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## IGS Poll

### Title

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***Californians express support for more funding to help close persistent gaps in voting participation.***

The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted on behalf of the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund finds that California voters do not look like the state's population, and that voters are concerned and want to do something about it. Californians believe that the state has a responsibility to do more to encourage participation of under-represented groups. A strong majority of California voters wants the state to invest more funding into community-based organizations to do voter education.

The poll found broad consensus among California voters in support of state programs to expand voter outreach services to encourage voting participation among under-represented groups. Two in three voters (66%) maintain that the state government has a responsibility to do so, and a similar proportion (64%) supports devoting greater funding and resources to community organizations and non-partisan outreach groups to inform voters as to when elections are being held and their options for returning their ballot. Black Californians, women, and younger voters voice greater support for funding these efforts.

There are substantial differences between the characteristics of the state's registered voters who vote regularly in state elections and those who do not. For example, "regular voters," those who voted in five or more of the last seven elections, are considerably older, are disproportionately white, and are more likely to be college graduates, married, and own their own homes. By contrast, infrequent voters and non-voters, those who vote in only 1 or 2 elections or none at all, are markedly younger, single, and include large proportions of non-college graduates, renters, and Latinos.

About three in ten voters who do not vote regularly say that among the reasons they do not vote is because they "don't know enough about the candidates or the issues" (31%) or that they are "not that interested" (30%). Slightly more than one in four also hold the view that "special interests and big money are controlling things" (28%), feel "my vote doesn't matter that much" (27%) or say they had only recently become a voter (26%).

When Californians are asked whether they are concerned about the much lower voting participation rates of younger voters and voters of color compared to older voters and whites, three-quarters expressed concern, with about half describing the situation as a major concern.

More than half of the state's registered voters (59%) reported engaging in at least one of seven political activities during the 2022 elections and the characteristics of these voters generally reflect

the segments of voters most likely to regularly vote in elections. In addition, there is broad consensus across nearly all major demographic and political subgroups that mailing voters their ballots about a month in advance of the election has made voting easier, with 63% of registered voters statewide reporting this.

This report, the first of a five-part series on democracy, voting rights, and state election laws, come from a *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted July 20-25, 2023, among 6,164 California voters.

“Despite important and historic recent voting reforms in California, we know the state’s democracy is both unfinished and underfunded,” said Marquis Mason, Advocacy Partnership Coordinator at California Environmental Voters. “If we want to achieve a truly multi-racial democracy, then the most marginalized need to have confidence in their vote and know that their voice is precious and needed. California currently puts very little funding into engaging voters and making sure those who have the ability to vote actually do so. Today’s polling results show that Californians believe that must change.”

In addition, Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director of California Common Cause observed, “Almost a third of infrequent voters in California say they don’t vote regularly because they don’t know enough about what is on the ballot. That is a desperate cry for more voter education, from the state and from civic engagement organizations. Almost a third say they don’t vote because they aren’t interested. If we want to have a representative democracy, we have to reach these folks and convince them of the power of their voice.”

#### **Wide differences in characteristics of Californians who vote regularly and those who don’t**

In the latest statewide survey of registered voters, the *Berkeley IGS Poll* examined the demographic characteristics of voters who participated in the survey against their official voting records for the last seven statewide elections held since 2018. Voters were then subdivided into four categories: (1) “regular voters,” those who had voted in five or more of the last seven elections, (2) “intermittent voters,” those who voted in 3 or 4 of these elections. (3) “infrequent voters,” those who voted in only 1 or 2 of these elections and (4) “non-voters,” those who had not participated in any of these seven elections.

Regular voters, who comprise 39% of all registered voters, are considerably older and tend to include larger proportions of whites, college graduates, married voters, and homeowners. For example, 71% are 50 or older, 71% are white, 68% own their home, 59% are married, and 55% are college graduates.

By contrast, infrequent voters, who account for 28% of the overall electorate, and non-voters, who represent 15% of those on the voter rolls, are markedly younger, have not graduated from college, rent their homes, and include large proportions of Latinos and voters who are single.

