

A Penta White Paper

Penta Policy Insiders

California Insights Review Series

Environment and Climate

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Executive summary

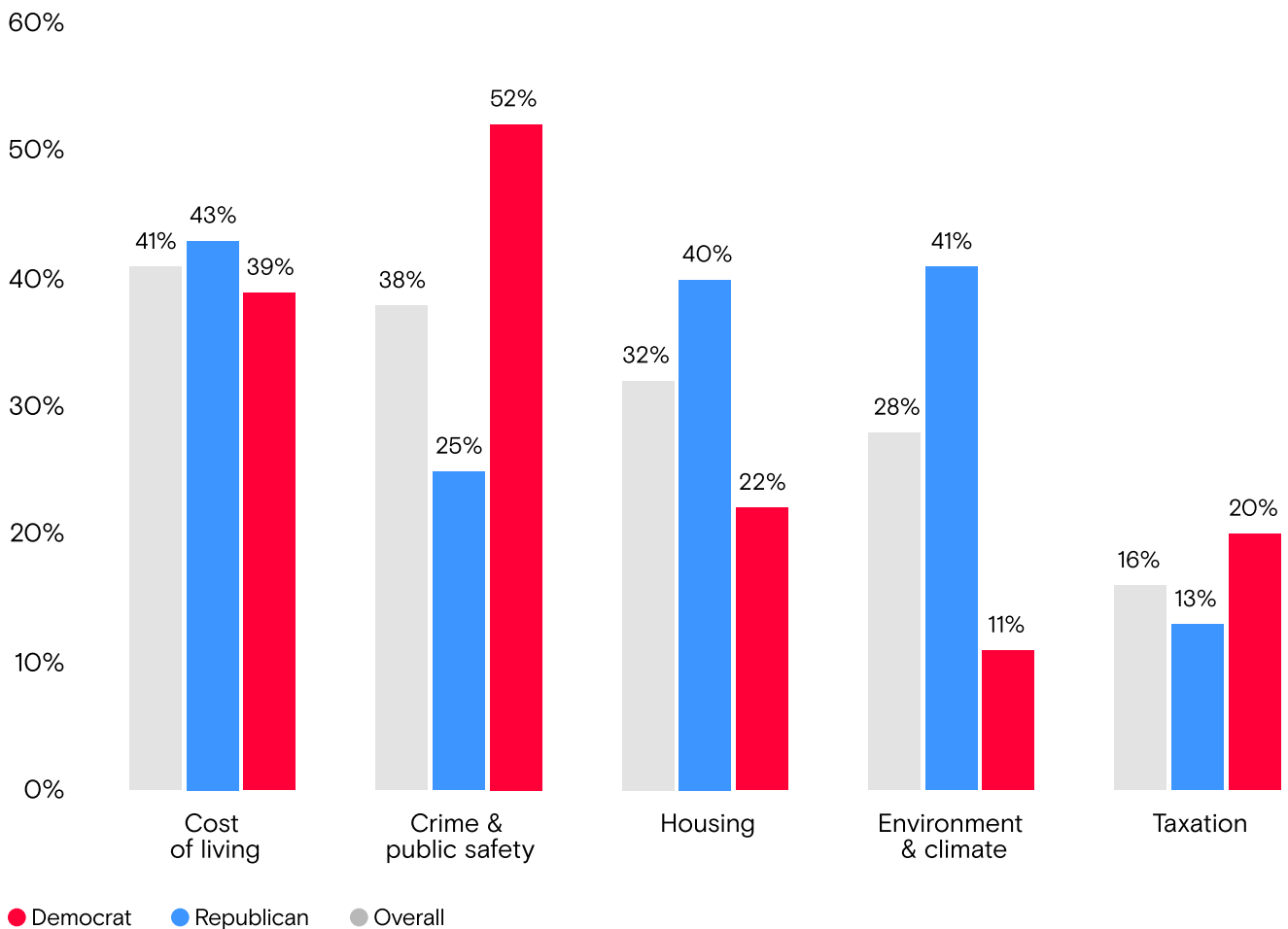
We are pleased to share our findings in the California Insights Review for 2023. From July to October 2023, we surveyed over 300 policymakers in the state about their policy priorities and the top issues facing their communities.

