

UC Berkeley

IGS Poll

Title

Release #2019-15: Sanders and Warren Now Share the Lead in California. Preferences Unusually Fluid Three Months Before the State's Primary Election.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0qv6s2r9>

Author

DiCamillo, Mark

Publication Date

2019-12-05



Institute of Governmental Studies
126 Moses Hall
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720
Tel: 510-642-6835
Email: igs@berkeley.edu

Release #2019-15

Thursday, December 5, 2019

***Sanders and Warren Now Share the Lead in California
Preferences Unusually Fluid Three Months Before the State's Primary Election.***

By Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*
(c) 415-602-5594

Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, at 24%, and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, at 22%, are now the frontrunners in California's March Democratic presidential primary. The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds former Vice President Joe Biden dropping to third place, with 14% support, followed by South Bend, Indiana Mayor Pete Buttigieg at 12%. The poll, completed prior to U.S. Senator's Kamala Harris' announcement on Tuesday that she was dropping out of the race, found just 7% of the state's likely Democratic electorate backing her candidacy at the time of her withdrawal.

When voters supporting Harris are allocated to the other candidates based on her supporters' second choice preferences, the standings change only slightly, with Sanders at 25%, Warren 24%, Biden 17% and Buttigieg 13%.

The findings underline the fluidity of likely voter preferences in California just three months before the state's March 3 primary. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who formally entered the race during the polling period, was not much of a factor in the survey, receiving just 2% of the state's likely voter preferences.

California voters see a number of differences in the attributes that they ascribe to the leading candidates. For example, more voters here describe Biden as the candidate having the best chance of defeating President Donald Trump, and as being best qualified to serve as president. Yet, few view him as the Democrat with the sharpest mental abilities, or best able to understand the problems of voters like themselves, or comes closest to sharing their own values and beliefs or is most likely to bring about the right kind of change to Washington. Sanders scores best on these latter three qualities, while Warren is rated highest as having the sharpest mental abilities, with Buttigieg a close second.

The state's likely voters also express differing levels of concern about the septuagenarians in the race. For example, while about one in three of the state's Democratic primary voters express high levels of concern about Sanders' and Biden's age in serving as and effective Presidents, just 7% say this about Warren.

These findings come from the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed in English and Spanish online November 21-27 among 1,694 likely voters in the state's Democratic presidential primary.

Voter consideration of the Democratic candidates and their preferences

When likely voters in the California Democratic primary were asked which candidates they were giving at least some consideration to supporting in next March’s presidential election, about half cites Warren (58%) and Sanders (49%). Another four in ten were considering each of three other candidates -- Buttigieg (41%), Biden (39%), and Harris (38%), prior to her withdrawal. There is a big drop-off in the consideration of the other candidates, with entrepreneur Andrew Yang and New Jersey Senator Cory Booker mentioned by 17% each, and Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar by 14%.

Just 8% said they were giving consideration to supporting Bloomberg, who officially announced his entry into the race during the polling period. However, he began airing ads promoting his candidacy across the state on November 25, after most of the data collection for this survey had been completed.

Sanders and Warren now lead the field in first choice preference, with 24% of likely voters backing Sanders, and 22% choosing Warren. Biden was running third, with 14% support, while Buttigieg was in close pursuit, at 12%. Just 7% were choosing Harris. None of the others were receiving more than 3% support, while 8% of likely voters did not offer a preference.

Warren was mentioned most often as Californians’ second-choice preference. When voters first and second choice preferences were combined, about four in ten of the state’s likely voters cite either Warren or Sanders among their top two choices, while about one in four mention Biden or Buttigieg.

