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Title

Release #2020-12: How partisan differences and views of President Trump are framing voter perceptions of the virus

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5zc889qp>

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Publication Date

2020-08-05



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Release #2020-12

Wednesday, August 5, 2020

How partisan differences and views of President Trump are framing voter perceptions of the virus

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*
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In its latest survey the *Berkeley IGS Poll* polled California voters on a wide range of issues relating to the coronavirus. The findings are being reported in two parts, today and tomorrow. Today's release focuses on how partisan differences and views of President Donald Trump are shaping voter perceptions of the virus.

Today's report finds large and consistent differences in how the state's Republicans (and voters supporting Donald Trump's re-election) view the coronavirus compared to other voters. The most prominent concern whether the state moved too quickly to ease restrictions on businesses, the role that masks play in preventing the spread of the disease, and the reopening of the public schools.

After reviewing the results relating to the reopening of the schools, Professor Eric Schickler, co-director of the University of California, Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies, which conducted the Poll, observed, "it is striking that parents of school age children and non-parents have very similar views about the reopening of the schools, while there is a substantial gap between Republicans and Democrats."

Most Californians believe restrictions on businesses were eased too early

Six in ten Californians (61%) believe the state, along with city and county officials, moved too quickly to ease restrictions on businesses. This compares to 33% who feel the restrictions needed to be eased because of the economic damage they were causing.

Democrats overwhelmingly hold to the dominant view that the restrictions were eased too quickly (80%). Non-partisan voters who are registered as No Party Preference also feel this way by a greater than two-to-one margin. By contrast, Republican voters take the opposite view, with nearly three in four (73%) believing that the restrictions needed to be eased because of the economic damage they were causing.

These same large differences are also observed when comparing voters who are supporting President Trump's re-election in this year's election to other voters. While voters backing

Trump overwhelmingly feel the restrictions on businesses needed to be eased because of the economic damage they were causing, those supporting Biden are even more likely to believe the restrictions on businesses were eased too quickly.

Table 1
Did the state, along with city and county officials, ease restrictions on businesses too quickly or did these restrictions need to be eased because of the economic damage they were causing (among California registered voters)

	Restrictions were eased too quickly %	Restrictions needed to be eased because of the economic damage they were causing %	No opinion %
Total statewide	61	33	6
Party registration			
Democrat	80	14	6
Republican	22	73	5
No Party Preference	64	28	8
Other party	55	37	8
Vote choice for president*			
Biden supporter	80	13	7
Trump supporter	17	79	4
Undecided voters	53	32	15

* The survey found that 67% of the state’s likely voters were backing Biden, 28% were supporting Trump and 5% were undecided.

Two in three believe wearing a mask is an “extremely effective” way to prevent a person from getting the virus

By a two-to-one margin Californians (66%) believe wearing a face mask is an extremely effective way to prevent a person from contracting the coronavirus when in the presence of other people. This compares to 25% who think wearing a mask is only somewhat effective, while just 7% feel it is not effective at all.

Greater than eight in ten Democrats (81%) hold to the dominant view that wearing a mask is extremely effective in preventing a person from getting the disease, as do two-thirds of the state’s No Party Preference voters. By contrast, Republicans are far less convinced, with just 39% maintaining that wearing a mask is extremely effective, 38% saying it is only somewhat effective and 21% believing it is not effective at all.

Wide differences about the perceived effectiveness of wearing a mask are also observed between voters backing Trump’s re-election and other voters. Among Biden supporters 80% feel wearing a mask is an extremely effective way to prevent a person from getting the virus. This contrasts sharply with how Trump supporters view this, as just 35% feel that wearing a mask is an extremely effective method of avoiding the disease.

	<u>Extremely effective</u> %	<u>Somewhat effective</u> %	<u>Not at all effective</u> %
Total statewide	66	25	7
Party registration			
Democrat	81	17	1
Republican	39	38	21
No Party Preference	66	27	4
Other party	58	29	9
Vote choice for president			
Biden supporter	80	19	1
Trump supporter	35	39	23
Undecided voters	60	31	4

Note: In this and succeeding tables the differences between 100% and the sum of percentages for each row represents the proportion of voters with no opinion.

