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*Public Opinion Research
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TO: Interested Parties

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RE: What Recent Surveys Say About Californians and Water

DATE: September 15, 2015

There have been two significant polls in recent months about Californians and their attitudes toward a range of policies as our state faces a serious and historic drought. Each of these polls explored voter reactions toward a range of options for financing the infrastructure needed to manage California water supplies going forward.

In July 2015, FM3 conducted a survey of California voters on water issues. We found:

- Voters believe that the heaviest water users should pay more – nearly three-quarters (74%) favor permitting “*local governments to charge higher water rates to customers who use the most water to encourage water conservation.*” The data is very clear in showing that the public backs charging those who use the most water a higher rate.
- Nearly four in five voters (79%) said they prefer “investment in infrastructure even if it means paying a few more dollars per month” over lower water rates “even if that means we do not make new investments in infrastructure to provide reliable water supplies.”
- As shown on the following page in **Figure 1**, more than 60 percent of voters support a water fee of up to four dollars per month on their water bill; seven in 10 (72%) support \$1 per month to improve local, regional and state water supply reliability and water quality.

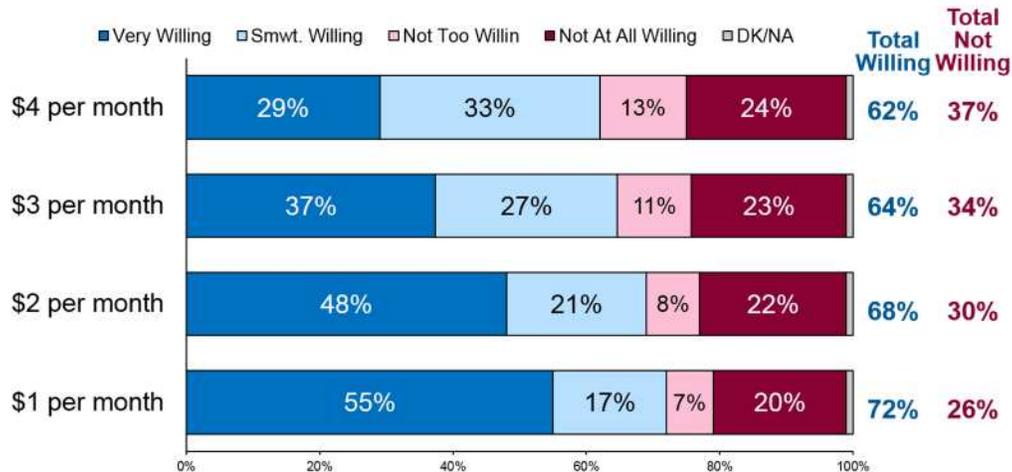
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FIGURE 1

Californians’ Willingness to Pay to Address the Drought

Next, suppose this fee to address the impacts of droughts and improve local, regional and state water supply reliability and water quality were for _____. In that case, would you be very willing, somewhat willing, not too willing, or not at all willing to pay it?



Late last week, USC Dornsife /Los Angeles Times released a statewide poll, a portion of which dealt specifically with the drought. As reported in the Times, one member of the bipartisan polling team said “voters are looking for all of the above solutions as long as the solutions do not raise costs for them personally.” Specifically, just 38 percent said they would favor (and 58 percent would oppose) a proposal to “increase water rates and bills to help encourage conservation and decrease water use.”

These results suggests that voters are, not surprisingly, ambivalent about water fees when they have no idea of 1) how much it would cost them or 2) how the money would be used. In addition, the USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll suggested there may be multiple simultaneous cost increases (question #79 asked voters if they would favor or oppose increasing “water rates and bills to help encourage conservation and decrease water use”). The question also suggested that the only purpose of increased costs is to deter water use (rather than to invest in vital infrastructure to address the state’s water needs).

When these factors are considered, both polls are entirely consistent and point to some clear and fundamental truths: **concern about the drought is acute and widespread; voters are demanding action to address it; and when asked whether they would pay a modest cost to fund critical water infrastructure improvements, voters are strongly supportive.**