



Institute of Governmental Studies
126 Moses Hall
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720
Tel: 510-642-6835
Email: igs@berkeley.edu

Release #2020-04

Tuesday, March 3, 2020

Voters willing to tolerate delays in the election vote count to maximize Californians' opportunities to register and vote.

By Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*
(c) 415-602-5594

As Californians cast their ballots in today's primary elections, state election officials warn that it may take weeks to count all the votes. This is one of the consequences of changes to state election laws giving Californians an ever-increasing amount of flexibility with regard to when those who are not registered can become registered voters and how and when voters can cast their ballots in an election.

The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds that by a nearly two-to-one margin (64% to 35%) Californians believe that providing voters with maximum opportunities to register and vote outweigh the drawbacks this may cause in slowing the vote count.

Three quarters of the state's Democrats and two thirds of No Party Preference voters say expanding opportunities to register and vote is more important than facilitating a faster vote count. Republican voters feel otherwise and by a three-to-two margin attach greater importance to speeding the vote count than providing voters with greater flexibility in registering and voting.

There is broad-based, bipartisan voter support for two recent changes made to state election law. Nearly nine in ten voters (89%) feel it is a good thing to give all voters the opportunity to vote by mail and to allow their ballots to be counted if postmarked by Election Day and received up to three days after the election. Nearly as many (83%) also say it is a good thing to offer same day voter registration, enabling eligible citizens who are not registered to vote to become a registered voter any time up to and including Election Day.

Voters attach a higher priority to providing Californians with maximum opportunities to register and vote than to speeding the vote count

One of the consequences of allowing Californians greater flexibility with regard to when they can register to vote and how they can vote is that it increases the number of ballots left uncounted on Election Day, since the eligibility of these last-minute registrants and late arriving mail ballots needs to be verified.

Californians in the survey were asked which is more important -- providing Californians with maximum opportunities to register and vote even if it takes a long time to count all the votes or changing election laws to take away some of this flexibility to ensure a faster vote count. The results indicate that by a nearly two-to-one margin (64% to 35%) voter attach higher priority to offering Californians with greater flexibility in voting than to speed the vote count.

There are partisan differences in opinions about this. By a greater than three to one margin (76% to 23%) Democrats attach higher priority to maximizing opportunities to register and vote than to limiting this flexibility to speed the vote count. A two-to-one majority of No Party Preference voters (65% to 32%) also feel this way. On the other hand, Republicans say it is more important to ensure a faster vote count than expanding the flexibility given voters when registering and voting three to two (60% to 39%).

Table 1

Which is more important – providing Californians with maximum opportunities to register and vote even if it takes a long time to count all the votes or changing election laws to take away some of this flexibility to ensure a faster vote count

(among registered voters)

| | Total registered voters % | Party registration | | |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| | | Democrat % | Republican % | No Party Pref./other % |
| More important to maximize opportunities given Californians to register and vote | 64 | 76 | 39 | 65 |
| More important to ensure a faster vote count | 35 | 23 | 60 | 32 |
| No opinion | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |

Broad-based, bipartisan support for two recent changes to state voting laws

The poll finds broad-based, bipartisan voter support for two recent changes to state laws governing when Californians can register to vote and how late they can send in a mail ballot in order for it to be counted in an election.

Nearly nine in ten of the state’s registered voters (89%) say it is a good thing to give all voters the opportunity to vote by mail and to allow their ballots to be counted if they are postmarked by Election Day and received up to three days after the election.

In addition, nearly as many (83%) feel it is a good thing to allow eligible citizens who are not registered to vote to become a registered voter any time up to and including Election Day.

Support for each of these recent changes to election law is bipartisan, with large majorities of both Democrats and Republicans describing them as a good thing.

Table 2
Voter views about two recent changes to the state’s voting laws that provide Californians with greater opportunities to register and vote (among registered voters)

| | Total registered voters % | Party registration | | |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| | | Democrat % | Republican % | No Party Pref./other % |
| <u>Give all voters the opportunity to vote by mail and allow ballots postmarked by Election Day to be counted if they are received up to three days after the election</u> | | | | |
| Good thing | 89 | 94 | 79 | 90 |
| Bad thing | 11 | 6 | 21 | 10 |
| <u>Allow eligible citizens not registered to vote to become a registered voter anytime up to and including Election Day</u> | | | | |
| Good thing | 83 | 94 | 60 | 85 |
| Bad thing | 17 | 5 | 40 | 15 |
| No opinion | * | 1 | * | * |

*less than ½ of 1%

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 20-25, 2020 among 6,688 registered voters statewide.

The survey was administered by distributing email invitations to random samples of the state's registered voters. Samples of registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., derived from information contained on the state's official voter registration rolls. Prior to the distribution of emails, the overall sample was stratified by age and gender in an attempt to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

Once the survey questionnaire and email invitations had been finalized, they were translated into Spanish. 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.

To protect the anonymity of survey 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, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample of registered voters responding to the survey to population characteristics of the state's overall registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates from the survey are difficult to calculate precisely due to the effects of sample stratification and the post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that results from the overall sample of registered voters have a sampling error of approximately +/- 1.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Detailed tabulations reporting the results to each question included in this report can be found at the *Berkeley IGS Poll* website at <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.

Question wording

California gives all registered voters the opportunity to vote by mail as long as their ballots are postmarked by Election Day and received up to three days after an election. Generally speaking, do you think offering voters this type of flexibility when voting by mail is a good thing or a bad thing?

Recent changes in state election laws also allow eligible citizens who are not registered to vote to become a registered voter anytime up to and including Election Day. Generally speaking, do you think offering eligible citizens the opportunity to register to vote up to and including Election Day is a good thing or a bad thing?

Providing Californians with greater flexibility in when they can register to vote and how they can vote results in many more votes being left uncounted on Election Night, since the eligibility

of these late voters needs to be verified. In some elections this can delay the final counting of votes for up to a month after an election. Given this tradeoff, which do you think is more important – (1) changing election laws to ensure a faster vote count even if this takes away some of the flexibility that Californians now have with regard to when they can register and vote, or (2) continue providing Californians with maximum opportunities to register and vote even if it takes a long time to count all the votes?

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. IGS's acting 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. A complete listing of the reports issued by the Berkeley IGS Poll go to <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.