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Most Californians have confidence in the state's democracy, but opinions divide sharply along partisan and ideological grounds.

A majority of California voters are pleased with how the state's democracy is working. Overall 21% say they are extremely or very satisfied, 32% are moderately satisfied, 14% slightly satisfied, and 30% are not at all satisfied. However, opinions divide sharply along partisan and ideological lines, with three in four Democrats and liberal voters generally satisfied with the way democracy is working in the state, while large majorities of Republicans and conservative voters say they are not at all satisfied.

Similarly, the poll finds that most voters also have confidence in the integrity of the state's election system, with 48% having a high degree of confidence, 20% moderate confidence, and 29% not very or not at all confident. Large partisan differences characterize opinions of this as well. While Democrats and liberals generally express high levels of confidence in the integrity of the election process in California, large majorities Republicans and conservatives say they are not confident.

A major factor contributing to Republican and conservative voters' much lower level of confidence in the election process relates to their greater concerns about voter fraud. Despite no evidence of any widespread problems with voter fraud in the state, three in four GOP voters (75%) and 85% of the state's strongly conservative voters report having major concerns about voter fraud. By contrast, relatively small proportions of the state's Democrats (28%) or voters who are strongly liberal (12%) or somewhat liberal (23%) in politics view voter fraud as a major concern.

Voters hold mixed views when asked how well represented they feel they are by their local elected officials. Statewide 45% of voters report that they are well represented while 47% say they are not. Many Californians also see broad political divisions in their own local community, with nearly four times as many voters (43%) believing there are major political divisions among their local residents, while just 12% say they see relatively few political divisions among the residents of their community.

Opinions both about how well represented voters feel by their local elected officials and their perceptions of political divisiveness of their local communities are also tied to the partisan and ideological orientation of voters, with Democrats and liberal voters offering much more positive assessments than their Republican and conservative counterparts.

These findings come from a special *Berkeley IGS Poll* about democracy, voting rights, and election laws conducted on behalf of the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund. The survey was completed online July 20-25, 2023, among 6,164 registered voters across California.

“These data show that former President Donald Trump’s false claims of a stolen 2020 election and years of baseless complaints about voter fraud from conservative leaders have poisoned Republican voters about the state’s democracy that, by any measure, has successfully combined expanding access while maintaining election security,” said Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director of California Common Cause. “California has some of the most secure election systems in the nation. All voters, not just Democrats and those on the left, can have confidence in the casting and counting of our ballots.”

A majority of voters are pleased with how democracy is working in California

When asked how democracy is working in California 21% say they are extremely or very satisfied, 32% are moderately satisfied, 14% are slightly satisfied, while 30% are not at all satisfied. But views about this divide sharply along partisan and ideological lines, with three in four Democrats and liberals offering positive assessments, while majorities of Republicans and conservative voters are not at all satisfied.

On a regional basis there is greater dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy among voters in the sparsely populated counties in the North Coast/Sierras region, followed by voters in the Central Valley, Inland Empire and Orange County regions, which tend to include larger proportions of Republican voters. By contrast, satisfaction with the state’s democracy is greater in the heavily Democratic regions of the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County.

Table 1
Satisfaction with the way democracy is working in California

	Extremely/ very satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Slightly satisfied	Not at all satisfied	No opinion
	%	%	%	%	%
Total registered voters	21	32	14	30	4
<u>Party registration</u>					
Democrats	34	40	12	10	3
Republicans	5	13	14	67	2
No party preference/others	15	33	16	30	5
<u>Political ideology</u>					
Strongly conservative	7	9	11	72	1
Somewhat conservative	9	20	15	51	4
Moderate	18	36	15	27	4
Somewhat liberal	32	42	12	9	5
Strongly liberal	37	38	12	10	2
<u>Region</u>					
Los Angeles County	23	36	12	24	5
San Diego County	26	28	14	28	3
Orange County	18	28	15	36	3
Inland Empire	23	24	14	36	4
Central Coast	20	31	14	31	4
Central Valley	18	27	15	37	3
San Francisco Bay Area	22	38	13	22	4
North Coast/Sierras	10	34	14	42	--

Most voters express confidence in the integrity of the state’s election system

The largest share of Californians (48%) describe themselves as extremely or very confident in the overall integrity of the state’s election system, and another 20% express moderate confidence in the system. This compares to 29% who are not very or not at all confident.

However, there are wide differences in confidence by party affiliation and political ideology. While greater than two in three Democrats and liberals are extremely or very confident in the system, large majorities of Republicans and strongly conservative voters are not confident.

“Regular voters,” those who voted in five or more of the last seven elections, express much greater confidence in the integrity of the state’s election system than those who vote only infrequently or have not participated at all in the last seven elections.

Regionally, voters in the San Francisco Bay Area express the most confidence in the integrity of the election system, while voters living in the numerous, but sparsely populated, counties of the state’s North Coast/Sierras region have the least confidence.

