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Newsom holds a clear lead among Democratic voters in California should he decide to run for president in 2028

-- Harris places a distant fourth in her home state --

by Mark DiCamillo
Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

Governor Gavin Newsom holds a large early lead over other possible Democratic contenders for the 2028 Democratic presidential nomination among rank-and-file Democrats in his home state.

According to the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll*, 28% of the state's Democratic voters now select Newsom as their first choice to be their party's nominee should he launch a bid for president in 2028. New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez places a distant second at 14%, followed by former Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg at 11%.

Former Vice President and California Senator Kamala Harris trails, receiving just 9% support among Democratic voters in her home state, while Arizona Senator Mark Kelly places fifth at 7%. None of nine other possible Democratic contenders listed in the poll received more than 3% of California Democratic voter preferences, while 19% were undecided.

After Democratic voters offered their first choices as their party's presidential nominee, voters were asked for their second-choice preferences. In this setting, Newsom receives the support of another 14% of California Democrats, Harris obtains another 11%, followed by Buttigieg with 10% and Ocasio-Cortez at 8%.

Thus, when Democrats choosing Newsom as their second choice are combined with those citing him as their first choice, about four in ten of his home state Democrats say they would back him as their first or second choice for president should he decide to run in 2028.

The poll also updated Newsom's job performance rating as Governor among the state's overall electorate, and the results show that he receives only mixed reviews, with 48% approving and 48% disapproving. This represents a decline from a more positive 51% approve to 43% disapprove score he received in an August *Berkeley IGS Poll*. Opinions of Newsom's job performance as governor are highly polarized by party, with 76% of Democrats approving, compared to just 5% among Republicans.

IGS Co-Director G. Cristina Mora observed that "the results seem to suggest that Newsom's more aggressive stance vis-à-vis President Trump, particularly through social media, appears to be resonating with Democratic voters in his home state. Though Californians may hold mixed views on

his gubernatorial tenure overall, they do see him as the strongest counter to Trump and MAGA candidates. Harris's earlier presidential defeat, compounded by what appear to be persistent voter biases against women and candidates of color, may also be shaping these early numbers."

Table 1

1st and 2nd Choice Preferences for the 2028 Democratic Presidential Nomination
(among registered Democrats in California)

	1st choice	2nd choice
	%	%
Gavin Newsom, Governor of California	28	14
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, U.S. representative from New York	14	8
Pete Buttigieg, former U.S. Secretary of Transportation	11	10
Kamala Harris, former Vice President	9	11
Mark Kelly, U.S. Senator from Arizona	7	6
J.B. Pritzker, Governor of Illinois	3	5
Cory Booker, U.S. Senator from New Jersey	2	3
Ro Khanna, U.S. Representative from California	2	3
Josh Shapiro, Governor of Pennsylvania	2	4
Gretchen Whitmer, Governor of Michigan	2	3
Andy Beshear, Governor of Kentucky	2	3
Wes Moore, Governor of Maryland	1	1
Gina Raimondo, former Secretary of Commerce	*	1
Rahm Emanuel, former Mayor of Chicago	*	1
Undecided	19	26

* Less than ½ of 1%.

Democratic presidential preferences across subgroups of the state's Democratic Party

Newsom's early support for President among California Democrats is broad-based, as a third or more of his home state Democrats choose him as their first or second choice for president across nearly all major Democratic voter subgroups. However, some significant subgroup differences are uncovered by the poll. For example, Newsom is backed by larger proportions of Democrats ages 50 or older than among voters under age 40. Latino and Black Democratic registrants are also more supportive than white or Asian American voters.

Ocasio-Cortez's Democratic support exceeds Newsom's among the state's younger voters and is statistically equivalent to Newsom's among California Democrats who identify as strongly liberal in politics. Buttigieg's Democratic support in this state is greatest among whites, 30% of whom choose him as their 1st or 2nd choice to be the Democratic nominee for president in 2028. He also does well among Democratic liberals and homeowners.

Harris, like Newsom, receives greater early support from the state's Latino and Black Democratic voters than from white and Asian American Democrats. She also polls better among renters and Democrats under age 30. However, she receives less support from strongly liberal voters, many of whom prefer Ocasio-Cortez, than from Democratic moderates or the relatively small segment of conservatives within the Democratic party.

