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Author

DiCamillo, Mark

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Institute of Governmental Studies
102 Philosophy Hall, #2370
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720-2370
Tel: 510-642-1473
Email: igs@berkeley.edu

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Reducing the cost of living is utmost on California voters' minds, but many cite a host of other issues as matters they'd like the next governor to address.

-- More voters feel the state is on the wrong track than moving in the right direction two to one --

by Mark DiCamillo
Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

In its latest statewide survey, the *Berkeley IGS Poll* presented voters with a wide array of 17 different issues facing the state and asked voters which one or two they consider to be their top priorities for the next governor to address. Receiving the most mentions is dealing with the state's cost of living, which four in ten voters (40%) cite in this setting. Concerns about the state's high cost of living cross party lines, as greater than one in three of Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans all mention it among their top concerns.

However, Republican voters select one other issue even more frequently. And it has to do with cutting waste, fraud and political corruption, chosen by 48%. This issue is also cited by 27% of the state's non-partisan voters as a priority concern, while just 10% of Democrats do so.

By contrast, Democratic voters cite a long and diverse list of issues that they'd like the next governor to address, with no single issue other than the high cost of living dominating. Most frequently are building more affordable housing (18%), protecting immigrant communities (17%), homelessness (16%), protecting the environment (16%), and education and the schools (16%).

These matters are of less concern to Republican voters, with none cited by more than 9%. Instead, many GOP voters attach a high priority to addressing crime and public safety (22%), cutting taxes (21%), lowering the state's high gasoline prices (19%) and balancing the state's budget (13%).

When asked about the overall direction of the state, Californians hold a pessimistic response, as by a two-to-one margin (54% to 27%), more voters feel it is off on the wrong track than moving in the right direction. Views about the state's direction are unusually partisan, with nearly all Republicans believing it is on the wrong track, while a 62% majority of Democrats see it moving in the right direction. Even so, 26% of Democrats believe the state is on the wrong track and another 12% are not sure. The views of the state's non-partisan voters largely mirror those of the overall electorate, with a 57% majority saying the state is on the wrong track.

These findings come from a *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted online March 9-15, 2026, among 5,019 registered voters, of whom 3,889 were considered likely to vote in the June primary election.

Observed Berkeley IGS co-director Eric Schickler, “The wide range of concerns cited as being important to the state’s Democrats reflects, in part, their broad and fractured field of candidates, as none as yet has won over a large segment of Democratic voters with a clear message about what they want this election to be about.”

Table 1
**Top priorities that likely voters feel the next Governor should address
overall and by party registration**

	Total likely voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No party preference/ other %
Reducing the cost of living in California	40	44	34	40
Cutting waste, fraud and political corruption	25	10	48	27
Homelessness	13	16	9	12
Building more affordable housing	12	18	2	12
Crime and public safety	12	6	22	11
Education and the public schools	12	16	5	10
Balancing the state budget	11	9	13	10
Protecting immigrant communities	11	17	1	11
Protecting the environment	10	16	1	10
Cutting taxes	10	4	21	8
Lowering the state’s high gasoline prices	10	5	19	10
Reducing health care costs	7	11	2	6
Job creation	5	6	2	4
Promoting clean energy sources	5	7	**	5
Reforming the state’s homeowners insurance market	5	5	4	6
Reducing energy utility rates	4	6	3	7
Reducing the size of state government	4	1	11	5

** less than ½ of 1%.

Issue priorities among voters backing each of the leading gubernatorial candidates

Big differences are also evident in the issue priorities that voters supporting each of the leading gubernatorial candidates would like the next governor to address, since voting preferences for governor are also highly partisan. For example, voters backing Republicans Steve Hilton or Chad Bianco for governor hold similar views to those held by all Republicans about the issues they consider most important. However, on only one issue, crime and public safety, a larger proportion of Bianco’s voters than Hilton’s supporters cite it as a priority issue.

There are both similarities and differences in how voters supporting the leading Democratic candidates for governor are rating these issues. The issues common to voters supporting each of the leading Democrats include homelessness, building more affordable housing and education/the public schools. Supporters of the leading Democrats also consider protecting the environment as a priority issue, while voters backing Mahan and Villaraigosa are less apt to mention it. Protecting the immigrant community is cited more frequently by voters supporting Xavier Becerra and Antonio Villaraigosa than by those supporting any of the other candidates.

