

UC Berkeley

IGS Poll

Title

Release #2024-22: Governor Race 2026

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/97b1p0sq>

Author

DiCamillo, Mark

Publication Date

2024-11-13



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

Release #2024-22

Wednesday, November 13, 2024

No clear leader in poll of potential candidates in 2026 race for Governor.
- Many would consider supporting Kamala Harris should she choose to run -

By Mark DiCamillo
Director, Berkeley IGS Poll

California will be electing a new governor in 2026, as current Governor Gavin Newsom cannot run again because of term limits. In its latest survey of California registered voters, the *Berkeley IGS Poll* asked voters for their initial preferences in the state's 2026 gubernatorial election. When measuring preferences in this survey, voters were presented with a long list of 9 Democrats and 4 Republicans who have either already announced their intentions to run for governor or have been mentioned in press reports as potential candidates.

In this setting, no single candidate emerges as the clear leader, with about half of the state's voters (52%) not expressing a preference at this time. Atop the field at this early stage are Democratic Congresswoman Katie Porter, and two Republicans, Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco and state Senator Brian Dahle. Porter receives 13% of voters' first or second choice preferences were she to run, Bianco gets 12% and Dahle 11%.

Three other Democrats follow at 7%, Lt. Governor Eleni Kounalakis, former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra. Five other Democrats and two Republicans trail, with each receiving between 2% and 5%.

However, many Californians say they would also consider Vice President Kamala Harris as a candidate for governor in 2026 should she choose to enter the race. While Harris was not included among the potential candidates in the poll's preference measures, when asked separately whether they would consider supporting her as a gubernatorial candidate, one in three voters (33%) say they would be very likely to do so, and another 13% would be somewhat likely.

These findings come from a statewide *Berkeley IGS Poll* random sample survey completed online October 22-29 among 4,341 Californians registered to vote in English and Spanish.

Observed IGS co-director Eric Schickler, "At this early stage it is not surprising that there is no early frontrunner among voters in the 2026 Governor's race. If Vice President Harris were to run, she would have an important advantage as she is by far the best known of the potential candidates. But for now, this is shaping up to be a wide-open race, with several Democrats likely to battle it out for the attention of Democratic voters."

Table 1
1st and 2nd choice preferences among announced and
other possible candidates for Governor in 2026
(among California registered voters)

	1st or 2nd choice	1st choice	2nd choice
	%	%	%
Katie Porter, Congresswoman, Democrat	13	10	3
Chad Bianco, Riverside Sheriff, Republican	12	8	4
Brian Dahle, state Senator, Republican	11	6	5
Eleni Kounalakis, Lt. Governor, Democrat	7	3	4
Antonio Villaraigosa, former Los Angeles Mayor, Democrat	7	4	3
Xavier Becerra, U.S. Health & Human Services Secretary, Democrat	7	3	4
Steve Hilton, former TV news host and policy advisor, Republican	6	3	3
Rob Bonta, California Attorney General, Democrat	5	3	2
Lanhee Chen, policy advisor and academic, Republican	5	2	3
Betty Yee, former state Controller, Democrat	4	2	2
Rick Caruso, Los Angeles County businessman, Democrat	4	2	2
Tony Thurmond, state Superintendent of Public Instruction, Democrat	2	1	1
Tony Atkins, state Senator, Democrat	2	1	1
Undecided	52	52	63

Wide subgroup differences in early voter preferences for governor

There are pronounced differences in early voter preferences for governor across major subgroups of the registered voter population. For example, Porter would be the early leader among the state’s registered Democrats, receiving 22% of their first or second choice preferences. On the other hand, Bianco and Dahle would have the early lead among the state’s Republicans, with each receiving about a third of their first or second choice preference votes.

Porter would also be the poll favorite among female voters and among the state’s Asian American and Black voters, while Bianco and Dahle would begin the race in a very competitive position with Porter among whites and male voters.

Democrats Villaraigosa and Becerra would hold a slight edge over Porter among Latinos, although Republican Bianco and Dahle would also be competitive among these voters as well.

On a regional basis, Porter leads in the San Francisco Bay Area, while Bianco has the advantage among voters in the Inland Empire, which includes Riverside County where he now serves as sheriff. Dahle runs strongest among voters in the Sacramento/North Valley and North Coast/Sierras regions, while both Bianco and Dahle would share the lead among voters in the San Joaquin Valley.

Table 2
1st and 2nd choice preferences for Governor in 2026
across major subgroups of the state’s registered voter population

	Porter (D) %	Bianco (R) %	Dahle (R) %	Kouna -lakis (D) %	Villara -igosa (D) %	Bec- erra (D) %	Hilton (R) %	Bonta (D) %	Chen (R) %	Others %
Total registered voters	13	12	11	7	7	7	6	5	5	12
<u>Party registration</u>										
Democrat	22	1	2	10	11	10	1	8	1	15
Republican	2	34	31	1	2	1	19	1	11	5
No Party Preference/other	10	10	8	5	6	6	4	4	6	13
<u>Gender</u>										
Female	15	9	9	8	7	6	5	5	4	13
Male	12	15	13	5	8	7	8	5	6	12
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>										
White	16	14	13	7	4	5	8	5	5	12
Latino/Hispanic	11	13	10	6	15	13	5	5	6	14
Asian /Pacific Islander	12	7	7	6	4	4	6	6	6	14
Black	13	4	8	9	5	5	4	7	6	18
<u>Region</u>										
Los Angeles County	15	9	7	7	12	9	5	4	3	17
San Diego County	9	14	8	7	6	4	9	5	6	16
Orange County	12	12	14	4	5	4	10	4	5	6
Inland Empire	11	23	13	6	11	9	7	5	5	8
Central Coast	16	11	9	5	6	5	9	4	7	13
Sacramento/North Valley	12	14	18	5	2	5	7	5	8	11
San Joaquin Valley	7	15	14	7	4	8	8	3	7	11
San Francisco Bay Area	17	6	9	9	5	5	5	8	4	13
North Coast/Sierras*	11	12	19	6	3	3	2	6	3	8

Many Californians would consider supporting Vice President Harris as a gubernatorial candidate if she decided to run

Were Vice President Harris to enter the 2026 gubernatorial race, one in three of the state’s voters (33%) say they would be very likely to consider supporting her candidacy and another 13% would be somewhat likely. This compares to 42% who would not be likely to give her their support, while another 12% are undecided.

