

# Voters want U.S. to invest in water

Water is the throughline of the Biden Administration's top priorities for the nation: COVID-19, racial equity, economic recovery, and climate change.

More than a year into the pandemic, millions of Americans are still living without this public health essential. Lawmakers and advocates are calling for the U.S. to invest billions in America's public water systems to build climate-resilient communities, create economic opportunity, and right decades of disinvestment in communities of color.

To help inform infrastructure conversations, 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 voter opinions of water threats and solutions. Below, we share key findings from the poll and the full report.

## Voters want protections against water shutoffs

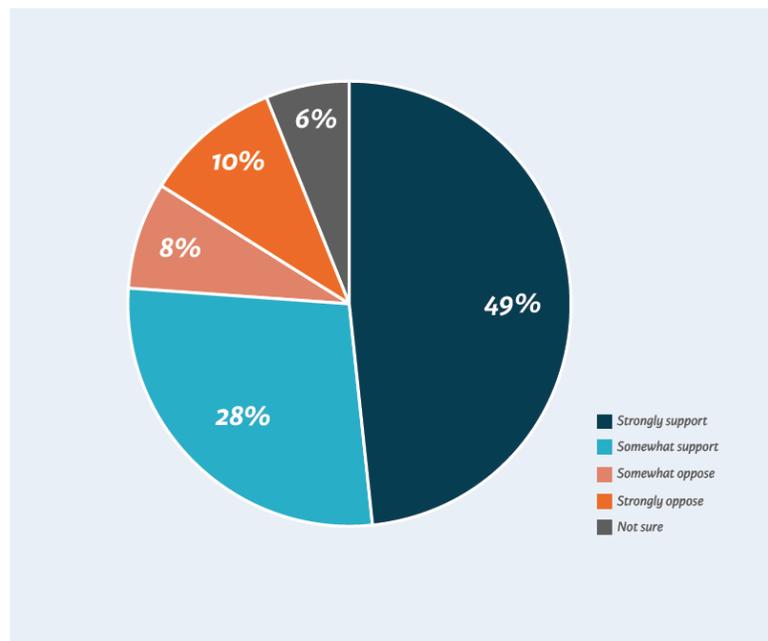
**More than 3 in 4 voters (77%) support pausing water shutoffs for families behind on their water bills during the pandemic.** Support for pausing water shutoffs [has remained strong](#) over the last few months.

**77%** of voters support pausing water shutoffs for families behind on their water bill payments during the coronavirus pandemic



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

Among Registered Voters in the U.S.  
N = 1,624 February 26 - March 7, 2021



In the past year, 17% of voters report having had trouble paying their water bill, and 16% have sought help to pay for all or part of their water bill in the past six months. About 1 in 5 voters report having experienced a water shutoff (22%) and/or threat of disconnection (22%).

Voters also support policies that assist families and communities struggling with water affordability by:

- Providing funding to improve water systems that serve small towns (87%)
- Providing funding for water systems that serve communities struggling economically (84%)
- Providing federal assistance to families struggling to pay their water bills (81%)

## Voters concerned about threats to drinking water safety

More than 3 in 4 voters (77%) say the tap or drinking water in their local area is very (32%) or somewhat (45%) safe to drink. When asked about the greatest threats to safe drinking water, respondents rated pollution to rivers, lakes and aquifers (69%), dangerous substances (63%), and outdated public water systems (63%) as top concerns.

