



May 3, 2017

To: Interested Parties

From: Ben Tulchin, Corey O'Neil and David Kornahrens;  
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Re: **New Statewide Survey Shows Overwhelming Support for Water Desalination Plants in California**

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Tulchin Research recently conducted an online California statewide survey among voters to assess awareness and opinions toward water desalination efforts to increase the state's drinking water supply. The poll found that voters have a high level of awareness of desalination as a water conversion method and a comparable share of voters favor efforts by the state to approve desalination plants. The poll also found that voters across the state are more likely to vote for a candidate for elected office who supports water desalination projects. Below are the key findings from this study.

### Key Findings

This recent statewide survey finds that most voters in California are aware of the process of seawater desalination that turns ocean water into drinking water. Specifically, five out of six voters (84%) indicate they have heard about seawater desalination to convert ocean water into drinking water while just 16 percent of voters are either unaware (14%) or unsure (2%).

#### Seawater Desalination Awareness

<i>Have you heard of seawater desalination, the process that turns ocean water into drinking water by removing the salt and other impurities?</i>	
<b>Yes</b>	<b>84%</b>
No	14%
Don't Know/NA	2%
<b>Yes - No</b>	<b>+70</b>

Upon asking voters their sentiments toward the state approving desalination plants, an overwhelming majority want to see the state approve more desalination plants. Notably, nine out of ten voters (90%) favor desalination efforts, including a majority (56%) that *strongly* favors these efforts. Conversely, just five percent of voters oppose desalination efforts while five percent of voters are undecided.

### Support for Water Desalination Plants in California

<i>Seawater desalination is a technology that could help Southern California increase its drinking water supply and reduce the need to ship water from Northern California. Would you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose efforts by the state to approve desalination plants?</i>	
<b>Total Favor</b>	<b>90%</b>
<i>Strongly Favor</i>	56%
<i>Somewhat Favor</i>	34%
<b>Total Oppose</b>	<b>5%</b>
<i>Strongly Oppose</i>	2%
<i>Somewhat Oppose</i>	3%
Undecided	5%
<b><i>Favor – Oppose</i></b>	<b>+85</b>

Support for investing in water desalination plants in California is felt across every key demographic group in the state.

- Both men and women support desalination, with 94 percent of men and 87 percent of women in favor;
- This sentiment crosses party lines as Republicans (92%), Democrats (90%) and independents (89%) all favor desalination efforts by wide margins;
- A solid majority of voters in every region of the state favors water desalination, including voters in Sacramento/North State and the Central Valley (93% favor in both regions) followed by voters in the Bay Area (91%), the L.A. area (90%), L.A. County (89%) and San Diego (85%);
- There is also strong support for desalination efforts among every ethnic group in the state, including Caucasian and Asian voters (91%), Latinos (90%), and African Americans (81%);
- This opinion is consistent across generations as voters under age 50 (92%) and over age 50 (89%) favor desalination at nearly equally high levels.

The table below lays out responses by key demographic groups.

### Support for Water Desalination Plants in California by Demographic Group

<i>Seawater desalination is a technology that could help Southern California increase its drinking water supply and reduce the need to ship water from Northern California. Would you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose efforts by the state to approve desalination plants?</i>				
	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>+/- Diff</u>
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>+85</b>
<b><u>Gender</u></b>				
Male	94%	5%	2%	<b>+89</b>
Female	87%	5%	8%	<b>+82</b>
<b><u>Party</u></b>				
Democrat	90%	4%	6%	<b>+86</b>
Republican	92%	5%	3%	<b>+87</b>
Independent/Other	89%	6%	5%	<b>+83</b>
<b><u>Region</u></b>				
LA County	89%	4%	7%	<b>+85</b>
LA Area	90%	5%	5%	<b>+85</b>
Bay Area	91%	4%	5%	<b>+87</b>
San Diego	85%	12%	3%	<b>+73</b>
Sacramento/North State	93%	0%	7%	<b>+93</b>
Central Valley	93%	6%	1%	<b>+87</b>
<b><u>Race</u></b>				
White	91%	3%	5%	<b>+88</b>
Latino	90%	8%	3%	<b>+82</b>
Black	81%	11%	8%	<b>+70</b>
Asian	91%	2%	6%	<b>+89</b>
<b><u>Age</u></b>				
18-49	92%	6%	2%	<b>+86</b>
50+	89%	4%	7%	<b>+85</b>

We also measured voters' opinions about desalination after providing more context about the issue. The description included a cost element and described how "the cost of desalinated water could be more than traditional household water supplies," but how over time, "desalination could make water rates less expensive." Given this description, voters still overwhelmingly favor desalination (87% total favor), including nearly half (45%) who *strongly* favors it. Opposition remains muted as still only nine percent oppose desalination while four percent are undecided.

**Favor/Oppose: Water Desalination Plants (Informed Ask)**

<i>Seawater desalination provides a community with a drought-proof, locally controlled and high quality supply of drinking water. Initially, the cost of desalinated water could be more than traditional household water supplies, but over time, desalination could make water rates less expensive. Knowing this, would you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose initially paying a few dollars more on your monthly water bill for desalinated water?</i>	
<b>Total Favor</b>	<b>87%</b>
<i>Strongly Favor</i>	45%
<i>Somewhat Favor</i>	42%
<b>Total Oppose</b>	<b>9%</b>
<i>Strongly Oppose</i>	3%
<i>Somewhat Oppose</i>	6%
Undecided	4%
<b>Favor – Oppose</b>	<b>+78</b>

In an effort to test support for desalination plants against opposition arguments, we provided voters with two statements, one from supporters of desalination and one from opponents. Given these two differing arguments, over three-quarters of voters (78%) side with the supporter argument for desalination describing desalination as a proven drinking water technology that can provide more local, drought-proof drinking water and reduce water costs in the long term. Conversely, just 13 percent of voters side with the opponent argument describing desalination as too expensive, energy intensive and not what we should be focusing on for water conservation efforts.