Cost of living is the top concern for California policymakers in 2023, with over 40 percent of policy staff identifying the lack of affordability in the state as a major issue. Additionally, this concern is cited as an underlying contributor to several of the other main priorities for California’s policy leaders - housing, crime and public safety, and taxation. Both parties highlight the inability of many working families to afford rent or purchase a home. This, in turn, can exacerbate homelessness and its perceived connection to increased criminal activity. These themes, according to policymakers, all tie back to Californians struggling with the rising cost of living and needs to be addressed urgently.

This report is the fifth in a series that examines four of California policymakers’ top priorities, which include (i) cost of living and housing (ii) crime and public safety (iii) taxation and (iv) environment and climate.

Top policy priorities in California

Multiple selections permitted



California deep dive

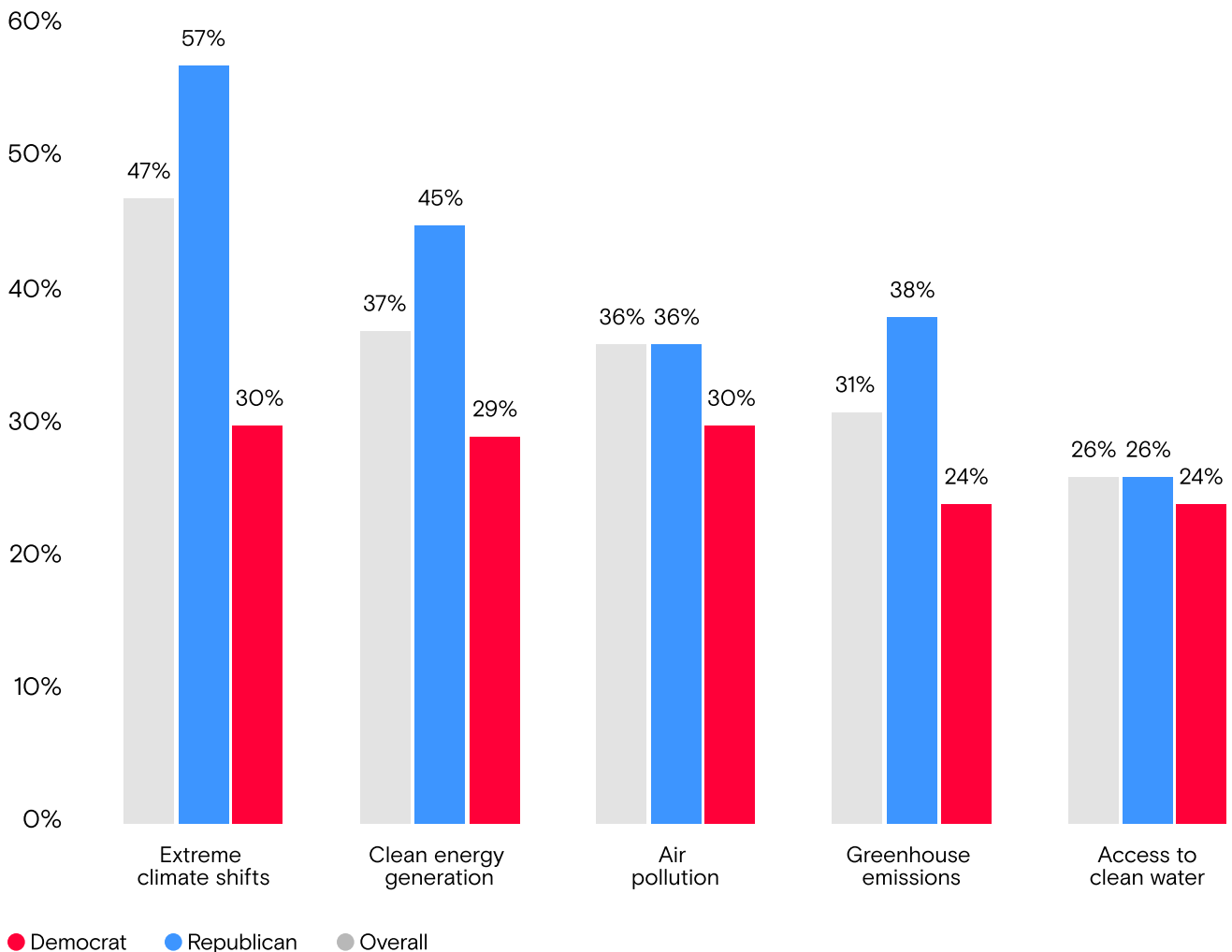
Environment and climate

California faced a number of extreme weather events in 2023.¹ From droughts to floods to severe storms, the Golden State has weathered many unusual climate events, bringing the state's environment front and center for California policymakers. The environment is a priority for more than a quarter of all California policy leaders, with 28 percent agreeing that the environment and climate are top issues. However, Democrats in the state place a higher emphasis on the topic, with more than 40 percent agreeing that the environment is a priority, compared with just 11 percent of Republicans.

When it comes to the environment, policy leaders emphasize extreme climate shifts and clean energy to be among the critical areas of focus. Additionally, Democrat policy staff in the state also highlight their support for regulations on chemicals that are potentially harmful to humans and the overall environment.

Top environment priorities in California

Multiple selections permitted





We need to step back and all take a look at what is contributing to climate change. What can we do to negate it without harming lives? But obviously, some industries will change more than others. **If we don't [act], we're just going to completely lose our great state, our environment, our wildlife, our homes, businesses.**

Former District Representative, California State Assembly, D

Spotlight on California's chemical bans

This year, California's legislative body passed the California Food Safety Act, a law that prohibits the use of four food additives commonly used in the United States that are considered to be potential carcinogens.² The use of harmful chemicals has been top-of-mind for policy leaders in the state, with many specifically citing concerns with the prevalence of plastic in California communities.