*Table 1*  
**Demographic characteristics of California registered voters  
 by frequency of voting in the last seven statewide elections**

|                              | Regular<br>voters (39%) | Intermittent<br>voters (18%) | Infrequent<br>voters (28%) | Non-voters<br>(15%) |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| <u>Age</u>                   |                         |                              |                            |                     |
| 18-29                        | 4                       | 15                           | 29                         | 41                  |
| 30-39                        | 12                      | 22                           | 21                         | 25                  |
| 40-49                        | 13                      | 17                           | 20                         | 10                  |
| 50-64                        | 27                      | 27                           | 22                         | 14                  |
| 65 or older                  | 44                      | 19                           | 9                          | 9                   |
| <u>Gender</u>                |                         |                              |                            |                     |
| Female                       | 53                      | 50                           | 53                         | 48                  |
| Male                         | 47                      | 50                           | 47                         | 52                  |
| <u>Race/ethnicity</u>        |                         |                              |                            |                     |
| White non-Hispanic           | 71                      | 51                           | 34                         | 34                  |
| Latino                       | 14                      | 28                           | 39                         | 41                  |
| Asian/Pacific Islander       | 9                       | 14                           | 19                         | 15                  |
| Black                        | 5                       | 5                            | 7                          | 7                   |
| <u>Education</u>             |                         |                              |                            |                     |
| High school graduate or less | 10                      | 16                           | 21                         | 34                  |
| Some college/trade school    | 36                      | 40                           | 46                         | 40                  |
| Bachelor's degree            | 33                      | 29                           | 22                         | 19                  |
| Post graduate degree         | 22                      | 14                           | 12                         | 7                   |
| <u>Tenure</u>                |                         |                              |                            |                     |
| Homeowner                    | 68                      | 42                           | 33                         | 19                  |
| Renter/other                 | 32                      | 58                           | 67                         | 80                  |
| <u>Marital status</u>        |                         |                              |                            |                     |
| Married                      | 59                      | 45                           | 40                         | 31                  |
| Not married/live together    | 7                       | 11                           | 10                         | 8                   |
| Widow/separated/divorced     | 19                      | 18                           | 12                         | 15                  |
| Single/never married         | 15                      | 27                           | 38                         | 46                  |

*Source: July 2023 Berkeley IGS Poll from an examination of each participant's actual voting record.*

**Three in four voters express concern about the much lower voting participation rates of younger voters and voters of color, with about half describing it as a major concern**

When voters are asked to what extent they are concerned about the potential threat to a representative democracy in California of much lower voting participation rates of younger voters and voters of color compared to older voters and whites, most express concern and about half describe the situation as a major concern.

The segments most likely to express major concerns about the much lower voting participation rates of younger voters compared to their older counterparts include Democrats (62%), voters who are strongly liberal (74%) or somewhat liberal (63%) in politics, voters ages 18-29 (61%) and women (54%). These same segments, as well as Blacks (74%), Latinos (61%), Asian Americans (56%), express greater concerns that voters of color are not voting at anywhere near the same rates as whites.

*Table 2*

**Voter concerns about the threat to a representative democracy in California of lower voting participation rates among certain segments of the state’s electorate**

|   | <b>A major concern</b><br>% | <b>A minor concern</b><br>% | <b>Not a concern</b><br>% | <b>No opinion</b><br>% |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Latino, Black, Asian American, and Native American voters voting at much lower rates than white voters. | 54                          | 20                          | 18                        | 8                      |
| Younger voters voting at much lower rates than older voters.  | 48                          | 27                          | 19                        | 6                      |

**Voters believe the state government has a responsibility to encourage voting participation and outreach efforts to under-represented groups**

There is broad consensus among voters that the state has a responsibility to expand outreach services to encourage voting participation among under-represented voter groups and that it should devote more funding to community organizations and non-partisan outreach groups to better inform voters about when elections are being held and the options they have for returning their ballots. Two in three voters (66%) maintain that the state government has a responsibility to do so, and a similar proportion (64%) supports devoting greater funding to community groups to better inform voters.

While large majorities across most demographic and political subgroups concur with both statements, Black voters, women, Democrats, liberals, and college graduates are more likely than others to both believe this is a state responsibility and support more state funding in this area. The exceptions are Republicans and strongly conservative voters, majorities of whom do not believe this is a state responsibility and oppose devoting more state funds to this effort.

“Persistent participation gaps show that California has a long way to go in building a fully inclusive and representative democracy,” said Marquis Mason, Advocacy Partnership Coordinator at California Environment Voters. “Targeted investments into electoral education and outreach are needed to close the participation gap and uplift community groups that are trusted messengers to underrepresented communities.”

