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While Californians view Newsom in very positive terms, clouds loom with regard to his managing the state's impending budget deficit.

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds that when state voters are asked their opinions of six high profile California politicians, Governor Gavin Newsom receives the best rating, with 54% viewing him favorably and 41% unfavorable. Newsom job approval rating is similar (55% approve vs. 39% disapprove). Yet, clouds loom on the horizon as majorities say they are not confident that he and the legislature will be able to manage the state's impending budget deficit in a way that will avoid significant cutbacks to programs and services.

Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vice President Kamala Harris receive the next largest proportions of favorable voter appraisals, with slightly less than half viewing each favorably, although about as many voters also hold unfavorable views of them.

While less well-known to the state's voters, U.S. Senator Alex Padilla is maintaining a highly positive image with those who offer an opinion. This contrasts with the appraisals given to his counterpart in the Senate, Dianne Feinstein, whom more voters now view negatively than positively. Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy fares the poorest in these rankings, with nearly twice as many voters viewing him unfavorably as favorably.

Voter ratings of each politician are highly partisan. Yet, opposite party views of Newsom, Pelosi, and Harris are more extreme than the others, as greater than eight in ten Republicans say they hold "strongly unfavorable" opinions of each of the three.

IGS Co-Director G. Cristina Mora notes that "the results provide cautious optimism for Newsom as he remains popular even in times of high inflation and inequality across the state. Questions remain, however, about how long his popularity will last as Californians look to the immediate future."

Governor Newsom remains California's most popular elected official

Newsom won re-election last year receiving 59% of the votes cast, in an election with a turnout of about half of the state's nearly 22 million registered voters. The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll*, which polled a representative sample of the overall electorate, finds Newsom to be

California’s most popular politician, with a 54% majority saying they view the Governor favorably, while 41% hold an unfavorable opinion.

The poll also asked voters their opinions of five other prominent California elected officials. Receiving the next largest proportion of favorable responses are former Speaker Pelosi and Vice President Harris, whom 48% and 46% respectively, view favorably. However, in both cases about as many voters view each negatively.

While newly elected Senator Padilla is less well-known, the early impressions that voters have of him are quite positive, with 41% viewing him favorably and 23% holding an unfavorable opinion. This contrasts with how Californians now view Feinstein, his counterpart in the Senate, whose negatives now exceed her positives 43% to 37%. Speaker McCarthy, the only Republican on the list, receives the poorest evaluations, with about twice as many holding an unfavorable opinion (53%) as a favorable view (28%).

While assessments of each politician are highly partisan, the partisan antipathy toward some of the officeholders is more extreme than for the others. For example, about nine in ten Republican voters view Newsom, Pelosi, and Harris negatively, nearly all of whom describe their feelings as strongly unfavorable.

Image ratings of the state’s most influential elected officials among California registered voters							
	Favorable (total) %	Strongly favorable %	Somewhat favorable %	Unfavorable (total) %	Somewhat unfavorable %	Strongly unfavorable %	No opinion %
Gavin Newsom (D)	54	26	28	41	11	30	5
Democrats	80	44	36	15	10	5	5
Republicans	8	4	4	89	7	82	3
No Party Pref/other	48	15	34	45	16	29	7
Nancy Pelosi (D)	48	26	22	45	11	34	7
Democrats	75	45	30	17	11	6	8
Republicans	6	2	4	91	6	85	3
No Party Pref/other	38	15	23	52	17	35	10
Kamala Harris (D)	46	17	29	46	14	33	8
Democrats	72	30	42	20	13	7	8
Republicans	6	1	5	90	7	83	4
No Party Pref/other	38	11	27	52	18	34	10
Alex Padilla (D)	41	16	25	23	10	13	36
Democrats	59	27	32	8	5	3	33
Republicans	13	3	10	52	18	34	35
No Party Pref/other	37	9	28	24	13	11	39
Dianne Feinstein (D)	37	12	25	43	18	25	20
Democrats	55	20	35	24	16	8	21
Republicans	10	2	8	77	18	59	13
No Party Pref/other	31	8	23	45	20	25	24
Kevin McCarthy (R)	28	8	20	53	16	37	19
Democrats	13	3	10	68	14	54	19
Republicans	66	22	44	22	13	9	12
No Party Pref/other	23	4	18	53	21	32	24

Most voters also view Newsom’s job performance positively

The survey also updated voter opinions about the job Newsom is doing as governor. The results indicate that they are generally in line with their overall image impressions of him, with 55% saying they approve of Newsom’s performance in office, while 39% disapprove.

And, similar to the electorate's image ratings of the Governor, assessments of Newsom’s job performance are also extremely partisan. While 82% of the state’s Democratic voters say they approve of the job the Governor is doing, 88% of Republicans disapprove, nearly all of whom disapprove strongly.

Table 2
Trend of the overall job performance of Governor Gavin Newsom
(among California registered voters)

	Approve (total) %	<i>Approve strongly %</i>	<i>Approve somewhat %</i>	Disapprove (total) %	<i>Disapprove somewhat %</i>	<i>Disapprove strongly %</i>
February 2023	55	25	30	39	10	29
August 2022	53	20	33	42	13	29
February 2022	48	16	32	47	16	31
September 2021	50	20	30	42	11	31
July 2021	50	20	30	42	12	30
April 2021	52	21	31	43	13	30
January 2021	46	14	32	48	17	31
September 2020	64	25	39	36	13	23
September 2019	60	18	42	39	12	27
June 2019	57	15	42	42	17	25
Party (Feb. 2023)						
Democrats	82	41	41	12	8	4
Republicans	8	4	4	88	8	80
No Party	49	15	34	43	16	27
Pref./other						

Note: In this and succeeding tables, the differences between the sum of each row’s percentages and 100% equal the proportion of voters with no opinion.

