

# National poll shows broad support for water solutions



The COVID-19 crisis has brought increased attention to long-standing water safety, access, and affordability issues. Advocates are leveraging this attention to push for overdue infrastructure investments as well as support for ratepayers and utilities impacted by the pandemic and resulting recession.

The [Water Hub at Climate Nexus](#) partnered with Climate Nexus Polling, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication on a national poll to understand more about the water solutions voters support and the concerns that motivate them. Below, we share the topline findings from the poll. Full results follow.

- **Voters see pollution of water sources as the biggest threat to safe drinking water in their community**, followed by outdated infrastructure and lead pipes.
- **A majority (56%) of voters think Clean Water Act rollbacks will have a negative impact on the quality of drinking water in their community**, and a plurality (43%) think it will negatively impact economic growth.
- **There is broad support for stimulus funding for water programs:**
  - 84% of voters support funding water systems for small towns and communities
  - 83% support protecting natural areas
  - 82% support extending water and sanitation services to communities that lack access
  - 79% support assistance to families struggling to pay water bills
  - 78% support helping farmers reduce water use and pollution
  - 77% support investing in preparation for future floods and droughts
- **63% of voters support a shutoff moratorium.** Our [June poll](#) found 76% support with slightly different phrasing, underscoring the importance of language.
- **Voters want lawmakers to prioritize multi-benefit water projects.** They say it's important for water infrastructure investments to do the following:
  - Reduce urban heat and air pollution (91%)
  - Increase climate resilience (88%)
  - Save consumers money (84%)
  - Slow climate change by saving energy or reducing emissions (83%)
- **By roughly a 2-to-1 margin, voters say the federal government should increase spending on water infrastructure now.**

## Voters are worried about water pollution

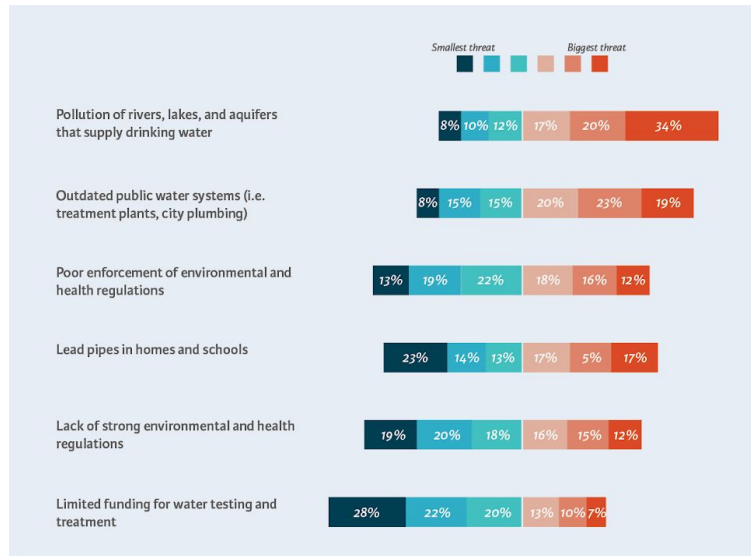
When asked what they see as the biggest threat to safe drinking water in their community, voters tend to focus on pollution of water sources (34%), outdated infrastructure (19%), and lead pipes (17%). Lax laws (12%), poor enforcement (12%), and limited funds for testing and treatment (7%) are lesser concerns.

**Q:** In your opinion, please rank these threats from the biggest threat to safe drinking water in your local community to the smallest threat.



