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Californians want their elected leaders to reflect the diversity of its people.

Eight in ten Californians consider it important for their local elected officials to represent the diversity of their community, with 55% describing it as very important for their local elected officials to represent the diversity of their community and 25% saying it is somewhat important.

Most voters are also concerned that the state's elected leaders are not reflective of the diversity within California's population. About half (47%) describe this as a major concern to them, while another 28% say it is a minor concern. Voters of color, especially Black voters, as well as women are more likely than others to express major concerns about this. Strong majorities of Democrats (93%), Republicans (61%), and No Party Preference voters (76%) all express concern.

Veronica Carrizales, Vice President of Policy and External Affairs for California Calls, stated, "A representative democracy can only be achieved when elected officials reflect the values of the communities they represent. Sacramento has historically ignored the needs of low-income communities of color when shaping legislation and allocating resources. To restore trust in government and democracy, our communities need people who will fight for their needs and interests."

Many Californians believe voter registration and voting access is not meeting the needs of diverse voters. Four in ten voters (41%) believe that Black, Latino, Asian American, and Native American voters are more likely to encounter problems when registering and voting than their white counterparts. And an even larger proportion (60%) says this way when asked to compare the problems that non-English-speaking citizens face when registering and voting to English-speaking citizens.

"To build the nation's first truly representative democracy, California must build the nation's first multilingual democracy," said Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director of California Common Cause. "While we have made progress on making voting registration and voting easier, language access in elections has fallen far behind. California lags other states when it ought to be a nationwide leader."

Californians also support allowing more of its immigrant residents to vote. By a five to four margin (51% to 42%) voters are supportive of extending voting rights to non-citizen parents in local school board elections where their children attend.

Annette Wong, Managing Director of Programs at Chinese for Affirmative Action, said “A representative democracy requires that those impacted by decisions made by elected officials have meaningful access to elect those officials. Non-citizen voting is percolating in local municipalities throughout the state. This poll reflects the re-emerging popularity of non-citizen voting as an important step toward bringing us closer to a truer democracy.”

However, more voters oppose than support 52% to 42% allowing 16 and 17-year-olds who attend local public schools to vote in their school board elections.

Younger voters and Latinos are much more supportive of both proposals than older voters and white voters. Views about both proposals also divide the electorate sharply along partisan and ideological grounds, with Democrats and liberals very much in favor, while Republicans and conservatives are strongly opposed.

These findings come from the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted July 20-25, 2023, among 6,164 registered voters in California. It is the third of a five-part series on democracy, voting rights and reforming election laws, and was funded under a grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

Eight in ten voters consider it important for local elected officials to reflect the diversity of their communities

When asked how important they feel it is for local elected officials to represent the diversity of their communities, eight in ten (80%) consider it important, with 55% describing it as very important and 25% as somewhat important. Majorities of Democrats (93%), Republicans (61%) and No Party Preference/other voters (76%) all agree that it is important.

However, wide partisan and ideological differences characterize the intensity of the concern, with Democrats and liberals twice as likely to feel this is very important compared to Republicans and conservatives. Black voters also feel particularly strongly about this, with 81% saying it as very important. Women (64%) are also more likely than men (46%) to say it is very important.

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not Important	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
Total registered voters	55	25	16	4
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	70	23	6	2
Republicans	32	29	35	5
No party pref./other	51	25	19	6
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	36	23	36	4
Somewhat conservative	33	32	32	2
Moderate	55	25	15	6
Somewhat liberal	66	25	7	2
Strongly liberal	77	18	3	1
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	54	26	14	6
30-39	56	20	19	5
40-49	54	27	16	3
50-64	56	24	17	2
65 or older	55	26	16	3
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	64	23	9	3
Male	46	26	24	4
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	52	28	17	2
Latino	59	21	14	6
Asian/Pacific Islander	49	27	20	5
Black	81	12	6	1

Voters also concerned that the state’s elected leaders don’t reflect the diversity of California

Most voters also express concerns that the state’s elected leaders are not reflective of the diversity of California’s population, with about half (47%) describing it as a major concern and 28% saying it is a minor concern. Just 20% are not concerned.

Party and political ideology are again strong influences. While majorities of Democrats (86%), Republicans (52%) and No Party Preference/other voters (74%) all describe the lack of diversity in state leadership as a concern, Democrats and liberals are far more likely than Republicans and conservatives to say it is a major concern. In addition, women and voters of color (especially Black voters), are more likely than men or white voters to express major concerns about California’s elected leaders not reflecting the diversity of the state.

	A major concern	A minor concern	Not a concern	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
Total registered voters	47	28	20	6
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	57	29	9	5
Republicans	29	23	43	5
No party preference/other	45	29	18	8
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	36	17	41	5
Somewhat conservative	31	28	36	5
Moderate	47	26	18	9
Somewhat liberal	51	37	9	4
Strongly liberal	64	28	6	3
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	54	23	17	7
30-39	51	26	16	7
40-49	51	24	20	5
50-64	45	29	22	4
65 or older	38	34	23	5
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	55	26	13	6
Male	38	30	26	6
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	39	33	25	3
Latino	57	21	12	10
Asian/Pacific Islander	48	28	16	8
Black	70	20	6	4

Perceptions of whether California’s voters of color and its non-English-speaking citizens face greater difficulties than others when registering and voting

Four in ten Californians (41%) believe that the state’s Black, Latino, Asian American, and Native American voters are more likely to encounter problems when registering and voting than their white counterparts. And an even larger proportion (60%) say this way when asked about the problems that non-English-speaking citizens face compared to other citizens.

