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50% of voters consider the state budget deficit “extremely serious.”
***Spending cuts and tapping the state’s rainy-day fund most favored
by voters as ways to close the deficit.***

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

Half of the state’s registered voters (50%) describe the budget deficit that California is now facing as “extremely serious,” while another 37% consider it “somewhat serious.”

Voters in the survey were offered four possible methods that the state could employ to deal with the deficit, and two of the four are clearly the most popular. These include making spending cuts to government services, supported by 51%, and tapping into the state’s rainy-day fund, backed by 35%. Much smaller proportions back two other possible alternatives -- borrowing from special funds, cited by 17%, and raising taxes, 13%. *(Note: Adds to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.)*

Large majorities of Republican and conservative voters are alarmed by the deficit, with about three in four describing the situation as extremely serious. They overwhelmingly back spending cuts to government services as the preferred method to close the deficit. Men, older voters, whites, Asian Americans, and No Party Preference are also more likely than others to favor spending cuts.

On the other hand, while about one in three Democrats, liberals, and Black voters also favor spending cuts, more prefer tapping into the state’s rainy-day fund as the best way to address the deficit.

The latest poll also finds that only a third of voters (33%) believes the state is moving in the right direction overall, while 57% think it is off on the wrong track. This is a somewhat more negative assessment than voters have given in similar measures conducted over the past eleven years.

When asked to assess the job Gavin Newsom is doing as Governor, 47% disapprove while 46% approve. This is not much different than the ratings he received last October when more voters disapproved by a narrow 49% to 44% margin. However, similar to the October survey, twice as many voters say they strongly disapprove of the Governor’s performance (33%) as strongly approve (17%).

Observed IGS Co-Director Eric Schickler, “The survey suggests little appetite for tax increases to address the deficit, but a challenge for Governor Newsom and the legislature is that while spending cuts, in principle, are relatively popular, that support would likely dissipate when it comes time to making cuts to specific programs and services.”

Half of the electorate describes the state’s budget deficit as “extremely serious”

Half of the state’s registered voters (50%) describe the budget deficit that California is now facing as “extremely serious,” with another 37% saying they consider it “somewhat serious,” while just 8% feel it is not serious.

Republicans and conservatives are much more likely than other voters to feel the deficit is “extremely serious,” with about eight in ten reacting this way. By contrast, most Democrats and liberal voters who offer an opinion label the deficit situation as “somewhat serious.” Voters under age 30 are also less likely than older voters to view the budget deficit as “extremely serious.”

Table 1
Perceived seriousness of the state’s current budget deficit
(among California registered voters)

	Extremely serious	Somewhat serious	Not serious	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
Total registered voters	50	37	8	5
Likely voters	54	35	8	3
Party registration				
Democrats	35	48	11	6
Republicans	80	14	2	4
No party preference/others	50	37	8	5
Political ideology				
Strongly conservative	83	11	2	4
Somewhat conservative	72	21	4	3
Moderate	51	35	6	8
Somewhat liberal	33	54	9	4
Strongly liberal	23	53	17	7
Gender				
Female	52	36	6	6
Male	48	38	10	4
Age				
18-29	39	41	11	9
30-39	48	38	10	4
40-49	53	32	8	7
50-64	55	34	6	5
65 or older	52	39	6	3
Race/ethnicity				
White	50	39	8	3
Latino	50	35	8	7
Asian/Pacific Islander	46	39	7	8
Black	56	28	7	9

Voters favor spending cuts and tapping into the state’s rainy-day fund to close the deficit

When voters are offered four possible means for closing the deficit, voters prefer spending cuts to government services (51%) and tapping into the state’s rainy-day fund (35%) over two other

alternatives, borrowing from special funds (17%) or raising taxes (13%). Another 14% have no opinion. (Note: Adds to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.)

Spending cuts are by far the most preferred method for dealing with the deficit by the state’s Republicans and conservative voters, with about three in four backing this course of action. Men, older voters, whites, Asian Americans, and No Party Preference voters are also more likely than others to favor spending cuts to the other alternatives.

While about one in three Democrats, liberals, and black voters back spending cuts, more favor tapping into the state’s rainy-day fund.

Table 2
Voter preferences regarding how the state budget deficit should be closed
(among California registered voters)

	Spending cuts to government services %	Tapping state’s rainy-day reserve fund %	Borrowing from special funds %	Raising taxes %	No opinio n %
Total registered voters	51	35	17	13	14
Likely voters	52	38	18	15	12
<u>Party registration</u>					
Democrats	37	43	22	20	16
Republicans	76	23	10	3	11
No party preference/others	53	31	16	12	16
<u>Political ideology</u>					
Strongly conservative	76	21	11	3	8
Somewhat conservative	74	27	11	3	9
Moderate	56	33	18	7	17
Somewhat liberal	36	45	21	19	18
Strongly liberal	21	43	23	36	15
<u>Gender</u>					
Female	45	38	20	11	18
Male	57	31	15	16	11
<u>Age</u>					
18-29	43	26	18	16	23
30-39	48	32	17	16	15
40-49	50	35	16	10	16
50-64	53	38	18	11	12
65 or older	57	40	17	13	11
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>					
White	54	35	17	16	11
Latino	48	35	16	9	19
Asian/Pacific Islander	53	29	20	15	17
Black	36	48	24	8	18

(Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.)