Due to weighting and rounding, percentages may not always add up to 100%

Among Registered Voters in the U.S.  
N = 1,984 August 5-6, 2020



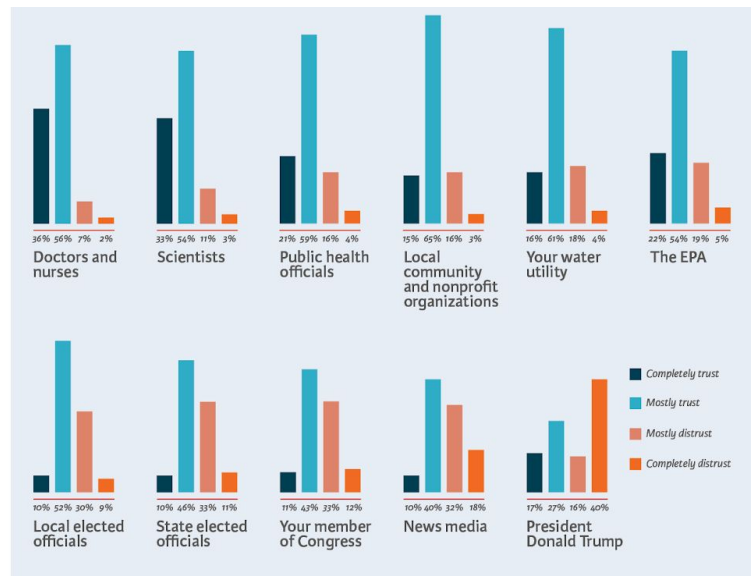
When asked who they trust for information about water quality, voters say doctors and nurses are the most trusted sources (92% completely or mostly trust), followed by scientists (87%), health officials (80%), nonprofit organizations (80%), and utilities (77%).

**Q:** How much do you trust or distrust each of the following as a source of information about your drinking water?



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## Concerns about the Clean Water Act rollbacks

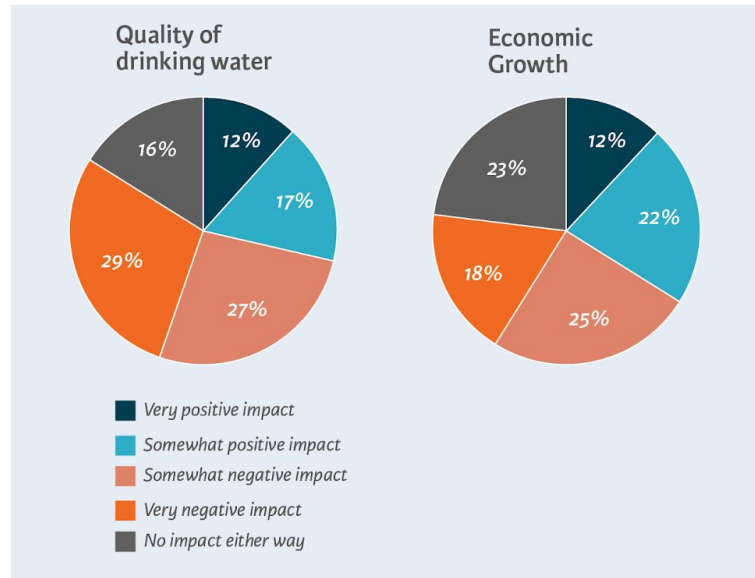
While only 11% of respondents say they have heard “a lot” about recent changes in the way small streams and wetlands are protected under the Clean Water Act, **a majority (56%) say they believe the change will have a negative impact on drinking water quality.** A plurality also believe the change will have a negative impact on economic growth.

**Q:** Do you think the Trump administration’s change in Clean Water Act regulations will have a positive or negative impact on each of the following in your community, or will it not have an impact either way?



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## Voters want the government to spend more on water now

While clean water programs create jobs and generate economic activity, some people still believe we have to choose between the economy and environment. To understand more about voter's current priorities, we asked whether they consider water quality or economic growth more important. **By roughly a 3-to-1 margin, voters say it is more important to protect water quality than pursue economic growth that may compromise water quality.** 76% said “protecting water quality, even if it costs jobs or economic growth,” is more important, while 24% said “economic growth, even if it leads to poorer water quality” is more important.

