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California Voters Want Candidates to Prioritize Efforts to Defend Democracy

The most recent *Berkeley IGS Poll* of 8,578 registered voters, including 5,472 likely voters (weighted N=3513), finds that a substantial majority of California voters want candidates and elected officials to prioritize efforts to defend democracy and make voting more accessible.

When asked how important it is for presidential candidates to prioritize this issue, 63% stated that it was very important and another 11% believed it was somewhat important. By contrast, 18% viewed protecting democracy as “not too important” or “not important at all.” Democrats were nearly universal (95%) in citing this as important, while 41% of Republicans and 71% of No Party Preference (NPP)/Other voters agreed.

Likewise, a 72% majority stated that it is important for state legislative candidates to prioritize efforts to defend democracy and make voting more accessible. Once again, Democrats (93%) were more likely than Republicans (38%) to see this as an important consideration; 68% of NPP/Other voters saw defending democracy as important for state legislative candidates.

A similar message emerges when likely voters are asked about the importance of a series of issues as they are “considering the candidates for Governor”: the top-ranked issue was “defending democracy and protecting voting rights,” cited as very important by 80% of likely voters and “somewhat important” by another 12%. Just 5% of likely voters rated this issue as “not at all important.” The issue is rated as very important by a substantial share of each partisan group: 91% of Democrats, 62% of Republicans, and 76% of NPP/Other voters.

When asked whether state leaders should prioritize efforts to defend democracy and protect voting rights more specifically in the context of President Trump’s proposed election law changes that would make it harder for some citizens to vote, the results are again similar: 76% of voters believe that it is important for state leaders to prioritize efforts to defend democracy and protect voting rights; 94% of Democrats, 46% of Republicans, and 73% of NPP/Other voters share this view.

Voters are skeptical when asked whether state leaders are doing enough to defend democracy. While 27% of registered voters say that they are doing enough, 51% disagreed and 22% had no opinion. Democrats (36%) were more likely than Republicans (15%) to say that state leaders were doing enough, but a plurality of each partisan group stated that they were not doing so.

Finally, voter confidence in the 2026 election process was somewhat mixed. When asked whether this year's "elections in California will be free of federal interference," 48% expressed confidence while 41% were not confident. Democrats (45%) and NPP/Other voters (46%) were somewhat less confident than Republicans (57%). On the other hand, there was greater confidence that local election officials "will conduct the June primary election fairly and securely, and that the vote count will be accurate": 65% of voters were confident in local election officials while 31% were not confident. Republicans (42%) were less confident than Democrats (79%) and NPP/Other (62%) voters.

IGS co-Director Eric Schickler commented that "these results suggest that California voters broadly want their state's leaders to prioritize protecting democracy and voting rights. The concern that American democracy is under threat has evidently gotten voters' attention and created the expectation that state officials will respond accordingly."

California Voters Want Candidates and Officials to Prioritize Democracy

There was widespread support for presidential and state legislative candidates prioritizing "efforts to defend democracy and make voting more accessible." When it comes to presidential candidates, 74% of registered voters rated this as an important priority (63% very important). More than 70% of each racial group stated this should be an important priority, with the highest ratings for Black (80%), Asian American (80%), and Latino (77%) voters. Support was similar across age groups, ranging from 69% (aged 40-49) to 79% (voters 65 and over). The main differences were across partisan and ideological groups, with Democrats far more likely (95%) than Republicans (41%) to rate defending democracy and making voting more accessible as an important priority (71% of NPP/Other voters did so). Among voters who approve of the job Newsom is doing, 98% believe defending democracy should be important for presidential candidates (90% very important).