Considerations of Harris as a potential gubernatorial candidate are highly partisan, with 72% of Democrats saying they would be very or somewhat likely to consider supporting her, while 87% of Republicans would not. Among voters not affiliated with either major party, 24% would be very likely and 13% somewhat likely to support a Harris 2026 bid for governor.

Table 3
Consideration of Kamala Harris as a potential gubernatorial candidate in 2026 (among California registered voters)

	Total likely voters	Democrats	Republicans	No Party Pref./others
	%	%	%	%
Very likely	33	54	4	24
Somewhat likely	13	18	4	14
Not too likely	6	6	3	9
Not at all likely	36	10	84	35
Undecided	12	12	5	18

Most Californians are unfamiliar with the potential gubernatorial candidates at this stage

When voters are asked whether they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the various people being mentioned as possible candidates in the 2026 gubernatorial election, majorities of voters have no opinion of each.

Porter would begin the race with the most well-defined image profile, with 29% viewing her favorably and 17% unfavorably. About four in ten voters can also offer an opinion of Becerra and Villaraigosa, although Becerra’s profile is 22%-16% positive, while Villaraigosa’s profile is 25% to 17% negative. Somewhat fewer voters can offer an opinion of Bianco or Dahle, with Bianco viewed favorably by 17% and unfavorably by 14%, while Dahle is viewed more positively than negatively, 15% to 9%.

Voter image ratings of nearly all the potential gubernatorial candidates are highly partisan, with the Democratic and Republican candidates receiving much more positive assessments among voters of their own party. However, two of the lesser-known potential candidates defy these partisan stereotypes. According to the poll, Republican policy advisor and academic Lanhee Chen receives similar ratings among both the state’s Democrats and Republicans, while Democratic businessman Rick Caruso is viewed more negatively among voters of his own party than he does among Republicans.

Table 4
Image ratings of announced candidates and other possible contenders
for Governor in 2026 (among registered voters)

	Favorable %	Unfavorable %	No opinion %
<u>Katie Porter</u> - Total voters	<u>29</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>54</u>
Democrats	45	7	48
Republicans	7	32	61
<u>Chad Bianco</u> - Total voters	<u>17</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>69</u>
Democrats	4	20	76
Republicans	43	4	53
<u>Brian Dahle</u> - Total voters	<u>15</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>76</u>
Democrats	5	8	87
Republicans	38	8	54
<u>Eleni Kounalakis</u> - Total voters	<u>15</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>68</u>
Democrats	27	5	68
Republicans	3	38	59
<u>Antonio Villaraigosa</u> - Total voters	<u>17</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>58</u>
Democrats	23	15	62
Republicans	8	46	46
<u>Xavier Becerra</u> - Total voters	<u>22</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>62</u>
Democrats	33	5	62
Republicans	5	37	58
<u>Steve Hilton</u> - Total voters	<u>11</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>75</u>
Democrats	3	19	78
Republicans	30	6	64
<u>Rob Bonta</u> - Total voters	<u>18</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>64</u>
Democrats	28	7	65
Republicans	4	40	56
<u>Lanhee Chen</u> - Total voters	<u>10</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>82</u>
Democrats	8	6	86
Republicans	16	13	71
<u>Betty Yee</u> - Total voters	<u>16</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>72</u>
Democrats	20	6	74
Republicans	7	27	66
<u>Rick Caruso</u> - Total voters	<u>12</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>69</u>
Democrats	8	20	72
Republicans	16	17	67
<u>Tony Thurmond</u> - Total voters	<u>11</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>76</u>
Democrats	16	7	77
Republicans	3	26	71
<u>Tony Atkins</u> - Total voters	<u>7</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>81</u>
Democrats	11	5	84
Republicans	4	26	70

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 October 22-29, 2024, among 4,838 registered voters in California. In order to minimize respondent fatigue, the overall sample was subdivided into two random subsamples when posing the candidate image rating questions. 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.

The latest poll also included an oversampling of registered voters in Los Angeles County, administered using the same methods, to enable the poll to examine some election contests facing voters in Los Angeles County and to the *Times*. After the completion of data collection, the results were weighted to realign the Los Angeles County oversample to its actual share of the statewide registered voter population.

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 from the overall registered voter sample have an estimated sampling error of about +/-2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings from the two random subsamples have an estimated sampling error of about +/-3 percentage points.

Question wording

A number of people have been mentioned as potential candidates for Governor in 2026. If all of these people were running for Governor in 2026 and you were voting today, who would be your first choice? Who would be your 2nd choice?

Regardless of whom you might choose to support for Governor in the 2026 election, please indicate whether you have generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of each of these potential candidates, or don't you know enough about him to say.

Suppose Vice President Kamala Harris is not elected President in November, and she decided to run for Governor in 2026. How likely would you be to vote for Harris for Governor of California?

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 G. Cristina Mora.

IGS conducted periodic surveys of California public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll seeks to provide broad measures of contemporary public opinion and generate data for scholarly analysis. Veteran pollster Mark DiCamillo serves as director of the poll. For a complete listing of reports issued by the poll, please visit <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.