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While there is bipartisan support in California to preserve the right to recall elected officials, majorities favor reforming the process.

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*
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With tomorrow's recall election of Governor Gavin Newsom looming in the background, Californians in the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* were asked their opinions about continuing to have the right to recall state elected officials like the governor as part of the state constitution. The survey also obtained reactions to five possible reform proposals.

By a resounding three-to-one margin (75% to 24%) voters describe the recall provision as a good thing. This view is held by majorities of all political stripes, although Democrats and liberals express somewhat greater reticence, with greater than one in three viewing it as a bad thing.

Yet, the poll also supports for several reforms to the way the recall process works. Receiving the broadest support is one that calls for changing the rules governing replacement elections so that if no candidate receives a majority of the vote, and the officeholder is voted out of office, a runoff election should be held between the top two vote getters. This reform is favored 69% to 21% among all voters, including 75% of Democrats, 64% of No Party Preference voters and 41% of Republicans.

Three other reform proposals receive majority backing from the electorate, although views about each is much more partisan and ideologically based, with large majorities of Democrats and liberals in favor and large majorities of Republicans and strong conservatives opposed. These include:

- Toughening the rules that apply to recalling state elected officials, so that officeholders can only be recalled for cause, such as when an officeholder is found to have carried out illegal or unethical conduct (59% favor vs. 29% opposed).
- Increasing the number of signatures required for a recall election to qualify for the ballot from 12% of the total votes cast in the last statewide election to 25% (55% to 30%).
- Making it more difficult for candidates to run in a gubernatorial replacement election by requiring them to meet a higher threshold than the current \$4,000 filing fee and the 7,000 voter-signature threshold that is now in place (51% to 32%).

Observed IGS co-Director Eric Schickler, "The results show that at the time of the Newsom recall, most voters, including a majority of Democrats, support recall elections in principle, but also favor reforms that would impose somewhat higher hurdles in bringing future recall elections to the ballot."

Three in four supports maintaining the recall provision as part of the state constitution

There is strong support among California registered voters for maintaining a way to recall state elected officials, like the governor, as part of the state constitution. Three in four voters (75%) describe having this provision as part of the California constitution as being a good thing, while just 24% think it is a bad thing.

Support for maintaining the recall includes large majorities across voters of all parties, ideologies, and demographic subgroups. However, among Democrats and liberals greater than one in three describe the recall provision as a bad thing.

	Good thing	Bad thing
	%	%
Total registered voters	75	24
<u>Party registration</u>		
Democrat	62	37
Republican	96	4
No party preference	75	23
Other party	84	14
<u>Political ideology</u>		
Strongly conservative	94	6
Somewhat conservative	91	9
Moderate	77	22
Somewhat liberal	63	36
Strongly liberal	58	41
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	77	22
Female	73	25
<u>Age</u>		
18-29	85	14
30-39	77	21
40-49	73	25
50-64	71	28
65 or older	69	29
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>		
White	75	24
Latino	75	24
Asian/Pacific Islander	74	25
African American	71	29

Note: Differences between 100% and the sum of percentages equal proportion of voters with no opinion.

Majorities of voters support several reforms to the recall process

Voters in this survey were presented with five proposals aimed at reforming the state's recall election process and asked whether they favored or opposed each one. The results indicate that majorities back a number of these proposals.

The recall reform that receives the broadest support is one that calls for changing the rules governing replacement elections such that if none of the replacement candidates receives a majority and the officeholder facing recall is voted out of office, a runoff election should be held between the top two vote getters.

This proposal is favored greater than three to one (69% to 21%) among the overall electorate, and receives the support of 75% of Democrats, 64% of No Party Preference voters and 41% of Republicans. Voters who say they are strongly conservative in politics are the most resistant to making this change, opposing it by a 50% to 32% margin.

Three other reform proposals win majority backing from the state's overall electorate, although views about each is highly partisan and ideologically based, with large majorities of Democrats and liberals in favor, while Republicans and strong conservatives are opposed.

By a greater than two to one margin (59% to 29%) voters favor toughening the rules that apply to recalling state elected officials, so that officeholders can only be recalled for cause, such as when an officeholder is found to have carried out illegal or unethical conduct. Democrats are overwhelmingly in favor of this idea, 78% to 12%, but Republicans are opposed more than two to one (29% in favor vs. 61% opposed).

