



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

Release #2021-09

Wednesday, May 12, 2021

***Californians' Early Assessments of the Performance of President Biden  
and Vice President Harris are Highly Positive.***

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

Californians generally offer highly positive assessments of the job performances of Joe Biden as President and Kamala Harris as the nation's Vice President. In its examinations of how voters here view the nation's new political leaders, the *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds 62% approving of the job Biden is doing as President, while just 34% disapprove. Vice President Harris also is rated favorably, with 53% approving and 33% disapproving. In addition, most of the voters who approve of Biden's and Harris's performance do so strongly.

Biden's initial ratings place him in the mid-range of the job marks given by California voters to other recent presidents at the beginning of their first year in office. All told, four of Biden's nine immediate predecessors – Barack Obama, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and John F. Kennedy – received higher initial job performance scores than Biden, while four others – Donald Trump, George W. Bush, Gerald Ford, and Bill Clinton – were given lower marks. George H.W. Bush's initial job ratings were generally like those now given to Biden.

The demographic profile of voters who approve of the job President and the Vice President are doing is similar. Voters view both through a highly partisan and ideological lens, with nine in ten Democrats and liberals expressing their approval, while greater than eight in ten Republicans and strong conservatives disapprove. Both also receive their most favorable job assessments from voters in Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area, and are held in somewhat higher regard by women than men and by voters of color than by whites.

When voters are presented with various personality descriptions about the President and Vice President, the description that the largest proportion of Californians feel applies to President Biden, is that he "has the right experience to be President" (66%), while the next largest proportion feel he "cares about people like you".

The descriptions that majorities of voters feel apply to Vice President Harris include "is playing a significant role in the administration" (56%) and "is capable of stepping into the presidency if needed" (54%).

IGS co-director Eric Schickler observed, “Given the highly partisan state of politics and the Democrats’ nearly two-to-one advantage over Republicans among the California electorate, it is not surprising that Biden and Harris begin their terms in a very strong position here.”

**Californians offer highly favorable assessments of President Biden’s and Vice President Harris’s performance**

President Biden and Vice President Harris receive highly favorable approval ratings from the statewide electorate in the *Berkeley IGS Poll’s* first assessment of their performance in office. Greater than six in ten of the state’s voters (62%) say they approve of the job Biden is doing as President, while 34% disapprove. Just 4% have no opinion.

Vice President Harris is also held in high regard, with 53% approving and 33% disapproving, although a somewhat larger proportion (14%) has no opinion.

In addition, most of those who say they approve of Biden and Harris report strongly approving of their performance -- 39% in the case of Biden and 35% with regard to Harris.

**Table 1**  
**Current opinions of the job performance of President Joe Biden**  
**and Vice President Kamala Harris**  
**(among California registered voters)**

|                     | President<br>Joe Biden<br>% | Vice President<br>Kamala Harris<br>% |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <u>Approve</u>      | <b>62</b>                   | <b>53</b>                            |
| Approve strongly    | <b>39</b>                   | <b>35</b>                            |
| Approve somewhat    | <b>23</b>                   | <b>18</b>                            |
| <u>Disapprove</u>   | <b>34</b>                   | <b>33</b>                            |
| Disapprove somewhat | <b>8</b>                    | <b>6</b>                             |
| Disapprove strongly | <b>26</b>                   | <b>27</b>                            |
| No opinion          | <b>4</b>                    | <b>14</b>                            |

**Similar demographic profile in the ratings given to Biden and Harris**

There are a lot of similarities in the assessments that Californians give to the President and Vice President across demographic subgroups of the state’s registered voter population.

Each is viewed through a highly partisan and ideological lens, with nine in ten Democrats and self-described liberals approving, while greater than eight in ten Republicans and strongly conservative voters disapprove.

Both receive their most favorable assessments among voters in the heavily populated urban hubs of Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area and also receive somewhat higher approval ratings among women than men, and among voters of color than among white voters.