**Desalination Arguments: Supporters vs. Opponents**

<i>Here are two statements about seawater desalination. Please indicate which statement is closer to your opinion: (ROTATE)</i>	
<i>(Some/other) people say we need seawater desalination. It’s a proven drinking water technology used around the world and there is a successful plant working in San Diego that serves as a model for future plants built in California. Seawater desalination will provide more local, drought-proof drinking water and reduce how much water must be sent from Northern California to Southern California, which is expensive, bad for the environment and not a sustainable long term water strategy.</i>	<b>78%</b>
<i>(Some/other) people say we don’t need seawater desalination. The drought is over. It’s too expensive and energy intensive and can harm marine life. We should focus more on water conservation and less on new expensive technologies that requires lots of energy from polluting fossil fuels.</i>	13%
<i>Don’t Know</i>	10%
<b>Supporter – Opponent</b>	<b>+65</b>

The survey also asked voters about their feelings toward local elected officials and their likelihood to vote for a candidate based on their position on water desalination. Over three-

quarters of voters (78% total likely, 31% *much* more likely) say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate for elected office who supports seawater desalination compared to just six percent who say they would be *less* likely and another 17 percent are unsure.

### Candidate Vote Likelihood: Water Desalination Support

<i>Would you be much more likely, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely, or much less likely to vote for a candidate for elected office if you knew that candidate supported seawater desalination projects?</i>	
<b>Total More Likely</b>	<b>78%</b>
<i>Much More Likely</i>	31%
<i>Somewhat More Likely</i>	46%
<b>Total Less Likely</b>	<b>6%</b>
<i>Much Less Likely</i>	2%
<i>Somewhat Less Likely</i>	4%
Undecided	17%
<b>More – Less</b>	<b>+72</b>

This strong preference for a candidate who supports funding water desalination plants holds across both partisan and regional lines. The table below lays out this preference among voters by party and region.

### Opinions Toward Legislators Supporting Water Desalination Plants by Party & Region

<i>Would you be much more likely, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely, or much less likely to vote for a candidate for elected office if you knew that candidate supported seawater desalination projects?</i>				
	<u>More Likely</u>	<u>Less Likely</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>+/- Diff</u>
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>+72</b>
<b><u>Party</u></b>				
Democrat	81%	4%	15%	<b>+77</b>
Republican	77%	3%	20%	<b>+74</b>
Independent/Other	73%	10%	16%	<b>+63</b>
<b><u>Region</u></b>				
LA County	79%	6%	14%	<b>+73</b>
LA Area	77%	4%	19%	<b>+73</b>
Bay Area	82%	5%	14%	<b>+77</b>
San Diego	76%	10%	14%	<b>+66</b>
Sacramento/North State	69%	4%	27%	<b>+64</b>
Central Valley	77%	6%	17%	<b>+71</b>

In sum, California voters are overwhelmingly in favor of approving seawater desalination plants and strongly back candidates who support this new way of securing California's water supply.

## STATEWIDE SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Tulchin Research designed and administered this online statewide survey conducted by professional online vendors and reached 500 likely voters in California. The survey was conducted April 20-24, 2017, and interviews were conducted in English.

The survey was conducted using an online proportional quota sampling methodology. Respondents were chosen at random from a listed panel of online users who have opted in to taking surveys. The respondent universe represents the major characteristics of the statewide population by sampling a proportional amount of each key demographic group determined by statewide voter sampling counts and quotas. The survey screened out non-registered voters and utilized demographic quotas that reflect the California electorate. The data were weighted by gender, age, ethnicity, party, region and education to ensure an accurate reflection of the statewide voter population. The sample size with these weights applied is 500.

In interpreting survey results, all surveys are subject to potential sampling error. This means the results of this survey may differ from interviewing the entire universe of all California voters. The size of the sampling error depends upon the total number of respondents in the survey, the number of respondents of a particular question, and the percentage distribution responses to a specific question, such as the desalination vote question specifically in this particular survey memo. The survey's overall margin of error is plus or minus 4.38% at the 95% confidence level. This means that 95 times out of 100, if a response to a given question to which all respondents answered was 50%, we could be 95% confident that the true percentage would fall within plus or minus 4.38% of this percentage or between 45.62% and 54.38%. Given 90% of respondents in this survey answered "Favor" to funding desalination plants, we can infer that the sampling error specific to that response is +/- 2.6% or between 87.4% and 92.6%.

The table below represents the estimated sampling error for different percentage distributions of responses.

### Sampling Error by Percentage (at 95 in 100 confidence level)

#### PERCENTAGES NEAR

	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
<b>SAMPLE SIZE</b>									
<b>800</b>	2.1	2.8	3.2	3.4	3.5	3.4	3.2	2.8	2.1
<b>700</b>	2.2	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.0	2.2
<b>600</b>	2.4	3.2	3.7	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.4
<b>500</b>	2.6	3.5	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.0	3.5	2.6
<b>400</b>	2.9	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.5	3.9	2.9
<b>300</b>	3.4	4.5	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.2	4.5	3.4
<b>200</b>	4.2	5.5	6.4	6.8	6.9	6.8	6.4	5.5	4.2
<b>100</b>	5.9	7.8	9.0	9.6	9.8	9.6	9.0	7.8	5.9