Table 1
**Importance that candidates running for President in 2028 prioritize efforts to defend
democracy and make voting more accessible in the nation's elections**
(among California registered voters)

	Important (net) %	Very important %	Somewhat Important %	Not important (net) %	Not too important %	Not at all important %
Total registered voters	74	63	11	18	6	12
<u>Party registration</u>						
Democrats	95	88	7	2	1	1
Republicans	41	27	14	43	13	31
No Party Pref./other	71	57	14	18	6	13
<u>Gender</u>						
Male	70	59	12	22	7	15
Female	78	68	11	14	5	9
<u>Age</u>						
18-29	77	64	13	15	5	9
30-39	73	60	13	17	6	11
40-49	69	57	12	21	8	14
50-64	71	60	11	20	7	14
65 or older	79	72	8	16	5	11
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>						
White	71	61	10	22	7	15
Latino	77	65	12	14	5	9
Asian/Pacific Isle	80	68	12	13	6	7
Black/African Amer.	80	69	10	13	4	8
<u>Job rating of Gov. Newsom</u>						
Approve	98	90	7	1	1	1
Disapprove	35	22	14	48	14	34

Differences between 100% and the sum of each subgroup's "important" and "not important" percentages equal the proportion of voters with no opinion.

The levels of support and demographic breakdowns were similar when voters were asked about whether state legislative candidates should prioritize defending democracy and making voting more accessible. Of registered voters, 72% rated this important (56% very important). And, support was similar across racial groups, ranging from 69% for non-Hispanic white voters, 74% for Latinos, 76% for Asian American, and 77% for Black voters. The parties again split on this question, with 93% of Democrats, 68% of NPP, and 38% of Republicans rating this as an important priority.

“Californians are struggling to make ends meet, and voting is one of the few ways most people are able to communicate their needs at scale,” says Sky Allen, Executive Director of Inland Empire United. “Voters want to know there’s an opportunity to engage, and that there are candidates willing to fight for them to be heard.”

Likely voters in the June primary were also asked how important “defending democracy and protecting voting rights” was as they considered the candidates for Governor. Fully 80% rated this consideration as “very important.” This item garnered bipartisan support, with 91% of Democrats, 62% of Republicans, and 76% of NPP/Other voters stating that this was a “very important” consideration. At least 70% of each region, age group, gender, educational, and racial group cited

“defending democracy and protecting voting rights” as very important when it comes to the gubernatorial race.

“We have now seen in multiple waves of polling that California voters are concerned about attacks on democracy, and this has now become one of the top voting issues as we head towards November,” said Professor Matt A. Barreto, Faculty Director, UCLA Voting Rights Project. “The headlines about threats to voting rights and democracy have sparked voters into wanting to see California do more to protect their rights. Through this poll, voters are telling elected officials to do more to guarantee equal access to voting, to ensure that all votes are counted and to protect the fundamental right to vote.”

<i>Table 2</i>				
Importance of “defending democracy and protecting voting rights” when considering whom to support for governor in the June primary election (among California likely voters)				
	Very important %	Somewhat Important %	Not at all important %	No opinion %
Total likely voters	80	12	5	3
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	91	7	1	1
Republicans	62	18	12	8
No Party Pref./other	76	14	6	4
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	83	10	4	3
San Diego County	82	11	5	2
Orange County	76	11	8	5
Inland Empire	79	12	7	2
Central Coast	77	12	8	3
Central Valley	78	12	4	6
San Francisco Bay Area	81	13	4	2
North Coast/Sierras	78	9	9	3
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	72	16	8	4
30-39	77	15	7	1
40-49	78	12	7	3
50-64	79	11	5	5
65 or older	83	10	4	3
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	76	14	6	4
Female	83	10	4	3
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White	80	12	5	3
Latino	79	11	6	4
Asian/Pacific Isle	82	12	3	3
Black/African Amer.	81	6	10	3
<u>Education</u>				
High school grad or less	82	8	5	5
Some college/trade school	78	11	6	4
College graduate (B.A.)	79	13	5	3
Post graduate degree	82	11	5	2

Another question on the survey asked whether state leaders should prioritize efforts to defend democracy and protect voting rights more specifically in the context of President Trump's proposed election law changes that would make it harder for some citizens to vote. In response, 76% of registered voters stated they believe it is very or somewhat important for state leaders to prioritize efforts to defend democracy and protect voting rights. Support for this view was near-universal (94%) among Democrats. Republicans were split, with 46% stating that defending democracy and protecting voting rights was "very important" or "somewhat important," while 41% said it was "not too important" or "not important at all." NPP/Other party voters were in between the two parties, with 73% stating that defending democracy and protecting voting rights was very or somewhat important.

