

Health and education are top voter concerns

When California voters are asked how concerned they are in regards to twenty-eight issues and problems facing the state today, health and education concerns top the list. Greater than two in three voters statewide (69%) report being “extremely concerned” about health care costs, and 68% say this about the public schools. In addition, the next two highest ranking issues also relate to health and education, with 57% saying they are extremely concerned about the public health system and 55% feeling this way about higher education.

Half or more of California voters also report being extremely concerned about six other issues facing the state. These include: the cost of electricity (53%), illegal drug use (53%), crime and law enforcement (52%), the cost of living (52%), taxes (51%) creating more jobs in new industries (50%) and protecting the environment (50%).

A large number of issues are rated as being of great concern to between 45% and 49% of voters. These include: air and water pollution, illegal immigration, gun control, terrorism and security, housing costs, the state’s economy, homelessness and poverty, unemployment, the supply of electricity, the water supply, and traffic congestion.

By comparison, smaller proportions of California voters rate these other issues as being a major concern: providing adequate government services (25%), race relations (31%), abortion (33%), welfare/public assistance programs (37%), overpopulation/overcrowding (41%) and the state budget deficit (41%).

Table 1, opposite, summarizes the level of voter concern about the twenty-eight different state problems posed in the late-January 2002 survey, ranked according to the proportion extremely concerned about each issue.

Table 1
Level of voter concern about 28 issues facing California

	Extremely concerned %	Somewhat concerned %	Not concerned %
Health care costs	69	23	7
Public schools	68	26	5
Public health system	57	30	12
Higher education	55	33	12
Cost of electricity	53	33	14
Illegal drug use	53	28	18
Crime and law enforcement	52	37	11
Cost of living/inflation	52	36	12
Taxes	51	36	12
Creating more jobs in new industries	50	35	14
Protecting the environment	50	37	13
Air and water pollution	49	40	11
Illegal immigration	49	29	21
Gun control	49	28	21
Terrorism and security	47	39	14
Housing costs	47	37	16
State’s economy	46	42	10
Homelessness and poverty	46	39	14
Unemployment	46	37	17
Supply of electricity	46	37	16
Water supply	45	36	19
Traffic congestion	45	40	14
State budget deficit	41	42	14
Overpopulation/overcrowding	41	37	22
Welfare, public assistance programs	37	43	18
Abortion	33	25	38
Race relations	31	42	24
Providing adequate gov’t services	25	47	23

(Differences between the sums of each item’s percentages and 100% equal proportion with no opinion.)

Trend of voter concerns (1986 - 2002)

During most gubernatorial election cycles since 1986, *The Field Poll* has measured voter concerns about the state's major issues. The current survey shows that voter concerns about health care have increased this year, while concerns about the state's other top issue, the public schools, remained at levels similar to those found in previous surveys.

Some of the problems included in the 2002 survey not measured in previous surveys were the public health system, the cost of electricity, and terrorism and security. Two of these issues, the public health system and the cost of electricity, are rated among voters' top five concerns in the current survey. However, terrorism and security in late January was viewed as being of somewhat less concern. The current poll also shows that voters are less troubled by the state budget deficit than they were eight years ago, when the state also was facing a large deficit. In 1994 69% of voters said they were extremely concerned about the deficit, while just 41% say this at present.

Voter concerns about a number of other issues-- illegal drug use, crime and law enforcement taxes, illegal immigration, air and water pollution, race relations, unemployment, and welfare and public assistance programs -- have also declined.

