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California voters in broad agreement that American democracy faces critical dangers, but Democrats and Republicans disagree on the nature of the threats.

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There is broad bipartisan agreement among the California electorate that the nation's democracy and its election processes face a number of serious threats. According to the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* majorities of Californians in both parties consider politics in the United States today to be highly divisive, agree that democracy itself is in crisis, and that voting rights are also under threat.

Large majorities of the state's voters cite a number of things as being serious threats to the nation's election processes. These include people threatening political violence if they do not get what they want, which 73% consider a "major threat," people trying to overturn or change election results (64%) and organized efforts aimed at making it harder for Americans to vote in elections (63%). About half of the electorate (53%) considers foreign interference in U.S. elections as a major threat, while fewer (39%) describe people voting illegally in elections as a major threat.

Yet, Democrats and Republicans prioritize these specific threats quite differently. For Democrats the top threats are the potential for political violence if people don't get their way, which 81% consider a major threat, organized efforts aimed at making it harder to vote (79%) and the possibility that election results will be overturned or changed (75%). Far fewer Democrats (25%) say this about illegal voting illegally in elections.

On the other hand, among Republicans the largest proportion (69%) rates illegal voting in elections as a major threat, while just 32% say this about organized efforts to make it harder to vote. About half of GOP voters (49%) consider the possibility that election results will be changed or overturned as a major threat, while 58% describe people threatening violence if they don't get their way as a major threat.

Another major partisan divide relates to voter confidence in the accuracy of machine tallies of election results. Among Democrats 86% express confidence in the accuracy of these tallies, while just 45% of Republicans say this.

Observed IGS Co-Director Eric Schickler, “While California voters are in broad agreement that American democracy faces critical dangers, Democrats and Republicans disagree sharply on the nature of the threats, making the challenge of addressing the problem particularly daunting.”

Two in three Californians describe politics in the country today as highly divisive

When asked to rate the divisiveness of politics in the United States today on a ten-point scale where 1 equaled “no political divisions” and 10 meant “political divisions were on the edge of civil war,” two in three Californians (64%) offer an 8, 9 or 10 score denoting a very high extent of political divisiveness. Nearly all the rest (33%) offer moderately divisive scores of 4, 5, 6 or 7, while just 3% see few political divisions.

The view that U.S. politics today is highly divisive crosses party lines with both registered Democrats and registered Republicans offering very similar assessments.

Table 1
Californians’ views about the extent of political divisions
in the United States today on a 1-10 scale*
(among California registered voters)

	Total CA voters %	Democrats %	Republican s %	No Party Preference /other %
<u>Highly divisive (net)</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>65</u>	<u>64</u>	<u>61</u>
10	24	22	27	22
9	17	18	14	17
8	23	25	23	22
<u>Moderately divisive (net)</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>34</u>
7	17	16	17	18
6	7	7	8	6
5	8	7	8	9
4	1	1	1	1
<u>Not divisive (net)</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>
3	1	2	*	1
2	*	*	1	1
1	2	1	1	3

* less than ½ of 1%

Broad bipartisan agreement that nation’s “democracy is in crisis and at risk of failing”

By a greater than four-to-one margin (78% to 17%) California voters agree with the statement that “American democracy is in crisis and is at risk of failing.” Views about this are bipartisan and include 83% of Democrats and 73% of Republicans.

An NPR/Ipsos poll of the U.S. public conducted in January of this year found similar results, with 70% agreeing and 16% disagreeing with this statement.

Table 2
Agree/disagree: “American democracy is in crisis and is at risk of failing”
(among California registered voters)

	Total CA voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /other %
Agree	78	83	73	74
Strongly	43	47	41	38
Somewhat	35	36	32	36
Disagree	17	13	24	17
Somewhat	11	19	14	10
Strongly	6	4	10	7
No opinion	5	4	3	9

Majorities are pessimistic that Americans of different political views can come together and work out their differences in today’s political environment

Not only do Californians see the nation’s politics and the functioning of its democracy to be in peril, but they also offer a generally bleak assessment of the future. The survey finds that by a two-to-one margin (63% to 32%) the state’s voters are more pessimistic than optimistic that Americans of different political views can come together and work out their differences in today’s political environment.

This includes large majorities of voters of all political stripes, including 66% of state’s registered Democrats, 59% of Republicans and 62% of those not affiliated with either major party.

Table 3
How optimistic or pessimistic are you that Americans of different political views can come together and work out their differences in today’s political environment
(among California registered voters)

	Total CA voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /other %
Optimistic	32	30	36	33
Very	5	4	6	6
Somewhat	27	26	30	27
Pessimistic	63	66	59	62
Somewhat	32	34	30	30
Very	31	32	29	32
No opinion	5	4	5	5

Clouded views about both the nation’s election security and its voting rights

California voters are also more likely to describe both election security and voting rights in the country as being “under threat” rather than being “strong.” The poll finds that by a 52% to 35% margin Californians consider election security in the United States to be under threat, with a larger proportion of Republicans (74%) than Democrats (44%) holding to this view.

