

Public Attitudes and Support for Solar Power
A Survey of Likely Voters in California
Conducted for Environment California Research & Policy Center
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HIGHLIGHTS

The June 2004 Public Attitudes and Support for Solar Power Survey was conducted for Environment California Research and Policy Center by Baldassare Associates. The survey included telephone interviews with 600 likely voters living in California. Interviewing was conducted June 24-27, 2004. The margin of error is +/- 4 percent for the total sample. Here are the highlights of the survey:

- Californians show strong support for increasing the use of solar power in the state. By a 2:1 margin, likely voters favor developing more renewable energy sources (61%) over building more power plants (31%) to meet the state's growing energy needs. Support for increasing the use of solar power is greatest among Democrats (67%), and in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area (64% each).
- Nearly nine in 10 (87%) have a favorable opinion of solar power, with 52 percent *very favorable*. Solid majorities in all demographic and political groups are favorable toward solar power.
- More than seven in 10 (72%) favor a plan to build half of new homes with solar power systems, which was proposed by Arnold Schwarzenegger as part of his energy action plan during his campaign for governor. A majority of Republicans and Democrats alike favor this plan. Two in three voters who favor the plan for 50% of new homes to be built with solar power want this goal accomplished by 2010.
- Overall, six in 10 likely voters want the state to institute standards directing the inclusion of solar power systems in new housing. At least half in all demographic and political groups support state solar standards.
- A similar number (58%) favor including provisions for solar power as part of the state's building code. While a majority of Democrats supports this (66%), fewer than half of Republicans agree (47%).
- Voters strongly support encouraging the use of solar power systems with subsidies. Six in 10 favor providing subsidies to builders to install solar power on new homes, and seven in 10 want subsidies for homeowners to purchase solar systems.
- Sixty-eight percent would be more interested in buying a home if it included solar energy, and 63 percent would be willing to pay more to buy a solar home. Most (52%) would be willing to pay less than \$10,000. Those most inclined to pay more for a home equipped with solar power are Central Valley residents (73%), 18- to 34-year-olds (72%), and those with incomes over \$100,000 (66%).
- Voters see the most important reason to support solar power development as decreasing dependence on foreign oil (35%).

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY AND ENERGY POLICY PREFERENCES

California’s likely voters overwhelmingly (79%) see the cost and supply of electricity as an important problem facing the state today, with four in 10 calling it a *big problem*. Those aged 35- to 54 are especially likely to say electricity issues constitute a big problem today (49%), and women are more likely than men to say this is a big problem (45% to 34%). There are no significant differences between political parties or region in perception of the cost and supply of electricity as an important state problem.

How much of a problem is the cost and supply of electricity in California today?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Big problem	39%	26%	49%	36%	39%	42%
Somewhat of a problem	40	48	37	38	38	39
Not much of a problem	16	20	11	21	19	14
Don’t know	5	6	3	5	4	5

Asked what strategy the state should pursue to address its growing energy needs, by a 2:1 margin (61% to 31%), voters choose increasing the use of renewable energy over building more power plants. Increasing solar and other types of renewable power is the preference in all groups, with younger voters (70%) and Democrats (67%) especially supportive. Renewable sources are also favored more strongly in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area (64% each), but a majority in all regions choose this approach.

To address the state’s growing energy needs, which of the following approaches do you prefer for California...						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Build more power plants	31%	21%	29%	38%	43%	25%
Increase renewable power	61	70	65	52	49	67
Other	1	1	--	--	--	--
Don’t Know	7	8	6	9	8	7

OPINION OF SOLAR POWER

California likely voters are highly favorable toward solar power, with a majority (52%) saying they have a *very favorable* opinion of this power source. All together, nearly nine in 10 (87%) voters have a *very* or *somewhat favorable* view of solar power as an energy source.

Solid majorities in all demographic groups are favorable toward solar power, with more than half of voters under 55, nearly six in 10 (59%) Democrats and 57 percent of college graduates saying they are very favorable. Older voters and Republicans are somewhat less positive, but even in these groups, only about one in 10 are *not favorable* toward solar power. By region, favor for solar power is highest in the Bay Area (57% very favorable).