Table 2
Confidence in the overall integrity of the election system in California

	Extremely/ very confident %	Moderately confident %	Not very/Not at all confident %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	48	20	29	3
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	69	21	9	2
Republicans	13	17	68	2
No party preference/other	45	20	30	5
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	13	15	70	1
Somewhat conservative	24	18	53	5
Moderate	46	24	27	4
Somewhat liberal	69	20	9	2
Strongly liberal	77	16	6	1
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	48	20	28	3
San Diego County	50	18	29	2
Orange County	43	19	35	3
Inland Empire	41	22	34	3
Central Coast	53	16	30	1
Central Valley	41	21	34	3
San Francisco Bay Area	61	18	18	3
North Coast/Sierras	37	20	43	--
<u>Voting Frequency</u>				
Regular voters	59	12	29	--
Intermittent voters	51	21	27	2
Infrequent voters	41	27	29	4
Non-voters	34	25	34	8

“Regular voters” are those who voted in at least 5 of the last 7 state elections held since 2018.

“Intermittent voters” are those who did not vote in 3 or 4 of the last 7 state elections held since 2018.

“Infrequent voters” are those who voted in only 1 or 2 of the last 7 state elections held since 2018.

“Non-voters” are those who did not vote in any of the last 7 state elections held since 2018.

A major factor contributing to Republican and conservative voters' lower confidence in the integrity of the election system relates to their far greater concerns about voter fraud. Despite no evidence of any widespread problems with election fraud in the state, 75% of Republicans say they have major concerns about voter fraud as a threat to the state's democracy, and this increases to 85% among strongly conservative voters. By contrast, only about one in four Democrats and even smaller proportions of liberals consider voter fraud a major concern.

Many see broad political divisions among the residents in their local community

The voters surveyed by the poll were also asked to assess the political divisions that exist among residents in their own local community on a 10-point scale, where 10 represented major divisions and 1 hardly any divisions. The results show that greater than four in ten Californians (43%) rate their communities with a highly divisive score of 8, 9 or 10, while just 12% say their residents have relatively few political divisions by offering scores of 1, 2 or 3. The rest (45%) offer a more mixed assessment and give scores of 4, 5, 6 or 7.

Appraisals are again highly partisan, with a majority of Republicans believing there are large political divisions among the residents of their communities, while most Democrats offer a mixed assessment.

When the results are examined on a regional basis, smaller proportions of voters report high levels of political divisiveness in the heavily Democratic regions of the San Francisco Bay Area (31%) and Los Angeles County (36%) compared to voters in the Central Valley (55%) and the North Coast and Sierra region (60%).

Table 3

Voter perceptions of the political divisions among residents in their local community on a 1-10 scale, where 10 = major divisions and 1 = hardly any divisions

	Highly divisive (8-10 score)	Mixed (4 – 7 score)	Few divisions (1-3 score)
	%	%	%
Total registered voters	43	46	12
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	35	51	13
Republicans	57	34	9
No party preference/other	45	44	11
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Strongly conservative	60	28	14
Somewhat conservative	48	41	9
Moderate	41	46	12
Somewhat liberal	35	43	12
Strongly liberal	38	59	11
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	36	50	13
San Diego County	46	43	11
Orange County	48	44	7
Inland Empire	45	44	10
Central Coast	49	44	8
Central Valley	55	35	10
San Francisco Bay Area	31	53	17
North Coast/Sierras	60	28	13

Mixed views of how well voters feel their local elected officials represent their interests

Voters are evenly divided in their assessments of how well their local elected officials are representing their interests, with 45% feeling well represented and 47% saying they are not.

Democrats and liberals feel well represented by their local officials nearly two to one. This contrasts with Republicans and conservatives who say they are not well represented by a margin greater than two to one. A majority of the state’s non-partisan voters also offer negative assessment of their local elected officials.

The frequency in which voters are participating in elections is also tied to voter evaluations. “Regular voters,” those who voted in five or more of the last seven elections, offer much more positive assessments of their local elected officials than those who vote less frequently.

“The approval rating of our local elected officials is underwater. If we are going to build Californians’ faith in their local democracies, we need a wholesale set of reforms, including independent redistricting commissions and public financing of elections at the local level and strong conflict of interest laws that ensures the local politicians work for the public interest and not special interests,” said Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director of California Common Cause.

Table 4

How well do you think your local elected officials represent your interests?

	Well represented	Not well represented	No opinion
	%	%	%
Total registered voters	45	47	7
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	60	33	7
Republicans	28	68	4
No party preference/other	37	54	10
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Strongly conservative	29	68	3
Somewhat conservative	34	63	3
Moderate	42	49	9
Somewhat liberal	59	30	10
Strongly liberal	59	34	6
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	49	44	7
San Diego County	45	50	6
Orange County	47	46	6
Inland Empire	37	54	9
Central Coast	49	43	7
Central Valley	38	53	9
San Francisco Bay Area	52	43	6
North Coast/Sierras	39	51	10
<u>Voting frequency</u>			
Regular voters	55	43	2
Intermittent voters	41	53	6
Infrequent voters	44	46	12
Non-voters	33	52	15

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 July 20-25, 2023, among 6,164 California registered voters. Funding for the poll 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

On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in California?

Using a 1 to 10 scale please rate the extent to which you think there are political divisions among people living in your own local community today, where 1 means there are hardly any political divisions at all and 10 means there are major political divisions. Choose any number between one and ten for your answer.

How confident are you about the overall integrity of the election system here in California?

To what extent do the following things concern you as being potential threats to having a representative democracy in California – voter fraud?

How well do you think your local elected officials represent your interests?

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.