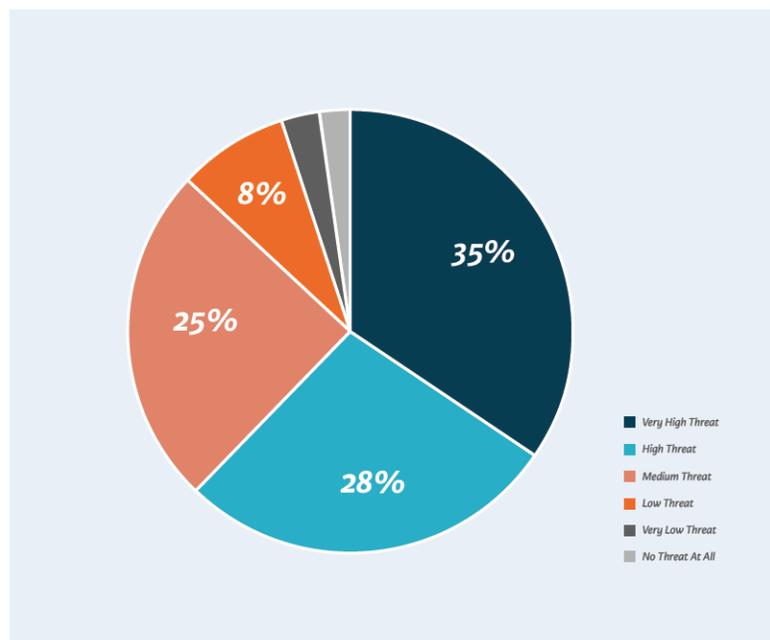
**63%** of voters see outdated public water systems as a threat to drinking water safety



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- Additionally, 61% of voters think poor enforcement of environmental and health regulations is a threat to drinking water safety
- A majority of voters identified other threats — limited funding for water testing and treatment (51%), a lack of strong environmental and health regulations (53%) — to drinking water safety.

- A plurality of voters say climate change (45%) is a threat.

## Racial inequity

Communities of color are less likely to say their drinking water is safe. Only 17% of Black voters say their drinking water is very safe compared to about a third (35%) of white voters who say their water is very safe to drink. Black voters are also more likely than white voters to report having experienced water shut-offs (34% vs. 19%).

## Support for solutions

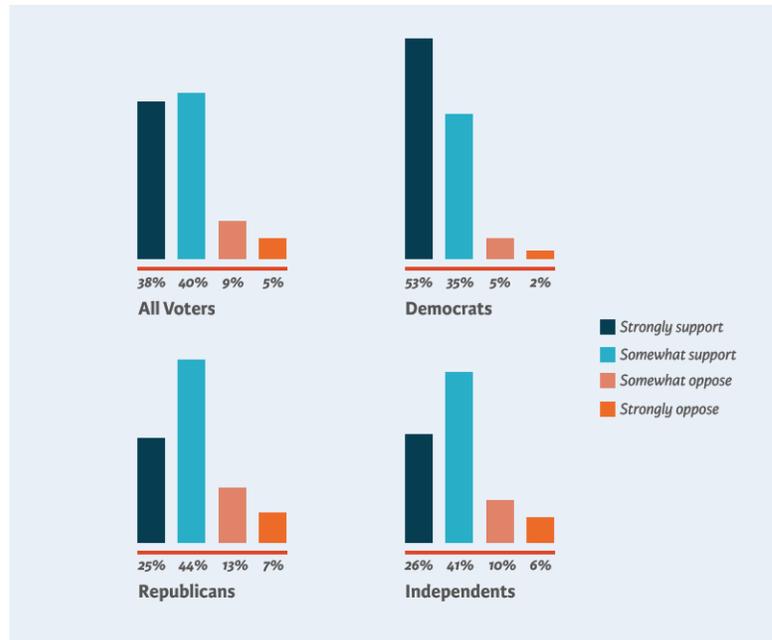
**78% of voters across the country support increasing federal spending on water infrastructure.** Voters support programs to create jobs building and expanding clean water infrastructure as part of Biden’s economic stimulus plan. Water infrastructure investments are popular with a majority of voters, regardless of political party affiliation.

