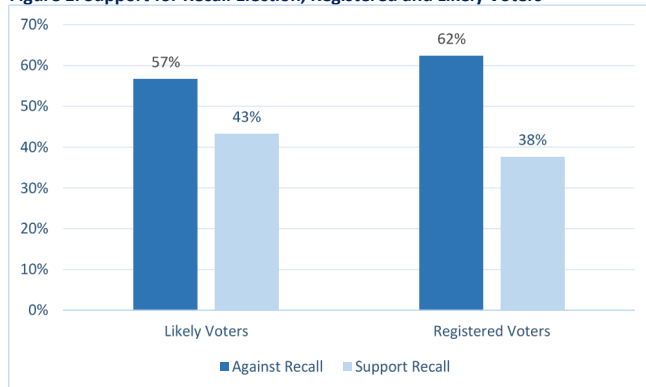**SEPTEMBER 2021**

FACT SHEET—Heating Up: Recall Election and Climate Crisis in Fresno

Likely voters in the City of Fresno oppose recalling the Governor by a 14% margin. Climate change is dividing voters at the poll more than any other issue.

Figure 1. Support for Recall Election, Registered and Likely Voters

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of Fresno Speaks 2021 Survey Data

The Fresno Speaks Survey

Fresno Speaks has produced the largest random sample surveys in the city of Fresno since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The project, a partnership between the UC Merced Community and Labor Center and the Fresno County Civic Engagement Table, surveyed 1,520 registered voters with phones, in the city of Fresno, from July to August 2021.

Respondents were asked about a range of community, health, civic and budgeting issues. Two yes/no questions related to the recall were asked: 1) Do you support the recall of the governor? and 2) Do you plan to vote in the recall election?[1]

The Gubernatorial Recall Question

Registered voters were against the recall by a 24 percent gap (see Figure 1), with 62% against and 38% in support. Latino, Black, and Asian voters were more likely against the recall, while white voters were evenly split. Among likely voters, attitudes against the recall shrank nearly in half (to 14 percent). The margin of error was +/- 3.

These findings of voter attitudes against the recall are consistent with recent state-wide polling. One statewide survey found a 19 percent gap among likely voters.[2] Other recent statewide polls of likely voters have given the "against the recall" vote between an 8 and 15 point lead.[3]

Consistent with previous statewide polling, 91 percent of pro-recall registered voters were determined to cast their ballots versus 72 percent of registered voters against the recall.

Climate as the Key Policy Issue in Fresno

Respondents were asked which issues they were concerned about. Generally, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be the biggest concern among households in the city. However, the biggest concerns dividing pro and anti-recall voters were climate change, racism, air pollution, and voting rights.

[1] N= 1135 for Likely Voters and N = 1436 for Registered Voters
[2] See Baldassare et al. (2021)

[3] See https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/california-recall-polls/

To measure commitment to a social issue, Fresno voters were presented with 16 major social issues and asked if they were willing to attend a local meeting to strategize solutions.[4]

Climate change emerged as the issue with the greatest divergence between pro and anti-gubernatorial recall voters in Fresno. Almost half of likely voters against the recall (47%) are willing to attend a local meeting to address climate change, while only 29% of likely voters that support the recall would be interested in attending (see Figure 2).[5] These differences are much less pronounced for unlikely voters.

This same pattern of divergence on the climate change issue was observed in another Fresno Speaks question about Measure C, the county transportation tax initiative. Registered and likely voters against the recall chose to invest the funds into solutions for air pollution and climate change more than twice as much as pro-recall voters.
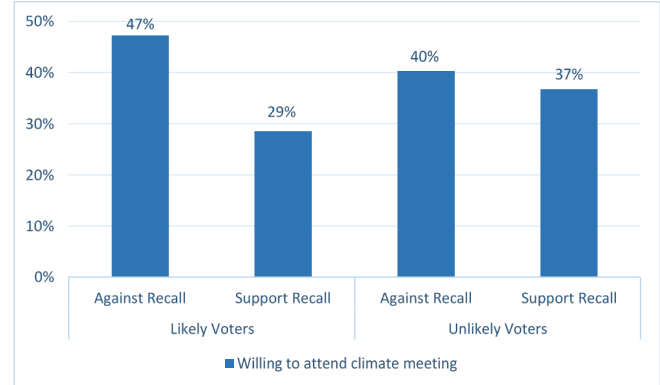
Implications of the Recall Vote

Voter polarization along climate issues in Fresno highlights the implications of the recall question and how climate plays an increasingly salient role in both local politics and local quality of life.

Global warming has been most visible in historic heat waves, droughts, and wildfires. July 2021 was the hottest July on record for Fresno.[6] One heat wave peaked at 114 degrees on July 11, melting car windshield sun protectors.[7] The July heat wave hospitalized dozens of Fresno residents.

The 2020 and 2021 wildfires, the most severe in state history, also extended Fresno's number of poor air quality days. The extreme weather was especially harmful to residents with breathing and lung ailments, as Fresno consistently ranks among the top three US metro areas for poor air quality.[8]

Figure 2. Willingness to attend local meeting on climate issues

Source: UC Merced Community and Labor Center analysis of Fresno Speaks 2021 Survey Data

Environmental justice groups have been advocating for increased state investment to mitigate the increasing threats of climate change for vulnerable populations, and the governor plays a key role in such state climate action policy.

In 2020, the state allocated one third of the climate change portion of its budget to low-income and disadvantaged populations. The current 2021-2022 state budget calls for $1 billion in investment to address wildfires, $3 billion to prepare for drought, and $3.7 billion for climate resiliency programs and infrastructure.

This recall election will shape how the state and environmental groups continue to work towards improved climate policy and relief to communities suffering the impacts of global warming.

References

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Rodriguez-Delgado, Cresencio. 2021. "California may spend billions on permanent relief shelters as sweltering heat blankets the state." PBS NewsHour, August 2, 2021.

Mission Statement

The UC Merced Community and Labor Center conducts research and education on issues of community, labor and employment, in the San Joaquin Valley and beyond.

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[4] The 16 issues included: air pollution, racism, quality of public education, police reform, climate change, youth community involvement, housing costs, gang violence, unemployment, access to health care, support for disability services, cost of utility/energy bills, access to the internet, problem of loose dogs in neighborhood, homelessness, and voting rights.
[5] Correction: A previous version of this fact sheet listed this figure as 45%.

[6] See Rodriguez-Delgado (2021).
[7] See https://abc7news.com/fresno-heat-wave-hot-weather-central-valley-temperatures/10884843/
[8] See 2020 American Lung Association Rankings for air pollution of over 200 metropolitan areas, https://www.lung.org/research/sota/city-rankings/states/california/fresno