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## IGS Poll

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Release #2023-09: Strong Bipartisan Support for Changing Some of the Rules Applicable to the State Ballot Referendum Process

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## ***Strong Bipartisan Support for Changing Some of the Rules Applicable to the State Ballot Referendum Process.***

By Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*  
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The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* of California registered voters finds strong bipartisan support for making a number of changes to the rules that apply to state ballot referenda. Under California law proponents or opponents of an existing state law can use the referendum process to gather signatures to qualify a referendum and have voters weigh in and vote to either uphold or overturn the law.

By a 50% to 15% margin the poll finds that voters would back a proposed change to the way signatures are collected when attempting to qualify a referendum for the ballot. The change would require that when gathering signatures, a minimum proportion of them should be gathered by volunteers rather than allowing them all to be collected by paid signature gatherers. The poll also found that very few Californians (6%) understand that none of the signatures currently needed to qualify a referendum for the ballot need to be collected by volunteers.

Large majorities of voters also say they would back a number of other proposals aimed at making changes to the state's ballot referendum process. These include:

- Simplifying the descriptions that appear on the ballot to make it clearer to voters as to whether the intent of the referendum is to uphold or overturn a law (81% support).
- Requiring paid signature gatherers to sign a statement stating that the descriptions they give to voters when collecting signatures to qualify a referendum for the ballot are accurate and truthful (80%), and to revoke the license of those who give voters inaccurate information (79%).
- Requiring that the top three funders backing a referendum be listed on all pages of the petitions used by signature gatherers to collect voter signatures (76%), and that the official ballot summaries provided to voters prior to an election identify both the top three funders supporting the referendum as well as the top three funders opposing the referendum (75%).

All of these proposals receive broad-based bipartisan backing from the state's electorate.

The poll was conducted on behalf of the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, a private foundation established in 1953 by Evelyn D. and Walter A. Haas through its Democracy program. The objective

was to test a number of the elements proposed in AB421, an Assembly bill which aims to modify a number of procedures relating to the state’s century-old referendum process.

Observed Eric Schickler, C0-Director of IGS, “One of the most striking aspects of the results is the bipartisan nature of voter support for these proposals. There are relatively few areas in today’s political world in which the state’s Democrats and Republicans can find common ground, but putting in place these relatively modest changes to the state’s referendum process appears to be one of them.”

**Very few voters recognize that none of the signatures collected to qualify a referendum for the election ballot need to come from volunteers**

When California voters are asked to estimate what proportion of the signatures collected to qualify a referendum for the state election ballot now need to gathered by volunteers as opposed to paid signature gatherers, just 6% are able to choose the correct answer, which is that none of these signatures are required to gathered by volunteers.

Most California voters (57%) volunteer that they don’t know the answer, while the remaining 37% offer a wide range of incorrect responses.

	%
0% (no minimum)	6
10%	3
20%	2
30%	2
40%	1
50% (half)	11
60%	4
70%	3
80%	2
90%	1
100% (all)	8
Don’t know	57

**Bipartisan support for establishing a minimum volunteer signature requirement when qualifying ballot referenda**

The poll finds broad-based support for requiring that a minimum proportion of the signatures collected to qualify a referendum for the ballot be gathered by volunteers as opposed to paid signature gatherers. Statewide over three times as many voters support establishing such a requirement (50% to 15%), although 35% have no opinion.

Pluralities of voters of all political stripes endorse creating such a requirement. Among registered Democrats supporters of the change outnumber opponents 52% to 12%. Republicans back the idea 44% to 19%, while No Party Preference voters endorse it 50% to 16%. Support also includes large majorities of both men and women, voters of all ages, and across each of the state’s major racial and ethnic subgroups.

<b>Table 2</b>			
<b>Would you support or oppose requiring that a minimum proportion of the signatures collected to qualify a referendum for the ballot be gathered by volunteers?</b>			
<b>(among California registered voters)</b>			
	<b>Support</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>35</b>
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	52	12	36
Republicans	44	19	37
No party pref./other	50	16	34
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Strongly liberal	56	7	37
Somewhat liberal	44	15	41
Moderate	51	15	34
Somewhat conservative	50	18	32
Strongly conservative	43	21	36
<u>Age</u>			
18-29	40	17	43
30-39	44	14	42
40-49	51	13	36
50-64	55	12	33
65 or older	55	18	27
<u>Gender</u>			
Female	49	11	40
Male	51	19	30
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	50	15	35
Latino	45	14	41
Asian/Pacific Islander	50	16	34
Black	56	19	25

**Bipartisan support for making other modifications to the state referendum process**

The poll also finds strong bipartisan support for making a number of other modifications to the state referendum process.

