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Release #2023-25: Broad-based, bipartisan support for state government action to counter threats posed by deepfakes, disinformation and artificial intelligence in next year's election.

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Broad-based, bipartisan support for state government action to counter threats posed by deepfakes, disinformation and artificial intelligence in next year's election.

With next year's primary and general elections approaching, a new *Berkeley IGS Poll* funded by the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr., Fund finds extremely high levels of voter concern about the digital dangers posed to our democracy, including generative AI's power to generate disinformation and deepfakes in political campaigns, and finds broad-based and bipartisan support for California state government to protect the public from these threats. Among the poll's main findings are these:

- 84% of Californians are concerned about the dangers that disinformation, deepfakes and artificial intelligence pose in next year's elections, with 60% very concerned.

- 73% agree that state government has a responsibility to act to protect voters and the public that these technologies pose in next year's elections.

- 87% agree that high tech companies and social media platforms should be required to clearly label deepfakes and AI-generated audio, video, and images that appear on their websites, with 70% agreeing strongly.

- 90% agree that high tech and social media platforms should be required to explain to the public how the personal data they accumulate from users is being used to personalize the ads, news, and other content that users see.

- 78% agree that these companies should be required to follow reasonable and effective methods to ensure that users are who they say they are and bar from their platforms users whose identities cannot be verified.

- Support is similarly high for an alternative approach that would require greater transparency for users with very large audiences who have a greater potential for making disinformation go viral, with 76% in agreement.

Voter sentiments about these issues are bipartisan and include large majorities of Democrats, Republicans and No Party Preference voters. They also span voters across all age, gender, race, and income subgroups of the registered voter population.

The poll also finds strong support for measures aimed at preparing the next generation from the dangers posed by AI, disinformation, and deepfakes, by expanding civics education in the schools and

teaching digital information literacy to high schoolers to make it easier for them to identify differences between real and fake news, and between real images and deep fakes.

Californians alarmed by dangers that disinformation, deepfakes, and artificial intelligence pose to next year's elections; support state government taking action to mitigate threats

Fully 84% of voters are concerned about the dangers that disinformation, deepfakes, and artificial intelligence pose to next year's elections, with 60% very concerned. This view is shared by about eight in ten Democrats, Republicans, and No Party Preference voters, and by solid majorities of men and women, and voters across all regions, ages, and racial segments of the voter population.

Three in four voters (73%) believe state government has a responsibility to take action to protect Californians from the dangers these threats pose in advance of the elections. Support for state action against these threats is shared by large majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and No Party Preference voters, as well as by voters of all age, races, and income brackets.

Table 1
Concerns about the dangers of disinformation, deepfakes and artificial intelligence in next year's elections and the need for state government to take action
(among California registered voters)

	Total registered voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /others %
How concerned are you about the dangers that disinformation, deepfakes, and artificial intelligence pose to next year's elections?				
Very concerned	**60**	65	55	57
Somewhat concerned	**24**	24	24	25
Not too/not at all concerned	**12**	8	18	14
No opinion	**4**	3	3	4
Does state government have a responsibility to take action to protect Californians from political disinformation, deepfakes and artificial intelligence in the 2024 elections?				
Yes	**73**	86	54	69
No	**18**	6	35	22
No opinion	**9**	8	11	9

"Voters have seen disinformation poison our politics in recent years, and generative AI has the power to rapidly intensify that trend. Unless these problems are addressed urgently, we may soon be in an information environment in which we don't know what images, video, and audio we can trust," said Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director of California Common Cause. Last week, California Common Cause launched a new entity, the California Institute for Technology and Democracy (CITED), which will attempt to find solutions that protect our democracy and elections from AI, disinformation, and deepfakes.

"It seems clear that Californians across all races, ages, genders, and regions are ready for state government to take a strong, active hand in regulating social media platforms. They want protections for our democratic discourse before things go from bad to worse."

Voters see social media companies as responsible for a deterioration of public discourse and don't think they are capable of solving these problems themselves

When asked if technology companies and social media platforms are "contributing to a worsening of our political discourse by not properly identifying obvious mistruths and disinformation," over three-fourths of Californians (78%) agree, 54% strongly. Majorities of voters from all parties concur , including 84% of Democrats, 68% of Republicans, and 76% of No Party Preference voters.

