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## IGS Poll

### Title

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### Author

DiCamillo, Mark

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

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## ***Californians reasonably optimistic that an agreement on the debt ceiling will be reached, but foresee major problems if it is not.***

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

When the *Berkeley IGS Poll* polled Californians earlier this week, voters appeared reasonably optimistic that an agreement on the nation's debt ceiling would be reached. Greater than six in ten (61%) at the time said they felt a deal was likely, while 34% thought it was not. Optimism was bipartisan, with 66% of the state's registered Democrats expecting an agreement to be reached along with 59% of Republicans.

However, there was also near unanimity among voters of all political stripes that should a deal not be reached that it would create a serious problem for the country. Statewide 88% of the overall electorate feels this way, including 93% of the state's Democrats, 84% of Republicans and 82% of No Party Preference voters.

When asked whose position they side with more on matters relating to federal spending and the debt ceiling -- President Joe Biden's or the Republicans in Congress -- 40% sided with the President, and 28% sided with the Congressional Republicans, while another 17% said neither. Not surprisingly, opinions divide sharply along partisan lines, with Democratic voters overwhelmingly siding with the President's position (66% to 4%) and GOP voters even more one-sided in their support of the stance of Congressional Republicans (77% to 2%).

The poll also found Californians more divided than they were earlier this year about the job Biden is doing as President. Statewide 48% now approve of the President's performance overall, while 46% disapprove. Three months ago, Californians gave the President higher marks, with 57% approving and 39% disapproving.

Even so, evaluations of the President still exceed those given to the job being done by Congressional Republicans or by Congressional Democrats. Californians are particularly critical of Congressional Republicans, with just 28% approving and 65% disapproving of their performance. The ratings given Congressional Democrats, while somewhat better, are still underwater, with 43% approving and 50% disapproving. Evaluations of the President and the Congress are both highly partisan.

Impressions of House Speaker and home state congressional leader Kevin McCarthy also display the same highly partisan characteristics, with most Democrats viewing him unfavorably and most Republicans offering a positive assessment. Among the overall electorate 29% hold a favorable opinion of McCarthy, 49% view him unfavorably, and 22% have no opinion.

Observed IGS Co-Director Eric Schickler, “Although California Democrats and Republicans agree that failure to reach an agreement to raise the debt ceiling will pose a major problem for the country, they remain sharply divided as to which side should give ground.”

**Optimism that an agreement on the debt ceiling will be reached**

As the poll was being completed earlier this week, Californians felt reasonably optimistic that an agreement on the nation’s debt ceiling would be reached in Washington. At the time 61% of the state’s registered voters felt an agreement was likely, while 34% thought it was not. However, fewer than one in four (23%) believed an agreement was “very likely.” Voter optimism was bipartisan and included 66% of the state’s Democrats and 59% of Republicans.

**Table 1**  
**Likelihood that an agreement on the debt ceiling will be reached**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Republicans</b>	<b>No Party</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Pref/others</b>
				<b>%</b>
<u>Likely (net)</u>	<b>61</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>54</b>
Very likely	<b>23</b>	25	21	22
Somewhat likely	<b>38</b>	41	38	32
<u>Not likely (net)</u>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>37</b>
Not too likely	<b>24</b>	23	25	26
Not at all likely	<b>10</b>	8	12	11
No opinion	<b>5</b>	3	4	9

**Near unanimity that if an agreement is not reached it would create serious problems**

However, there is near unanimity among Californians that if an agreement on the debt ceiling is not reached it would create a serious problem for the country. Statewide 88% feel this way, with 63% viewing such an outcome as “very serious.”

Voters of all political stripes say that not reaching an agreement on the debt ceiling would create a serious problem for the country, including 93% of Democrats, 84% of Republicans and 82% of No Party Preference voters.

**Table 2**  
**Seriousness of the problem if an agreement on the debt ceiling is not reached**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Republicans</b>	<b>No Party</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Pref/others</b>
				<b>%</b>
<u>Serious (net)</u>	<b>88</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>82</b>
Very serious	<b>63</b>	70	56	56
Somewhat serious	<b>25</b>	23	28	27
<u>Not serious (net)</u>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>
Not too serious	<b>7</b>	4	9	9
Not at all serious	<b>2</b>	1	3	3
No opinion	<b>3</b>	2	4	6

### Highly partisan views about whose position voters support about the debt ceiling debate

When asked whose position they side with more on matters relating to federal government spending and increasing the debt limit, President Biden’s or the Republicans in Congress, opinions divide sharply along partisan lines. The state’s Democratic voters are one-sided in supporting the President’s position, while Republicans overwhelmingly side with the positions being taken by Congressional Republicans. The state’s No Party Preference voters are about evenly split, with 28% favoring the President’s position and 25% favoring of the position of the Republicans in Congress and 27% not favoring either side.

