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***Trump opens up big lead in California's GOP presidential primary.
-Republican voters hold very different views of the former President
than the state's overall electorate -***

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

Former President Donald Trump has opened up a big lead in California's March 2024 Republican presidential primary. According to the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* the former President now leads Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, his nearest rival, 44% to 26% among Republicans likely to vote in next year's March primary. No other Republican received more than 4% support in the current poll. Just three months ago the same poll found Trump trailing DeSantis 37% to 29% in this state.

While Trump's lead over DeSantis is broad-based, the former President polls best among strongly conservative Republicans, men, non-college graduates, and voters ages 50 - 64.

The poll also documents the markedly different views that registered Republicans have of the former President to those held by the overall electorate. For example:

- Three in four Republicans (74%) have a favorable opinion of Trump overall, 41% of whom say their opinion is strongly favorable. Among all California voters just 27% view the former President favorably, and only 14% have a strongly favorable opinion.
- When asked about the recent New York trial that found Trump guilty of sexual abuse in an incident that occurred more than 20 years ago, three in four California Republicans (74%) believe it was impossible for Trump to get a fair trial in New York City and 66% discount the seriousness of the verdict. Among the overall electorate just one in three (35%) concur that it was impossible for Trump to get a fair trial in New York and 67% feel the verdict should be treated seriously.
- Fully 86% of the state's Republicans also believe that the multiple investigations looking into Trump's actions following the 2020 presidential election are more about politics and political revenge than about justice and the law, and 70% feel the investigations should be halted for the good of the country because they are worsening the nation's political divisions. Among all California voters just 35% feel the investigations are more about

politics and political revenge than justice and the law, and a similar proportion (37%) say the investigations should be stopped.

- When asked about Trump’s culpability in these cases, fewer than one in four Republicans (23%) believe Trump committed a crime in any of these cases, while among the overall electorate 71% think he did, of whom 50% say he definitely did.
- When asked about the vitriolic comments that Trump has made in reaction to the investigations, 67% of Republicans believe he is justifiably angry and his criticisms of the investigations are understandable, while among the overall electorate just 26% feel this way.

IGS Co-Director G. Cristina Mora notes, “the results indicate just how difficult it is for Republican candidates to gain traction with Trump in the running. Even in California, where a majority of voters view Trump unfavorably, his presence looks large, with Republican voters feeling he is being treated unfairly in the courts and public opinion.”

Trump opens up big lead over DeSantis in California’s GOP presidential primary

The current poll finds Trump to be the choice of 44% of Republicans considered likely to vote in California’s upcoming March presidential primary, comfortably outdistancing DeSantis, his closest rival, who stands at 26%. Three months ago, DeSantis was the choice of 37% of the state’s Republicans and led Trump by eight points. None of twelve other presidential contenders included in the poll received more than 4% support.

Table 1
Trend of voter preferences in California’s 2024 GOP presidential primary election
(among Republican voters in California)

	May 2023 %	February 2023 %	August 2022 %
Donald Trump, former President	44	29	38
Ron DeSantis, Florida Governor	26	37	27
Liz Cheney, former Wyoming Congresswoman	4	4	NA
Mike Pence, former Vice President	4	3	7
Nikki Haley, former South Carolina Governor	3	7	3
Vivek Ramaswamy, high tech executive	2	NA	NA
Kristi L. Noem, South Dakota Governor	1	2	NA
Tim Scott, South Carolina Senator	1	1	*
Chris Sununu, New Hampshire Governor	1	*	NA
Chris Christie, former New Jersey Governor	1	NA	NA
Larry Elder, Broadcaster/Author	*	NA	NA
Asa Hutchinson, former Arkansas Governor	*	NA	NA
Perry Johnson, Michigan businessman	*	NA	NA
John Bolton, former national security adviser,	*	NA	NA
Other/Undecided	13	17	25

Note: May 2023 preferences based on likely voters while prior measures were asked of all registered Republicans
*NA: Not measured * less than 1/5 of 1%*

Presidential primary preferences across major subgroups of the likely GOP electorate

While Trump’s lead over DeSantis is now broad-based, the former President is running best among strongly conservative voters, non-college graduates, men, and voters between ages 50 and 64. On a regional basis, Trump also holds big leads among Republican voters in Los Angeles and Orange counties, the Central Valley, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

DeSantis, on the other hand, is competitive with Trump among Republicans who describe themselves as political moderates, college graduates, and Inland Empire voters, and also holds narrow leads over the former President among Republicans under age 40 and voters in San Diego County.

