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Majorities of California voters support reforms on redistricting, money in politics and local primary elections.

In its latest statewide survey the *Berkeley IGS Poll* asked voters about their concerns regarding certain aspects of election politics and various proposals aimed at reforming the process. The results are briefly summarized below:

- Nearly eight in ten voters (79%) say they have major concerns about corporations having too much influence on elections.
- Seven in ten (71%) express major concerns about the gerrymandering of election districts that deliberately favor one party over another.
- Two in three voters (65%) have major concerns about the amount of money that is required to run for public office.
- A 53% majority of voters support allowing candidates who are running for state elected positions to receive public financing if they abide by certain campaign contribution limits, compared to 33% who are opposed.
- By a more than two to one margin (47% to 20%) Californians support creating independent redistricting commissions in local government, although a large proportion (33%) has no opinion.
- By a greater than three to one margin (66% to 20%) voters are in favor of having the two candidates who receive the most votes in a primary election to compete again in the general election when far more voters are likely to be participating.

These results come from a statewide poll conducted July 20-25, 2023, among 6,164 registered voters throughout California. It is the fifth of a five-part series on democracy, voting rights and the state's election laws funded under a grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

Two in three voters have major concerns about the amount of money needed to run for public office

A large majority of Californians (65%) say they have major concerns about the amount of money that is required to run for public office. Another 20% describe this as a minor concern while just 8% say they are not concerned.

Concerns are broad-based and bipartisan, with majorities of Democrats (67%), Republicans (58%), and No Party Preference voters (67%) saying this is a major concern.

“Bipartisan majorities are sick of big money swamping out elections. Everyone knows campaigns funded by big donors make politicians accountable to special interests instead of the public interest,” said Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director of California Common Cause. “The good news is that we know the solutions. Small donor public financing systems can dramatically increase the number of small donors and give candidates without personal wealth or networks of wealth a chance to win.”

Table 1

Voter concern about the amount of money needed to run for public office

	A major concern	A minor concern	Not a concern	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
Total registered voters	65	20	8	7
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	67	20	5	8
Republicans	58	22	14	6
No party preference/other	67	19	6	8

A majority supports public financing for state elective posts if candidates agree to campaign contribution limits

By a five-to-three margin (53% to 33%) California voters support allowing candidates running for state elected positions to receive public financing if they abide by certain campaign contribution limits.

Opinions divide sharply along party lines, with Democrats favoring the idea 62% to 24%, while Republicans are broadly opposed 54% to 35%. The opinions of No Party Preference/other voters mirror that of the overall electorate, with 53% in favor and 30% opposed.

Table 2

Voter views about allowing public financing for state elective posts if the candidate abides by campaign contribution limits

	Support %	Oppose %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	53	33	14
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	62	24	14
Republicans	35	54	11
No party preference/other	53	30	17

Major concerns about partisan gerrymandering of election districts

There is also a high level of concern among California voters about the gerrymandering of election districts that deliberately favor one party over another. Greater than seven in ten voters (71%) express major concerns about this, while another 16% describe it as a minor concern. Just 5% are not concerned.

There are no statistical differences in the responses of voters by party with roughly seven in ten of Democrats, Republicans and No Party Preference/other voters expressing a high level of concern.

Table 3

Concerns about partisan gerrymandering of election districts that favor one party

	A major concern %	A minor concern %	Not a concern %
Total registered voters	71	16	5
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	70	17	5
Republicans	72	18	5
No party preference/other	72	15	5

Differences between 100% and the sum of percentages for each row equal proportion with no opinion.

Voters express support for establishing independent redistricting commissions to draw district lines for larger counties and cities, but many are undecided

While California has already established an independent redistricting commission to decide how district boundary lines are drawn for its congressional and legislative districts, there is a proposal to establish similar commissions for counties and cities with populations of 300,000 or more and for school and community college districts with over 500,000 residents.

A near majority of voters (47%) say they would favor such a law while just one in five (20%) are opposed. However, many voters are currently unsure about the proposal, as 33% offer no opinion.

The City of Los Angeles has been the subject of much discussion about reforming its redistricting process since the release of explosive recordings last year that exposed racist and ugly redistricting conversations among city leaders behind closed doors. The poll finds that support

for the independent redistricting proposal among L.A. County voters to be greater than two to one (47% to 19%).

There are some partisan differences among statewide voters about this proposal although they are not as wide as some of the other proposals polled. Democrats express support (54% to 15%), as do No Party Preference/other voters (44% to 17%). However, Republicans are more divided, with 38% supportive and 33% opposed.

The idea of establishing independent redistricting commissions for larger counties, cities, and school and community college districts is regarded favorably by voters in all regions of the state, although many are uncertain about this and did not offer an opinion.