Table 1
California voter consideration and support for the Democratic presidential candidates
(among likely voters in California’s Democratic primary)

	Considering support %	1st choice %	2nd choice %	1st/2nd choices (combined) %
Elizabeth Warren	58	22	20	42
Bernie Sanders	49	24	14	38
Pete Buttigieg	41	12	12	24
Joe Biden	39	14	12	26
Kamala Harris **	38	7	9	16
Andrew Yang	17	3	4	7
Cory Booker	17	1	3	4
Amy Klobuchar	14	3	3	6
Michael Bloomberg	8	2	1	3
Julian Castro	8	1	2	3
Tom Steyer	8	1	1	2
Tulsi Gabbard	4	1	2	3
Deval Patrick	2	*	*	*
Michael Bennet	1	1	*	1
Marianne Williamson	1	*	*	*
Steve Bullock **	1	*	*	*
John Delaney	1	*	*	*
Joe Sestak **	*	*	*	*
Undecided/none	8	9	16	9

* less than ½ of 1% ** Harris, Bullock and Sestak have since dropped out of the presidential race

Preferences remain fluid, with the leading candidates maintaining differing bases of support

Results from the latest poll demonstrate the fluidity of Californians' first choice preferences for the Democratic nomination. The poll's last sampling of likely voters in September had Warren leading the field, with 29% of likely voters backing her candidacy, followed by Biden at 20% and Sanders at 19%. Warren's current 22% standing in the poll represents significant erosion in support for her candidacy, which appears to be working to the benefit of Sanders. Buttigieg's growing support in California also appears to be coming at Biden's expense, as Buttigieg polls well among older voters, a former Biden stronghold.

Sanders' strongest base is with the state's younger voters, especially those under age 30. He also leads among Latinos, voters who are very liberal in politics and among likely voters living in Northern California counties outside the San Francisco Bay Area.

Voters with a post graduate education form the base of Warren's strongest supporters in the state. She is also competitive among very liberal voters, voters 30-39, and leads in the Central Valley.

There are wide differences in voter preferences for Biden between the moderate and liberal wings of the likely electorate. The former Vice President is the clear leader among voters describing themselves as moderate to conservative in politics. Yet, these voters comprise fewer than a third of likely voters in the Democratic primary. On the other hand, Biden runs poorly among the state's much larger constituency of liberals, especially very liberal voters, with whom he polls just 6%.

Prior to her departure from the race Harris was failing to capture significant support from most of the state's major Democratic primary voting blocs.

Table 2
First preferences for California's Democratic presidential primary across subgroups
(among likely voters in California's Democratic primary)

	<u>Sanders</u>	<u>Warren</u>	<u>Biden</u>	<u>Buttigieg</u>	<u>Harris</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total - Late November 2019	24	22	14	12	7	12	9
September 2019	19	29	20	6	8	10	8
Party registration							
(.82)* Democrats	23	22	15	11	8	11	10
(.18) No Party Preference	26	20	12	15	4	15	8
Political ideology							
(.37) Very liberal	35	33	6	8	5	9	4
(.33) Somewhat liberal	21	21	13	16	8	13	8
(.30) Moderate/conservative	12	9	26	11	10	15	17
Age							
(.17) 18-29	46	21	3	5	9	10	6
(.17) 30-39	36	29	6	9	6	10	4
(.15) 40-49	27	21	14	8	8	13	9
(.26) 50-64	16	21	20	15	7	9	12
(.25) 65 or older	6	18	22	17	7	18	12
Region							
(.30) Los Angeles County	27	21	15	9	8	12	5
(.14) South Coast	23	22	16	14	5	13	7
(.13) Other Southern California	23	17	18	12	5	10	15
(.13) Central Valley	20	29	12	14	5	8	12
(.25) San Francisco Bay Area	21	22	13	12	7	13	12
(.05) Other Northern California**	30	19	10	9	4	16	12
Gender							
(.40) Male	25	21	17	14	5	13	5
(.60) Female	23	23	13	10	9	10	12
Race/ethnicity							
(.54) White non-Hispanic	19	27	12	18	6	11	7
(.29) Latino	32	11	19	3	12	10	13
(.21) English dominant	37	13	14	4	9	10	13
(.08) Spanish dominant**	21	6	31	-	18	10	14
(.07) African American**	19	29	27	5	3	12	5
(.08) Asian American**	26	24	9	7	6	16	12
Education							
(.21) High school or less	29	14	13	9	14	10	11
(.32) Some college/trade school	27	17	20	10	5	10	11
(.23) College graduate	25	25	12	14	6	12	6
(.24) Post-graduate work	14	33	11	14	6	13	9

* denotes share of the likely Democratic primary voters reporting this characteristic ** small sample sizes

Democratic primary voters see differences in the attributes of the leading candidates

Californians likely to vote in the March primary ascribe differing attributes to the leading candidates.

