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California voters are backing Becerra over Hilton for governor by 55% to 37% in latest Berkeley IGS Poll

by Mark DiCamillo
Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

According to the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* in California's upcoming open-seat election for governor, Democrat Xavier Becerra is maintaining a comfortable 18 percentage point lead over Republican challenger Steve Hilton. The poll completed August 3-9 among a weighted random sample of 2,310 Californians considered likely to vote in the November general election finds 55% supporting Becerra, while 37% are backing Hilton, with 7% undecided.

Preferences for governor are sharply divided by party and political ideology, with Becerra receiving nearly universal support from the state's Democrats, liberals, and progressives, while Hilton is receiving the nearly unanimous backing of the state's Republicans and conservatives. Preferences also vary by region, with Becerra holding big leads among voters in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles County and the state's Central Coast, while Hilton leads among voters in the San Joaquin Valley, Orange County and in the state's North Coast/Sierras region.

Voters who back Becerra offer two attributes most when asked about their reasons for supporting him--"supports traditional Democratic policies, like expanding healthcare and protecting LGBTQ+ rights" (38%) and "will aggressively fight Trump administration policies" (38%). Among Hilton's backers, 55% say they do so because he "supports traditional Republican policies, like lowering taxes and reducing government regulations" as the attribute most important to them when backing his candidacy, while 28% cite that he is "not part of the California political establishment."

Observed IGS co-director Professor Eric Schickler, "after the unsettled and chaotic primary, this is shaping up to be a fairly standard California general election, where Democrats enjoy a comfortable edge statewide. Hilton would need to make major inroads among traditionally Democratic leaning groups to make this a highly competitive race."

Preferences are highly partisan and ideologically based, but also vary by region

The poll finds voters sharply divided by party and political ideology. Becerra is currently receiving the support of nearly nine in ten Democrats (88%), while 91% of Republicans are backing Hilton. There is also nearly universal support for Becerra among voters who identify themselves as either a liberal, a progressive or a Democratic Socialist. By contrast, the state's Republicans, conservatives and voters who identify themselves as a MAGA supporter are nearly unanimous in their backing of Hilton.

Preferences vary considerably by region. Becerra is preferred by nearly three-to-one among voters in the San Francisco Bay Area, by a two-to-one margin in the state's Central Coast region and Los Angeles

County and by eleven points in San Diego County. On the other hand, the poll finds Hilton leading Becerra by 19 points in the San Joaquin Valley, and by 9 points in the North Coast/Sierras region.

While Becerra is preferred by majorities or pluralities of voters across all age, gender and racial/ethnic subgroups, he receives proportionally greater support from younger voters, women and Black voters.

<i>Table 1</i>			
Voter preferences for governor			
<i>(among likely voters in California's November 2026 general election)</i>			
	Becerra (D)	Hilton (R)	Undecided
	%	%	%
Total likely voters	55	37	7
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	88	6	6
Republicans	4	91	5
No Party Preference/other	58	30	12
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Strongly conservative	4	96	--
Somewhat conservative	9	84	7
Moderate	48	38	14
Somewhat liberal	93	1	6
Strongly liberal	94	--	6
<u>Other political identifiers</u>			
Progressive	90	4	6
Democratic Socialist	93	1	6
MAGA	2	97	1
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	60	31	9
San Diego County	50	39	11
Orange County	45	49	6
Inland Empire	46	48	6
Central Coast	62	33	5
Sacramento/North Valley	50	45	5
San Joaquin Valley	38	57	5
San Francisco Bay Area	69	24	7
North Coast/Sierras	44	53	3
<u>Age</u>			
18-29	69	17	14
30-39	62	30	8
40-49	53	42	5
50-64	52	39	9
65 or older	54	40	6
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	50	42	8
Female	61	33	6
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	54	41	5
Latino	57	35	8
Asian American/Pacific Islander	57	32	11
Black/African American	66	23	11

Supporters' reasons for backing each candidate

Voters backing each candidate were then presented with a list of attributes and asked which one was most important to them as a reason for supporting their candidate.

Becerra voters offer two main attributes most in this setting – “supports traditional Democratic policies, like expanding healthcare and protecting LGBTQ+ rights” (38%) and “will aggressively fight Trump administration policies” (38%). Another 13% said they backed him because he is “a Democrat” while 6% say their support is because he is “an experienced politician.”