There is even broader concern among the overall electorate about threats to voting rights, with 61% describing them as being under threat and just 30% think they are strong. While majorities of voters across all parties see voting rights as being under threat, Democrats are more likely to feel that way than either Republicans or non-partisan voters.

Table 4
Do you consider (election security/voting rights) in the U.S. to be strong or under threat?
(among California registered voters)

	Total CA voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /other %
<u>Election security</u>				
Is strong	35	44	18	34
Under threat	52	44	74	46
No opinion	13	12	8	20
<u>Voting rights</u>				
Is strong	30	23	41	32
Under threat	61	70	53	51
No opinion	9	7	6	17

Democrats and Republicans hold different views about the nature of the threats facing the country’s election process

Voters were asked to assess whether they considered each of five matters to be a major threat, a minor threat or not a threat to the nation’s election process and majorities consider four of five of them as major threats. This includes “people threatening political violence if they do not get what they want” (73%), “people trying to overturn or change election results” (64%), “organized efforts aimed at making it harder for Americans to vote in elections” (63%) and “foreign interference in U.S. elections” (53%). A somewhat smaller proportion (39%) considers “people voting or casting ballots illegally in elections” as a major threat to the election process.

Yet, the poll finds striking differences between Democrats and Republicans on these matters. For Democrats the top threats are the potential for political violence (81% major threat), organized efforts aimed at making it harder to vote (79%) and the overturning or changing of election results (75%). By contrast, among Republicans the largest proportion (69%) rates illegal voting in elections as a major threat. About half of GOP voters (49%) considers the possibility that election results will be changed as a major threat, while 58% believe people threatening violence if they don’t get their way as a major threat. Just 32% say this about organized efforts to make it harder to vote.

Table 5
Voter perception of specific threats facing the election process
(among California registered voters)

	Total CA voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /other %
<u>People threatening political violence if they do not get what they want</u>				
Major threat	73	81	58	71
Minor threat	17	12	26	17
Not a threat	6	3	12	6
No opinion	4	4	4	6
<u>People trying to overturn or change election results</u>				
Major threat	64	75	49	60
Minor threat	21	16	29	22
Not a threat	10	6	17	10
No opinion	5	3	5	8
<u>Organized efforts aimed at making it harder for Americans to vote in elections</u>				
Major threat	63	79	32	61
Minor threat	15	12	20	16
Not a threat	17	5	42	15
No opinion	5	4	6	8
<u>Foreign interference in U.S. elections</u>				
Major threat	53	59	46	48
Minor threat	30	28	31	32
Not a threat	10	8	14	11
No opinion	7	5	9	9
<u>People voting or casting ballots illegally in elections</u>				
Major threat	39	25	69	37
Minor threat	21	20	21	22
Not a threat	35	50	6	33
No opinion	5	5	4	8

While 86% of California Democrats express confidence in the accuracy of machine tallies of election returns, 52% of Republicans do not

By a nearly three-to-one margin (71% to 25%) California voters say they are confident that machine tallies of election returns are being counted accurately. This view is held overwhelmingly by the state's Democrats, who express confidence in these tallies nearly eight to one (86% to 12%), 57% of whom are very confident.

On the other hand, most Republicans feel otherwise, with 52% reporting not being confident in these tallies while just 45% expressing confidence, only 12% of whom are very confident. Non-partisans hold views that are closer to the Democrats on this issue, with 69% expressing confidence in the accuracy of machine tallies.

Table 6
Confidence that voting machine tallies of election results are counted accurately
(among California registered voters)

	Total CA voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Preference /other %
<u>Confident</u>	<u>71</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>69</u>
Very	41	57	12	37
Somewhat	30	29	33	32
<u>Not confident</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>25</u>
Somewhat	15	9	27	15
Very	10	2	25	10
No opinion	4	3	3	6

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 24 – October 31, 2022, among 7,602 California registered voters.

The poll was administered by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state’s registered voters. 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 specific issues of interest to voters in Los Angeles 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.

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 registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California and were derived from information contained on the state’s official voter registration rolls. Prior to distribution of the emails, the overall 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 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 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 approximately +/-2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Question wording

On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate the extent to which you think there are political divisions within the United States today, where 1 means there are no political divisions and 10 means there are political divisions on the edge of civil war. Choose any number between one and ten for your answer.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “American democracy is in crisis and is at risk of failing”?

How optimistic or pessimistic are you that Americans of different political views can come together and work out their differences in today’s political environment?

Do you consider each of the following to be a major threat, a minor threat or not a threat to democracy in the United States today?

- (1). People voting or casting ballots illegally in elections
- (2). People trying to overturn or change election results
- (3). Organized efforts aimed at making it harder for Americans to vote in elections
- (4). People threatening political violence if they do not get what they want
- (5). Foreign interference in U.S. elections

How confident are you that voting machine tallies of election results are counted accurately?

Do you believe election security in the United States is strong or do you feel it is under threat?

Do you believe voting rights in the United States are well protected or do you feel they are under threat?

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 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>.