	Jan. 2002 %	Nov. 1997 %	July 1994 %	July 1986 %
Health care costs*	69	55	61	62
Public schools	68	69	70	71
Public health system	57	NA	NA	NA
Higher education	55	48	63	NA
Cost of electricity	53	NA	NA	NA
Illegal drug use	53	61	69	77
Crime and law enforcement	52	63	79	73
Cost of living	52	44	56	57
Taxes	51	53	62	55
Creating more jobs in new industries	50	45	70	45
Protecting the environment	50	48	54	65
Air and water pollution	49	48	60	71
Illegal immigration	49	59	64	54
Gun control	49	48	NA	NA
Terrorism and security	47	NA	NA	NA
Housing costs	47	42	42	48
State's economy	46	38	77	41
Homelessness and poverty**	46	36	49	NA
Unemployment	46	35	62	53
Supply of electricity***	46	29	32	43
Water supply	45	43	51	NA
Traffic congestion	45	45	44	NA
State budget deficit	41	NA	69	NA
Overpopulation, overcrowding	41	39	46	NA
Welfare, public assistance programs	37	47	66	46
Abortion	33	33	NA	NA
Race relations	31	43	46	NA
Providing adequate gov't services	25	28	37	35

NA Not asked

* In previous surveys, the wording of this item was "health care"

** In previous surveys, the wording of this item was "homelessness"

*** In previous surveys, the wording of this item was "energy supply"

Partisan differences in issue concerns and rankings

Democrats express somewhat higher levels of concern about more state issues than Republicans. This is especially true in regard to health concerns, economic issues, and environmental matters. The top ranking issues to the state's Democratic rank-and-file are as follows:

- health care costs (76% extremely concerned)
- the public schools (76%)
- the public health system (67%)
- protecting the environment (63%)
- air and water pollution (62%)
- homelessness and poverty (62%)

The top ranking issues among Republicans, on the other hand, are these:

- the public schools (65%)
- crime and law enforcement (61%)
- illegal drug use (60%)
- health care costs (59%)
- illegal immigration (58%)

	Democrat		Republican	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Health care costs	76	(1)	59	(4)
Public schools	76	(1)	65	(1)
Public health system	67	(3)	44	(14)
Higher education	60	(8)	54	(7)
Cost of electricity	56	(14)	56	(6)
Illegal drug use	57	(12)	60	(3)
Crime and law enforcement	52	(18)	61	(2)
Cost of living	61	(7)	42	(15)
Taxes	51	(19)	54	(7)
Creating more jobs in new industries	58	(11)	48	(9)
Protecting the environment	63	(4)	31	(25)
Air and water pollution	62	(5)	37	(19)
Illegal immigration	44	(23)	58	(5)
Gun control	59	(9)	39	(17)
Terrorism and security	56	(14)	45	(12)
Housing costs	57	(12)	38	(18)
State's economy	51	(19)	46	(11)
Homelessness and poverty	62	(5)	29	(26)
Unemployment	59	(9)	32	(24)
Supply of electricity	50	(21)	47	(10)
Water supply	54	(16)	34	(21)
Traffic congestion	54	(16)	41	(16)
State budget deficit	41	(25)	45	(12)
Overpopulation, overcrowding	47	(22)	36	(20)
Welfare, public assistance programs	44	(23)	33	(23)
Abortion	35	(27)	34	(21)
Race relations	40	(26)	24	(27)
Providing adequate gov't services	35	(27)	13	(28)

Big differences in issue rankings between conservatives and liberals

There are large differences in the issue rankings between self-described conservative and liberal voters. For example, the top six issues to conservatives are:

- illegal immigration (64%)
- illegal drug use (64%)
- the public schools (64%)
- crime and law enforcement (60%)
- taxes (59%)
- health care costs (59%)

This contrasts with the top six concerns of liberal voters, who rate the following as being of greatest concern to them:

- health care costs (78%)
- the public schools (75%)
- the public health system (75%)
- protecting the environment (74%)
- higher education (68%)
- homelessness and poverty (64%)

On most issues, the degree of concern expressed by political moderates registers between those of liberals and conservatives.