**78%** of voters support increasing federal spending on water infrastructure



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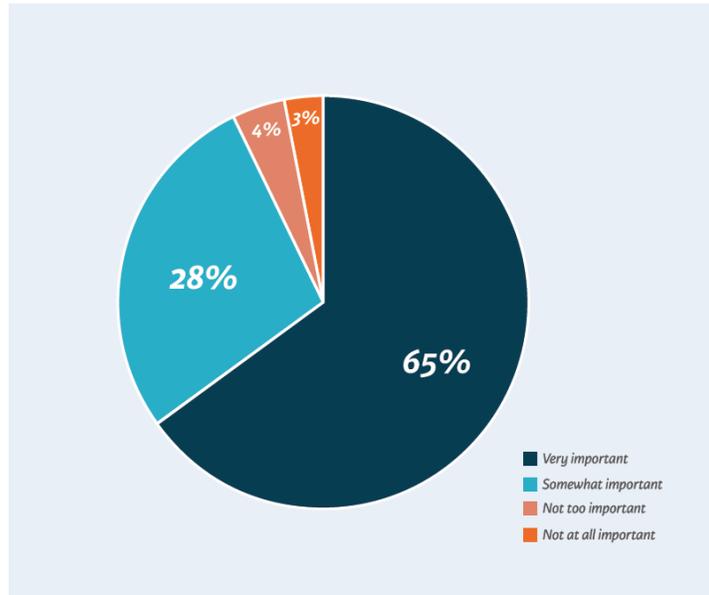


When asked about what President Biden should prioritize in his economic stimulus plan, **more than 9 in 10 (93%) voters believe fixing outdated and unsafe drinking water systems should be a priority.**

**93%** of voters believe it's important to fix outdated or unsafe drinking water systems as part of the Biden administration's economic stimulus plan



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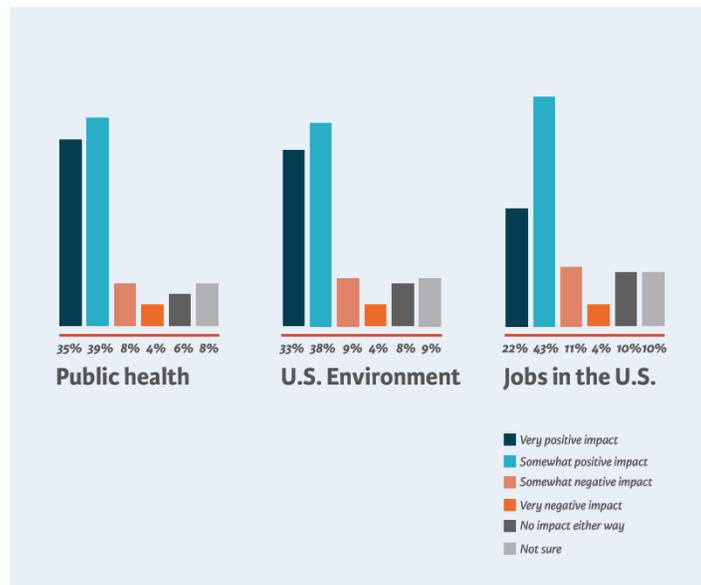


Voters believe increasing federal spending on water infrastructure will have a positive impact on public health (74%), the environment (71%), jobs in the U.S. (65%), communities of color (60%), and the U.S. economy (55%).

**Q:** Do you think increasing federal spending on 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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In addition to protecting and restoring rivers, lakes, and streams (90%), U.S. voters rate local infrastructure solutions — helping communities prepare for future droughts and floods (88%), slowing climate change through resilience infrastructure investments (79%), and creating more greenspace for communities (77%) — as important economic recovery objectives.