*Table 3*

**Does state government have a responsibility to expand voter outreach services to encourage voting participation among under-represented groups?**

**(Support/Oppose) Should state government devote greater funding and resources to community organizations and non-partisan outreach groups to inform voters when elections are being held and their options for returning their ballots?**

|                                | <u>A state responsibility?</u> |           | <u>More state funding?</u> |             |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------|-------------|
|                                | Yes<br>%                       | No<br>%   | Support<br>%               | Oppose<br>% |
| <b>Total registered voters</b> | <b>66</b>                      | <b>22</b> | <b>64</b>                  | <b>25</b>   |
| <u>Party registration</u>      |                                |           |                            |             |
| Democrats                      | 84                             | 7         | 81                         | 9           |
| Republicans                    | 31                             | 55        | 32                         | 57          |
| No party preference/other      | 66                             | 20        | 62                         | 24          |
| <u>Political ideology</u>      |                                |           |                            |             |
| Strongly conservative          | 29                             | 60        | 33                         | 57          |
| Somewhat conservative          | 42                             | 43        | 44                         | 45          |
| Moderate                       | 67                             | 18        | 61                         | 24          |
| Somewhat liberal               | 83                             | 8         | 80                         | 11          |
| Strongly liberal               | 93                             | 2         | 89                         | 4           |
| <u>Gender</u>                  |                                |           |                            |             |
| Female                         | 72                             | 17        | 68                         | 16          |
| Male                           | 59                             | 28        | 59                         | 30          |
| <u>Age</u>                     |                                |           |                            |             |
| 18-29                          | 78                             | 8         | 68                         | 16          |
| 30-39                          | 70                             | 20        | 64                         | 20          |
| 40-49                          | 63                             | 24        | 63                         | 23          |
| 50-64                          | 64                             | 26        | 62                         | 31          |
| 65 or older                    | 59                             | 30        | 62                         | 30          |
| <u>Ethnicity</u>               |                                |           |                            |             |
| White non-Hispanic             | 63                             | 28        | 63                         | 29          |
| Latino                         | 67                             | 16        | 64                         | 22          |
| Asian/Pacific Islander         | 73                             | 14        | 62                         | 20          |
| Black                          | 82                             | 9         | 79                         | 10          |
| <u>Education</u>               |                                |           |                            |             |
| High school graduate or less   | 63                             | 20        | 61                         | 23          |
| Some college/trade school      | 63                             | 25        | 60                         | 28          |
| Bachelor's degree              | 70                             | 20        | 68                         | 23          |
| Post graduate degree           | 71                             | 21        | 71                         | 23          |

*Differences between 100% and the sum of each row's percentages for each question equal the proportion of voters with no opinion.*

### **The reasons Californians give for voting**

Californians who vote offer a wide range of reasons when asked why they do so, with most choosing multiple reasons from a list of possible answers. Clustered at the top of the list are the following: “to stand up for the candidates and issues I believe are important” (65%), “to influence the direction of state and local government” (64%), and “it’s an important civic duty (62%). Other reasons cited by majorities or near majorities as a reason for voting include: “to have a say in how my tax dollars are spent” (58%), “to bring about change (53%),” and that “my vote makes a difference and can affect the election outcome” (46%).

Liberal voters are more likely than other voters to say they vote because it is their civic duty, that it will bring about change, or could impact the outcome of elections.

There are only modest differences across party lines on these replies. The most significant are that Republicans are more likely than Democrats to say they vote to have a say in how their tax dollars are spent but are less likely to think their vote will make a difference and affect the outcome of the election.

### **Lack of information is the most common reason for not voting**

About three in ten of those who do not vote regularly say it’s because they “don’t know enough about the candidates or the issues” (31%) or that they are “not that interested” (30%). About one in four hold the view that “special interests and big money are controlling things” (28%), feel “my vote doesn’t matter that much” (27%) or that “I have only recently become a voter” (26%). Another 14% choose as one of their reasons for not voting that “voting systems are corrupt and the results can’t be trusted,” 9% say it’s because “election ballots in California are too long,” 6% say they are “confused about how to vote,” and another 6% feel “voting is inconvenient and takes too much time.”

The voter segments most likely to say they do not vote because they don’t know enough about the candidates or issues include younger voters (40%), Latinos (36%), Asian Americans (38%), and women (34%). Younger voters and high school graduates are also the segments most likely to report that they only recently became a registered voter as a reason for not voting. Black voters were more likely than voters of other racial and ethnic backgrounds to cite not being interested as a reason for not voting (43%). Republicans who don’t often vote are more likely than Democrats to believe special interests and big money are controlling things, say their vote doesn’t matter much, or that voting systems are corrupt and election results can’t be trusted.