Table 2
Presidential primary preferences across subgroups of the GOP electorate - May 2023
(among Republicans likely to vote in California’s March 2024 primary)

	Trump	DeSantis	Others	Undecided
	%	%	measured	%
	%	%	%	%
Total likely voters	44	26	17	13
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	55	21	17	8
San Diego	33	41	18	8
Orange County	56	25	8	11
Inland Empire	31	29	18	22
Central Valley	47	18	18	17
San Francisco Bay Area	51	26	17	6
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	62	23	6	9
Somewhat conservative	39	29	20	12
Moderate	28	24	29	19
<u>Gender</u>				
Female	39	26	18	17
Male	49	25	17	9
<u>Age</u>				
18-39	33	38	12	17
40-49	42	30	15	13
50-64	53	22	14	11
65 or older	42	21	25	12
<u>Education</u>				
High school graduate or less	52	30	12	6
Some college/ trade school	49	20	15	16
College graduate	37	30	22	11

Another poll finding is that when considering whom to support as their Republican presidential nominee 71% of the state’s GOP voters say it is more important to nominate the candidate who best represents their opinions on the major issues facing the country, while just 26% feel it is more important to nominate the candidate perceived to have the best chance of beating incumbent President Joe Biden in the November general election.

Republicans view Trump more favorably than they did three months ago, while DeSantis’s image rating has declined

Both Trump and DeSantis are viewed favorably by a large majority of this state’s GOP voters. However, the latest poll also shows that Trump’s standing with California Republicans since February has actually increased slightly from 69% to 74%, despite his guilty verdict in the New York City sexual abuse case earlier this month. Over this same period, DeSantis’ favorability ratings declined from 79% to 75%, with the largest drop occurring among GOP voters holding a strongly favorable opinion of him, which declined from 54% in February to 43% in the current poll.

Table x
Image ratings of Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis among registered Republicans in California -- May 2023 vs. February 2023

	Trump		DeSantis	
	May %	February %	May %	February %
<u>Favorable (net)</u>	74	69	75	79
Strongly favorable	41	37	43	54
Somewhat favorable	33	32	32	25
<u>Unfavorable (net)</u>	23	28	15	11
Somewhat unfavorable	13	14	7	4
Strongly unfavorable	10	14	8	7
No opinion	2	3	10	10

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 May 17-22, 2023, among 7,465 California registered voters, of whom 1,853 were registered Republicans including a weighted subsample of 1,472 Republicans were considered likely to vote in the state’s March 2024 GOP presidential primary. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

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 voter registration rolls and were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of voter registration lists in California.

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.

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 the 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, while approximate sampling error of findings from both the Republican registered voter sample and its likely voter subsample are +/- 3.5 percentage points.

Question wording

(ASKED OF REPUBLICAN LIKELY VOTERS):

Suppose you were voting in the 2024 Republican primary for President and the following Republicans decided to run. If the election was held today who would be your 1st choice?

When considering whom to support as the 2024 Republican presidential nominee, which is more important to you – (1) Nominating the candidate with the best chance of defeating Joe Biden or (2) Nominating the candidate who best represents your opinions on the major issues facing the country?

(ASKED OF ALL REGISTERED VOTERS):

Last week a jury in New York found Donald Trump liable for the sexual abuse and defamation of magazine writer E. Jean Carroll and ordered him to pay her \$5 million in damages. Trump called Carroll's claims lies, said the trial was a witch hunt and that he would appeal the ruling. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this?

- (1) It's impossible for Donald Trump to get a fair hearing from a jury in New York, so their verdict in this case is not fair.
- (2) The verdict should be treated with seriousness and is another example of the indefensible behavior of former President Trump.

Trump is also under investigation in relation to several other matters. He has been charged in New York with falsifying business records in order to conceal damaging information during the 2016 election, is being investigated for trying to overturn the 2020 presidential election results in Georgia, for his role in promoting the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and for keeping government documents, some of them classified, at his Mar-a-Lago estate after leaving the White House. Which statement better describes your views about the main motivations behind these investigations – (1) They aim to hold Trump accountable for his unlawful actions or (2) They are more about politics and political revenge than about justice and the law?

Do you think that Trump committed a crime in any of these cases – definitely, probably, probably not, definitely not?

How likely do you think it is that Trump will be convicted in these cases – very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, not at all likely?

Regardless of the eventual outcome of these investigations, which statement best describes your view of Trump's reaction to these investigations --- (1) He's justifiably angry and his criticisms of the investigations are understandable, (2) Regardless of how he may feel, his comments show a profound disrespect for the law and our legal system?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1) The ongoing investigations of former President Trump are worsening the nation's political divisions and should be stopped for the good of

the country, (2) It is important for former President Trump to be held accountable for any unlawful actions he may have committed following the 2020 presidential elections, so they are not repeated in future elections.

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>.