Yet, clouds loom on the horizon as voters fear the impact of the state’s budget deficit

However, when voters are asked about California’s impending budget deficit, which is expected to exceed \$20 billion over the next fiscal year, most express fears that it will seriously impact state programs and services. Specifically, the poll finds 57% of voters lack confidence in the governor and state legislature in their ability to deal with the deficit without having to make significant cutbacks in the programs and services the state provides.

Views about the impact that the budget deficit will have on the state are highly partisan. Republicans are nearly universal in their skepticism of the governor’s and legislature’s ability to painlessly manage the deficit. In addition, more than twice as many non-partisan voters say they are not confident as those who say they are confident in their ability to manage the deficit without having to make significant cutbacks. Democrats take a more optimistic view, with 60% expressing confidence in the governor and the legislature's ability to deal with the deficit, while 34% are not confident.

Table 3
Voter confidence that the Governor and legislature will be able to deal with state budget deficit without making significant changes to state programs and services
(among California registered voters)

	Confident (total) %	<i>Very confident %</i>	<i>Somewhat confident %</i>	Not confident (total) %	<i>Not too confident %</i>	<i>Not at all confident %</i>
Total registered voters	37	11	26	57	26	31
Democrats	60	20	40	34	26	8
Republicans	5	2	3	91	18	73
No Party Pref./other	28	6	22	64	31	33

Voter support for one of Newsom’s more contentious proposals to reduce the deficit

One of the Governor’s proposals to reduce next year’s budget deficit has generated a fair amount of criticism from environmentalists and members of his own party. This relates to his call to scale back funding that had previously been budgeted for zero emission vehicles and climate change. Yet, when voters are asked about this, 62% favor this proposal, including majorities of Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans.

Table 4
Voter opinions of Governor Newsom’s proposal to scale back funding previously budgeted to promote zero emission vehicles by about 10% to help reduce the budget deficit
(among California registered voters)

	Favor (total) %	<i>Favor strongly %</i>	<i>Favor somewhat %</i>	Oppose (total) %	<i>Oppose somewhat %</i>	<i>Oppose strongly %</i>
Total registered voters	62	30	32	26	15	11
Democrats	59	21	38	29	18	11
Republicans	70	48	22	19	6	13
No Party Pref./other	60	29	31	26	15	11

Pelosi receives high marks for her performance as House Speaker, but voters have low expectations for McCarthy

In recent years two Californians, Democrat Pelosi and Republican McCarthy, have risen through the ranks of their respective parties in Congress to be elected Speaker of the House.

Pelosi served as House Speaker from 2007-2011 and again from 2019 through the beginning of this year. McCarthy succeeded Pelosi this year after the Republicans won majority control of the House in last year’s Congressional elections.

However, Californians’ opinions of the two diverge considerably. When asked to assess the job Pelosi did during her two tenures as House Speaker, 45% offer a positive rating of excellent or good, 15% say fair, while 32% rate her performance as poor or very poor.

By contrast, when asked about their expectations of the job McCarthy will do as the new House Speaker, home state voters offer a much more negative assessment, with twice as many thinking he will do a poor or very poor job (42%) as feel his performance will be excellent or good (21%).

Assessments are highly partisan, and Pelosi clearly benefits from this since there are about twice as many registered Democrats as Republicans in the state. Yet, when comparing each’s ratings among their own party members, the expectations that Republicans have of the job McCarthy is likely to do are not nearly as positive as those given Pelosi’s by her fellow Democrats. In addition, twice as many non-partisan voters offer negative as positive assessments of the job they think McCarthy will do as House Speaker, which is a more critical assessment than the ratings they give to Pelosi’s tenure.

Table 5
Voter appraisals of the job Nancy Pelosi did as House Speaker and voter expectations of the job Kevin McCarthy will do as the new House Speaker (among California registered voters)

	Excellent/ good %	Fair %	Poor/ very poor %	No opinion %
Nancy Pelosi	45	15	32	8
Democrats	71	15	7	7
Republicans	5	9	82	4
No Party Preference/other	35	20	33	12
Kevin McCarthy	21	18	42	18
Democrats	11	13	58	18
Republicans	49	28	11	12
No Party Preference/other	16	19	39	26

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 February 14-20, 2023 among 7,512 California registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The poll was administered by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state’s registered voters. 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 receive further email invitations.

Samples of California registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in the state and were derived from information contained on the official voter registration rolls. The sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents.

To protect the anonymity of 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 during data processing. In addition, after the completion of data collection, post-stratification weights were applied to the survey data file align the sample of registered voters to population characteristics of the registered voters statewide and within major regions of the state.

The sampling error associated with the survey results are difficult to calculate precisely because of sample stratification and the post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that findings based on the overall sample of registered voters statewide are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Question wording

Please indicate whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each of the following political figures, or whether you don't know enough about them to offer an opinion? (SEE RELEASE FOR POLITICAL LEADERS LISTED)

Last year California Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi completed her final term as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Looking back, how would you rate the job Pelosi did as House Speaker?

Another California Congressman, Kevin McCarthy, was just elected as the new Speaker of the U.S. House of Representative. What kind of job do you think Kevin McCarthy will do as House Speaker?

Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the way Gavin Newsom is handling his job as Governor of California?

It is estimated that California will be facing a state budget deficit of more than \$20 billion in the next fiscal year. How confident are you that Governor Newsom and the state legislature will be able to balance the budget without making significant changes to the programs and services that the state provides?

Governor Newsom has proposed scaling back by about 10% some of the money that he had previously budgeted to promote zero emission vehicles to help combat climate change. Do you favor or oppose the Governor scaling back this part of the budget to reduce the deficit?

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 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 seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion and generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a listing of reports issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll*, go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.