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Big differences in the perceived threat of becoming a gun violence victim underlie partisans' differing views on gun control

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

Nearly two-thirds of the California voting public (63%) say they are worried that they or someone close to them could become the victim of gun violence, with 30% reporting they are very worried about this. Yet, the perceived threat of gun violence is viewed quite differently by the state's Democratic and Republican voters.

Among Democrats, greater than three in four (78%) express worries that they or someone close to them could experience gun violence, with 40% saying they are very worried. However, only about one in three of Republican voters (36%) reports such concerns and only 11% are very worried about this.

Republican voters' lower level of concern about the threat of gun violence in their own lives appears to be a significant factor contributing to these voters' much lower levels of support for gun control legislation that would seek to reduce such violence.

For example, when the poll asked voters their opinions of whether passing stricter gun laws would help reduce the occurrence of mass shootings, which have been on the rise in recent months both here and across the country, a huge gulf is found between the views of Democratic and Republican voters. Among Democrats, 66% believe passing stricter gun laws would help reduce mass shootings a great deal. Among Republicans only 10% feel this way, while 78% think the passage of such laws would not do much to help at all.

The poll also finds that when voters are asked which is more important with regard to gun ownership laws -- imposing greater controls on gun ownership or protecting Americans' 2nd Amendment right to bear arms -- greater than eight in ten Democrats choose the former while greater than eight in ten Republicans choose the latter.

Said IGS co-director Eric Schickler, "While other studies have shown Republicans to express similar fears of crime as Democrats, it is striking that they report being less threatened by gun violence than their Democratic counterparts. This underscores how deep party polarization regarding guns is in California, and in the U.S. more broadly."

Two in three Californians worry about becoming a victim of gun violence

The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* asked the state’s registered voters how worried they were that they or someone close to them could become the victim of gun violence. The results show that nearly two in three (63%) express worries about this, with 30% very worried and 33% somewhat worried.

But there are large partisan differences with regard to these fears. Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to express these concerns, with 78% of Democrats saying they worry about this compared to 36% among Republicans. A similarly wide gulf in concerns about the threat of gun violence is found between self-described liberals and conservatives.

Demographically, women, persons of color and voters living in urban areas are more likely than men, whites and rural Californians to hold such concerns.

Table 1
How worried are you that you or someone close to you
could become the victim of gun violence
(among California registered voters)

	Worried (net) %	Very worried %	Somewhat worried %	Not worried (net) %	Not too worried %	Not at all worried %
Total statewide	63	30	33	36	24	12
<u>Party registration</u>						
Democrats	78	40	38	20	16	4
Republicans	36	11	25	62	35	27
No party preference/other	61	30	31	37	25	12
<u>Political ideology</u>						
Strongly conservative	41	20	21	58	29	29
Somewhat conservative	46	19	27	53	35	18
Moderate	65	32	33	32	21	11
Somewhat liberal	71	32	39	28	23	5
Strongly liberal	78	40	38	21	15	6
<u>Urbanity of locale</u>						
Urban	71	35	36	27	18	9
Suburban	60	28	32	39	26	13
Rural	48	23	25	50	31	19
<u>Gender</u>						
Female	71	38	33	27	19	8
Male	55	22	33	43	27	16
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>						
White non-Hispanic	54	19	35	46	31	15
Latino	75	47	28	23	13	10
Asian/Pacific Islander	73	40	33	22	17	5
Black	78	44	34	20	13	7

Note: Differences between the sum of each row’s percentages and 100% equal the proportion with no opinion

Highly partisan views about the impact that the passage of stricter gun laws would have on reducing mass shootings

In the wake of the recent spike in the number of mass shootings both around the country and here in the state, Californians were asked what impact they thought the passage of stricter gun control laws would have in reducing the number of these shootings. The results are mixed, with 45% believing such laws would help a great deal, 18% saying they would help some, while 34% feel they will not help very much at all.

However, these percentages mask very large partisan and ideological differences of opinion on the matter. Among Democrats and liberals there is broad consensus that passing such laws would help reduce the occurrence of mass shootings, with 66% saying this would help a great deal and 22% feeling they would help some. By contrast, 78% of the state’s Republicans and strong conservatives take the opposite view and feel the passage of such laws would not help much at all in reducing these shootings. Non-partisan voters are more divided, with about as many feeling such laws would reduce mass shootings a great deal (41%) as think they would not help much at all (37%).

Women, persons of color and voters living in urban areas are also more likely than men, whites and rural residents to think it’ll help reduce the number of mass shootings a great deal.