Perhaps reflecting Californians' perspectives on the lack of action by lawmakers and regulators, an identical 78% agree that technology companies and social media platforms "have too much power and influence when it comes to shaping laws and regulations that govern their own field in Congress and in the state legislature." This view also extends across all parties, all ages, races, genders, and regions, with seven in ten or more in agreement.

Californians express little faith that technology companies and social media platforms will be able to solve the problems confronting democracy without governmental intervention. When asked if they "can be counted on to address the dangers of disinformation, deepfakes and artificial intelligence without the need for government involvement", 60% disagreed, including 62% of Democrats, 60% of Republicans, and 58% of No Party Preference voters.

Table 2
Views about the power of high-tech companies and social media platforms
and their ability to address disinformation threats without government regulation
(among California registered voters)

"High-tech companies and social media platforms…"	Total registered voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /others %
Have too much power and influence when it comes to shaping laws and regulations that govern their own field in Congress and in the state legislature.				
Agree	**78**	78	82	75
Disagree	**11**	9	11	12
No opinion	**11**	13	7	13
Are contributing to a worsening of our political discourse by not properly identifying obvious mistruths and disinformation in user posts and political advertisements posted on their websites.				
Agree	**78**	84	68	76
Disagree	**14**	8	24	16
No opinion	**8**	8	8	8
Can be counted on to address the dangers of disinformation, deepfakes and artificial intelligence without the need for government involvement.				
Agree	**32**	32	31	33
Disagree	**60**	62	60	58

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No opinion	**8**	6	9	9

Broad support for greater transparency around deepfakes and high-tech algorithms

Very large majorities of Californians support a number of possible policy solutions aimed at requiring social media companies to address AI, disinformation, and deepfakes. Voter support reaches 87% with regard to requiring tech companies and social media platforms to clearly label deepfakes and AI-generated audio, video, and images that appear on their websites, with 70% agreeing strongly. This includes solid majorities of voters across the political spectrum, as well as among voters across all age groups, genders, and races.

There is also near universal agreement that tech companies and social media platforms should be required to explain to their users and the general public how their algorithms work -- i.e. how their algorithms accumulate user data to personalize ads, news, and other content -- with 90% expressing agreement with this proposal, 76% strongly.

This includes 92% of Democrats, 90% of Republicans, and 89% of No Party Preference voters, as well as large majorities of voters of all ages and racial backgrounds.

Table 3
Voter opinions about various requirements being proposed
regarding the operations of high-tech companies and social media platforms
(among California registered voters)

"High tech companies and social media platform should be required to….	Total registered voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /others %
Explain to their users and to the general public how the personal data they accumulate from users is being used to personalize the ads, news, and other content that users see				
Agree	**90**	92	90	89
Disagree	**3**	3	4	3
No opinion	**7**	5	6	8
Clearly label deepfakes and AI-generated audio, video, and images that appear on their websites				
Agree	**87**	91	79	87
Disagree	**7**	4	14	5
No opinion	**6**	5	7	8

"For many years, social media platforms have evaded the sort of common-sense regulation that applies to airlines, pharmaceutical companies, car manufacturers, and other industries whose products can hurt the public," said Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director at California Common Cause. "In California, voters are ready for the era of unregulated, consequence-free tech to end."

Californians want transparency for social media users and an end to anonymous trolls

There is strong support for changing the rules that social media companies must follow to create greater transparency for its users, with 78% agreeing that social media companies should be required

to follow reasonable methods to ensure users are who they say they are and bar from their platforms users whose identities cannot be verified. Support includes 82% of Democrats, 76% of Republicans, and 73% of No Party Preference voters.

Support is similarly high for an alternative approach that would require greater transparency for users with very large audiences who have a greater potential for making disinformation go viral, with 77% of voters supporting this. Agreement includes 84% of Democrats, 67% of Republicans, and 73% of No Party Preference voters. There are relatively few differences in responses among voters across the state's other major demographic subgroups.