"Immigrant families know that democracy is strongest when every voice is heard. California can continue to lead by protecting voter access, rejecting voter suppression, and ensuring that every eligible voter can participate freely and safely. A healthy democracy does not fear participation—it welcomes it," stated Angelica Salas, Executive Director, Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA).

When asked whether state leaders are "doing enough to defend democracy in California," only 27% of registered voters responded in the affirmative, while 51% said they were not doing enough and 22% had no opinion. Republicans were less likely (15%) than Democrats (36%) to say that state leaders were doing enough, but it is noteworthy that 50% of Democrats, 56% of Republicans, and 48% of NPP/Other voters felt that state leaders were not doing enough. Older voters were more positive about whether state leaders had done enough than younger voters: 32% of those 65 and over stated that state leaders had done enough, as compared to just 19% of 18-29 year olds. But even so, a slim majority (51%) of older voters said that state leaders had not done enough. There were only modest differences across racial and regional groups on this item.

"These numbers tell us that California voters are worried about what's at stake," said Dora Rose, Deputy Director, League of Women Voters of California. "They have recently witnessed the Supreme Court limiting federal voting rights protections and executive orders that could destabilize elections. With fewer federal protections, the responsibility now falls to the states. Californians want state leaders to act to protect voters now."

Aaron Robertson, Director of Political Voice at Catalyst California commented that "Just months until the critical November midterms, this poll makes it clear that Californians see serious challenges ahead and want leaders to act with urgency. Even after the Supreme Court's dismantling of the federal Voting Rights Act, the legislature still has time to commit to policies that advance opportunity, equity, and racial justice for communities of color and restore public confidence in our government's ability to ensure everyone's wellbeing."

Voters are Confident in Local Election Officials, but Many Are Worried About Federal Interference

The survey asked voters two questions about their confidence in the election process. When asked "how confident are you that this year's elections in California will be free of federal

interference,” voters were split: 48% expressed confidence, while 41% were not confident. Republicans were more confident (57%) than Democrats (45%) or NPP/Other (46%) voters that the election will be free of federal interference. A slim majority of Democrats (51%) were not confident of this, as compared to 23% of Republicans and 43% of NPP/Other voters. There were substantial racial differences on this item as well, with 55% of non-Hispanic white voters confident that the election will be free of federal interference, as compared to 40% of Latino, 43% of Black, and 43% of Asian American voters. Older voters (59% of those 65 and over) were far more likely than voters age 18-29 (37%) to express confidence that the election will be free of federal interference.

“It is alarming, yet unsurprising, that close to half of California voters do not feel confident that our state’s elections will be free from federal interference,” said Sydney Fang, policy director for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders for Civic Empowerment Education Fund. “Voters are concerned about attempts to suppress votes, including threats of intimidation at the polls, attacks on vote by mail, and the seizure of ballots and voting machines. These threats more deeply impact the confidence of Latine, Black, Asian American, and young voters, who already experience significant barriers to voting.”

Table 3

**Confidence in local officials to conduct the election fairly & securely and the vote count will be accurate and that California’s elections this year will be free of federal interference
(among California registered voters)**

	<i>Local officials will conduct elections fairly/secure and vote count accurate</i>			<i>California’s elections this year will be free of federal interference</i>	
	Confident %	Not confident %		Confident %	Not confident %
Total registered voters	65	31		48	41
<u>Party registration</u>					
Democrats	79	18		45	51
Republicans	42	55		57	23
No Party Pref./other	62	31		46	43
<u>Age</u>					
18-29	58	34		37	51
30-39	59	35		43	46
40-49	58	36		46	44
50-64	66	30		52	36
65 or older	75	24		59	34
<u>Gender</u>					
Male	66	30		55	36
Female	63	32		42	46
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>					
White	71	26		55	36
Latino	55	39		40	48
Asian/Pacific Isle	64	29		43	46
Black/African Amer.	62	32		43	46

Differences between 100% and the sum of each subgroup’s “confident” and “not confident” percentages for each question equal the proportion of voters with no opinion.