For example, more voters describe Biden as having the best chance of defeating President Donald Trump in next year’s general election, and as being best qualified to serve as president. On the other hand, few view him as the Democrat with the sharpest mental abilities, or best able to understand the problems of voters like themselves, or who comes closest to sharing their own values and beliefs or is most likely to bring about the right kind of change to Washington.

Sanders scores best on these latter three qualities, leading the field as the Democrat who best understands the problems of voters like themselves, is most able to bring the right kind of change to Washington, and comes closest to sharing their own values and beliefs.

By contrast, Warren is seen as the candidate with the sharpest mental abilities, with Buttigieg a close second. Warren herself places a close second to Sanders as the candidate most likely to bring the right kind of change to Washington.

Table 3
Perceived attributes of the leading Democratic presidential candidates
(among likely voters in California’s Democratic primary)

	<u>Sanders</u>	<u>Warren</u>	<u>Biden</u>	<u>Buttigieg</u>	<u>Harris</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>None/not sure</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Has the best chance of beating President Donald Trump in the November general election	22	13	29	6	3	10	17
Would do the most to bring about the right kind of change to Washington	28	23	9	12	6	12	10
Comes closest to sharing your own values and beliefs	27	19	7	13	9	13	12
Best understands the problems of people like you	28	19	6	11	8	13	15
Has the sharpest mental abilities	12	24	5	19	10	15	15
Has the experience and is best qualified to serve as president	24	21	28	5	5	9	8

Greater concerns expressed about Sanders’ and Biden’s age than Warren’s

A much-discussed aspect of this year’s Democratic presidential candidate field is that four of them, including three of the current poll leaders, are septuagenarians. This includes Sanders, who is 78, Biden and Bloomberg who are both 77, and Warren who just turned 70.

Californians likely to vote in the March primary voice differing levels of concern about the four candidates. Greatest concern is expressed relative to the ages of Sanders and Biden, with about one in three saying they are extremely or very concerned that their age may hinder their ability to serve as effective Presidents. Just 7% say this about Warren, while 17% say this about Bloomberg.

Table 4
How concerned are you that the age of the older Democratic candidates in the race will negatively affect their ability to serve effectively as President (among likely voters in California’s Democratic primary)

	<u>Extremely/very concerned</u> <u>%</u>	<u>Somewhat concerned</u> <u>%</u>	<u>Not too/not at all concerned</u> <u>%</u>
Bernie Sanders	35	27	38
Joe Biden	33	27	40
Michael Bloomberg	17	23	59
Elizabeth Warren	7	15	78

California voter impressions of the Democratic candidates vary

Likely voters hold varying impressions of the leading Democratic candidates. At one end of the scale are Sanders and Warren, both of whom are very well known and are viewed favorably by the Democratic electorate. However, in Warren’s case the proportion of likely voters offering a positive view of her declined ten points since September, from 77% to 67%.

Over this same period Biden’s image among voters has also taken a hit, declining from a 57% to 34% positive assessment in September to a more divided view, 47% to 40% favorable to unfavorable rating now.

Most likely voters in California continue to a highly positive impression of Buttigieg, although one in three are still unable to offer an opinion. The same can be said of the image profiles of Booker and Yang, who are viewed quite favorably by those who offer an opinion, although nearly half are unable to do so.

At the other end of the scale are Bloomberg and Hawaii Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, each of whom were not well known to large segments of the state’s electorate, with each maintaining a more negative than positive image with voters at the time of the survey.