**Table 3**  
**Whose position on government spending and increasing the debt limit do you side with more?**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	Total %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Pref/others %
President Biden	40	66	2	28
The Republicans in Congress	28	4	77	25
Both	8	10	5	8
Neither	17	14	14	27
No opinion	7	6	2	12

### Biden now receiving only mixed job ratings in California

Californians have mixed views of the job Biden is doing as President. with 48% approving and 46% disapproving. Ominously, twice as many strongly disapprove as strongly approve. This is a much more divided assessment than was observed in February, the last time the poll measured the President’s job performance. At that time 57% approved, while 39% disapproved. Assessments of the President have been and continue to be highly partisan.

**Table 4**  
**Trend of voter appraisals of the job Joe Biden is doing as President**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	Approve (total) %	Approve strongly %	Approve somewhat %	Disapprove (total) %	Disapprove somewhat %	Disapprove strongly %	No opinion %
<b>May 2023</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>6</b>
February 2023	57	23	34	39	9	30	4
September 2022	52	18	34	43	12	31	5
August 2022	48	16	32	48	16	32	4
April 2022	50	17	33	46	14	32	4
February 2022	47	17	30	48	14	34	5
July 2021	59	30	29	37	10	27	4
April 2021	62	39	23	34	8	26	4
<i>Party (May '23)</i>							
Democrats	76	30	46	18	12	6	6
Republicans	7	1	6	92	8	84	1
No Party Prefer- ence/others	38	10	28	52	15	27	10

**Assessments of the job performance of Congressional Republicans and Congressional Democrats are lower than the President's**

Californians are very critical of the job Congressional Republicans are doing, with two and one-half times as many disapproving (68%) as approving (27%). Half of the state's voters (50%) also disapprove of the performance of Congressional Democrats, while 43% approve.

**Table 5**  
**Overall job ratings of the Democrats and the Republicans in Congress**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Republicans</b>	<b>No Party</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Pref/others</b>
				<b>%</b>
<b><u>Republicans in Congress</u></b>				
Approve (net)	<b>27</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>24</b>
Strongly	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>
Somewhat	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>20</b>
Disapprove (net)	<b>68</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>68</b>
Somewhat	<b>18</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>
Strongly	<b>50</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>45</b>
No opinion	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>
<b><u>Democrats in Congress</u></b>				
Approve (net)	<b>43</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>34</b>
Strongly	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
Somewhat	<b>33</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>29</b>
Disapprove (net)	<b>50</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>53</b>
Somewhat	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>19</b>
Strongly	<b>32</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>34</b>
No opinion	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>13</b>

**Voter views of House Speaker McCarthy also seen through a partisan prism**

Those surveyed in the current poll were also asked whether they held a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of House Speaker McCarthy. The results indicate that 49% of the state's voters view him unfavorably, while just 29% have a favorable opinion of the Speaker.

Views about McCarthy divide sharply along partisan lines, with Democrats viewing him negatively 65% to 14%, while Republicans offer a 58% to 21% favorable assessment. The views of No Party Preference voters generally mirror those of the overall electorate.

**Table 6**  
**Image ratings of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Democrats</b>	<b>Republicans</b>	<b>No Party</b>
	<b>Registered</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Preference</b>
	<b>voters</b>			<b>/others</b>
	<b>%</b>			<b>%</b>
Favorable	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>29</b>
Unfavorable	<b>49</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>45</b>
No opinion	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>

## **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 May 17-22, 2023 among 7,465 California registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

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**

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

Do you approve or disapprove of the way the (Republicans) (Democrats) in Congress are doing their job? (*ordering of each question was rotated*)

President Biden and the Republicans in Congress disagree on important matters relating to federal government spending and increasing the debt ceiling to enable the government to pay its bills and not go into default. Generally speaking, whose position on dealing with these matters do you tend to side with more on this matter—President Biden, the Republicans in Congress, both, or neither?

How likely do you think it is that President Biden and the Republicans in Congress will reach agreement to extend the debt limit and avoid default, which could result in the federal government not being able to meet its obligations to pay for programs like Social Security, Medicare, and defense, or to pay off holders of U.S. Treasury bills and bonds – very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely or not at all likely?

If an agreement on extending the debt ceiling is not reached, and the federal government does go into default, how serious a problem, do you think this would be for the country very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious?

Please indicate whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each of the following political figures, or whether you don't know enough about them to offer an opinion -- Kevin McCarthy, California Congressman and Speaker of the House?

**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>.