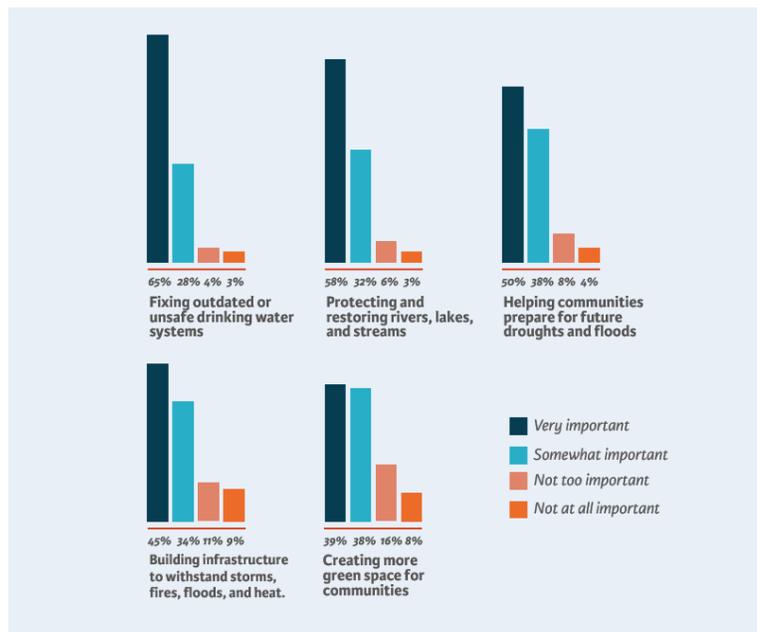
**Q:** *How important are the following objectives in Biden's economic stimulus plan?*



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When asked about water infrastructure priorities for their own local communities, an overwhelming majority of voters say maximizing water conservation and efficiency (85%), preparing for drought and flood (82%), water recycling and reuse (82%), expanding groundwater supplies (81%), and maximizing nature-based solutions (78%) are important priorities.

### Voters support equitable investments

Roughly two-thirds of U.S. voters believe in an equitable approach to infrastructure investments. 65% of voters say the government should prioritize communities with the greatest need, including those currently living with unsafe water, rather than distributing funds equally to all communities (35%).

## Climate and water

Voters across the United States are experiencing the water and extreme weather impacts of climate change in different ways.

Asked, has your local community experienced any of the following in the past year or two?

- Nearly 6 in 10 Western voters say they have experienced wildfires in the past two years (West: 59%, South: 14%, Northeast: 10%, Midwest: 8%)
- Voters in the West are more than twice as likely as voters in any other region to say they've experienced drought recently (West: 42%, Northeast: 19%, South: 19%, Midwest: 15%)
- A majority of voters in the South say they've experienced stronger storms (South: 54%, Northeast: 45%, West: 42%, Midwest: 40%, )
- More than a third of voters in the South say they've experienced increased flooding (South: 34%, Midwest: 26%, West: 22%, Northeast: 19%)

Asked about the severity of extreme weather events in their local area over the past five years:

- 58% of voters say the severity of stronger storms has increased
- 53% believe extreme heat in their local area is more severe
- 43% say the severity of flooding had increased
- Voters in the West are more likely than in other parts of the country to say droughts (54%) and wildfires (66%) have become more severe in their local area.

Of respondents who say an extreme weather event has gotten much more or somewhat more severe in their local area, at least 3 in 4 voters identified climate change as a major or minor influence on extreme heat (83%), drought (81%), stronger storms (80%), wildfire (79%) and increased flooding (75%).

Voters across the country say extreme weather poses a threat to public health and safety and the U.S. economy. Asked how serious the threat is to...

...public health and safety in the U.S.?

- 79% of voters say wildfires are a very or somewhat serious threat
- 76% believe drought is a serious threat to public health and safety
- 76% believe stronger storms are a threat
- 74% say increased flooding is a threat

... the U.S. economy?

- 79% think wildfires are a very or somewhat serious threat to the economy
- 77% of voters say drought threatens the U.S. economy

- 77% believe increased flooding is a very or somewhat serious threat
- 75% say stronger storms are a threat to the economy

Full toplines available [here](#). To access the crosstabs , 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 February 26 - March 7, 2021 of 1,624 registered voters in the United States. The margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.5% at the 95% confidence level.*