Table 2
To what extent do you think passing stricter gun laws would help reduce the occurrence of mass shootings in California (among California registered voters)

	Would help a great deal %	Would help some %	Would not help very much %	No opinion %
Total statewide	45	18	34	3
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	66	22	11	1
Republicans	10	10	78	2
No Party Preference/others	41	20	37	2
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	12	9	78	1
Somewhat conservative	19	9	68	4
Moderate	43	20	34	3
Somewhat liberal	59	27	13	1
Strongly liberal	74	20	6	--
<u>Urbanity of locale</u>				
Urban	50	21	27	2
Suburban	44	18	37	1
Rural	34	13	51	2
<u>Gender</u>				
Females	52	19	27	2
Males	38	18	42	2
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	40	19	40	1
Latino	50	17	31	2
Asian/Pacific Islander	52	22	23	3
Black	55	17	22	6

Majorities attach greater importance to imposing controls on gun ownership than on protecting voters' 2nd Amendment right to own a gun, but opinions are highly partisan

The poll also finds that by a nearly two-to-one margin (60% to 34%) Californians attach greater importance to imposing greater controls on gun ownership than on protecting their 2nd Amendment right to own a gun.

Yet, Democrats and Republicans, as well as the state's conservatives and liberals, hold diametrically opposite opinions about this. More than eight in ten Democrats and liberals say they attach greater importance to imposing controls on guns, while more than eight in ten Republicans and strong conservatives take the opposite view and place a higher priority on protecting Americans' 2nd Amendment right to own a gun.

While majorities of both urban and suburban voters attach greater import to imposing more controls on gun ownership, rural voters are more divided, with 42% holding this view, while 50% place greater importance on protecting their 2nd Amendment rights.

	Imposing greater controls on gun ownership %	Protecting 2nd Amendment right to own guns %	No opinion %
Total statewide	60	34	6
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	86	8	6
Republicans	12	82	6
No Party Preference/other	57	36	7
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Strongly conservative	15	82	3
Somewhat conservative	23	71	6
Moderate	58	33	9
Somewhat liberal	82	8	10
Strongly liberal	94	3	3
<u>Urbanity of locale</u>			
Urban	67	26	7
Suburban	58	36	6
Rural	42	50	8
<u>Gender</u>			
Females	68	27	5
Males	51	41	8
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	58	37	5
Latino	62	31	7
Asian/Pacific Islander	65	28	7
Black	69	22	9

Little change in voter opinions about the tradeoff between gun ownership laws and protecting 2nd Amendment rights compared to past polls

Findings from the latest poll are quite similar to those found in each of six previous statewide surveys in which the same question was posed to random samples of the state’s registered voter public. In each poll roughly six in ten reported attaching more importance to imposing greater controls on gun ownership, while only about one in three gave greater importance to protecting their 2nd Amendment right to own guns.

Table 4
Trend of voter opinions as to which is more important -- protecting Americans’ 2nd Amendment right to own guns or imposing greater controls on gun ownership (among California registered voters)

	Imposing greater controls on gun ownership %	Protecting 2nd Amendment right to own guns %	No opinion %
February 2023	60	34	6
July 2021	57	36	7
Late April 2018	64	32	4
February 2013	61	34	5
April 2002	55	39	6
June 2000	56	37	7
August 1999	57	35	8

Note: Findings prior to 2018 are based on statewide surveys conducted by The Field Poll, as reported in Release #2441, published February 26, 2013 by Field Research Corporation.

Many voters unfamiliar with the state’s “red flag laws”

Nearly half of the voting public (47%) say they are not familiar with the usage of “red flag laws” in the state, that allow police to temporarily take away the guns of someone who poses a threat to themselves or others. However, among those who report having some familiarity with these laws there is widespread agreement that they are not being used enough.

Voters’ lack of familiarity with the state’s red flag laws spans most major political and demographic subgroups. But, among those reporting some awareness of the laws, Democrats and liberals are about twice as likely as Republicans and conservatives to say that these laws are not being used enough.

Table 5
Voter views about how usage of state’s “red flag law” by law enforcement which allows police to temporarily take away the guns of someone who poses a threat to themselves or others (among California registered voters)

	Not being used enough %	Used about the right amount %	Being used too often %	Don’t know enough to offer an opinion %
Total statewide	41	6	6	47
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	52	9	7	42
Republicans	24	10	13	53
No Party Preference/others	39	5	5	51
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	26	9	14	51
Somewhat conservative	29	12	14	45
Moderate	44	7	4	45
Somewhat liberal	45	4	2	49
Strongly liberal	53	2	1	44
<u>Urbanity of locale</u>				
Urban	45	5	4	46
Suburban	41	7	7	45
Rural	32	9	7	52
<u>Gender</u>				
Females	47	5	3	45
Males	36	8	9	47
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	41	6	5	48
Latino	44	8	7	41
Asian/Pacific Islander	38	6	7	49
Black	47	7	8	38

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.

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 voter registration 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 the 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

To what extent do you think the following government actions would help in reducing the occurrence of mass shootings in California in the future -- passing stricter gun laws?

How much do you personally worry that you or someone close to you could become the victim of gun violence?

When it comes to gun ownership laws, which do you think is more important: (1) Protecting Americans' 2nd Amendment right to bear arms or (2) Imposing greater controls on gun ownership?

Several years ago, California adopted a "red flag law" that allows police to temporarily take away the guns of someone who poses a threat to themselves or to others. How do you feel the law is being used by officials in your area – not being used enough, used about the right amount, used too often, don't know enough about it to have an opinion?

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 complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.