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New Polling Confirms: Clean Water Matters to Iowa Voters

Key findings from a survey exploring perceptions of Iowa's water quality

To: Interested Parties

From: GQR

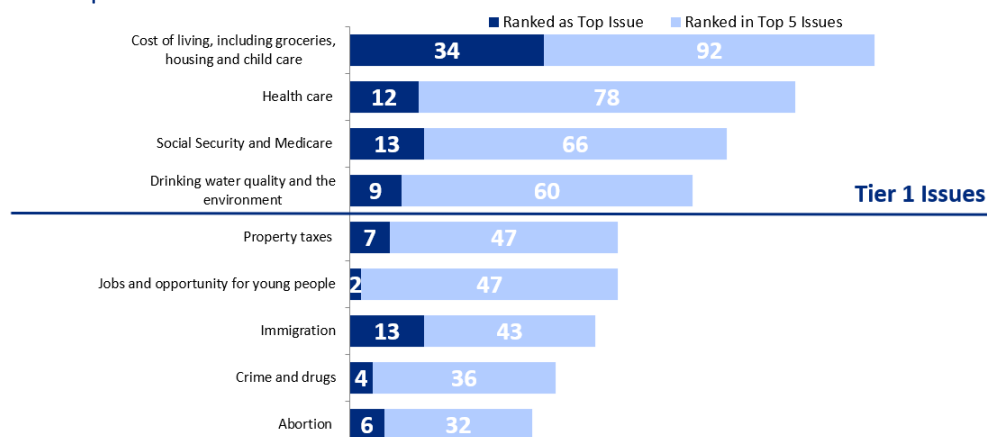
A new survey of 2026 likely voters in Iowa¹ finds a majority of voters are aware of Iowa's water crisis, and many already link it to rising cancer rates. Drinking water quality is ranked as one of the most important issues heading into the midterm elections, and 26 percent of Iowa voters say there is little to no chance they would support a candidate in November who does not prioritize water quality.

Water quality is a top issue, and the level of awareness and concern is high

Drinking water quality and the environment is a top issue for Iowa voters, with a strong 60 percent majority picking it as one of their top five most important issues, only behind cost of living, health care and Social Security and Medicare. This is a bipartisan issue, with 78 percent of Democrats, 64 percent of independents and 41 percent of Republicans ranking it as a top five issue. Sixty-nine percent of the electorate has personally been affected by cancer, and among these voters, 65 percent rank water quality as a top five issue. Forty percent of them rank it as a top three issue, only behind costs and health care.

Without prompting, when voters are asked why they rank water quality as one of their top issues, 50 percent cite the general importance of clean and safe water, **but 29 percent explicitly cite rising cancer rates, and 17 percent specifically call out nitrates and other pollutants in the water supply.**

Figure 1. Issue Importance in the 2026 Midterm Elections



¹ On behalf of the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future (CLF), GQR conducted a mixed mode survey among 800 likely 2026 voters in Iowa from July 9-16, 2026. Text-to-web interviews made up 75 percent of respondents, online panel made up the other 25 percent. Please contact Elizabeth Sena at GQR (info@gqrr.com) with any questions.

A majority of Iowans are hearing about the quality of Iowa's drinking water. More than three quarters of Iowa voters (84 percent) have recently heard about the quality of Iowa's drinking water, and almost half (47 percent) report hearing a lot. Voters personally affected by cancer are more likely to have heard about Iowa's water quality than those who haven't been affected, and voters who have had a career in the agricultural industry are more likely to have heard than those who have not worked in agriculture.

- ***Of those who have heard about water quality recently, 85 percent felt more concerned after seeing information about water quality in Iowa.*** This holds across the political divide: 95 percent of Democrats, 84 percent of independents and 78 percent of Republicans felt more concerned about drinking water quality after hearing more.
- When asked what information they heard in an open-ended question, fully 59 percent of voters report hearing about the high levels of nitrates or chemicals in the water supply, including 63 percent of Democrats, 62 percent of independents and 53 percent of Republicans. Central Iowans in Des Moines are most likely to recall hearing about nitrates or chemicals (67 percent).
- Another 22 percent report hearing that poor water quality is causing cancer rates to rise in Iowa. This is higher among independents (24 percent) – particularly independent men (26 percent) – younger voters (32 percent) and college educated voters (28 percent).