Strong support for requiring people to wear face masks in enclosed public places

There is overwhelming support among California voters for requiring people to wear a face mask when in enclosed public places, such as in stores or offices. Statewide 90% endorse this policy, with 80% favoring it strongly. Just 10% are opposed.

Partisan differences are also observed, although they have more to do with a voter's strength of support than support versus opposition. Democrats and Biden supporters are nearly unanimous in saying they strongly favor taking this approach. On the other hand, among Republican voters and backers of Trump's re-election fewer than half strongly endorse this policy, while another one in four favor it somewhat and 32% are opposed.

	<u>Favor strongly</u> %	<u>Favor somewhat</u> %	<u>Oppose somewhat</u> %	<u>Oppose strongly</u> %
Total statewide	80	10	5	5
Party registration				
Democrat	95	3	1	1
Republican	48	24	12	16
No Party Preference	85	9	3	3
Other party	77	9	9	4
Vote choice for president				
Biden supporter	96	3	1	*
Trump supporter	43	25	14	18
Undecided voters	78	13	5	4

* less than 1/2 of 1%

“These findings demonstrate the powerful ways that partisanship shapes perceptions of the virus and proper health and safety protocols. Red versus Blue differences concerning mask wearing continue today,” said Associate Professor Cristina Mora, IGS’s other co-director.

Californians are divided about the reopening of the state’s public schools

There is no consensus among voters about the best approach to take regarding the reopening of the state’s public schools. Four in ten voters (39%) favor allowing only online instruction, while 42% support employing a hybrid approach that combines both in-school and online instruction. Relatively few (14%) favor resuming normal in-school instruction.

Among Democrats and Biden supporters, narrow majorities favor permitting only online instruction, and hardly any support resuming normal in-school instruction. Republicans and Trump supporters hold different views, with pluralities believing the schools should resume normal in-school instruction and few favoring online-only instruction. There are only modest regional differences with regard to the reopening of the schools by region and hardly any differences between parents and non-parents of school age children on this issue.

Table 4
Opinions of the best approach to take with regard to the reopening of public schools in the fall (among California registered voters)

	Resume normal in-school <u>instruction</u> %	Hybrid approach combining in-school <u>and online instruction</u> %	Online instruction <u>only</u> %
Total statewide	14	42	39
Party registration			
Democrat	2	42	52
Republican	44	37	14
No Party Preference/other	9	45	39
Vote choice for president			
Biden supporter	1	44	51
Trump supporter	47	36	12
Undecided voters	9	44	38
Parent of school-age child			
No	14	42	38
Elementary school parent	16	38	43
Secondary school parent	16	40	42
Region			
Los Angeles County	10	38	48
San Diego County	19	45	30
Orange County	21	41	33
Inland Empire	17	44	34
Other Southern California	19	42	35
Central Valley	17	39	38
San Francisco Bay Area	9	46	40
Other Northern California	14	44	35

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 21-27, 2020 among 8,328 California registered voters.

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 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 California registered voters 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 May the state of California, along with city and county officials, began easing some of the restrictions on businesses that had originally been imposed to try to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Based on what you know now, do you believe – (1) the restrictions were eased too quickly, (2) the restrictions needed to be eased because of the economic damage they were causing, (3) no opinion.

In your opinion, how effective are the following for preventing a person from getting the coronavirus -- wearing a mask – (1) extremely effective, (2) somewhat effective, (3) not at all effective, (4) no opinion.

Do you favor or oppose requiring people to wear face masks while in enclosed public places, such as stores or offices?

Which of the following do you believe would be the best approach to take with regard to reopening the state's public schools in the fall – (1) allow students to return to normal in-school instruction, (2) allow students to return to in-school instruction part of the time to reduce class sizes and allow for more social distancing, but require online instruction part of the time, (3) require students to receive online instruction only.

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>.