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Becerra opens up 27 point lead over Hilton in the governor's race

-- Supporters see his election as historic --

by Mark DiCamillo,
Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

The *Berkeley IGS Poll's* final pre-election survey of Californians likely to vote in next week's midterm election for governor to replace outgoing Governor Gavin Newsom finds Democrat Xavier Becerra with a huge 27 percentage-point lead over his Republican challenger Steve Hilton. At present 61% of the likely electorate now back Becerra, while just 34% are supporting Hilton.

As has been observed throughout the campaign, voting preferences in the governor's race are directly tied to a voter's party registration, with 94% of the state's Democrats backing Becerra while 94% of the state's GOP voters support Hilton. In a state where Democrats outnumber Republican registrants nearly two to one, this heavily favors candidates who are backed by the state's Democrats. The state's No Party Preference voters are also backing Becerra nearly two to one.

Support for Becerra is extremely broad-based as he is now receiving the support of 50% or more of voters across all major regions and demographic subgroups of the state's likely electorate. In addition, most Californians expect Becerra to carry the day in this election, with 71% believing he will become the state's next governor compared to only 16% who think Hilton will.

Becerra has steadily improved his image with voters over the course of the campaign, with 53% now holding a favorable opinion of him, up from 48% six weeks ago and 44% shortly before the primary election. One of the main factors contributing to Becerra's growing popularity relates to the priority that his supporters attach to fighting Trump administration policies. Greater than six in ten voters backing Becerra (62%) cite "fighting Trump administration policies" as one of their main concerns in this election, far outdistancing a host of other concerns, including the high cost of living.

By contrast, just 34% of voters hold a favorable opinion of Hilton, little changed from 35% in September and 31% at the time of the June primary, with the concerns mentioned most frequently by his backers are reducing taxes (49%) and immigration enforcement (41%).

Becerra's supporters also see the possibility of him becoming the state's first elected Latino governor as historic. A 55% majority of Becerra voters said they felt "proud" at the thought that

the state would elect its first Latino governor, and 60% said that electing a Latino governor could help ease fears in the Latino community. Importantly, expectations were more muted among Latino voters, with only 40% believing that electing Becerra would help ease community fears.

IGS Co-Director G. Cristina Mora noted, “The findings show just how popular and historic Becerra has become among supporters. And while greater than four in ten Latinos feel proud and think it is important to elect a Latino governor, they also recognize that it will take much more than a single elected official to ease the fears and difficulties experienced by the Latino immigrant community. With Trump still in office and prices still high, Latino voters seem cautious yet hopeful about the new governor.”

These findings come from a statewide *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted online in English and Spanish October 19-25 among 2,787 registered voters, of whom a weighted subset of 1,477 voters had either already voted or were considered likely to vote in the state’s upcoming midterm election.

Becerra’s lead over Hilton in the governor’s race has grown to 27 points

The *Berkeley IGS Poll*’s final pre-election survey of California voters finds Becerra with a huge 27 percentage-point lead over Hilton in the next week’s midterm election. The poll finds Becerra the choice of 61% of the likely electorate, while just 34% are backing Hilton.

Voting preferences are directly tied to the party registration of voters, with 94% of the state’s Democrats backing Becerra and 94% of Republicans supporting Hilton. The poll also finds Becerra with a wide lead among voters not affiliated with either major political party.

The poll finds Becerra receiving 50% or more of voter preferences across all major regions of the state and across all major demographic subgroups. The Democrat continues to receive his strongest support from voters living in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles County, those who live along the state’s Central Coast as well as younger voters.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Table 1</i> Comparing likely voter preferences for California governor overall and by subgroup in late October to those observed in mid-September</p>						
	Late October			Mid-September		
	Becerra	Hilton	Undecided	Becerra	Hilton	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total likely voters	61	34	5	58	33	9
<u>Party registration</u>						
Democrats	94	3	4	90	3	8
Republicans	4	94	2	4	90	5
No Party Preference/other	59	31	10	56	30	14
<u>Region</u>						
Los Angeles County	66	29	5	64	26	10
San Diego County	52	39	9	53	35	12
Orange County	50	49	1	51	42	7
Inland Empire	60	38	2	51	40	9
Central Coast	68	23	9	59	34	7
Sacramento/North Valley	51	41	8	53	42	6
San Joaquin Valley	55	45	--	45	49	6
San Francisco Bay Area	72	23	5	68	23	9
<u>Age</u>						
18-29	81	13	6	68	19	13
30-39	68	23	9	59	29	11
40-49	66	28	5	58	34	8
50-64	52	43	5	53	39	9
65 or older	60	37	3	58	36	7
<u>Gender</u>						
Male	57	39	4	54	37	9
Female	65	30	6	62	30	9
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>						
White non-Hispanic	59	37	4	58	36	6
Latino	60	34	6	58	32	10
Asian/Pacific Islander	72	24	3	57	29	14
Black	67	19	14	70	15	16
<u>Voting status</u>						
Already voted	61	36	3	NA	NA	NA
Hadn't voted yet	61	33	6	NA	NA	NA

In this and succeeding tables the percentages may add to slightly more or less than 100% due to rounding. Results from the sparsely populated North Coast/Sierras region not shown because of small sample sizes.