Table 4
Proportion of Voters “Extremely Concerned”
– By Political Ideology

	Conservative		Moderate		Liberal	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Health care costs	59	(5)	71	(1)	78	(1)
Public schools	64	(1)	66	(2)	75	(2)
Public health system	45	(15)	54	(5)	75	(2)
Higher education	51	(8)	50	(10)	68	(5)
Cost of electricity	57	(7)	57	(3)	43	(19)
Illegal drug use	64	(1)	53	(7)	36	(26)
Crime and law enforcement	60	(4)	50	(10)	44	(17)
Cost of living	51	(8)	55	(4)	49	(12)
Taxes	59	(5)	51	(9)	33	(27)
Creating more jobs in new industries	47	(14)	52	(8)	51	(11)
Protecting the environment	30	(26)	50	(10)	74	(4)
Air and water pollution	40	(21)	54	(5)	56	(9)
Illegal immigration	64	(1)	49	(13)	29	(28)
Gun control	44	(17)	45	(17)	62	(7)
Terrorism and security	48	(13)	49	(13)	40	(22)
Housing costs	42	(18)	47	(16)	53	(10)
State’s economy	49	(11)	44	(20)	47	(14)
Homelessness and poverty	35	(25)	43	(21)	64	(6)
Unemployment	41	(20)	43	(21)	59	(8)
Supply of electricity	50	(10)	45	(17)	43	(19)
Water supply	36	(24)	49	(13)	49	(12)
Traffic congestion	45	(15)	45	(17)	46	(15)
State budget deficit	49	(11)	37	(24)	38	(24)
Overpopulation, overcrowding	38	(23)	43	(21)	44	(17)
Welfare, public ass’t programs	39	(22)	33	(25)	43	(19)
Abortion	42	(18)	24	(27)	39	(23)
Race relations	26	(27)	28	(26)	46	(15)
Providing adequate gov’t services	17	(28)	24	(27)	38	(24)

Smaller differences in issue priorities between men and women voters

While female voters tend to express higher levels of concern than men on most issues, the relative ranking of the issues between the sexes is not much different. For example, the top issues to female voters this election year are:

- the public schools (75%)
- health care costs (73%)
- illegal drug use (60%)
- the public health system (59%)
- higher education (58%)
- crime and law enforcement (58%)

Four of these same six issues rank among the top concerns of male voters, albeit at somewhat lower levels of concern.

- health care costs (64%)
- the public schools (61%)
- the public health system (54%)
- higher education (51%)
- the cost of living (51%)
- taxes (51%)

Table 5
Proportion of Voters “Extremely Concerned”
– By Gender

	Male		Female	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Health care costs	64	(1)	73	(2)
Public schools	61	(2)	75	(1)
Public health system	54	(3)	59	(4)
Higher education	51	(4)	58	(5)
Cost of electricity	50	(7)	57	(7)
Illegal drug use	46	(11)	60	(3)
Crime and law enforcement	45	(13)	58	(5)
Cost of living	51	(4)	54	(10)
Taxes	51	(4)	51	(17)
Creating more jobs in new industries	47	(10)	54	(10)
Protecting the environment	46	(11)	53	(13)
Air and water pollution	45	(13)	54	(10)
Illegal immigration	49	(9)	48	(19)
Gun control	43	(16)	55	(9)
Terrorism and security	42	(19)	52	(14)
Housing costs	43	(16)	50	(18)
State’s economy	40	(21)	52	(14)
Homelessness and poverty	35	(24)	57	(7)
Unemployment	39	(23)	52	(14)
Supply of electricity	45	(13)	47	(20)
Water supply	43	(16)	46	(21)
Traffic congestion	50	(7)	41	(25)
State budget deficit	40	(21)	42	(23)
Overpopulation, overcrowding	41	(20)	42	(23)
Welfare, public assistance programs	31	(25)	43	(22)
Abortion	28	(27)	38	(26)
Race relations	31	(25)	31	(27)
Providing adequate gov’t services	20	(28)	31	(27)

Differences in issue concerns by age

There are some differences in the issues of greatest concern to voters across the various age subgroups. For example, the top state issues to voters age 18-39 are both education-related:

- the public schools (75%)
- higher education (65%)

Middle age voters between ages 40 and 59 rank both health and education issues as being of greatest concern to them:

- health care costs (72%)
- the public schools (68%)

The issues of greatest concern to older voters age 60 or older are these:

- health care costs (76%)
- illegal drug use (72%)

