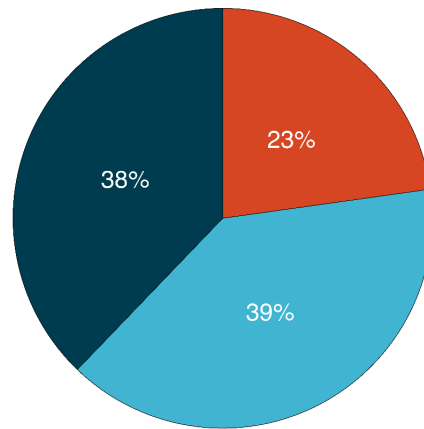
With more and more officials and advocates using the term “resilience” to talk about climate readiness, we wanted to learn how voters perceive the term, and how they view programs and projects designed to advance it.

Without receiving any context or explanation, **a strong majority of voters (74%) have a positive view of the term “resilience,” but they respond even more positively to alternative terms like protection (80%), preparedness (78%), and conservation (76%).** Among the terms we tested, voter views on preparedness were the most consistent across parties, with 49% of Democrats, 35% of Independents and 39% of Republicans saying they view it “very positively.” By contrast, 44% of Democrats, 29% of Independents and 31% of Republicans view resilience “very positively.” 53% of Democrats, 37% of Independents, and 39% of Republicans view protection “very positively.”

When asked what “resilience” means to them, voters often mention words such as “bounce back,” “strong,” “recover,” and “withstand,” but nine percent say they don’t know what it means. You can see the full list [here](#), and a word cloud below in the appendix.

When asked to choose among three definitions, voters are nearly split between thinking of resilience as “bouncing back” (39%) or “recovering stronger” (38%). Fewer think of resilience as “strong or healthy enough to avoid a crisis” (23%).

Thinking again about the term 'resilience', which description best matches what it means to you?

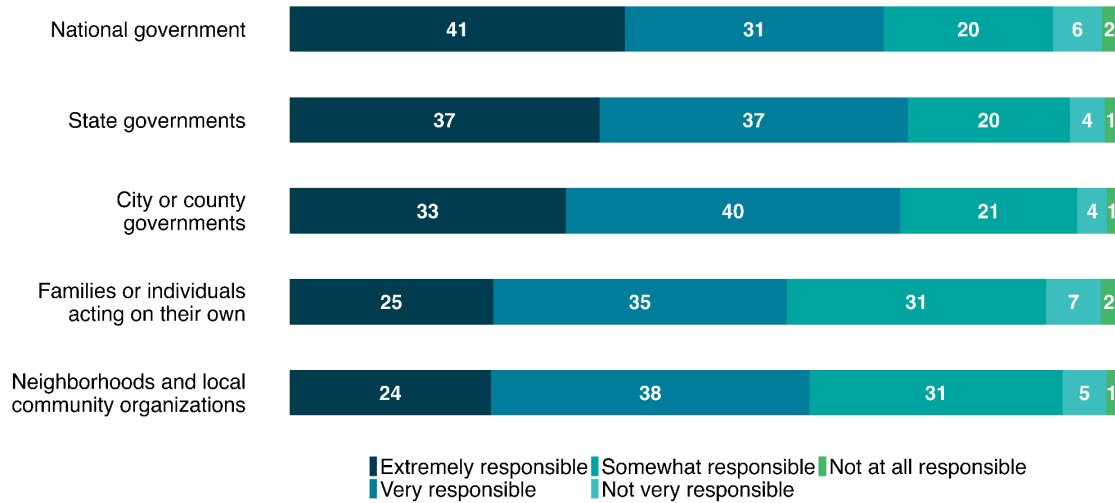


- Recovering stronger after a crisis or disaster
- Bouncing back to how things were before a crisis or disaster
- Strong or healthy enough to avoid a crisis or disaster

When we split the sample after telling voters that communities are working to improve their ability to handle weather-related disasters, and asked how important it was to invest in either “climate resilience” or “disaster resilience,” the responses broke down along party lines.