### **Two in three voters say the recent changes in which all voters are mailed their ballots in advance of Election Day has made voting easier**

A large majority of Californians (63%) believes that the recent changes made to the state’s election laws in which all voters are mailed their election ballots a month in advance of Election Day has made voting easier for them. This compares to 27% who report that the law has had no impact on them, while just 4% say the change has made voting more difficult for them.

There is broad consensus across nearly all major demographic and political subgroups that mailing voters their ballots in advance of the election has made voting easier. Democrats, liberals, college graduates, and Black voters are more likely than other voters to say this. The exceptions are Republicans and strongly conservative voters, who are more likely to report not being affected by the changes in the law.

|                                | <b>Has made voting...</b> |                       |                    |                        |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
|                                | <b>Easier</b><br>%        | <b>No change</b><br>% | <b>Harder</b><br>% | <b>No opinion</b><br>% |
| <b>Total registered voters</b> | <b>63</b>                 | <b>27</b>             | <b>4</b>           | <b>6</b>               |
| <u>Party registration</u>      |                           |                       |                    |                        |
| Democrats                      | 77                        | 16                    | 2                  | 5                      |
| Republicans                    | 36                        | 49                    | 9                  | 6                      |
| No party preference/other      | 62                        | 27                    | 3                  | 8                      |
| <u>Political ideology</u>      |                           |                       |                    |                        |
| Strongly conservative          | 38                        | 49                    | 9                  | 4                      |
| Somewhat conservative          | 45                        | 40                    | 7                  | 8                      |
| Moderate                       | 63                        | 27                    | 3                  | 7                      |
| Somewhat liberal               | 78                        | 16                    | 1                  | 6                      |
| Strongly liberal               | 81                        | 14                    | 1                  | 4                      |
| <u>Age</u>                     |                           |                       |                    |                        |
| 18-29                          | 54                        | 26                    | 4                  | 16                     |
| 30-39                          | 70                        | 21                    | 4                  | 5                      |
| 40-49                          | 63                        | 29                    | 4                  | 4                      |
| 50-64                          | 63                        | 29                    | 4                  | 4                      |
| 65 or older                    | 65                        | 30                    | 3                  | 2                      |
| <u>Ethnicity</u>               |                           |                       |                    |                        |
| White non-Hispanic             | 66                        | 28                    | 3                  | 3                      |
| Latino                         | 60                        | 26                    | 4                  | 9                      |
| Asian/Pacific Islander         | 56                        | 27                    | 4                  | 12                     |
| Black                          | 73                        | 17                    | 4                  | 6                      |

**Over half of the state’s voters participated in some form of political activity in 2022 elections**

A 59% majority of the state’s registered voters say they engaged in at least one of seven political acts or activities during the 2022 election campaigns.

The things most frequently cited were by trying to persuade someone to vote one way or another, reported by 30%, posting a message or comment online about a political or social issue (28%), giving money to an organization for a political or social cause (25%) or giving money directly to a candidate, political party, or specific election campaign (23%).

Whites and older voters were the most likely to have been politically active during the 2022 elections overall and were more likely than others to have participated in each of the four major political activities. Voters living in higher income households, and those living in the San Francisco Bay Area or Central Coast were the segments most likely to have given money to an interest group on an issue of concern or to a specific political party or candidate. For example, Bay Area voters were twice as likely to give money to a political party or candidate than San Joaquin Valley voters. Older voters were nearly six times more likely to give to a political party or candidate than young voters. Older voters were also three times as likely as young voters to give money to an organization or group concerned about a political or social issue.



**Table 5**  
**Voters who report being politically active in the 2022 elections**  
**and the most common activities cited**