Thinking about solar power, which uses the sun to make electricity, do you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, or not too favorable opinion of this energy source?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Very favorable	52%	52%	54%	48%	42%	59%
Somewhat favorable	35	40	35	34	41	30
Not favorable	8	8	6	10	13	4
Don't know	5		5	8	4	7

SCHWARZENEGGER'S SOLAR HOMES PLAN

Overall, California voters are very supportive of Gov. Schwarzenegger's proposal, announced during his campaign, to have half of all new homes built in the state include solar power systems. Nearly three in four (72%) favor Schwarzenegger's proposed energy action plan, with 43 percent saying they *strongly favor* it. Only one in six (16%) are opposed.

More than half of likely voters in all demographic groups support the plan to build new homes with solar capacity. Support is strongest among voters aged 18 to 34, among whom 52% strongly favor the proposal. Democrats favor the solar plan more than do Republicans (49% to 35% very favorable) and renters are more supportive than are homeowners (50% to 41% very favorable). There are no significant differences by region or other demographic variables.

When he was running for office, Arnold Schwarzenegger proposed an environmental action plan that called for half of all new homes to be built with solar power systems. Do you favor or oppose this plan?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Strongly favor	43%	52%	45%	37%	35%	49%
Somewhat favor	29	30	29	29	30	28
Somewhat oppose	9	8	7	11	9	8
Strongly oppose	7	2	7	9	10	5
Don't know	12	8	12	14	15	10

Those who favored the plan to build 50 percent of new homes with solar power systems were asked when they thought it was feasible to reach that goal. A plurality (40%) said the 50 percent goal should be reached by the year 2010, opting for this choice over 2007 (26%) or 2015 (25%).

This six-year timetable is the top choice in all demographic groups. Likely voters 55 and older and those in the Bay Area are somewhat more inclined to opt for a longer time-schedule, with 32 percent in each group saying the target date for the 50 percent solar new homes goal should be 2015.

By what year do you think California should achieve the goal of building half of all new homes with solar power?						
<i>Asked of those who favor 50% solar plan:</i>	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
2007	26%	30%	27%	23%	26%	22%
2010	40	51	42	31	39	42
2015	25	14	24	32	27	28
Other	2	1	1	3	1	1
Don't know	7	4	6	11	7	7

SOLAR STANDARDS

The concept of state standards for including solar power systems in new housing construction is favored by six in 10 California voters, while three in 10 are opposed. While a majority in all groups favor state solar standards, favor is greatest among voters aged 18 to 34 (72%), Democrats (67%) and renters (67%). Opposition is highest among Republicans (41% opposed).

Should the state set standards for the inclusion of solar power on new housing?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Total Favoring Standards	60%	72%	59%	55%	50%	67%
Oppose Standards	31	21	32	34	41	23
Don't know	9	7	9	11	9	10

Nearly six in 10 voters (58%) say they favor requiring solar power systems to be part of the California building code for new construction, while one in three (34%) are opposed. Support for this approach reaches two-thirds or more among younger voters (68%), Democrats (66%), renters (70%) and those with household incomes below \$50,000 a year (67%). Women are much more in favor of this than are men (64% to 52%). Opposition is greatest among Republicans (44% opposed).

Do you favor or oppose requiring solar power systems to be part of California's building codes, just like earthquake safety and energy efficiency standards are today?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Favor	58%	68%	60%	51%	47%	66%
Oppose	34	23	37	37	44	27
Don't know	8	9	3	12	9	7

SOLAR POLICY PREFERENCES

Voters express strong support for subsidies to encourage solar power use, both for builders to install solar systems on new homes (60%) and for homeowners to purchase solar systems (70%). Both types of subsidies are favored by two-thirds or more among voters under 55, Democrats and renters, while the greatest opposition comes from older voters and Republicans.

Subsidies for builders are supported by a majority in all groups, including both homeowners (57%) and renters (66%). Opposition to builders' subsidies is greater in the Central Valley (41%) than elsewhere.

The highly popular homeowners' subsidies are favored by strong majorities in both parties and all demographic groups and regions. More than two in three homeowners (69%) and renters (71%) alike favor encouraging solar use through subsidies to those buying solar systems.