The views of Latinos and Asian Americans about the difficulties that voters of color face when registering and voting are close to those of the overall electorate, while Black voters are more likely to believe there are problems. Voters of color are more likely than white voters to believe non-English-speaking citizens are more apt to encounter such problems compared to the state’s English speakers.

Perceptions are again strongly influenced by a voter’s party and ideological affiliation, with large majorities of Democrats and liberals believing these groups face greater difficulties, while large majorities of Republicans and conservatives say they do not. Younger voters and women are also more likely than older voters and men to believe that the state’s voters of color and its non-English speakers encounter greater difficulties when registering and voting than others.

Table 3

Compared to whites, are Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans more likely to encounter problems when trying to register and vote in California or not?

Compared to English-speaking citizens, are non-English-speaking citizens more likely to encounter problems when trying to register and vote in California or not?

	Voters of color		Non-English speakers	
	Yes, more likely %	No more likely %	Yes, more likely %	No more likely %
Total registered voters	41	38	60	24
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	57	19	73	12
Republicans	13	74	34	51
No party pref./other	39	38	59	22
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	13	79	32	57
Somewhat conservative	18	64	42	42
Moderate	39	35	57	21
Somewhat liberal	53	21	73	13
Strongly liberal	72	10	85	5
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	57	25	79	10
30-39	50	30	65	21
40-49	42	36	58	25
50-64	32	47	51	32
65 or older	32	45	51	29
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	45	33	63	21
Male	37	43	56	27
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	38	40	56	27
Latino	44	35	67	19
Asian/Pacific Islander	44	33	64	23
Black	58	26	63	16

In Tables 3 and 4 the differences between 100% and the sum of each question's percentages equal the proportions with no opinion.

Views about expanding voting rights in local school board elections to segments not currently eligible but who have a stake in its decisions

Californians were asked whether voting rights in local school board elections should be granted to two groups not currently eligible but who have a stake in the outcome – the parents of non-citizens with children in the public schools and 16- and 17-year-olds who attend the local public schools. The poll finds voters support extending voting rights to non-citizen parents by a five to four margin (51% to 42%). However, more voters oppose (52%) than support (42%) allowing 16 and 17-year-olds who attend local public schools to vote in these elections.

Both matters divide the electorate sharply along partisan and ideological grounds. While Democrats and liberal voters support granting voting rights in these elections to both groups by wide margins, Republicans and conservative voters are very one-sided in their opposition.

There are also significant differences of opinions about this across other demographic subgroups. For example, a majority of voters aged 18 to 29 endorse the idea of granting voting rights to both groups in local school board elections, while a majority of voters aged 50 or older are opposed. Majorities of Latinos and Black voters also endorse both proposals, while a majority of white voters are opposed. The poll also finds women more supportive than men.

Table 4
Voter views about extending voting rights in local school board elections to two groups not currently eligible who have a stake in its decisions

	Non-citizen parents		16- and 17-year-olds	
	Support %	Oppose %	Support %	Oppose %
Total registered voters	51	42	42	52
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	69	24	61	33
Republicans	19	78	11	86
No party preference/other	49	42	38	54
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	18	80	13	85
Somewhat conservative	28	69	18	78
Moderate	50	41	42	52
Somewhat liberal	63	30	53	50
Strongly liberal	82	12	72	21
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	70	23	57	36
30-39	59	33	49	45
40-49	49	44	43	51
50-64	41	54	38	58
65 or older	42	52	30	64
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	56	37	47	48
Male	45	48	37	56
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	43	51	37	59
Latino	68	25	51	43
Asian/Pacific Islander	52	38	46	47
Black	51	45	54	41

A plurality of voters see California’s diversity as an advantage rather than a source of problems

Many more voters view the different nationalities, religions, races, and lifestyles within California’s population as an advantage (42%) rather than a challenge and a source of problems (10%). However, nearly as many (40%) see it as both an advantage and a challenge.

Opinions about this are again related to a voter’s party registration and political ideology. Large majorities of Democrats and political liberals view the state’s diversity as an advantage and very few see it as a challenge and source of problems. Relatively few of the state’s Republicans however view this an advantage, with most either seeing it more as a challenge and source of problems or as both an advantage and a challenge.

Table 5

**Are the different nationalities, religions, races, and lifestyle of California’s people more of an advantage or more of a challenge and source of problems for the state?
(among California registered voters)**

	More of an advantage %	More of a challenge & source of problems %	Both %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	42	10	40	7
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	57	5	31	6
Republicans	15	21	55	9
No party preference/other	40	10	43	8
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	15	27	50	8
Somewhat conservative	18	22	51	9
Moderate	36	9	45	10
Somewhat liberal	59	2	35	4
Strongly liberal	73	1	22	4
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	48	8	37	8
30-39	45	7	38	10
40-49	43	10	38	9
50-64	40	11	43	6
65 or older	37	14	43	5
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	44	8	37	8
Male	40	13	40	6
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	43	11	41	4
Latino	42	9	38	11
Asian/Pacific Islander	39	10	44	7
Black	39	7	37	16

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

California includes people of many different nationalities, religions, races, and lifestyles. Do you view this more as an advantage for the state or more as a challenge and source of problems?

Compared to whites, do you think Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans are more likely to encounter problems when trying to register and vote in California or not?

Compared to English-speaking citizens, do you think non-English speaking citizens are more likely to encounter problems when trying to register and vote in California or not?

To what extent do the following things concern you as being potential threats to having a representative democracy in California -- Elected leaders not reflecting the diversity of the state

How important do you think it is for local elected officials to represent the diversity of your community?

The parents of children in the public schools who are not citizens are generally not allowed to vote in local school board elections in California even though school boards make important decisions on school policies that can affect their children. Some have proposed changing this to grant voting rights to non-citizen parents to vote in local school board elections. Do you support or oppose this proposal?

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.