**Table 2**  
**Current job performance ratings given by California voters to President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris across subgroups of the registered voter population**

|                                | President Biden |              |              | Vice President Harris |              |              |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                | Approve %       | Disapprove % | No opinion % | Approve %             | Disapprove % | No opinion % |
| <b>Total registered voters</b> | <b>62</b>       | <b>34</b>    | <b>4</b>     | <b>53</b>             | <b>33</b>    | <b>14</b>    |
| <u>Party registration</u>      |                 |              |              |                       |              |              |
| Democrats                      | 90              | 7            | 3            | 82                    | 7            | 11           |
| Republicans                    | 11              | 87           | 2            | 7                     | 84           | 9            |
| No party preference            | 64              | 30           | 6            | 50                    | 28           | 22           |
| Minor parties                  | 43              | 47           | 10           | 36                    | 46           | 18           |
| <u>Political ideology</u>      |                 |              |              |                       |              |              |
| Strongly conservative          | 12              | 86           | 2            | 11                    | 85           | 4            |
| Somewhat conservative          | 25              | 73           | 2            | 20                    | 69           | 11           |
| Moderate                       | 64              | 29           | 7            | 53                    | 28           | 19           |
| Somewhat liberal               | 92              | 5            | 3            | 80                    | 5            | 15           |
| Strongly liberal               | 91              | 7            | 2            | 82                    | 7            | 11           |
| <u>Region</u>                  |                 |              |              |                       |              |              |
| Los Angeles County             | 69              | 27           | 4            | 60                    | 26           | 14           |
| San Diego County               | 60              | 37           | 3            | 52                    | 35           | 13           |
| Orange County                  | 53              | 43           | 4            | 45                    | 42           | 13           |
| Inland Empire                  | 52              | 43           | 5            | 45                    | 40           | 15           |
| Central Coast                  | 59              | 36           | 5            | 53                    | 34           | 13           |
| Central Valley                 | 51              | 45           | 4            | 44                    | 43           | 13           |
| San Francisco Bay Area         | 73              | 24           | 3            | 61                    | 24           | 15           |
| North Coast/Sierras            | 46              | 52           | 2            | 43                    | 52           | 5            |
| <u>Gender</u>                  |                 |              |              |                       |              |              |
| Male                           | 59              | 38           | 3            | 47                    | 37           | 16           |
| Female                         | 65              | 31           | 4            | 59                    | 29           | 12           |
| <u>Age</u>                     |                 |              |              |                       |              |              |
| 18-29                          | 62              | 29           | 9            | 47                    | 29           | 24           |
| 30-39                          | 65              | 31           | 4            | 54                    | 30           | 16           |
| 40-49                          | 63              | 33           | 4            | 55                    | 33           | 12           |
| 50-64                          | 60              | 38           | 2            | 54                    | 37           | 9            |
| 65 or older                    | 61              | 38           | 1            | 55                    | 35           | 10           |
| <u>Race/ethnicity</u>          |                 |              |              |                       |              |              |
| White                          | 56              | 41           | 3            | 48                    | 40           | 12           |
| Latino                         | 69              | 25           | 6            | 62                    | 25           | 13           |
| Asian/Pacific Islander         | 69              | 25           | 6            | 55                    | 24           | 21           |
| Black                          | 73              | 22           | 5            | 64                    | 21           | 15           |

**Biden’s job marks place him in the mid-range of those given to his immediate predecessors**

Biden’s initial job ratings place him in the mid-range of the job performance marks given by California voters to other recent presidents at the beginning of their first year in office.

Four of Biden’s nine immediate predecessors, Barack Obama, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and John F. Kennedy, each received higher initial job performance ratings from California voters than Biden at the beginning of their terms, while four others, including Donald Trump, George W. Bush Gerald Ford, and Bill Clinton, were given lower marks.

The early assessments that California voters gave to George H.W. Bush were generally similar to those now given to Biden.