The poll also finds that Californians overwhelmingly think Becerra will win the election. Greater than seven in ten (71%) say this compared to only 16% who think Hilton will win. Among voters backing Becerra nearly all (93%) think he will win, as do about a third (32%) of those backing Hilton.

Becerra has improved his image with voters over the final weeks of the campaign. The latest poll finds 53% of likely voters now holding a favorable opinion of him, up from 48% six weeks ago, while 41% view him negatively. By contrast, a slightly larger proportion of voters now holds an unfavorable opinion of Hilton (56%) that did so in mid-September, while 34% view him positively.

Overall opinions of the candidates, like their voting preferences, are closely related to the electorate's party registration. In the latest poll 83% of Democrats say they view Becerra favorably while just 13% have an unfavorable opinion, and very few offer a positive assessment of Hilton. The reverse is true for Hilton, who is viewed favorably by 90% of GOP voters and just 6% offer a negative opinion, while just 6% of Republicans regard Becerra favorably.

Table 2
Trend of image ratings of the candidates for governor
(late October vs. mid-September)

(late October vs. mid-September)								
Total likely voters			Party registration					
	Late Oct %	Mid- Sept %	Democrats		Republicans		No Party Pref./other	
			Oct. %	Sept. %	Oct. %	Sept. %	Oct. %	Sept. %
<u>Xavier Becerra (D)</u>								
Favorable (net)	<u>53</u>	<u>48</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>43</u>
Strongly favorable	22	16	37	29	2	2	13	9
Somewhat favorable	32	32	45	47	4	4	34	34
Unfavorable (net)	<u>41</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>44</u>
Somewhat unfavorable	11	12	9	10	9	11	16	17
Strongly unfavorable	30	28	4	4	78	72	31	27
No opinion	5	11	4	9	7	11	5	13
<u>Steve Hilton (R)</u>								
Favorable (net)	<u>34</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>87</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>32</u>
Strongly favorable	24	22	2	3	69	62	17	15
Somewhat favorable	11	13	2	5	22	25	16	17
Unfavorable (net)	<u>56</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>76</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>58</u>	<u>52</u>
Somewhat unfavorable	13	13	15	18	3	4	18	14
Strongly unfavorable	44	38	68	58	3	3	40	38
No opinion	10	13	13	16	4	6	10	15

One of the main factors contributing to Becerra's growing popularity relates to the priority that his supporters attach to fighting Trump administration policies. Greater than six in ten voters backing Becerra (62%) offer this as one of their major concerns in this year's election, far outdistancing all other concerns, such as reducing the cost of living, which 33% of Becerra supporters cite as a top concern, and ensuring that their party wins control of Congress, cited by 29%.

Other than sharing their concerns with Democratic voters about the state's cost of living, Hilton's supporters offer a very different set of issues as their top concerns in this election, with reducing taxes, immigration enforcement, fighting crime and ensuring public safety heading the list.

Table 3

Top issues of concern to the state's voters overall and by voter preferences for governor
(among likely voters in the mid-term election)

	Total likely voters %	Becerra voters %	Hilton voters %
Fighting Trump administration policies	40	62	2
Reducing the cost of living	34	33	34
Ensuring that my party maintains or wins control of the U.S. Congress	22	29	12
Reducing taxes	19	3	49
Fighting crime/ensuring public safety	15	4	36
Immigration enforcement	15	1	41
Promoting job creation and economic development	11	9	13
Improving health care coverage for those in need	9	13	1
Protecting immigrant communities	9	14	1
Managing AI and the building of data centers	8	11	2
Improving public education	7	9	3
Promoting housing development	5	7	1

Voter reactions to the possibility of California electing its first Latino governor

The poll also asked voters a series of questions about the possibility of California electing a Latino for the first time to serve as its governor.

The results show enthusiasm among likely Becerra voters. When asked how important it would be for California to elect its first Latino governor, 54% of those voters say it would be important, with only 38% saying it would not be important. Additionally, when asked how electing a Latino governor would make them feel, 55% of supporters say it would make them proud while 34% say they would be indifferent. Just 1% say it would make them feel uneasy.