"Voters are accustomed to the idea that people who make campaign contributions, defined as political speech by the Supreme Court, need to attach their names to that speech," said Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director at California Common Cause. "While it is important to protect whistleblowers and anonymous activists under repressive regimes, voters believe outspoken voices in our online political conversation should also have to stand by their statements."

"Californians know that banks, lenders and other corporations are required by law to know their customers, to protect our economy and are probably wondering why social media companies don't have to do the same to protect our democracy," Stein added.

Table 4
Voter opinions about proposals aimed fostering greater transparency
for the users of social media platforms
(among California registered voters)

"High tech companies and social media platforms should be required to…	Total registered voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /others %
Explain to their users and to the general public how the personal data they accumulate from users is being used to personalize the ads, news, and other content that users see.				
Agree	**90**	92	90	89
Disagree	**3**	3	4	3
No opinion	**7**	5	6	8
Follow reasonable and effective methods to ensure users are who they say they are and should bar from their platforms users whose identities cannot be verified.				
Agree	**78**	82	76	73
Disagree	**14**	10	16	18
No opinion	**8**	8	8	9
Seek greater identity authentication for users with very large audiences, to shine a light on those accounts that have the power to make information and disinformation go "viral."				

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Agree	**77**	84	67	73
Disagree	**13**	7	22	15
No opinion	**10**	9	11	12

Large majorities back expanded civics education in the schools and the teaching of digital information literacy to high school students

Voters whole-heartedly endorse preparing the next generation for the destabilized political environment and degraded information ecosystem they may inherit because of AI, disinformation, and deepfakes. Nearly nine in ten (87%) agree that "California high schools should be required to teach students an expanded civics education curriculum that better prepares them to vote, seek out and consume news and information, and/or participate in civic life," with 64% agreeing strongly. This includes 93% of Democrats, 78% of Republicans and 84% of No Party Preference voters.

Agreement is nearly universal among older voters 65 or older (92%), but also includes 84% of younger voters ages 18-29, who more recently completed high school. In addition, agreement exceeds eight in ten voters living in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the state alike, as well as among White, Latino, Black, and Asian American voters, and among both US-born voters and those born in another country.

Voters also support expanding the civics curriculum to address the threats of a new digital era. When asked if "California schools should be required to teach digital information literacy to the state's high school students to make it easier for them to identify differences between real and fake news, and between real images and deep fakes," 82% agreed, 57% strongly.

Support is again bipartisan and includes 90% of Democrats, 72% of Republicans and 79% of No Party Preference voters. In addition, greater than eight in ten voters ages 65 or older, middle-aged voters 50-64, and younger voters ages 18-29 also concur. Agreement exceeds eight in ten voters living in the state's urban, suburban, and rural areas, and as well as those among both voters born in the U.S. and those born in another country, and also includes greater than three in four of the state's White, Latino, Black, and Asian American voters.

Table 5
Voter opinions about various requirements being proposed for
California schools relating to teaching digital literacy and civics education
(among California registered voters)

"California schools should be required to…	Total registered voters %	Democrats %	Republicans%	No Party Preference /others %
Teach students expanded civics education curriculum that better prepares them to vote, seek out and consume news and information and/or participate in civic life.				
Agree	**87**	93	78	84
Disagree	**7**	2	16	7
No opinion	**6**	5	6	9

Teach digital information literacy to the state's high school students to make it easier for them to identify differences between real and fake news, and between real images and deep fakes.				
Agree	**82**	90	72	79
Disagree	**10**	4	22	11
No opinion	**8**	6	6	10

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 October 24-30, 2023 among 6,342 California registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided by the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr., Fund.

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 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 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

When thinking about the upcoming 2024 election for president and other state and local offices, to what extent are you concerned about the dangers that disinformation, deepfakes, and artificial intelligence pose to next year's elections – very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, not at all concerned?

Do you feel California state government has a responsibility to take action to protect Californians from political disinformation, deepfakes, and artificial intelligence in the 2024 elections – yes, no?

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? **(SEE RELEASE FOR WORDING OF ITEMS)** (**ORDERING RANDOMIZED DURING SURVEY ADMINISTRATION**)