---

**Table 3**  
**Comparing President Biden’s initial job performance rating in California to those of other recent U.S. Presidents**

---

|  | <u>Approve</u> | <u>Disapprove</u> | <u>No opinion</u> |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Joe Biden (D) – Late April 2021</b> | <b>62%</b>     | <b>34</b>         | <b>4</b>          |
| Donald Trump (R) – March 2017          | 39%            | 61                | --                |
| Barack Obama (D) – March 2009          | 65%            | 21                | 14                |
| George W. Bush (R) – May 2001          | 42%            | 44                | 14                |
| Bill Clinton (D) – May 1993            | 50%            | 46                | 4                 |
| George H. W. Bush – April 1989         | 61%            | 30                | 9                 |
| Ronald Reagan (R) – April 1981         | 74%            | 18                | 8                 |
| Jimmy Carter (D) – March 1977          | 68%            | 20                | 12                |
| Gerald Ford (R) – October 1974         | 55%            | 36                | 9                 |
| John F. Kennedy (D) – February 1961    | 76%            | 11                | 13                |

---

*Note: Job ratings of Biden and Trump from statewide surveys by the Berkeley IGS Poll, while the ratings of earlier presidents from statewide surveys conducted by The Field Poll, as reported in Release #2298, published March 4, 2009 by Field Research Corporation.*

**Personality descriptions that voters believe apply to President Biden**

Voters in the survey were then presented with a list of six personality descriptions and asked whether they believed each applied to President Biden.

The description that the largest proportion of the state’s voters feels applies to Biden is that he “has the right experience to be President.” Fully two in three voters statewide (66%) hold this view.

The next largest proportions feel the descriptions “cares about people like you” (56%) and “strong and decisive leader” (54%) apply to Biden. Another 52% also believe that the description “has the mental and physical stamina to be President” applies to the President, although 35% do not.

Partisanship strongly colors voter opinions with regard to each of these descriptions. For example, while eight in ten Democrats believe the four descriptions applies to Biden, only small proportions of Republicans feel this way. The views of No Party Preference voters generally mirror those of the overall electorate on each of these items.

There is no consensus among California voters as to whether Biden is “too progressive” or “not progressive enough.” Statewide, about one in three voters (32%) feel the description “too progressive” applies to the President, while just 18% think the description “not progressive enough” applies.

Republican voters are much more inclined to describe the President as being “too progressive” than are Democrats or No Party Preference voters. Fully two in three of the state’s GOP voters (64%) hold to this view, compared to just 15% of Democrats and 31% of No Party Preference voters.

**Table 4**  
**Personality descriptions that voters believe apply to President Biden**  
**(among California registered voters)**

|   | Applies<br>% | Does not<br>apply<br>% | No<br>opinion<br>% |
|---|--------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| <b><i>“Has the right experience to be President”</i></b>            |              |                        |                    |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                      | <u>66</u>    | <u>25</u>              | <u>9</u>           |
| Democrats   | 91           | 4                      | 5                  |
| Republicans   | 22           | 67                     | 11                 |
| No Party Preference/other   | 63           | 24                     | 13                 |
| <b><i>“Cares about people like you”</i></b>                         |              |                        |                    |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                      | <u>56</u>    | <u>33</u>              | <u>11</u>          |
| Democrats   | 82           | 9                      | 9                  |
| Republicans   | 13           | 79                     | 8                  |
| No Party Preference/other   | 53           | 34                     | 13                 |
| <b><i>“Strong and decisive leader”</i></b>                          |              |                        |                    |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                      | <u>54</u>    | <u>37</u>              | <u>9</u>           |
| Democrats   | 81           | 11                     | 8                  |
| Republicans   | 9            | 84                     | 7                  |
| No Party Preference/other   | 49           | 38                     | 13                 |
| <b><i>“Has the mental and physical stamina to be president”</i></b> |              |                        |                    |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                      | <u>52</u>    | <u>35</u>              | <u>13</u>          |
| Democrats   | 79           | 9                      | 12                 |
| Republicans   | 10           | 83                     | 7                  |
| No Party Preference/other   | 47           | 36                     | 17                 |
| <b><i>“Too progressive”</i></b>                                     |              |                        |                    |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                      | <u>32</u>    | <u>53</u>              | <u>15</u>          |
| Democrats   | 15           | 70                     | 15                 |
| Republicans   | 64           | 24                     | 12                 |
| No Party Preference/other   | 31           | 50                     | 19                 |
| <b><i>“Not progressive enough”</i></b>                              |              |                        |                    |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                      | <u>18</u>    | <u>61</u>              | <u>21</u>          |
| Democrats   | 24           | 58                     | 18                 |
| Republicans   | 9            | 72                     | 19                 |
| No Party Preference/other   | 18           | 56                     | 26                 |

**Personality descriptions that voters believe apply to Vice President Harris**

When voters are offered six personality descriptions in relation to Vice President Harris, the largest proportions feel that “is playing a significant role in the administration” (56%) and “is capable of stepping into the presidency if needed” (54%) apply. Slightly fewer feel the descriptions “strong and decisive leader” and “cares about people like you” applies to Harris.