A 55% majority also supports the idea of increasing the number of signatures required for a recall election to qualify for the ballot from the current 12 percent threshold of votes cast in the last statewide election to 25 percent. Democrats are again very one-sided in their support (77% to 10%), while Republican voters are very much opposed, 18% to 70%.

About half of the electorate (51%) backs the idea of making it more difficult for candidates to run in a gubernatorial replacement election by requiring them to meet a higher threshold than the current \$4,000 filing fee and the 7,000 voter-signature thresholds now in place. About one in three voters statewide (32%) are opposed and 17% are undecided. Democrats favor the idea more than three to one (65% to 18%), while Republicans are opposed 31% to 54%.

Opinions about a fifth reform proposal are somewhat more divided. This relates to the idea of allowing officeholders who are facing recall to also be included among the candidates in the replacement election. Among all voters 42% favor this idea, 35% are opposed and 23% are undecided. Opinions again divide voters along party and ideological lines, with Democrats and liberals in favor and Republicans and conservatives opposed.

Table 2			
Voter views about possible reforms to the state's recall election process among all registered voters statewide and by party registration			
	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
	%	%	%
Change election rules in replacement elections so that if no one receives much of the vote, a runoff election is held between the top two vote getters	<u>63</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>16</u>
Democrat	75	9	16
Republican	41	45	14
No Party Preference	64	18	18
Other party	56	24	20
Toughen the rules for recalling state elected officials so they can only be recalled for cause, such as when an officeholder commits illegal or unethical conduct	<u>59</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>12</u>
Democrat	78	12	10
Republican	29	61	10
No Party Preference	58	29	13
Other party	49	35	16
Increase the number of signatures required to qualify a recall election from 12% of the total votes cast in the last statewide election to 25%	<u>55</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>15</u>
Democrat	77	10	13
Republican	18	70	12
No Party Preference	55	26	19
Other party	42	41	17
Make it more difficult for persons to run as candidates in a gubernatorial recall election by requiring them to meet a higher threshold than the current \$4,000 filing fee and 7,000 voter signatures necessary for qualification	<u>51</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>17</u>
Democrat	65	18	17
Republican	31	54	15
No Party Preference	46	33	21
Other party	38	42	20
Allow officeholders facing a recall election to be listed among the candidates in the replacement election	<u>42</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>23</u>
Democrat	58	17	25
Republican	16	68	16
No Party Preference	39	34	27
Other party	36	37	27

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 August 30 - September 6, 2021, among 9,809 registered voters across California.

The survey distributed email invitations to 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 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 a wide range of population characteristics of the state's registered voters.

The sampling error associated with the statewide results are difficult to calculate precisely because 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 +/-1.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Question wording

Regardless of how you feel about the upcoming gubernatorial recall election, do you think it is a good thing or bad thing that the California constitution provides a way to recall state elected officials, like the governor?

Currently, a governor or any other statewide officeholder can be recalled from office for any reason. Do you favor or oppose toughening the rules for recalling state elected officials so they can only be recalled for cause, such as when an officeholder commits illegal or unethical conduct?

In order to qualify a recall election for the ballot, supporters currently need to gather the signatures of at least 12 percent of the total votes cast in the last statewide election for that office. Do you favor or oppose increasing the number of signatures required to qualify a statewide recall election from 12 percent to 25 percent?

When a recall election is called, voters are asked to vote Yes or No to remove that official from office, and if a majority votes to recall the official, the incumbent is removed from office. In the same election, voters are also asked who they would choose to replace that officeholder and the candidate receiving the most votes takes office, even if that candidate receives fewer than half the votes in the election. Would you favor or oppose changing this so that if no one receives a majority of the vote, a runoff election is held between the top two vote getters?

Currently, to become a candidate in most state elections all one must do is pay a filing fee of about \$4,000 or collect at least 7,000 signatures from voters in their home county. Do you favor or oppose making it more difficult for persons to run as candidates in a gubernatorial recall election by requiring them to meet a higher threshold than for other elections?

Currently, elected officials who are subject to recall are not allowed to include their name on the same ballot as those running to replace that officeholder. Do you favor or oppose allowing officeholders who are facing a recall election to be listed among the candidates in the replacement 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 copy of the detailed tabulations to this report or a listing of past poll reports issued by the poll, please visit <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.