Table 2
**Top priorities that likely voters feel the next governor should address
among supporters of the gubernatorial candidates**

	Total voters %	Hilton voters %	Bianco voters %	Swalwell voters %	Porter voters %	Steyer voters %	Becerra voters %	Villaraigosa voters %	Mahan voters %	Unde- ed %
Reducing the cost of living in California	40	34	34	41	40	48	48	58	37	41
Cutting waste, fraud and political corruption	25	50	52	8	10	11	13	8	14	19
Homelessness	13	7	7	16	17	17	16	18	20	14
Building more affordable housing	12	1	1	20	22	17	12	20	14	14
Crime and public safety	12	18	26	6	3	4	8	4	12	12
Education and the public schools	12	5	4	19	20	12	11	12	15	12
Balancing the state budget	11	15	12	12	6	9	13	2	12	10
Protecting immigrant communities	11	**	**	15	19	10	25	28	10	14
Protecting the environment	10	**	**	17	20	19	17	3	6	10
Cutting taxes	10	21	20	4	1	4	3	3	7	7
Lowering the state's high gasoline prices	10	19	18	6	2	4	2	9	7	10
Reducing health care costs	7	2	2	11	12	10	9	7	9	9
Job creation	5	3	1	5	8	4	7	9	9	5
Promoting clean energy sources	5	**	**	8	9	9	4	3	5	6
Reforming the state's home-owners insurance market	5	6	4	6	4	8	6	5	6	3
Reducing energy utility rates	5	4	3	4	5	10	5	5	9	5
Reducing the size of state government	4	12	11	**	**	1	1	**	6	2

*Subgroup preferences for Yee and Thurmond voters are not shown because of small sample sizes. ** less than 1/2 of 1%.*

Many more voters believe the state is on the wrong track than moving in the right direction

When California voters are asked to assess the overall direction of the state, by a two-to-one margin (54% to 27%) more feel it is on the wrong track than moving in the right direction.

However, there are wide partisan differences in these assessments. Nearly all Republicans (95%) consider the state to be on the wrong track, while Democrats hold a much more optimistic view, believing the state is moving in the right direction by a 62% to 26% margin. The views of the state's non-partisan voters largely mirror those of the overall electorate, with a 57% majority believing the state is on the wrong track and just 32% see it moving in the right direction.

Because views about the overall direction of the state are highly partisan, the assessments of voters supporting each of the individual gubernatorial candidates tend to follow the views of their party's members overall. As an example, nearly all of those backing Hilton or Bianco feel the state is off on the wrong track.

However, there are some significant differences in views about the overall direction of the state when comparing the reactions of voters supporting each of the leading Democratic candidates. For

example, more voters backing the candidacies of Swalwell, Porter or Becerra than those supporting the other Democrats hold an optimistic view of the state's overall direction, with about two-thirds or more of their backers feeling the state is moving in the right direction. By contrast, among voters backing the other major Democratic contenders 50% or less offer such an optimistic appraisal.

<i>Table 3</i>			
Voter assessments of the direction of the state of California			
(overall, by party and among supporters each of the gubernatorial candidates)			
	Right direction	Wrong track	No opinion
	%	%	%
Total likely voters	27	54	9
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	62	26	12
Republicans	3	95	2
No Party Preference/ others	32	57	11
<u>Voting preferences for governor</u>			
Hilton voters	2	98	**
Bianco voter	1	98	1
Swalwell voters	70	20	10
Porter voters	65	23	12
Steyer voters	49	36	15
Becerra voters	64	25	11
Villaraigosa voters	50	38	12
Mahan voters	49	40	11
Undecided voters	39	44	17

Subgroup preferences for Yee's and Thurmond's voters are not shown because of small sample sizes.

*** less than ½ of 1%.*

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 March 9-15, among 5,019 Californians registered to vote, 3,889 of whom are considered likely to vote in the June primary election.

To enable the survey to also obtain voter preferences in the Los Angeles mayoral primary election, the survey included an oversampling of voters in the city of Los Angeles. However, after the conclusion of data collection the overall results were weighted to return the disproportionate sampling of L.A. City voters to actual share of the overall statewide electorate. 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. 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 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 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 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 overall likely voter sample have a sampling error of about +/-2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Question wording

Generally speaking, do you think things in California are headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track?

California's next Governor will be facing a wide range of issues. Which one or two of the following issues do you consider to be the top priorities for the next Governor to address (SEE RELEASE FOR ISSUES LISTED) (ORDER RANDOMIZED)

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>.