Voter assessments about whether the Vice President is “too progressive” or “not progressive enough” are generally similar to those given to President Biden, with 31% saying the description “too progressive” applies to Harris, while 14% says this in relation to “not progressive enough.”

**Table 5**  
**Personality descriptions that voters believe apply to Vice President Harris**  
**(among California registered voters)**

|  | Applies<br>% | Does not apply<br>% | No opinion<br>% |
|--|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| <b><i>“Is playing a significant role in the administration”</i></b>  |              |                     |                 |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                       | <u>55</u>    | <u>24</u>           | <u>21</u>       |
| Democrats  | 73           | 9                   | 18              |
| Republicans  | 26           | 54                  | 20              |
| No Party Preference/other  | 52           | 23                  | 25              |
| <b><i>“Is capable of stepping into the presidency if needed”</i></b> |              |                     |                 |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                       | <u>53</u>    | <u>32</u>           | <u>15</u>       |
| Democrats  | 79           | 9                   | 12              |
| Republicans  | 10           | 77                  | 13              |
| No Party Preference/other  | 49           | 32                  | 19              |
| <b><i>“Strong and decisive leader”</i></b>                           |              |                     |                 |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                       | <u>51</u>    | <u>32</u>           | <u>17</u>       |
| Democrats  | 75           | 9                   | 16              |
| Republicans  | 9            | 77                  | 14              |
| No Party Preference/other  | 47           | 30                  | 23              |
| <b><i>“Cares about people like you”</i></b>                          |              |                     |                 |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                       | <u>46</u>    | <u>38</u>           | <u>16</u>       |
| Democrats  | 72           | 13                  | 15              |
| Republicans  | 6            | 84                  | 10              |
| No Party Preference/other  | 38           | 39                  | 23              |
| <b><i>“Too progressive”</i></b>                                      |              |                     |                 |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                       | <u>31</u>    | <u>47</u>           | <u>22</u>       |
| Democrats  | 13           | 66                  | 21              |
| Republicans  | 65           | 18                  | 17              |
| No Party Preference/other  | 30           | 43                  | 27              |
| <b><i>“Not progressive enough”</i></b>                               |              |                     |                 |
| <u>Total registered voters</u>                                       | <u>14</u>    | <u>58</u>           | <u>28</u>       |
| Democrats  | 20           | 56                  | 24              |
| Republicans  | 6            | 67                  | 27              |
| No Party Preference/other  | 11           | 55                  | 34              |

### **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. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The poll was administered online in English and Spanish April 29-May 5, 2021 among 10,289 California registered voters. To cover a broad range of issues and still minimize respondent fatigue the overall sample was divided into two random samples of 5,036 and 5,253 voters, respectively, when measuring the various personality descriptions applicable to President Biden and Vice President Harris.

The survey 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 registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California and were 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 to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

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 registered voters.

The sampling error associated with the results 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 findings based on the overall sample of registered voters are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-2 percentage points, while findings applicable to each random subsample have a sampling error of approximately +/- 2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

### **Question wording**

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Joe Biden is handling his job as President?

(ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF 5,036 REGISTERED VOTERS) Please indicate whether you feel each of the following descriptions applies to President Joe Biden? (SEE RELEASE FOR DESCRIPTIONS, ORDERING RANDOMIZED)

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Kamala Harris is handling her job as Vice President?



(ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF 5,253 REGISTERED VOTERS) Please indicate whether you feel each of the following descriptions applies to Vice President Kamala Harris? (SEE RELEASE FOR DESCRIPTIONS, ORDERING RANDOMIZED) \*

**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, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a copy of the detailed tabulations to this report or a listing of all past poll reports issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* please visit the poll's website at <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.