Only a third of voters believes California is moving in the right direction

One of the most long-standing tracking measurements in California relates to whether voters believe the state is generally moving in the right direction or is off on the wrong track. In the latest poll only one in three (33%) thinks the state is now moving in the right direction, while 57% feel it is off on the wrong track.

This is a somewhat more negative assessment than voters have given in measures taken over the past eleven years. However, the current findings are not nearly as negative as those observed during the nation's economic crisis that characterized the period 2008-2011. At that time between 69% and 80% of California voters described the state as being on the wrong track.

Table 3
Trend of voter assessments of the overall direction of the state of California

	Right direction %	Wrong track %	No opinion %
January 2024	33	57	10
February 2022	36	54	10
May 2021	46	45	9
January 2021	37	55	8
September 2020	48	52	*
2016 (average)	51	49	*
2015 (average)	45	41	14
2014 (average)	42	43	15
2013 (average)	44	44	12
2012 (average)	30	59	11
2011 (average)	24	66	10
2010 (average)	13	80	7
2009 (average)	17	75	8
2008 (average)	22	69	9
2007 (average)	45	43	12
2006 (average)	37	49	14
2005 (average)	31	58	11
2004 (average)	39	48	13
2003 (average)	20	72	8
2002 (average)	37	52	11
2001 (average)	43	50	7
2000 (average)	58	35	7
1999 (average)	52	34	14
1998 (average)	48	42	10
1997 (average)	36	54	10
1996 (average)	39	49	12
1995 (average)	32	57	11
1994 (average)	21	70	9
1993 (average)	11	83	6
1992 (average)	7	90	3
1989 (average)	50	42	8
1988 (average)	52	43	5

Note: 1988-2016 measures come from statewide surveys of registered voters conducted by The Field Poll as reported in release #2552, September 29, 2016, by Field Research Corporation.

** Less than 1/2 of 1%*

Newsom’s job approval ratings as governor are mixed

The latest poll finds that about as many voters now disapprove (47%) as approve (46%) of the job that Newsom is doing as governor overall. However, twice as many voters say they strongly disapprove of the Governor’s performance (33%) as strongly approve (17%).

Evaluations of Newsom have always been highly partisan. This is again the case in the latest poll, as nine in ten Republicans (90%) say they disapprove of Newsom’s performance as governor, while 72% of the state’s Democrats approve.

Table 4
Trend of the overall job performance of Governor Gavin Newsom
(among California registered voters)

	Approve (total) %	<i>Approve strongly %</i>	<i>Approve somewhat %</i>	Disapprove (total) %	<i>Disapprove somewhat %</i>	<i>Disapprove strongly %</i>
<i>Early January 2024</i>	46	17	29	47	14	33
Late October 2023	44	18	26	49	13	36
February 2023	55	25	30	39	10	29
August 2022	53	20	33	42	13	29
February 2022	48	16	32	47	16	31
September 2021	50	20	30	42	11	31
July 2021	50	20	30	42	12	30
April 2021	52	21	31	43	13	30
January 2021	46	14	32	48	17	31
September 2020	64	25	39	36	13	23
September 2019	60	18	42	39	12	27
June 2019	57	15	42	42	17	25
<u>Party registration</u>						
<i>(Early January 2024)</i>						
Democrats	72	30	42	21	14	7
Republicans	7	2	5	90	10	80
No Party Pref./others	37	9	28	55	19	36

Note: Differences between the sum of each row’s percentages and 100% equal the proportion with no opinion.

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 January 4-8, 2024, among 8,199 California registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

Data collection for the poll was completed 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 provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in the state and were derived from information contained on the official voter registration rolls. The sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents.

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 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 are difficult to calculate precisely because of sample stratification and the post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that findings based on the overall registered voter sample are subject to a sampling error of about +/-1.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. A more complete description of the survey methods used by the poll can be found on the *Berkeley IGS Poll* website at https://igs.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/survey_methods_of_the_berkeley_igs_poll_update_d_1_3_24.pdf

Question wording

Do you think things in California are generally going in the right direction or do you feel things are off on the wrong track?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Gavin Newsom is handling his job as Governor of California?

State budget analysts are now projecting that the state will be facing a large budget deficit next year, and unless economic conditions improve, in the following years as well. How serious a problem do you feel this is for the state?

How would you prefer that the state deal with this deficit? You may select more than one category: **(ORDERING RANDOMIZED)**

- Through spending cuts to government services
- By tapping into the state's "rainy day" reserve fund
- By borrowing from special funds
- By raising taxes

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 listing of reports issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll*, go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.