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Author

DiCamillo, Mark

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Jack Citrin Center for Public Opinion Research
Institute of Governmental Studies
124-126 Moses Hall
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720
Tel: 510-642-6835
Email: igs@berkeley.edu

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California's competitive congressional elections

Voters narrowly inclined to re-elect incumbent Democrat Ami Bera to the House of Representatives in the state's 7th congressional district

By Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*
(o) 510-642-6835 (c) 415-602-5594

According to the *Berkeley IGS Poll*, voters in California's 7th congressional district, by a narrow 48% to 44% margin, are inclined to re-elect Democrat Ami Bera for a fourth term to Congress this year. Opinions are highly partisan and closely tied to voter views about President Donald Trump and GOP control of Congress.

The district, located in suburban Sacramento, is considered one of the state's true swing districts in this year's closely watched elections to determine party control of the House of Representatives. A review of recent elections in the 7th district bear this out. After a first unsuccessful bid to unseat Republican Dan Lungren in 2010, Bera narrowly defeated Lungren in a 2012 rematch, 51% to 49%. Bera then withstood serious Republican challenges in his two subsequent re-election bids, winning 50.4%-49.6% in 2014 and 51% to 49% in 2016.

The poll finds that Bera's NO votes on the recently enacted tax bill and the unsuccessful attempt to repeal the ObamaCare health reform law last summer, appear to bolster his re-election chances. When voters are asked the impact that Bera's NO vote on the tax bill has on their willingness to support his re-election, 50% say it makes them more inclined to do so, while 39% are less inclined. Similarly, when asked about Bera's NO vote on the bill to repeal ObamaCare, 49% of likely voters say it increases their chances of voting for him, while 36% say it reduces their chances.

These are among the findings from a survey of 1,056 likely voters in California's 7th congressional district conducted by the non-partisan *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The survey was part of a larger study examining the vulnerability of incumbents running for re-election this year in three of the state's most competitive House districts. Other congressional districts polled include the state's 48th district held by Republican Dana Rohrabacher in Orange County and the 25th district held by Republican Steve Knight in Los Angeles County. Because the polls only attempted to assess district voter views of the incumbent and did not make reference to any named opponents,

voter preferences can change once their general election opponent becomes known and voters compare one candidate against the other.

Voters narrowly support Bera’s re-election to Congress

When likely voters districtwide are asked whether they are inclined or not inclined to re-elect Bera to another term this year, 48% are supportive, while 44% are not. Another 8% are undecided. Of those inclined to back Bera’s re-election, 25% say they back him strongly, while among those opposed, 33% are strongly disinclined to support him.

Table 1
Voter inclination to re-elect Democrat Ami Bera to another term in Congress
(among likely voters in the 7th Congressional District)

	Total likely voters %
Inclined to re-elect (net)	48
Strongly	25
Somewhat	23
Not inclined to re-elect (net)	44
Somewhat	11
Strongly	33
Undecided	8

Large differences in support for Bera across voter subgroups

Opinions about re-electing Bera to another term divide sharply along partisan lines, with 80% of Democrats inclined to back him and 81% of Republicans disinclined. No party preference voters are about evenly divided -- 45% inclined and 43% not inclined.

Views about Bera’s re-election are also highly correlated with voter opinions of the job performance of President Trump and their vote choice in the 2016 presidential election. The poll finds that a 59% majority of 7th district voters disapprove of the job Trump is doing as president, and among these voters 77% are inclined to support Bera’s re-election. Similarly, greater than eight in ten (82%) of the district voters who backed Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election are backing Bera’s re-election. By contrast, large majorities of voters who approve of Trump’s performance in office, or who voted for him for president in 2016 are disinclined to vote for Bera this year.

Opinions about Republican control of Congress are also closely tied to voter support for Bera’s re-election. According to the poll, a 55% majority of 7th district voters believe Republican control of both houses of Congress is a bad thing for the country, while 40% feel it is a good thing. Among the former group, support for Bera’s re-election is greater than eight to one (81% to 10%), while among the latter segment, voters are disinclined to back him 88% to 6%.

There are also differences in support for Bera’s re-election by gender and age. While women are inclined to back Bera’s re-election 54% to 39%, men are opposed 50% to 42%. In addition, while a majority of younger voters under age 40 are backing Bera, middle-age voters age 40-49 do not. Voters age 50-64 are about evenly divided, while seniors age 65 or older are inclined to support the incumbent 50% to 43%.

Table 2
Voter inclination to re-elect Democrat Ami Bera across subgroups
of likely voters in the 7th Congressional District

	Inclined to Re-Elect %	Not Inclined %	Undecided %
Total likely voters	48	44	8
Party registration			
(41%)* Democrats	80	12	8
(36%) Republicans	14	81	5
(23%) No party preference/other	45	43	12
Gender			
(45%) Male	42	50	8
(55%) Female	54	39	7
Age			
(10%) 18-29**	50	40	10
(14%) 30-39	56	33	11
(14%) 40-49	41	51	8
(33%) 50-64	47	48	5
(29%) 65 or older	50	43	7
Job performance of President Trump			
(41%) Approve	7	88	5
(59%) Disapprove	77	13	10
Opinion of GOP control of Congress			
(40%) Good thing	6	88	6
(55%) Bad thing	81	10	9
2016 vote for President			
(49%) Clinton	82	9	9
(38%) Trump	8	87	5
(13%) Other/ did not vote	42	49	9

* Represents proportion of all likely voters that this subgroup represents. ** Small sample base.