Greater than eight in ten (81%) support simplifying the descriptions that appear on the ballot to make it clearer to voters whether the intent of a referendum is to uphold or overturn an existing state law, including 84% of Democrats, 81% of Republicans and 75% of No Party Preference voters.

Eighty percent also favor a proposal to require paid signature gatherers to sign a statement that the descriptions they give to voters when collecting signatures to qualify a referendum are accurate and truthful and 79% support revoking the licenses of signature gatherers who knowingly give inaccurate

information to voters. Support for both statements also includes greater than three in four Democrats, Republicans and No Party Preference voters.

Seventy-six percent favor the idea of requiring that the names of the top three funders backing the referendum be printed on each page of the petition presented to voters. And an identical proportion (76%) endorses listing both the top three funders backing a referendum as well as the top three funders opposing to the referendum on the official ballot summaries provided to voters. Both proposals also receive strong bipartisan support.

**Table 3**  
**Voter views about other proposed changes to the referendum process**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	Support %	Oppose %	No opinion %
<b>Simplify the description that appears on the ballot so voters can clearly identify whether the referendum they are voting on is designed to uphold or overturn an existing law.</b>	<b><u>81</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>	<b><u>15</u></b>
Democrat	84	4	12
Republican	81	4	15
No Party Preference/other	75	6	19
<b>Require that signature gatherers sign a statement stating, under penalty of perjury, that the descriptions and information they gave to voters about the referendum were accurate and truthful.</b>	<b><u>80</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>	<b><u>16</u></b>
Democrat	83	4	13
Republican	78	5	17
No Party Preference/other	76	5	19
<b>Revoke the license of signature gatherers who knowingly give voters inaccurate or untruthful information when asking them to sign a petition to qualify a referendum for the ballot.</b>	<b><u>79</u></b>	<b><u>6</u></b>	<b><u>15</u></b>
Democrat	84	3	13
Republican	76	8	16
No Party Preference/other	75	7	19
<b>Require that the names of the top three funders of a referendum appear on each page of the petitions used by signature gatherers when asking voters to sign a petition to qualify a referendum for the ballot.</b>	<b><u>76</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>	<b><u>18</u></b>
Democrat	81	3	16
Republican	71	9	20
No Party Preference/other	74	5	20
<b>Require that the top three funders in support of and the top three funders opposed to a referendum are listed as part of the official ballot summaries provided to voters.</b>	<b><u>76</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>	<b><u>19</u></b>
Democrat	80	5	16
Republican	71	7	22
No Party Preference/other	74	4	22

### **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 May 17-22, 2023 among 7,465 California registered voters. Funding for examining voter opinions about the referendum process was provided to IGS under a grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

The poll was conducted 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 derived from information contained on the official voter registration rolls and provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists.

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

### **Question wording**

The next few questions are about the rules that govern ballot referenda which ask voters whether they want to uphold or overturn an existing state law.

To the best of your knowledge, of the total number of signatures collected to qualify a referendum for the ballot what's the minimum number that must be gathered by volunteers, as opposed to those gathered by paid signature gatherers -- 0% (no minimum), 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50% (half), 60%, 70%, 80%, 90% 100% (all of them)?

It happens that none of the signatures collected to qualify a referendum for the ballot currently are required to be gathered by volunteers. Would you support or oppose changing the law to require that some minimum proportion of the signatures collected to qualify a referendum for the ballot are gathered by volunteers?

Other proposals have been made to change the state's referendum process. Please indicate whether you would support or oppose each of the following five proposals. (*See release for statements*)

### **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, 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 copy of the detailed tabulations to this report or a listing of past poll reports issued by the poll, please visit <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.

### **About the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund**

The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund works to advance equality and justice so every person can thrive and live life with dignity and hope. Rooted in the Bay Area, it focuses on a set of issues that include: building a fairer, more representative democracy in California; advancing more humane approaches to immigration and expanding opportunities for immigrant youth and families; and making higher education more affordable for lower-income California students. It has awarded over \$670 million in grants since its founding in 1953.