Do you favor or oppose having the state provide subsidies to encourage builders to install solar power on new homes?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Favor	60%	71%	66%	48%	51%	66%
Oppose	35	23	31	46	44	28
Don't know	5	6	3	6	5	6

Do you favor or oppose having the state provide subsidies to encourage homeowners to purchase solar power systems?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Favor	70%	79%	75%	59%	62%	75%
Oppose	25	15	22	34	34	19
Don't know	5	6	3	7	4	6

CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD SOLAR HOMES

More than two in three California likely voters (68%) say that if they were in the market for a house, the presence of a solar power system would make them more interested in buying a particular home. A quarter (23%) say this would make no difference to them, while only 6 percent say a solar system would make them less interested in that house.

More than half in every group would be more interested in a home if it had solar power. The appeal is especially strong for younger voters (78%), Democrats (76%), and renters (76%), but two in three current homeowners also say a solar power system would pique their interest.

If you were buying a home yourself, would you be more interested or less interested in a home with a solar power system so you could provide some of your own electricity?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
More interested	68%	78%	73%	57%	58%	76%
Less interested	6	2	5	9	7	6
No difference	23	20	19	29	30	16
Don't know	3	--	3	5	5	2

Most voters (63%) say they would be willing to pay more to buy a home that had a solar power system with the capacity to cut their electric bills in half, including 70 percent of renters and 60 percent of homeowners. The majority (52%) opt for amounts of less than \$10,000, while one in 10 (11%) say they would pay an extra \$10,000 or more. While a majority in all groups is willing to pay some extra amount for solar power, those most inclined to pay more are Central Valley residents (73%), 18- to 34-year-olds (72%), and those with household incomes of \$100,000 or more (66%).

Would you be willing to pay more to buy a home with a solar power system that cut your electric bills in half? [If yes] How much more would you be willing to pay?						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Less than \$5,000	20%	21%	20%	20%	20%	18%
\$5,000 to \$9,999	32	42	31	28	29	33
\$10,000 to \$19,999	8	6	9	7	6	9
\$20,000 or more	3	4	3	2	2	3
Not willing to pay more	27	23	26	30	34	25
Don't know	10	4	11	13	9	12

REASONS TO SUPPORT SOLAR AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY

Reducing dependence on foreign sources of oil is the strongest single motivator to voters' support for increasing solar power use (35%), followed by reducing air pollution from fuel-burning power plants (16%), keeping electricity costs down (14%) and eliminating the need to build more power plants (8%). One in four (23%) volunteered the response that all the reasons are important. Women are more likely than men to mention reducing air pollution as a reason to support solar power (20% to 13%). There are no other significant demographic differences on this question.

Which of these do you think is the most important reason to support increasing the use of solar power in California...						
	Total	Age			Party	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Rep	Dem
Decreasing dependence on foreign oil	35%	30%	34%	40%	36%	34%
Reducing air pollution	16	20	14	17	14	21
Reducing electricity costs	14	17	13	12	18	10
Eliminating need for more power plants	8	12	9	5	7	9
All the above <i>[volunteered]</i>	23	19	27	21	19	24
None/Don't support increasing solar <i>[Vol]</i>	2		2	2	3	1
Don't know	2	2	1	3	3	1

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The June 2004 Public Attitudes and Support for Solar Power Survey was conducted for Environment California Research and Policy Center by Baldassare Associates. The survey included telephone interviews with 600 likely voters living in California. Respondents were selected at random from a list of voters registered in California who voted in the 2000 and 2002 general elections and the 2003 recall election, or registered after 2002 and voted in the recall, or are new registrants. Interviewing was conducted June 24-27 on weekend days and weekday nights. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level for the total sample. For subgroups, it would be larger. Sampling error is only one type of error to which surveys are subject. Results may also be affected by factors such as question wording, question order, and survey timing.

The sample obtained in the survey was closely comparable to available statistics on the demographic and geographic distribution of likely voters registered in California.

Throughout the report, we refer to four geographic regions. "Central Valley" includes Butte, Colusa, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Tulare, Yolo, and Yuba Counties. "SF Bay Area" includes Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma Counties. "Los Angeles" refers to Los Angeles County, and "Other Southern California" includes the mostly suburban regions of Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties. These four regions were chosen for analysis because they are the major population centers of the state, accounting for approximately 90 percent of the state population.

Note: throughout this report, results may not add up to 100% because of rounding.