More 7th district voters approve than disapprove of Bera’s performance in office

More voters in the 7th district approve (48%) than disapprove (40%) of the job Bera is doing in Congress. By comparison, 7th district voters hold a much more negative opinion of the job the Congress is doing overall, with just 14% approving and 85% disapproving, 63% strongly.

Table 3
Job performance of Congressman Bera vs. job performance of the overall U.S. Congress
(among likely voters in the 7th Congressional District)

	Congressman Bera %	Overall U.S. Congress %
Approve	48	14
Strongly	17	2
Somewhat	31	12
Disapprove	40	85
Somewhat	15	22
Strongly	25	63
No opinion	12	1

Bera’s re-election chances appear to be bolstered by his votes against the tax bill and the bill to repeal and replace ObamaCare

Bera’s votes against the recently enacted tax reform bill and the unsuccessful attempt to repeal and replace the ObamaCare health law last summer appear to strengthen his re-election chances among district voters. For example, 50% of voters say Bera’s NO vote on the tax bill makes them more inclined to support his re-election, while 39% say it makes them less inclined to do so.

The poll finds similar results when asked the impact of Bera’s NO vote on the bill to repeal and replace ObamaCare, with 49% saying this increases their chances of supporting his re-election, while 36% say it reduces their chances.

Table 4
Impact of Bera’s votes on the tax bill and the bill to repeal ObamaCare
(among likely voters in the 7th Congressional District)

	Impact of Bera’s . . .	
	“No” vote on the tax bill %	“No” vote on repeal of ObamaCare %
More inclined to re-elect him	50	49
Less inclined to re-elect him	39	36
No effect	9	14
No opinion	2	1

District voter views about five prominent issues being debated in Washington

Seventh congressional district voters were also asked their opinions about five issues that have been much in the news in Washington over the past year. They include the recently enacted tax bill, the bill to repeal and replace ObamaCare, providing legal status to undocumented immigrants brought to this country illegally by their parents, allowing offshore oil drilling off the California coast, and building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

There is greater than two-to-one support (67% to 31%) among district voters to provide legal status to undocumented immigrants brought to this country illegally by their parents. By contrast, voters oppose by a greater than two-to-one margin (66% to 30%) the recent Trump administration's recent proposal to allow offshore oil drilling off the California coast.

Majorities also oppose three other policy issues posed in the survey. These include the bill to repeal and replace ObamaCare, which voters oppose 56% to 43%, building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, opposed 58% to 41%, and the tax bill, opposed 57% to 40%.

Table 5
Voter opinion of a number of prominent issues facing the nation and the state
(among likely voters in the 7th Congressional District)

	Favor %	Oppose %	No opinion %
Providing legal status to undocumented immigrants brought to this country illegally by their parents	67	31	2
Repealing and replacing the ObamaCare health care law	43	56	1
Building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border	41	58	1
The recently enacted tax reform bill	40	57	3
Allowing offshore oil drilling off the California coast	30	66	4

About the Survey

The findings in this report are based on a survey of 1,056 likely voters in California's 7th congressional district by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The survey was administered by email among random samples of voters January 11–21, 2018 in English and Spanish. Results are subject to a sampling error of +/- 3.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

IGS administered the survey by sending an email invitation to randomly selected voters living in the 7th congressional district, asking them to participate in a short non-partisan survey conducted by the University. The sample and accompanying email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data Inc., and were derived from information contained on voters' official voting record.

During the data processing phase, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample of registered voters responding to the survey to the political and demographic characteristics of the 7th congressional district's registered voter population. Likely voters were then identified, based on each voter's stated likelihood of voting in this year's November congressional elections and on their past voting history as listed on their voting record, and the results in this report are based on this subset of voters.

The IGS study director was responsible for all phases of the research, including the development of the survey questionnaire and email scripts, its translation into Spanish, sample selection, development of the post-stratification weights, oversight of data processing and the identification of likely voters.

Questions asked

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President?

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job?

Do you approve or disapprove of the job being done by your own representative in Congress, Ami Bera?

There will be an election for Congress in your district in 2018, and Ami Bera will be running for re-election. If the election were being held today, would you be inclined or not inclined to vote to re-elect Democrat Ami Bera to another term in Congress?

The Republicans now hold a majority of the seats in both houses of Congress. Do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing for the country?

Do you favor or oppose each of the following bills that the U.S. Congress has voted on this year or may soon come before Congress? (ISSUES READ IN RANDOM ORDER)

- The bill to repeal and replace the nation's health insurance law, referred to as ObamaCare.
- The tax reform bill recently enacted by the Congress.
- A bill to provide legal status to undocumented immigrants brought to this country illegally as children by their parents, referred to as the Dream Act.
- A bill to fund the building of a wall along the U.S. Mexico border.
- A bill to allow offshore oil drilling off the California coast.

When the vote was taken earlier in 2017 on the bill to repeal and replace the ObamaCare health insurance law, your representative in Congress, Ami Bera, voted No. Does Ami Bera's No vote on the bill to repeal and replace ObamaCare make you more inclined or less inclined to support his re-election, or have no effect on how you will vote for Congress in 2018?

Recently, when the final vote was taken on the tax reform bill, your representative in Congress, Ami Bera, voted No. Does Ami Bera's No vote on the tax reform bill make you more inclined or less inclined to support his re-election or have no effect on how you will vote for Congress in 2018?

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 (UC) system's flagship Berkeley campus, it is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS conducts periodic surveys of the California public opinion on matters of politics, public policy and public issues through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*, housed within its newly established Citrin Center for Public Opinion Research. For a complete listing of stories issued by the poll go to <https://igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.