Table 5
Trend of image ratings of the Democratic presidential candidates
(among likely voters in California's Democratic primary)

	<u>Favorable</u> %	<u>Unfavorable</u> %	<u>No opinion</u> %	<u>Net favorability score</u> %
<u>Bernie Sanders</u>				
Late November 2019	68	21	11	+47
September 2019	64	26	10	+38
June 2019	67	27	6	+40
<u>Elizabeth Warren</u>				
Late November 2019	67	16	17	+51
September 2019	77	10	13	+67
June 2019	73	14	13	+59
<u>Pete Buttigieg</u>				
Late November 2019	53	14	33	+39
September 2019	51	14	35	+37
June 2019	52	10	38	+42
<u>Joe Biden</u>				
Late November 2019	47	40	13	+7
September 2019	57	34	9	+23
June 2019	67	28	5	+39
<u>Cory Booker</u>				
Late November 2019	42	16	42	+26
September 2019	41	19	40	+22
June 2019	47	13	40	+34
<u>Amy Klobuchar</u>				
Late November 2019	28	19	53	+9
September 2019	26	21	53	+5
June 2019	27	15	58	+12
<u>Andrew Yang</u>				
Late November 2019	38	14	48	+24
September 2019	27	22	51	+5
June 2019	12	12	76	0
<u>Michael Bloomberg</u>				
Late November 2019	15	40	45	-25
<u>Tom Steyer</u>				
Late November 2019	18	22	60	-4
<u>Tulsi Gabbard</u>				
Late November 2019	11	40	49	-29

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 administered online in English and Spanish November 21-27, 2019 among 3,482 registered voters statewide, 1,694 of whom are considered likely voters in California's Democratic presidential primary.

The survey was administered by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state's registered voters. Once the survey questionnaire and email invitations had been finalized, they were translated into Spanish. Each email 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. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to participate.

Samples of registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of voter listings derived from information contained on the state's official voter registration rolls. Prior to the distribution of emails, the overall sample of voter listings was stratified in an attempt to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

To protect the anonymity of survey respondents, voters' email addresses and all other personally identifiable information derived from the original voter listing were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number. At the conclusion of the data processing, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample of voters responding to the survey to population characteristics of the state's overall registered voter population. Likely voters were identified based on a voter's stated intention to vote in next year's primary election and factoring in their history of voting in past elections.

The sampling error associated with the results from the survey are difficult to calculate precisely due to the effects of sample stratification and the post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that the results from the likely Democratic presidential primary electorate are subject to an approximate sampling error of +/- 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Detailed tabulations reporting the results to each question included in this report can be found at the *Berkeley IGS Poll* website at <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.

Questions Asked

Thinking about California's March 2020 Democratic primary election for president. Which candidates are you currently considering supporting? Select as many names as those you are giving some consideration to supporting? If California's Democratic primary for president were being held today, who would be your first choice? Who would be your second choice?

The next question asks about the Democratic candidates who participated in the most recent presidential debate on November 20. Please indicate whether your opinion of each candidate is favorable, unfavorable or whether you don't know enough about him or her to say? (**NAMES RANDOMIZED**) Michael Bloomberg is also reportedly giving serious consideration to becoming a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination. Is your opinion of him favorable, unfavorable or don't you know enough about him to say?

Which of these candidates do you think (has the best chance of beating President Donald Trump in the November general election) (has the sharpest mental abilities) (best understands the problems of people

like you) (has the experience and is best qualified to serve as president) (would do the most to bring about the right kind of change to Washington) (comes closest to sharing your own values and beliefs)? **(ATTRIBUTE ORDER RANDOMIZED)**

How concerned are you that (Joe Biden's) (Bernie Sanders') (Elizabeth Warren's) (Michael Bloomberg's) age would negatively affect (his) (her) ability to serve effectively as President should (he) (she) win election in 2020? **(ORDERING OF NAMES RANDOMIZED)**

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 acting co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Associate Professor 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. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.