Table 6
Proportion of Voters “Extremely Concerned”
– By Age

	18-39		40-59		60 or older	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Health care costs	60	(3)	72	(1)	76	(1)
Public schools	75	(1)	68	(2)	58	(3)
Public health system	55	(4)	60	(3)	54	(7)
Higher education	65	(2)	52	(8)	44	(22)
Cost of electricity	49	(10)	58	(4)	53	(8)
Illegal drug use	40	(18)	52	(8)	72	(2)
Crime and law enforcement	48	(11)	56	(5)	51	(14)
Cost of living	55	(4)	50	(13)	52	(9)
Taxes	46	(15)	54	(7)	52	(9)
Creating more jobs in new industries	48	(11)	52	(8)	52	(9)
Protecting the environment	52	(7)	51	(11)	44	(22)
Air and water pollution	50	(9)	48	(17)	52	(9)
Illegal immigration	41	(17)	51	(11)	57	(6)
Gun control	48	(11)	49	(15)	52	(9)
Terrorism and security	44	(16)	43	(20)	58	(3)
Housing costs	53	(6)	44	(19)	44	(22)
State’s economy	37	(22)	56	(5)	44	(22)
Homelessness and poverty	47	(14)	46	(18)	46	(20)
Unemployment	51	(8)	41	(23)	47	(19)
Supply of electricity	40	(18)	50	(13)	48	(16)
Water supply	36	(23)	49	(15)	48	(16)
Traffic congestion	40	(18)	42	(21)	58	(3)
State budget deficit	34	(25)	42	(21)	48	(16)
Overpopulation, overcrowding	38	(21)	39	(24)	49	(15)
Welfare, public assistance programs	29	(27)	37	(25)	46	(20)
Abortion	35	(24)	34	(26)	30	(27)
Race relations	32	(26)	26	(27)	38	(26)
Providing adequate gov’t services	27	(28)	24	(28)	25	(28)

Regional differences in issue rankings

While there are some differences between Northern California and Southern California voters regarding their level of concern about the twenty-eight issues posed in the survey, these differences are not large.

The issues that the largest proportion of Northern California voters are extremely concerned about are these:

- the public schools (65%)
- health care costs (64%)
- the cost of electricity (55%)

The top issue concerns to Southern California voters tend to mirror those of the state overall:

- health care costs (72%)
- the public schools (70%)
- the public health system (61%)

Table 7
Proportion of Voters “Extremely Concerned”
– By Region

	Northern Californians		Southern Californians	
	%	Rank	%	Rank
Health care costs	64	(2)	72	(1)
Public schools	65	(1)	70	(2)
Public health system	50	(5)	61	(3)
Higher education	48	(9)	59	(4)
Cost of electricity	55	(3)	53	(8)
Illegal drug use	49	(7)	57	(5)
Crime and law enforcement	49	(9)	54	(6)
Cost of living	54	(4)	51	(11)
Taxes	50	(5)	51	(11)
Creating more jobs in new industries	48	(9)	52	(10)
Protecting the environment	44	(18)	54	(6)
Air and water pollution	47	(13)	51	(11)
Illegal immigration	48	(9)	50	(14)
Gun control	44	(18)	53	(8)
Terrorism and security	44	(18)	49	(15)
Housing costs	49	(7)	45	(21)
State’s economy	47	(13)	46	(20)
Homelessness and poverty	43	(21)	49	(15)
Unemployment	43	(21)	47	(17)
Supply of electricity	45	(16)	47	(17)
Water supply	46	(15)	43	(22)
Traffic congestion	43	(21)	47	(17)
State budget deficit	43	(21)	40	(23)
Overpopulation, overcrowding	45	(16)	39	(24)
Welfare, public assistance programs	41	(25)	35	(25)
Abortion	32	(26)	34	(26)
Race relations	31	(27)	31	(27)
Providing adequate gov’t services	21	(28)	29	(28)

The findings in this report come from a statewide cross-section survey of 1,022 California voters conducted January 23-27, 2002 by telephone in either English or Spanish. In order to cover a broad range of issues, the overall sample was divided into two approximately equal sized sub-samples of about 500 voters each. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from each sub-sample would have a sampling error of ±4.5 percentage points. Percentages based on subgroups have a wider range of statistical tolerance.