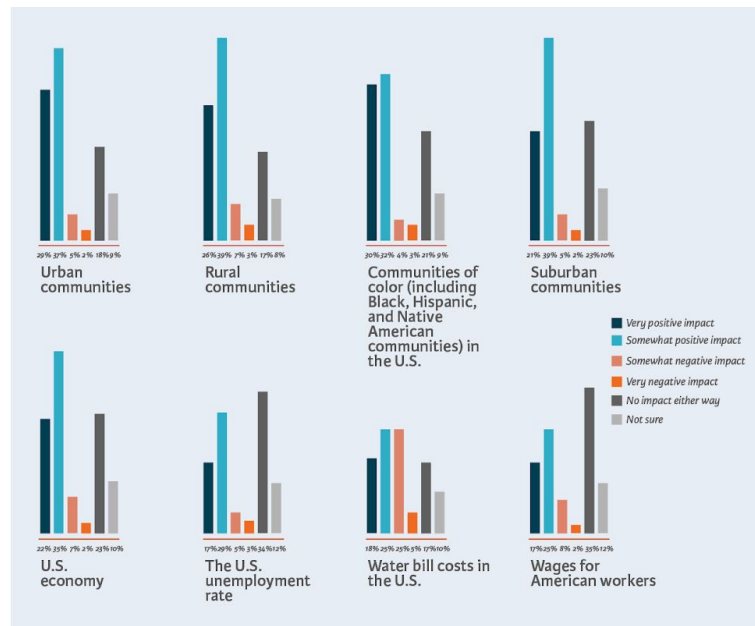
**When asked how they think updating our nation’s water infrastructure will impact the U.S. economy, 57% say they believe it would have a positive impact, while just 9% think it would have a negative impact.** A majority of voters also say they believe water infrastructure updates will have a positive impact on urban communities (66%), rural communities (65%), suburban communities (60%), and communities of color (62%). Respondents are more split on likely impacts to water bills.

**Q:** *Do you think updating our nation's water infrastructure would have a positive or negative impact on each of the following, or would it have no impact either way?*



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## Strong support for water programs as part of federal stimulus

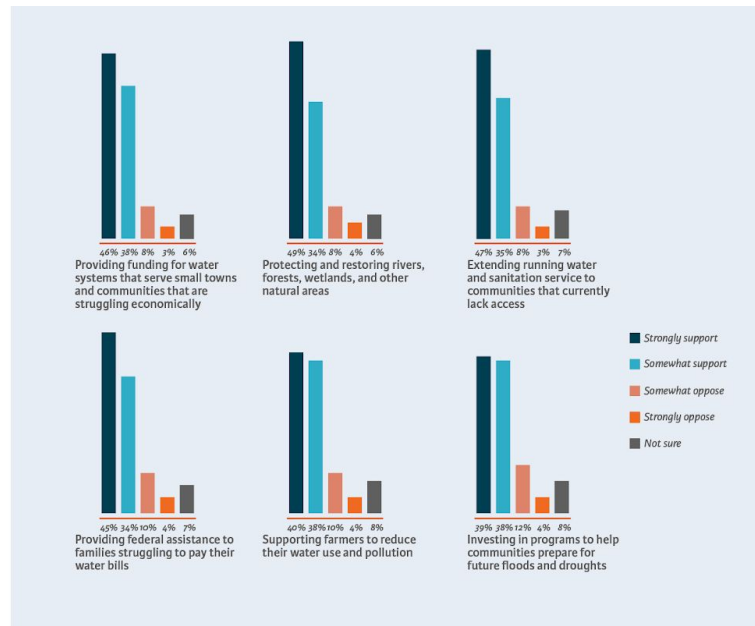
When asked whether they support including various water policies as part of future federal stimulus packages designed to provide relief from the coronavirus pandemic, voters signal **strong support for a range of options**, from funding small water systems (84%), to protecting forests, rivers and wetlands (83%), extending water and sanitation service to communities that currently lack access (82%), and providing assistance to families and businesses impacted by the pandemic (79%).

**Q:** As you may know, members of Congress are discussing future stimulus packages to support the economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. Do you support or oppose each of the following policies as part of a federal stimulus package in response to the coronavirus pandemic?



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A strong majority (63%) of voters say they support a “nationwide pause on water shutoffs to homes and businesses that are behind on their water bill payments during the coronavirus pandemic.” We saw even stronger support for a shutoff moratorium in our [June poll](#), when 76% of voters said they supported “temporarily stopping water shutoffs for Americans who are unable to pay their water bill.” The difference is likely due to the question language.

