



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY

**TO** Interested Parties

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FM3 Research

**RE:** California Voter Attitudes Toward a Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund

**DATE** March 9, 2018

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed 600 telephone interviews with California voters to assess their views on potential threats to drinking water quality, and their willingness to support action to improve it.<sup>1</sup> The results reveal **intense concern about the potential for drinking water contamination, and strong support for efforts by state and local government to address it.** California voters show a remarkable recall of the drinking water problems in Flint, Michigan which began in 2014 – and express serious concern about the potential for water quality problems of equivalent severity in their own community.

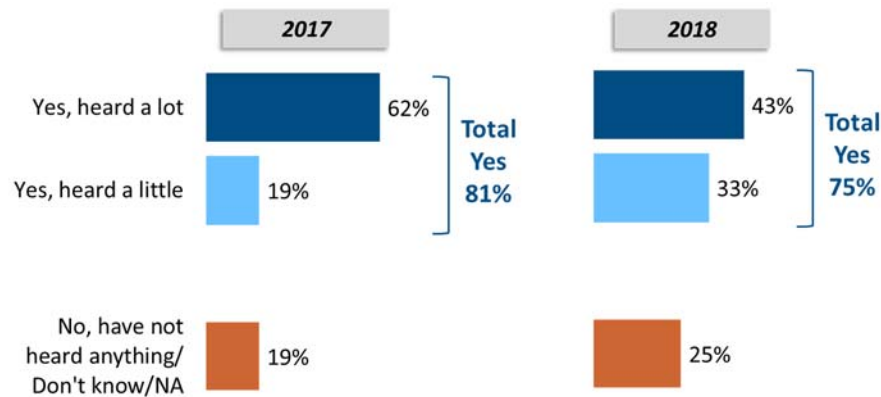
Voters hold state government, local government and water agencies accountable for action to ensure state drinking water, and would like to see their state legislator act to provide funding to improve water quality. Voters are also willing to do their own part to support such actions: in fact, voters are willing to pay as much as \$2 more on their monthly water bills if it will help ensure safe drinking water in communities around the state.

Key specific findings of the survey include:

- **Nearly four in five (79%) Californians express concern about current water quality problems in the state.** When informed that “testing shows that a number of substances are found at unsafe levels in water supplies in some parts of California,” nearly half of California voters (47%) describe themselves as “extremely concerned” and an additional one-third (32%) as “very concerned.”
- **California voters are surprisingly familiar with water quality problems in Flint, Michigan.** In 2017, fully 81 percent of voters said they were familiar with this issue, and despite the more than four years since the issue came to light nationally, awareness is still quite high. Three-quarters (75%) are familiar with water contamination problems in Flint that first came to light nationally more than three years ago (see **Figure 1** on the following page). Remarkably, more than 40 percent say they have “heard a lot” about drinking water problems in Flint.

**Figure 1: Awareness of Flint’s Water Quality Issues**

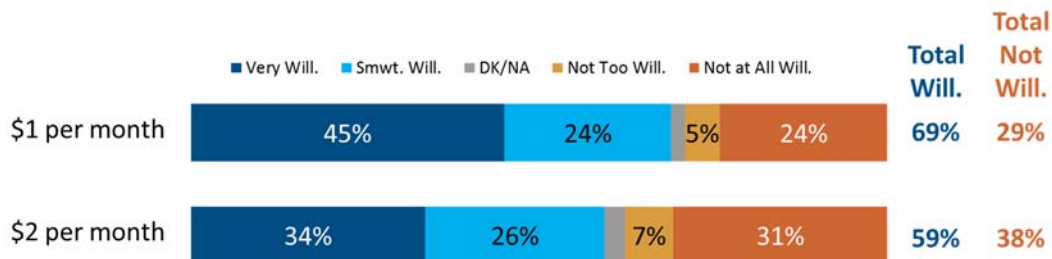
*Have you seen, heard, or read anything about recent severe water quality problems in the city of Flint, Michigan?*



- **Strong majorities are willing to fix drinking water contamination throughout the state through a fee on their water bill.** More than two-thirds (69%) would be willing to pay as much as an additional one dollar per month on their water bill to fix unsafe levels of contamination (**Figure 2**), with 45 percent “very willing.” A strong majority would be willing to pay even more up to an additional two dollars per month.

**Figure 2: Willingness to Pay to Fix Drinking Water Problems**

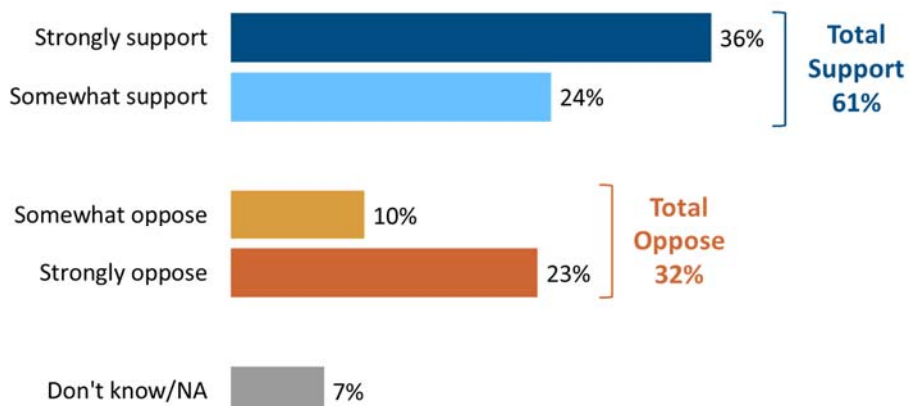
*Suppose this fee to fix drinking water problems in communities with unsafe levels of contaminants in their water supply cost \_\_\_\_\_. In that case, would you be very willing, somewhat willing, not too willing, or not at all willing to pay it?*



- **Three in five (61%) voters support the creation of a Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund.** Given a description of key elements of such a fund, as shown in **Figure 3** on the following page, a sizable majority backs the ideas and more than one-third (36%) “strongly support” it. This support cuts across major demographic and geographic categories, including:
  - Majorities of voters in every region of the state, including 64% in the Central Valley;
  - 65% of voters of color and 60% of white voters; and
  - 73% of urban voters, 60% of suburban voters, and 52% of rural voters.