Registered voters expressed greater confidence in whether local officials would conduct the June primary fairly and securely and the vote count from that election would be accurate. Fully 65% of voters were confident in local officials. Democrats (79%) and NPP/Other (62%) voters were more confident than were Republicans (42%). There were also some differences across racial groups, with non-Hispanic white voters the most confident (71%), but a majority of each racial group expressed confidence on balance. Similarly, older voters (75%) were the most confident in local officials, but 58% or more of each age group expressed confidence in local election officials.

“These results show that California voters care deeply about the future of our democracy and want their leaders to prioritize it,” said Jesse Salinas, President of the California Association of Clerks and Elections Officials and Yolo County Registrar of Voters. “Election officials agree that defending our elections and making voting secure and more accessible should be a priority for our state. That means real investment in the equipment and staff our offices need to stay secure against evolving threats, expanded education, and outreach to engage young people and underserved communities, and protecting election officials and voters from intimidation and harassment. With these investments, California can become the national model of democracy.”

About the Survey

The findings in this report are based on a *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The poll was conducted online in English and Spanish May 19-25, 2026, among 8,578 registered voters in California, including 5,472 likely voters (weighted N=3513). To enable the survey to also obtain voter preferences in the Los Angeles mayoral primary election, the survey also included an oversampling of registered voters in the city of Los Angeles. After the conclusion of data collection, the survey results were weighted to return the disproportionate sampling of L.A. City voters to its actual share of the state’s registered voter population. Funding for the questions was provided in part by the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr., Fund.

Data collection for the poll was completed by distributing email and text message invitations to stratified random samples of the state’s registered voters. Each email or text invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by the University and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminders were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further invitations.

Samples of the state’s registered voters were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California and were derived from information contained on the state’s voter registration rolls, which is a public document. The samples were stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents. A separate random sample of Spanish-speakers was drawn from the pool of registered voters requested that their official voting materials be sent to them in Spanish was also included to enable the survey to assess voter opinions among the state’s Spanish-speaking voters.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, the personally identifiable information of each voter that was listed on their voting record was purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, after the completion of data

collection, post-stratification weights were applied to the data file to align the overall sample to population characteristics of registered voters both statewide and within major regions of the state.

The sampling error associated with the survey results is difficult to calculate precisely because of sample stratification and post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that findings from the overall registered voter sample have a sampling error of about +/- 2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Question wording

When considering the candidates running for Governor of California in this election, how important were each of the following issues to you -- Defending democracy and protecting voting rights?
(asked of likely voters in the primary election)

President Trump is proposing to change the nation's election laws by imposing more restrictions that would make it harder for some citizens to vote in the nation's elections. How important is it for state leaders to prioritize efforts to defend democracy and protecting voting rights here in California?

Do you believe that state leaders are doing enough to defend democracy in California?

How confident are you that this year's elections in California will be free of federal interference?

How confident are you that your local election officials will conduct the June primary election fairly and securely, and that the vote count will be accurate?

How important is it to you that candidates running for state legislature in your district this year prioritize efforts to defend democracy and make voting more accessible in California's elections?

How important is it to you that candidates running for President in 2028 prioritize efforts to defend democracy and make voting more accessible in the nation's elections?

About the Institute of Governmental Studies

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication and public service. A component of the University of California system's flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS's co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Professor G. Cristina Mora.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. Veteran pollster Mark DiCamillo serves as director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll*. For a complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.