## Voters want lawmakers to prioritize multi-benefit water solutions

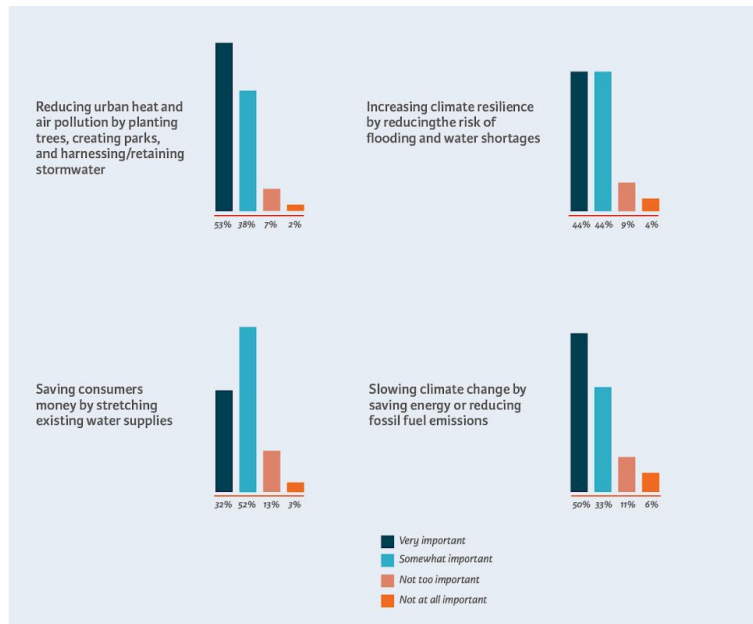
As Congress considers a range of infrastructure investments to help stimulate the U.S. economy, many water advocates are encouraging lawmakers to prioritize programs that save money and energy, and build climate resilience. Voters indicate strong support for water investments that offer these kinds of co-benefits. **Overwhelming majorities say it is important for water investments to also reduce urban heat and air pollution (91%), increase climate resilience (88%), save consumers money (84%), and slow climate change by saving energy or reducing emissions (83%).**

**Q:** *Some people say that federal investments in water infrastructure, such as drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems, must be made in ways that achieve other needs too. How important are the following objectives in determining federal investments in water infrastructure?*



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## Human rights message rated most convincing

We tested a range of messages to learn which ones voters find most convincing as reasons to invest in programs that ensure safe water for all. Respondents were shown five rounds of three of the following messages and asked to select the most and least convincing each time. Below, we list the messages in order from most to least convincing.

1. **Safe water is a human right, and it is the responsibility of our government to ensure everyone has access to this necessity.** (When this message was shown, it was rated as the most convincing message 42% of the time.)
2. **It is unacceptable that millions of people in the wealthiest country in the world are living without safe water.** The U.S. should lead on delivering safe water for all. (39%)
3. **America's water pipes, plants, and pumps were mostly built in the mid-20th century, and they are reaching the end of their useful life.** We must update our nation's plumbing before it's too late. (36%)
4. **Investing in systems that deliver safe water to communities will create good paying jobs and lead to economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.** (33%)
5. **Handwashing prevents the spread of disease. Ensuring safe water for all will make our communities healthier.** (29%)
6. **Communities of color are most likely to lack running water, have water service shut-offs and only have access to toxic taps.** Racial justice demands we provide safe water for all. (20%)

When we analyzed results by party and race/ethnicity, some key differences emerged. All groups except Republican voters rated the human right message (No. 1, above) most convincing, but voters of color rated the health message (No. 5) more convincing than other groups, and Black and Democratic voters rated the racial justice message (No. 6) more convincing. Republican voters found the aging infrastructure and jobs (No. 3 and 4) messages most convincing.

The full topline for this poll are available for download [here](#). If you would like to dig into the crosstabs or message testing results, please contact Nicole Lampe at [nlampe@climatenexus.org](mailto:nlampe@climatenexus.org).

*Methodology: Climate Nexus Polling, in partnership with the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, conducted a representative survey for the Water Hub at Climate Nexus on August 5-6, 2020 of 1,984 registered voters in the United States. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.3% at the 95% confidence level.*