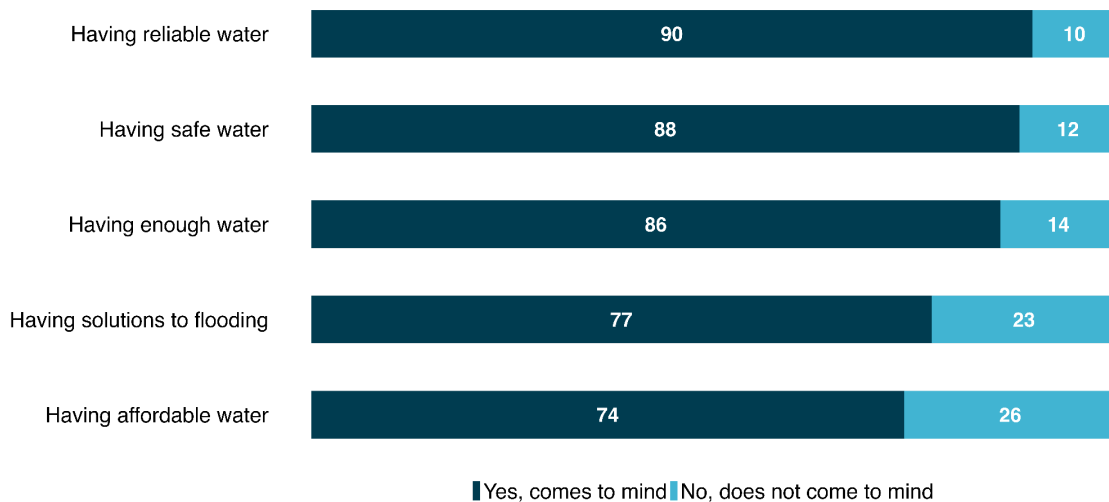
- 90% of Democrats, 78% of Independents, and 81% of Republicans say it is extremely or very important to invest in “disaster resilience.”
- 92% of Democrats, 76% of Independents, and 72% of Republicans say it is extremely or very important to invest in “climate resilience.”
- Regardless of the language, **more than 70% of voters across party lines say it is “extremely” or “very important” to invest in climate/disaster resilience.**
- When asked what term other than “resilience” they would use to describe a community’s ability to handle weather-related disasters, voters mention “prepared,” “strong” and “together” most frequently. See the full list [here](#) and a word cloud in the appendix.
- When asked which of several terms best describe a community that planned ahead to manage climate-related disasters, voters ranked “climate prepared,” “climate resilient,” and “climate ready” as the top three.
- Voters think governments at the national (72%), state (74%), and local (73%) level are most responsible for helping to build resilience to weather related disasters.

How responsible do you think the following groups are for helping to build resilience to extreme weather and weather-related disasters?



- More voters view built infrastructure (79%) as extremely or very important to a community’s disaster resilience than social (68%) or nature-based (63%) infrastructure.
- A majority of voters see urban green spaces (55%) and wild space outside of towns (67%) as somewhat or very effective at building water and weather resilience.
- Just 42% of voters are at least somewhat familiar with the term “water resilience” (11% very familiar) and when asked what comes to mind with that term, having reliable or safe water topped the list for voters.

Thinking now about the term "water resilience," which of the following comes to mind?



Limited awareness of infrastructure spending

While voters express strong support for water, sewer and disaster preparedness investments, and believe infrastructure investments help their communities, many are not aware of recent federal spending:

- 55% of voters have heard at least some about recent infrastructure spending by the U.S. government (17% have heard a lot).
- 71% of voters say infrastructure investments benefit their community (28% a lot).
- When asked how much they have heard about specific spending on clean water and climate preparedness:
 - 54% have heard at least some about spending for lead pipe replacement, PFAS testing and treatment, and river restoration (18% a lot).
 - 48% have heard at least some about spending to help communities prepare for extreme weather and related disasters (15% a lot).

Appendix

Methodology

Interview Dates: October 1-2, 2024

Sample Population: 2007 registered voters in the United States.

Sample Selection: Scientific online poll - stratified sample of panel respondents.

Weighting Parameters: The sample was weighted based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Voting and Registration Supplement to the Current Population Survey for registered voters in the United States based on age, gender, race, educational attainment, census region, and Hispanic ethnicity.

This topline provides weighted percentages, as well as the unweighted N-size for the total sample. Due to the effects of weighting and rounding, figures may or may not add up to 100%.

The standard deviation of the weights was: 0.056692. The maximum weight was: 1.2383373.

The minimum weight was: 0.8289296. 95% of the weights were between 0.8911343, 1.1211662.

Margin of Error: The 95% credibility interval for this survey is +/- 2.2%, which includes the square root of the design effect (DEFT): 1.0016049.

Polling was conducted by consultant Andrea Everett, formerly of Climate Nexus Polling.