I know there are a lot of progressive members who want to see carcinogenic chemicals put in everyday materials removed. That's what we're talking about. Chemicals end up in our environment and then get absorbed into our bodies. All I know is that there's more and more environmental concern or there's just too much plastic

Legislative Director, California State Senate, D

Fossil fuels dominate policymaker conversations on the environment

When it comes to the environment, policymakers are vocal about their thoughts on the transition away from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources, with 37 percent of policy staff citing clean energy generation as a key priority.



The other issue, in my mind, [is that] **the environmental community does not want the oil and gas industry to be part of our climate future**, which just blows my mind.

State Senator, California State Senate, D



One [issue] is the extraction and the potential impacts to the environment, particularly to groundwater and surface water, from the extraction of oil and gas. And then the use of oil and gas for fossil fuel use that has greenhouse gas emissions. And so it's both the extraction and then the consumption, so to speak, of oil and gas. The impacts associated with both of those will have impacts to the industry.

Executive Officer, California Executive Agency, D



If we're talking about eventually transitioning away from gas and oil to other energy sources, the question of price controls would slow down that transition. If prices are high, we'll see other forms of energy. So they're like two separate issues: consumer protection issue and an environmental protection issue, and they're not necessarily sort of aligned with each other.

Principal Counsel, California State Assembly, D

Conclusion

Despite more than a quarter of California policymakers highlighting the environment and climate as a top concern, policy leaders are starkly split along party lines regarding the importance of environmental priorities. Policymakers in the state are most worried about extreme climate shifts, followed by clean energy generation, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, Democrat policymakers in the Golden State are also particularly interested in regulating potentially harmful chemicals.



About Penta Policy Insiders

Penta Policy Insiders provides direct feedback from policymakers to government relations professionals, improving advocates' ability to understand, validate, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their engagement.

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Citations

1. <https://calmatters.org/environment/2023/12/climate-change-california-2/#:~:text=In%20summary&text=California%20was%20deluged%20with%20storms,California's%20longstanding%20groundwater%20crisis%20continued.>
2. <https://www.cbsnews.com/sacramento/news/california-becomes-first-us-state-to-ban-4-potentially-harmful-chemicals-in-food/>

Qualitative n: 43 | Quantitative n: 297

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