<i>Table 2</i> 1st or 2nd Choice Preferences for the 2028 Democratic Presidential nomination across major subgroups of the Democratic electorate											
	Newsom %	AOC %	Buttigieg %	Harris %	Kelly %	Pritzker %	Shapiro %	Booker %	Khanna %	Other %	Undecided %
<u>Political ideology</u>											
Strongly liberal	37	38	27	17	10	9	6	6	7	13	12
Somewhat liberal	42	13	24	20	18	9	6	6	2	16	18
Moderate/conservative	44	12	12	25	14	5	6	4	5	12	26
<u>Age</u>											
18-29	32	38	10	28	4	5	3	2	8	5	26
30-39	32	39	19	23	7	7	2	3	6	11	20
40-49	40	23	25	18	12	8	4	4	6	14	20
50-64	49	12	24	22	15	6	7	6	3	15	17
65 or older	45	8	27	13	23	11	11	9	3	19	14
<u>Gender</u>											
Male	42	23	20	16	15	9	7	3	5	16	19
Female	39	22	22	24	12	7	5	7	4	12	19
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>											
White	36	20	30	14	19	11	9	6	4	18	14
Latino	53	26	8	31	18	3	2	4	5	7	21
Asian/Pacific Isle	29	27	23	15	9	8	4	2	6	8	29
Black/African Amer.	49	13	6	37	13	3	7	7	5	21	15
<u>Tenure</u>											
Homeowner	41	17	28	13	20	9	8	7	3	18	15
Renter/other	40	28	16	26	8	7	5	4	6	11	21
<u>Region</u>											
Los Angeles County	39	28	19	16	12	7	7	6	5	13	23
San Diego County	47	25	17	19	18	8	4	4	3	12	18
Orange County	44	17	24	27	10	7	6	7	4	13	17
Inland Empire	46	24	20	29	15	5	6	4	4	10	17
Central Coast	36	21	25	35	20	8	4	4	2	9	11
Central Valley	40	22	23	24	15	7	4	4	6	12	17
San Francisco Bay Area	38	24	23	15	12	10	5	6	5	17	18
North Coast/Sierras*	44	21	23	10	19	5	8	8	1	12	18

*The sum of subgroup percentages may add to slightly more or less than 100% due to rounding. * Small sample base.*

Newsom receives mixed reviews from voters when asked about the job he is doing as governor

When the overall California electorate is asked to evaluate Newsom's overall job performance as governor, equal proportions now say they approve (48%) as disapprove (48%). This represents a decline from a more positive 51% to 43% approval rating in August the last time the *Berkeley IGS Poll* made an assessment.

However, he receives a much more positive assessment among members of his own party, with 76% of the state's Democrats approving while only 19% disapprove. By contrast, California Republicans are nearly unanimous in voicing disapproval of the job Newsom is doing as governor, with 93% disapproving, 85% of whom disapprove strongly. Newsom's approval ratings are also underwater among the state's non-partisan voters, with 54% disapproving while just 41% approve.

<i>Table 3</i> Trend of the job that Gavin Newsom is doing as governor (among California registered voters)						
	Approve (total) %	<i>Approve strongly %</i>	<i>Approve somewhat %</i>	Disapprove (total) %	<i>Disapprove somewhat %</i>	<i>Disapprove strongly %</i>
<i>March 2026</i>	48	16	32	48	13	35
<u>Party registration</u>						
Democrat	76	28	48	19	13	6
Republican	5	1	4	93	8	85
No Party Pref./other	41	11	30	54	18	36
<u>Past measures</u>						
August 2025	51	24	27	43	11	32
Late April 2025	46	14	32	46	16	30
Early January 2024	46	17	29	47	14	33
Late October 2023	44	18	26	49	13	36
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

Differences between 100% and the sum of percentages for each year include the proportion of voters with no opinion

Majority approves of Newsom's advocacy of alternative U.S. policies internationally

An additional question included in the poll asked California voters their opinion of Governor Newsom's increasing participation as a spokesperson in overseas conferences at which he advocates alternatives to the U.S. policies being promoted by President Trump. The reactions of state voters to his taking on this role are quite positive, with 59% approving and 37% disapproving. However, the state's Democrats and Republicans hold diametrically opposite opinions about this, with 88% of Democrats approving, while 87% of Republicans 87% disapprove.

<i>Table 4</i> California voter opinions of Governor Newsom's increasing participation in overseas conferences advocating alternatives to the U.S. policies being promoted by President Trump			
	Approve %	Disapprove %	No opinion %
Total statewide	59	37	4
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	88	9	3
Republicans	9	87	4
No Party Preference/other	58	36	6
<u>Job rating of Gov. Newsom</u>			
Approve	95	3	2
Disapprove	24	72	4

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 March 9-15, among 5,109 California registered voters. To enable the survey to also obtain voter preferences in the Los Angeles mayoral primary election, the survey included an oversampling of voters in the city of Los Angeles. However, after the conclusion of data collection, the overall results were weighted to return the disproportionate sampling of L.A. City voters to their actual share of the overall statewide electorate. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

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 state and local voter registration rolls, which are public documents. The sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents.

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 points at the 95% confidence level.

Questions wording

(IF REGISTERED DEMOCRAT) A large number of Democrats have been mentioned as possible candidates for President in the 2028 elections. If you were voting today, of the following possibilities, who would be your first choice in the 2028 Democratic presidential primary? (ORDERING RANDOMIZED. SEE RELEASE FOR CANDIDATES LISTED) (IF CANDIDATE CHOSEN) Who would be your second choice?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Gavin Newsom is handling his job as Governor?

In recent months Governor Newsom has traveled to several international conferences in Brazil, Switzerland and Germany, meeting with foreign dignitaries and presenting California as a state that is offering an alternative to the policies being promoted by President Trump on issues like climate change and the economy. Do you approve or disapprove of Newsom taking on this role?

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>.