<i>Table 2a</i>	
Which of the following attributes do you consider most important as a reason for your supporting Becerra for governor?	
<i>(among likely voters supporting Becerra)</i>	
	%
Supports traditional Democratic policies, like expanding healthcare and protecting LGBTQ+ rights	38
Will aggressively fight Trump administration policies	38
A Democrat	13
An experienced politician	6
Latino, son of immigrants	1
Another reason	4

Among voters supporting Hilton by far the largest proportion (55%) say they back his candidacy because he “supports traditional Republican policies, like lowering taxes and reducing government regulations.” Another 28% back Hilton mainly because he is “not part of the California political establishment.” Smaller proportions cite two other attributes, that he is “a Republican” (7%) and that he is “endorsed by President Trump” (4%)

<i>Table 2b</i>	
Which of the following attributes do you consider most important as a reason for your supporting Steve Hilton for governor?	
<i>(among likely voters supporting Hilton)</i>	
	%
Supports traditional Republican policies, like lowering taxes and reducing government regulations	55
Not part of the California political establishment	28
A Republican	7
Endorsed by President Trump	4
A political strategist and commentator	1
Another reason	5

More likely voters hold a favorable than unfavorable opinion of Becerra, while Hilton's overall image rating is underwater

One of the main reasons Becerra prevailed in winning the state's highly contested June gubernatorial primary was that he was the only major candidate by the close of the campaign to be holding a more positive than negative image rating among primary election voters. The current poll finds that this is still the case, with more likely voters in the general election having a favorable (49%) than unfavorable opinion (43%) of him. Another 8% of the state's likely voters offer no opinion of Becerra.

This is similar to the 43% favorable to 38% unfavorable ratings that likely voters in the June primary held of Becerra one week before election, although at the time a somewhat larger proportion (19%) had no opinion of him.

This contrasts with the more negative than positive ratings that the state's electorate have been giving Hilton. The latest poll finds 50% of likely voters in the general election saying they hold an unfavorable view of the GOP standard bearer, while 39% offer a favorable opinion.

These assessments compare to a 38% to 31% negative to positive rating that Hilton was receiving among likely voters in the June primary one week before the election. However, in that poll nearly one in three likely voters (31%) could not offer an opinion of Hilton, whereas in the latest poll this has declined to just 11%.

Opinions of both candidates remain highly partisan. In the latest poll 77% of Democrats view Becerra positively while 84% of Republicans view him negatively. The opposite is true for Hilton, whom 75% of Democrats view unfavorably, while 90% of Republicans offer a favorable opinion.

Hilton also receives more negative than positive appraisals from voters not affiliated with either major party, with 59% viewing him unfavorably and 31% offering a favorable opinion. By contrast, No Party Preference and other non-partisans are slightly more inclined to hold a positive (48%) than negative (44%) opinion of Becerra.

Table 3
Trend of voter recognition and image ratings of Xavier Becerra and Steve Hilton
(among likely voters in California)

			Party Registration					
	Early	Late	Democrats		Republicans		No party pref./other	
	August	May	August	May	August	May	August	May
	2026	2026						
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<i>Xavier Becerra</i>								
Favorable	49	44	77	66	7	5	48	40
Unfavorable	43	38	16	16	84	77	44	40
No opinion	8	18	7	18	9	18	8	20
<i>Steve Hilton</i>								
Favorable	39	31	10	5	90	82	31	29
Unfavorable	50	38	75	55	6	6	59	39
No opinion	11	31	15	40	4	12	10	33

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 conducted online in English and Spanish August 3 - 9, 2026 among 4,207 registered voters throughout California, of whom a weighted sample of 2,310 were considered likely voters in the November general election. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

Data collection was completed by distributing email and text message invitations to stratified random samples of the state's registered voters. Each email or text invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by the University and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey questionnaire was housed. Reminders were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further invitations.

Samples of the state's registered voters 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 voter registration rolls, which is a public document. The samples were stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents. A separate random sample of Spanish-speakers was drawn from the pool of registered voters who requested that their official voting materials be sent to them in Spanish to enable the survey to assess voter opinions among the state's Spanish-speaking voters.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, the personally identifiable information about voters that was listed on their voting record was purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. Finally, after the completion of data collection, post-stratification weights were applied to the data file to align the overall registered voter sample to population characteristics of registered voters both 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 from the likely voter sample have a sampling error of about +/- 2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Question wording

Below are the candidates for Governor in California's November general election. If the election were being held today for whom would you vote for Governor?

Xavier Becerra, Party: Democrat, voting rights attorney
Steve Hilton, Party: Republican, small business owner
Undecided

Regardless of whom you might support for Governor, is your opinion of (Xavier Becerra)/ (Steve Hilton) favorable or unfavorable, or do you not know enough about him to say? *(ORDERING RANDOMIZED)*

IF INTENDING TO VOTE FOR BECERRA: The following are some of the attributes that apply to Xavier Becerra. Which of these do you consider most important to you as a reason you are supporting Becerra for Governor? *(SEE RELEASE FOR ATTRIBUTES LISTED)*

IF INTENDING TO VOTE FOR HILTON: The following are some of the attributes that apply to Steve Hilton. Which of these do you consider most important to you as a reason you are supporting Hilton for Governor? *(SEE RELEASE FOR ATTRIBUTES LISTED)*

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 Professor G. 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. Veteran pollster Mark DiCamillo serves as director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll*. For a complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.