Just as importantly, a strong 60% plurality of Becerra likely voters agreed that electing a Latino governor will help ease fears in the Latino community, while 19% disagree. On the other hand, his supporters were skeptical that it will reduce racial inequalities in the state, with more disagreeing (44%) than agreeing (37%) with this statement. At the same time, more than five times as many voters (73%) also disagree as agree (13%) that it has the potential of worsening racial tensions in the state.

As is true for most of the other issues polled in the governor's race, there are big differences between voters supporting Becerra and those backing Hilton on these matters. For example, only 2 percent of Hilton supporters believe that electing a Latino governor is somewhat important for the state, and less than 1 percent believe it is "very important." Moreover, 19% of Hilton supporters say they feel "uneasy" about the idea of electing a Latino governor in the state.

Interestingly, reactions to the possibility of California electing its first Latino governor among the state's Latino voters themselves are also mixed. For example, while 40% of Latino voters agree that it will help ease fears within the Latino community, 43% disagree. And only about 25% state that electing a Latino governor could help reduce racial tensions in the state. It may be that Latino

voters are more cautious about the effects that a single governor can have on fears and challenges that Latino communities face today.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Table 4</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Voter reactions to the possibility of California electing its first Latino governor <i>(among likely voters in the mid-term election)</i></p>				
	Total likely voters %	Becerra voters %	Hilton voters %	Latino voters %
<i>(Agree/Disagree)</i>				
<u>Electing a Latino governor . . .</u>				
<u>“will help ease fears in the Latino community”</u>				
Agree	44	60	18	40
Disagree	32	19	51	43
No opinion	24	21	31	16
<u>“will reduce racial inequalities in the state”</u>				
Agree	25	37	4	25
Disagree	57	44	80	61
No opinion	18	20	16	14
<u>“has the potential of worsening racial tensions in California”</u>				
Agree	21	13	37	19
Disagree	63	73	45	69
No opinion	15	14	19	12
<u>How does the possibility of California electing its first Latino governor make you feel?</u>				
Proud	36	55	3	45
Indifferent	42	34	54	32
Uneasy	7	1	19	5
No opinion	15	10	23	17
<u>How important do you feel it is for California to elect its first Latino governor?</u>				
Very important	15	24	--	27
Somewhat important	20	30	2	16
Not too important	16	22	7	12
Not at all important	42	16	87	40
No opinion	7	8	4	6

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 October 19-25, 2026, among 2,787 registered voters, of whom a weighted subset of 1,477 voters had either already voted or were considered likely to vote in the state's upcoming midterm election. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

Data collection for the poll 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 was housed. Invitations were sent in Spanish to voters who requested that their official voting materials be sent to them in Spanish and given the choice of conducting the survey in English or Spanish. Reminders were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt-out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further invitations. Voters who reported that they had already voted were included in the sample after verification that their ballot had been received by their local county registrar.

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 state and local voter registration rolls, which are public documents. The sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, the personally identifiable information of each voter that was listed on their voting record was purged from the data file prior to data analysis 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 data file to align the overall registered voter sample to population characteristics of all 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 overall likely voter sample have an approximate sampling error of +/- 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Question wording

The general election ballot (included) (includes) an election for Governor of California. Below are the candidates. *(ORDERING RANDOMIZED)* **(If already voted)** For whom did you vote for Governor of California? **(If hadn't voted yet)** If the election were held today, for whom would you vote

Xavier Becerra, Party: Democratic, voting rights attorney

Steve Hilton, Party: Republican, small business owner

Undecided

Regardless of whom you (supported) (might support) for Governor, what is your overall opinion of each of the following -- strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, strongly unfavorable, or do you not know enough about him to say? *(ORDERING RANDOMIZED)*

Which one or two of the following do you consider to be among your top issues in the November general election? Please select no more than two. (*SEE RELEASE FOR ISSUES LISTED, ORDERING RANDOMIZED*)

Regardless of whom you supported for Governor, who do you think will win the election and become the next Governor of California? (*ORDERING RANDOMIZED*)

Xavier Becerra could become California's first elected Latino governor. How important do you feel it is for California to elect its first Latino governor – very important, somewhat important, not too important, not at all important?

How does the possibility of California electing its first Latino governor make you feel very proud, somewhat proud, indifferent, somewhat uneasy, very uneasy?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the possibility of California electing its first Latino governor?

- (1) Electing a Latino governor will help ease fears in the Latino community
- (2) Electing a Latino governor has the potential of worsening racial tensions in California
- (3) Electing a Latino governor will reduce racial inequalities in the state

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>.