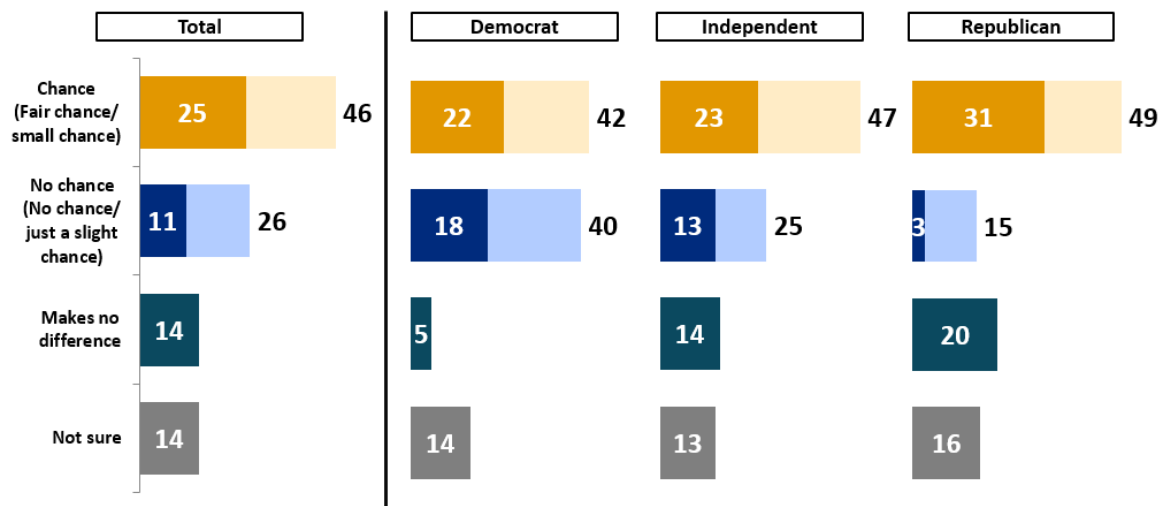
A 63 percent majority of Iowans are concerned about the quality of their tap water at home. This majority holds across every region of the state and partisan lines; 75 percent of Democrats, 62 percent of independents and 54 percent of Republicans are concerned about the quality of their tap water at home.

- Non-Ag workers are more willing to say they are concerned about the quality of their tap water at home than Ag workers, and those personally affected by cancer are much more concerned than those who haven't been (68 percent concern compared to only 51 percent concern).
- This majority holds across demographic groups, but there is a particular concern about the quality of tap water at home among women (69 percent concern), including younger women (85 percent), college educated women (71 percent) and independent women (66 percent).
- Lower-income voters making less than \$50k per year (27 percent of the electorate) are also more concerned about their water quality by 10 points than higher-income voters making \$100k to under \$200k per year (29 percent of the electorate).

This high level of concern is most apparent when looking at Iowans' personal drinking water habits: ***55 percent of Iowans report filtering their tap water before drinking it at least once a week, and 62 percent buy and drink bottled water at least once a month, with 26 percent exclusively drinking bottled water.***

When asked how this issue will affect their vote choice in November, ***26 percent of Iowa voters say there is no chance or just a slight chance they will support a candidate they agree with on most issues, but who does not make improving drinking water quality in Iowa a priority.*** This includes 40 percent of Democrats, 25 percent of independents (including 13 percent who say there is "no chance" they will support a candidate who does not prioritize improving water quality) and 15 percent of Republicans.

Figure 2. Chance of supporting a candidate in November that you agree with on most issues, but does not make improving drinking water quality in Iowa a priority



Views on the agricultural industry in Iowa

The agricultural industry in Iowa is popular and seen as an economic powerhouse, core to Iowa's culture. A majority of Iowa voters are favorable to the industry (58 percent favorable to 31 percent unfavorable), including more than a quarter being very favorable (26 percent very favorable).

However, voters personally affected by cancer view Iowa's agricultural industry more negatively (54 percent favorable to 37 percent unfavorable) than those who haven't been affected by cancer (67 percent favorable to 18 percent unfavorable), and voters who care most about drinking water quality are particularly unfavorable (only 35 percent favorable, 55 percent unfavorable among those who rank drinking water quality in their top 3 most important issues).

When breaking down the industry further, we find that the popularity of small farms is driving positive views of the broader industry. Small and medium-sized independent farms are exceedingly popular (90 percent favorable, 4 percent unfavorable), with very high ratings among Democrats (89 percent favorable), independents (89 percent favorable) and Republicans (92 percent favorable). *In stark contrast, Iowa voters deeply dislike large-scale corporate or industrial farming operations (just 14 percent favorable to 76 percent unfavorable) and national/multinational agricultural corporations (16 percent favorable to 67 percent unfavorable).* Both are heavily underwater among Democrats, independents and Republicans, and among Ag workers and non-Ag workers alike.

Voters personally affected by cancer are particularly negative towards both large-scale corporate farming and national/multinational ag corporations (81 percent and 72 percent unfavorable, respectively), but rate small independent farms highly (90 percent favorable).