|                                | <b>Politically<br/>active<br/>Mention<br/>any activity<br/>(net)<br/>%</b> | <b>Tried to<br/>persuade<br/>someone to<br/>vote in a<br/>certain way<br/>%</b> | <b>Posted a<br/>political<br/>comment/<br/>message<br/>online<br/>%</b> | <b>Gave money<br/>to an interest<br/>group on an<br/>issue of<br/>concern<br/>%</b> | <b>Gave<br/>money to a<br/>party or<br/>candidate<br/>%</b> |
|--------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Total registered voters</b> | <b>59</b>  | <b>30</b>   | <b>28</b>   | <b>25</b>   | <b>23</b>   |
| <u>Age</u>                     |  |   |   |   |   |
| 18-29                          | 48   | 27  | 26  | 13  | 7   |
| 30-39                          | 53   | 30  | 26  | 22  | 17  |
| 40-49                          | 57   | 29  | 29  | 22  | 18  |
| 50-64                          | 62   | 29  | 28  | 25  | 25  |
| 65 or older                    | 69   | 32  | 30  | 39  | 40  |
| <u>Race/ethnicity</u>          |  |   |   |   |   |
| White non-Hispanic             | 66   | 34  | 32  | 33  | 31  |
| Latino                         | 51   | 26  | 23  | 13  | 13  |
| Asian/Pacific Islander         | 47   | 25  | 19  | 19  | 15  |
| Black                          | 59   | 25  | 29  | 22  | 15  |
| <u>Annual household income</u> |  |   |   |   |   |
| Less than \$20,000             | 59   | 25  | 25  | 15  | 10  |
| \$20,000-\$39,999              | 56   | 24  | 27  | 14  | 13  |
| \$40,000-\$59,999              | 57   | 23  | 26  | 18  | 16  |
| \$60,000-\$99,999              | 57   | 29  | 28  | 26  | 24  |
| \$100,000-\$199,999            | 64   | 33  | 32  | 32  | 29  |
| \$200,000 or more              | 58   | 37  | 26  | 37  | 35  |
| <u>Region</u>                  |  |   |   |   |   |
| Los Angeles County             | 59   | 30  | 29  | 23  | 21  |
| San Diego County               | 56   | 28  | 23  | 25  | 22  |
| Orange County                  | 57   | 31  | 24  | 27  | 23  |
| Inland Empire                  | 57   | 30  | 27  | 19  | 20  |
| Central Coast                  | 64   | 31  | 24  | 33  | 30  |
| Sacramento/North Valley        | 62   | 28  | 33  | 27  | 25  |
| San Joaquin Valley             | 54   | 25  | 33  | 16  | 14  |
| San Francisco Bay Area         | 61   | 32  | 27  | 31  | 29  |
| North Coast/Sierras            | 63   | 34  | 32  | 30  | 28  |

## **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 July 20 - 25, 2023 among 6,164 California registered voters. Support for the poll was provided to IGS under a grant from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund.

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 official voter registration rolls and provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists.

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. In addition, 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 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.

## **Question wording**

**(IF REPORT VOTING AT LEAST SOME OF THE TIME)** Below are some of the reasons why people vote in elections in California. Please indicate which of these are reasons why you usually vote in most elections? You can select as many as apply. **(SEE RELEASE FOR REASONS LISTED)**

**(IF REPORT THAT THEY DO NOT ALWAYS VOTE)** Below are some of the reasons why people don't always vote in elections in California. Please indicate which of these are reasons why you haven't voted in many of these elections? You can select as many as apply. **(SEE RELEASE FOR REASONS LISTED)**

Two years ago, California changed its election laws so that all voters are now sent their official election ballot by mail 30 days before Election Day. This allows voters the opportunity to vote early or by mail, as well as also allowing them to continue to vote on Election Day if they want. Generally speaking, would you say that these changes have made voting easier for you, harder for you, or have not changed things for you?

Do you believe the state government has a responsibility to expand voter outreach services to encourage voting participation among under-represented groups in California elections?

Would you support or oppose state and local governments devoting greater funding and resources to community organizations and other non-partisan voter outreach groups to provide information and resources to voters alerting them as to when elections are being held and their options for returning their ballot?

To what extent do the following things concern you as being potential threats to having a representative democracy in California? (ORDERING OF STATEMENTS RANDOMIZED)

- Younger voters voting at much lower rates than older voters.
- Latino, Black, Asian American, and American Indian voters voting at much lower rates than white voters.

During last year's 2022 election campaigns, did you personally do any of the following things prior to the election? (SEE RELEASE FOR ACTIVITIES 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 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>.

#### **About the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund**

The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund works to advance equality and justice so every person can thrive and live life with dignity and hope. Rooted in the Bay Area, it focuses on a set of issues that include building a fairer, more representative democracy in California; advancing more humane approaches to immigration and expanding opportunities for immigrant youth and families; and making higher education more affordable for lower-income California students. It has awarded over \$671 million in grants since its founding in 1953.