“Voters, regardless of party, are in agreement that it’s our job to choose our elected officials and not their job to choose their voters,” says Sky Allen, Executive Director of Inland Empire United Education Fund. “We have seen independent redistricting commissions draw fair districts in a transparent and inclusive process multiple times now. It no longer makes sense for elected officials to draw their own districts.”

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
	%	%	%
Total registered voters	47	20	33
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	54	15	31
Republicans	38	33	29
No party preference/other	44	17	39
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	47	19	34
San Diego County	46	22	32
Orange County	44	26	31
Inland Empire	43	24	33
Central Coast	52	19	29
Central Valley	46	21	33
San Francisco Bay Area	53	14	33
North Coast/Sierras	41	20	39

Voters support run-off elections for all local election races even if one of the candidates receives a majority of the primary election votes

Currently for all state elective posts California has initiated a top-two system for primary elections whereby the two candidates who receive the most votes in the primary election, must compete against each other in the general election even if one of the candidates receives a majority of the votes in the primary.

However, for most local elections around the state if a candidate receives a majority of votes in the primary election that person wins the election outright and does not have to compete again in

the general election. Research has consistently shown that voters in primaries tend to be less reflective of the overall electorate than voters in the general election when turnout increases substantially. Many important officeholders, like district attorneys and sheriffs, never have to face voters in a general election because they win a majority of votes in the primary.

A proposal has been made to change this so that local election rules conform to those of state officeholders, since far more voters are likely to participate in general elections than in primary elections. Voters are quite supportive of making this change, as the poll finds 66% backing the change while just 20% are opposed.

There is a high degree of consensus about this among voters across all parties, regions, and demographic subgroups of the electorate.

Table 5

Require the top two candidates running in local primary elections to compete again in the general election when far more voters will likely be participating even if the primary election winner receives a majority of the votes

	Support %	Oppose %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	66	20	14
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	66	19	15
Republicans	63	27	10
No party preference/other	67	17	16

A broad range of bipartisan voters express concerns over corporations having too much influence in politics

There is broad-based concern among California registered voters that corporations have too much influence in politics. Statewide 79% of voters describe this as a major concern and another 13% consider it a minor concern. Just 4% are not concerned.

Concerns spans all voter subgroups and is bipartisan, with 82% of Democrats expressing a high level of concern, as do 72% of Republicans and 79% of No Party Preference/other voters.

Table 6

Voter concern about corporations having too much influence in politics

	A major concern %	A minor concern %	Not a concern %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	79	13	4	4
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	82	11	3	4
Republicans	72	15	9	4
No party preference/other	79	13	3	5

Along the same lines, greater than three in four voters (77%) agree that decisions made by state government on important issues are dictated more by what big corporations want than what is in the state's best interests. Just 14% disagree.

Agreement again receives bipartisan support, including 82% of Democrats, 69% of Republicans concurring and 75% of No Party Preference/other voters.

“Voters are clear eyed about the fact that corporations spend billions of dollars every year on elections to confuse Californians about the issues on the ballot. Campaign finance reform and more transparency is needed to curb the influence of corporations and put the power back into the hands of the people.” Voters are right to be concerned; the foundation of our democracy is at stake,” said Veronica Carrizales, Vice President of Policy and External Affairs at California Calls.

Table 7

Agree/disagree: Decisions made by state government on important issues, like housing, are dictated more by what big corporations want than by what is in the state’s best interests.

	Agree %	Disagree %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	77	14	9
Party registration			
Democrats	82	11	7
Republicans	69	21	10
No party preference/other	75	15	10

About the Survey

The findings in this report come from 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 July 20-25, 2023, among 6,164 California registered voters. Funding 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

To what extent do the following things concern you as being potential threats to having a representative democracy in California: (1) Corporations having too much influence on elections; (2) The amount of money needed to run for public office; (3) Partisan gerrymandering of election districts to deliberately favor one party. (ORDERING RANDOMIZED)

Some people think that the decisions made by state government on important issues like housing are dictated more by what big corporations want rather than by what is in the state’s best interests. Do you agree or disagree?

Would you support or oppose an option for the candidates running for Governor, and other state elected positions, including those running for the state legislature, to receive public funding for their campaigns if they agree to abide by certain campaign contribution limits?

Currently in most local elections, a candidate who receives a majority of the votes in the primary election wins the election outright and does not have to compete again in the general election, when far more voters are likely to be participating. Do you support or oppose changing this so that the top two candidates receiving the most votes in local elections must compete against each other in the general election even if one received a majority of the votes in the primary?

Currently cities in California have the option to establish independent redistricting commissions, where people from the local community meet to decide how district boundary lines are to be drawn when holding local elections such as for city council. Some have proposed requiring that counties and cities with populations of 300,000 or more, and school and community college districts with over 500,000 residents, to also establish independent redistricting commissions. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

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>.

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.