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The Strong Feelings Underlying this Year's Vote for President are Leading Many to Question the Fairness of the Process and Whether Americans Will Respect its Outcome.

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*
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The final pre-election *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds the strong emotions underlying this year's presidential election are creating an unusually high degree of skepticism of the process and leading many to believe that not all Americans will respect its outcome.

Similar to an earlier September survey, the latest poll finds that 40% of voters remain skeptical that the election will be conducted in a way that is fair and open. And, despite California's long history of voting by mail, 46% now report being less confident that their vote will be counted if they mailed in their vote than if they voted in person.

Nearly nine in ten (87%) also agree with the statement, "I worry that many Americans will not respect the outcome of this year's presidential election," with 40% agreeing strongly. A similar proportion (88%) thinks violence is likely to occur if there are disputes about who won the outcome, 44% of whom feel this would be very likely.

Voters supporting President Donald Trump's re-election generally express greater skepticism that the election will be conducted fairly, are considerably less confident about whether votes cast by mail will be counted, and are more likely to hold strongly to the opinions that many Americans won't respect the election outcome and that the country will experience violence if there are disputes about who won.

Continuing concerns about the fairness of this year's presidential election

Four in ten Californians (40%) express skepticism that this year's presidential election will be conducted in a way that's fair and open. These results are similar to those found by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* in mid-September when 42% said this. Both sets of findings are alarming to political scientists, since it threatens the stability of our entire democratic system. IGS co-Director Eric Schickler commented that "the lack of public confidence that all votes will be counted and that both parties will respect the election outcome are worrisome signs of a political system that is under unusual stress."

The latest poll finds some shifting in the voter segments who now feel this way. In September about as many voters supporting Democrat Joe Biden’s presidential candidacy as those supporting the Trump’s re-election expressed concern. Now, many more Trump supporters (56%) than Biden supporters (33%) hold to this view.

Both surveys also found younger voters more apt to be skeptical about the fairness of the election than older voters. However, the proportion of younger voters saying this has declined some as the election has drawn nearer.

Table 1
Californians’ views about whether this year’s presidential election
will be conducted in a way that is fair and open
(among likely voters in California)

	Late October		Mid-September	
	Very/somewhat likely %	Not too/not at all likely %	Very/somewhat likely %	Not too/not at all likely %
Total likely voters	60	40	58	42
Presidential preference				
Biden voters	67	33	59	41
Trump voters	44	56	55	44
Others/undecided	54	46	52	48
Age				
18-29	52	48	44	56
30-39	57	43	49	51
40-49	56	44	58	42
50-64	62	37	61	39
65-74	64	36	65	35
75 or older	64	36	65	35

Many Californians now have less confidence that votes cast by mail will be counted than those cast in person

Despite California’s long history of voting by mail, many voters now report being less confident that their vote will be counted using this method than when voting in person. This is particularly true among President Trump’s supporters. Among voters backing the President’s re-election 78% have less confidence that votes cast by mail will be counted than those cast in person. Just 32% of Biden’s supporters say this.

The poll also finds a direct relationship between voter confidence in mail ballot voting and how they intend to vote in this year’s election. Fully eight in ten Californians who intend to cast their ballot in person on Election Day (81%) are less confident that their vote would be counted if they voted by mail. By contrast, about three in four voters who will be mailing in their ballot have equal or greater confidence that their vote will be counted using this method than if they were to vote in person.

Table 2 Confidence that votes cast by mail will be counted compared to those cast in person in this year's election (among likely voters in California)			
	<u>Less confidence</u> <u>in mail balloting</u> %	<u>Equally</u> <u>confident</u> %	<u>More confidence</u> <u>in mail balloting</u> %
Total likely voters	46	36	18
Presidential preference			
Biden voters	32	47	22
Trump voters	78	13	9
No Party Preference/other	46	35	19
Voting method			
Cast by mail	26	50	24
Cast in drop box or hand delivered to vote center	47	36	17
Cast in person at the polls on Election Day	81	12	8

(In this and succeeding tables the sum of subgroup percentages from the current poll may add to slightly more or slightly less than 100% due to rounding.)

Many Californians worry that not all Americans will respect the election outcome

Most voters continue to be worried that not all Americans will respect the outcome of the presidential election. In September 82% agreed with the statement, “I worry that many Americans will not respect the outcome of this year’s presidential election.” In the latest survey 87% say this, 40% of whom agree strongly with this statement.

Large majorities of voters on both sides of the aisle express worries about whether or not their fellow Americans will respect the outcome of the election. However, voters supporting President Trump’s re-election are somewhat more likely than others to hold strongly to this view.

Table 3 Agree/disagree: “I worry that many Americans will not respect the outcome of this year’s presidential election” (among likely voters in California)				
	<u>Agree</u> <u>Strongly</u> %	<u>Agree</u> <u>somewhat</u> %	<u>Disagree</u> <u>somewhat</u> %	<u>Disagree</u> <u>strongly</u> %
Total likely voters				
Late October	40	47	10	3
Mid-September*	37	45	9	4
Presidential preference (late-Oct.)				
Biden voters	36	50	10	3
Trump voters	49	39	10	3
Others/undecided	37	48	13	2

* Another 5% of voters in the mid-September poll had no opinion on this question.

Most voters expect violence if there are disputes over who won the election

Emotions about the presidential election are running so high that most Californians expect violence if there are disputes about who won the election. Statewide 44% of voters think violence is very likely to occur in this situation, and another 44% consider violence a somewhat likely outcome.

Trump supporters are again somewhat more likely than others to think violence will occur should there be doubts about the outcome of the presidential election. Younger Californians are also more likely than older voters to feel this way.

Table 4 How likely is it that the country will experience violence if there are disputes about the accuracy of this year’s presidential election? (among likely voters in California)			
	<u>Very</u> <u>likely</u> %	<u>Somewhat</u> <u>likely</u> %	<u>Not</u> <u>likely</u> %
Total likely voters	44	44	12
Presidential preference			
Biden voters	40	46	13
Trump voters	53	39	8
Others/undecided	44	39	16
Age			
18-29	54	39	6
30-39	50	39	11
40-49	46	44	11
50-64	42	44	14
65-74	41	45	14
75 or older	32	53	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 October 16-21, 2020 among 6,686 California registered voters, of whom 5,352 were considered likely to vote or had already voted in this year's election.

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 in an attempt 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 overall sample of registered voters to population characteristics of the state's registered voters. Likely voters were identified based on a voter's stated interest in and intention to vote in the election and factoring in their history of voting in past elections.

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 sample of likely voters in the election are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

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

Question wording

In your opinion, how likely do you think it is that the current presidential election will be conducted in a way that is fair and open?

Compared to voting in-person at the polls, do you have more confidence that your vote will be counted when voting by mail, less confidence, or are you equally confident using either method?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “I worry that many Americans will not respect the outcome of this year’s presidential election?”

How likely do you think it is that the country will experience violence if there are disputes about the accuracy of this year’s presidential election?

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 complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.