**Figure 3: Support for Creating a Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund**

Some people have proposed creating a Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund to provide an ongoing source of funding to ensure all Californians have access to safe drinking water. The Fund will provide grants for long-term solutions in communities and schools without access to safe drinking water, as well as emergency assistance when needed. Agriculture will pay a fee on fertilizer to remove pollution caused by fertilizers, and households will pay a monthly fee of 95 cents on their water bills to address other water pollution that is not associated with agriculture. Low-income households would not be charged this fee. Would you say that you generally support or oppose this proposal?



- Given a choice, California voters favor additional investment in water infrastructure over keeping water rates low by three-to-one. Consistent with results of similar research last year, last year's nearly three-quarters (73%) of California voters preferred investment even if it means a few more dollars a month (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Support for Water Infrastructure Investment**

I am going to read you several pairs of statements about water in California. Please tell me which statement comes closest to your opinion. Remember, choose just one even if it's hard to decide.

Statement	% Chosen, 2017	% Chosen, 2018
We should invest in infrastructure to help ensure the safety of our drinking water, even if it means paying a few more dollars per month	71%	73%
We should keep water rates low, even if that means we do not make new investments in infrastructure to ensure safe drinking water	18%	22%
Both/Neither/Don't know	13%	5%

- Voters want their legislator to support a fee on their local water bill to ensure all California communities have safe drinking water.** More than three in five (62%) want their legislator to support such a policy, while about one-third (32%) want them to oppose it. Support for this kind of legislative action has remained very steady since 2017.

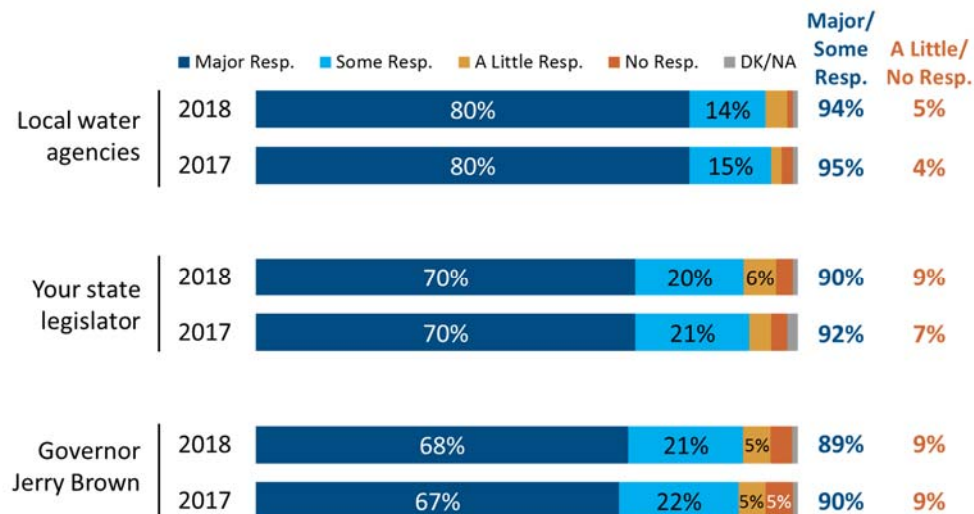
**Figure 5: Preference for Legislator Action to Ensure Safe Drinking Water**

*I am going to read you several pairs of statements about water in California. Please tell me which statement comes closest to your opinion. Remember, choose just one even if it's hard to decide.*

Statement	% Chosen, 2017	% Chosen, 2018
I would like my legislator to support a fee on my local water bill, if the funds are used to help ensure all California communities have safe drinking water	64%	62%
I would like my legislator to oppose any attempt to impose a fee on my local water bill, regardless of the purposes to which the fee might go	27%	32%
Both/Neither/Don't know	9%	5%

- Voters overwhelmingly believe that government and elected officials have a major responsibility for ensuring safe drinking water in California.** Unsurprisingly, four in five (80%) say their local water agencies bear “major responsibility” for ensuring safe drinking water. But as shown in Figure 6, there is a nearly universal sense among voters that state legislators and Gov. Jerry Brown are also responsible for ensuring safe drinking water in California communities.

**Figure 5: Responsibility for Ensuring Safe Drinking Water**



Taken together, these findings clearly demonstrate that **Californians are highly concerned with maintaining access to safe drinking water, and support the goals of the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund as well as the funding mechanism it specifies.** An overwhelming majority is willing to pay as much as one dollar per month to ensure safe, affordable access to drinking water throughout the state, and will support legislators who work to pass such a bill.

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<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** From Feb. 17-21, 2018, FM3 completed 600 telephone interviews in English and Spanish (on both landlines and cell phones) with likely November 2018 voters in California. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-4.0% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.