

'It's real.' Latinos, African Americans most likely to view pollution as a serious health threat

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Latinos and African Americans are more likely to view pollution as a serious health threat than other groups, according to a new statewide

study by the Public Policy Institute of California.

"African Americans and Latinos are more likely than others to say that air and [water pollution](#) in their part of California are very serious health threats to themselves and their families," said Mark Baldassare, president and CEO of the Public Policy Institute of California, in the study.

Two-thirds of Californians surveyed said air pollution is a very serious or somewhat serious threat.

In the study, 33% of Latinos and 29% of African Americans said air pollution is a very serious health threat in their part of the state compared to 12% of whites. An estimated 24% of Latinos and 20% of African Americans said polluted drinking water is a very serious health threat in their part of their state, compared to 8% of whites.

Latinos (89%) also were more likely to say they are willing to make major lifestyle changes to address global warming, compared to 74% of African Americans, 70% of Asian Americans and 62% of whites, the study showed.

When survey participants were asked if they were willing to pay more for electricity if it were generated by [renewable sources](#) like solar or wind energy, 54% of Asian Americans and 52% Latinos said they were willing to pay more, followed by 46% of African Americans and 42% of whites.

"Latinos care about [climate change](#) because they're at the front lines of climate change impacts and exposure to pollution," said Dr. Michael Mendez, author of the book, *Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement*. "It's real. Those impacts, both economic and health impacts, are happening in Latino families."

Primarily in California's agricultural regions, according to Mendez, some Latinos' access to clean drinking water is affected by dilapidated and rotting pipes that are corrosive and contain contamination.

When it comes to air pollution, Latinos are "exposed through various forms of cumulative pollution sources, because there's a lot of noxious facilities in areas that they live and work," he said. Latino and Black communities near freeways are also affected by air pollution.

Mendez helped co-lead a task force on climate change, environment and public health for the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative's 21st Century Latino Agenda.

"More than 60% of Latinos in the U.S. reside in four key states that have historically experienced extreme events," according to the agenda. "This includes wildfires and droughts in California."

Overall, nearly half of Californians said the threat of wildfires was a "big problem" where they lived, the study showed.

Among Central Valley region residents, 16% said air [pollution](#), vehicle emissions and smog were the most important environmental issues facing the state.

Residents living in the Los Angeles, San Francisco Bay Area, Orange/San Diego and Inland Empire regions were more likely to view [global warming](#), climate change and greenhouse gases as the most important environmental issues facing the state.

The study found Latinos and African Americans were more likely to say stricter environmental laws and regulations were worth the cost. About 70% of Latinos and 65% of African Americans said stricter environmental laws and regulations in the state are worth the cost,

according to the study.

When asked whether the state should take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions right away or wait until the state's economy and job sector improves, 56% of Latinos, 50% African Americans, 49% Asian Americans and 45% of whites said they should take action right away.

The report's findings are based on a survey of 1,561 Californians conducted between July 8-17.

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