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Title

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Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4fx2g63t

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Publication Date

2024-06-18

Release #2024-09   Tuesday, June 18, 2024

The media sources Californians turn to for news about election-related issues vary considerably across the registered voter population
-- Support for the government's potential ban of TikTok in the U.S. --

By Mark DiCamillo
Director, Berkeley IGS Poll

The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll*, conducted on behalf of the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, finds that California voters consult a wide range of information sources to obtain news about election-related issues. Most frequently cited is the official voter guide distributed to voters by state and local governments (58%), followed by newspapers and magazines, either online or in print (40%), Google or other search engines (39%), social media (32%), national TV or cable news (31%), and family, friends, neighbors or co-workers (31%).

Older voters and white voters are most likely to rely upon the official voter guide, newspaper and magazines, and national TV or cable news for their election-related information. By contrast, younger voters and voters of color are more likely than older voters to say they get such information from social media sites and search engines.

"The official California voter guide is intended to provide a common base of information for voters across the state," said Eric Schickler, co-director of IGS. "The survey results indicate that while the guide does an effective job in reaching older and white voters, other groups – especially young voters and people of color – are less likely to rely on the voter guide as a source of information."

YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and TikTok are the social media channels used most by California voters for election-related news. Yet, when social media users are asked about the accuracy of the information they are receiving, 60% describe misinformation and disinformation as a major problem.

The poll also probed voter attitudes toward the U.S. government's recently passed legislation that would effectively ban the use of TikTok in the U.S. unless the company separates itself from its Chinese owners. While this legislation is supported two to one (57% to 29%) by the overall electorate, Californians who use TikTok are opposed, 48% to 39%, and opposition increases to 69% among its heaviest users. In addition, those who say they use TikTok very often say they would be very upset if the government follows through with such a ban.

Many Californians express concerns about possible threats that Chinese government ownership of TikTok poses to U.S. users. For example, 55% are very concerned and 21% are somewhat concerned

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about the Chinese government possibly using algorithms to shape the kinds of information that U.S. TikTok viewers are seeing. Another 49% are very concerned and 23% somewhat concerned about the possibility that the Chinese government could access the personal information that TikTok collects from its U.S. users.

"We're pleased to see the results of this important poll, and particularly interested in findings about the growing public concern over spreading online misinformation," said Free Press Co-CEO Jessica J. González. "The platforms' failure to address the scourge of misinformation on their networks is inflicting disproportionate harm on our communities, especially as people everywhere prepare to vote."

More California voters rely on the official voter guide than any other source when seeking out election-related news and information

California voters refer to a wide range of information sources to get news and information about elected-related issues. Most widely cited is the official voter guide distributed to voters by state and local governments, used by 58%. Next most frequently mentioned are newspapers and magazines, either online or in print (40%), and Google or other search engines (39%).

One in three voters obtain election-related news and information from social media (32%), from national or cable television news (31%), or from family, friends, neighbors or co-workers (31%). Local television news, trusted community-based organizations, and state and local government websites are also cited by about one in four.

Table 1a
Information sources that California registered voters rely on to get news and information about election-related issues

	%
The official voter guide	58
Newspaper or magazines (either online or in print)	40
Google or other search engines	39
Social media, such as Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, YouTube or TikTok	32
National or cable television news	31
Family, friends, neighbors or co-workers	31
Local television news	29
Trusted community-based organizations	26
State and local government websites	25
Campaign mailers	18
Radio	17
Podcasts	16
Ethnic media sources	6
None of these	4

Big differences in which media sources voters rely on for election-related news across voter subgroups

The poll finds some significant differences in the usage of election-related news and information sources across demographic groups of the voting population.

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The largest gaps relate to differences between younger and older voters, and between white voters and voters of color. Older voters are more likely to rely upon the official voter guide, newspapers and magazines, either online or in print, and national TV or cable news for their election-related information. By contrast, younger voters are more likely to say they get their election-related news and information from social media and search engines.

In addition, voters who vote regularly (75%) are twice as likely as those who have not voted in a recent election (37%) to say they use the voter guide as a source of election-related information.

White voters are far more likely to reference the official voter guide than any other source, with 70% turning to this source for election-related information. This compares to fewer than half of the state's Latino, Black and Asian American/Pacific Islander voters who report using the official voter guide for this information. Voters of color are also less likely than white voters to obtain election-related news from newspaper or magazines, or from national or cable television news, and are more likely to report using social media.

Table 1b
Most frequently used information sources for getting news and election-related information across major subgroups of the state's registered voters

	Official voter guide %	Newspaper/ magazines %	Search engines %	Social media %	National TV news %	Family/ friends, etc. %.
Total registered voters	**58**	**40**	**39**	**32**	**31**	**31**
Party registration						
Democrat	63	48	41	34	34	32
Republican	53	29	30	30	34	31
No Party Pref./other	54	36	43	32	25	31
Frequency of voting						
Regular voters	75	51	36	24	41	34
Intermittent voters	55	33	41	34	28	27
Infrequent voters	47	32	39	39	24	30
Non-voters	37	32	43	41	24	31
Age						
18-29	46	33	51	58	17	42
30-39	53	36	52	39	20	36
40-49	53	38	38	31	29	31
50-64	62	38	34	25	37	27
65 or older	69	50	26	17	47	26
Gender						
Female	60	39	38	32	32	33
Male	56	40	40	33	31	29
Race/ethnicity						
White	70	48	39	29	36	35
Latino/Hispanic	44	27	36	37	28	26
Black/African American	44	32	40	38	32	26
Asian American/Pacific Islander *(net)*	49	38	45	37	23	33
Chinese American	51	36	49	32	19	38
Vietnamese American	55	27	34	35	13	32
Korean American	43	40	42	26	22	35

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Other AAPI	48	41	46	46	29	30

Most frequently used social media to obtain election-related news

A follow-up question asked voters what specific social media channels they use to obtain election-related news and information. While no single source dominates, YouTube (26%), Facebook (23%), and Instagram (22%) are most frequently mentioned. X, formerly Twitter (19%), TikTok (15%), and Reddit (12%) are also commonly used. None of the other nine social media listed is mentioned by more than 5%., while 42% say they do not use any social media channels to get election-related news and information.

Table 2a
Specific social media that California registered voters use to get news and information about election-related issues

	%
YouTube	26
Facebook	23
Instagram	22
X (Twitter)	19
TikTok	15
Reddit	12
Nextdoor	5
Truth Social	3
Threads	3
WhatsApp	3
Snapchat	2
Tumblr	1
WeChat	1
Twitch	1
Parler	1
Gab	*
Kakao Talk	*
Zalo	*
None of these	42

* less than ½ of 1%

Significant demographic differences in the types of social media used by California voters

The survey also finds significant differences in the demographic profile of the most popular social media channels used by Californians to obtain election-related news and information. For example, voters ages 18-29 are far more likely than older voters to obtain election-related news from YouTube, Instagram, X (Twitter), and TikTok. By contrast, use of Facebook for getting this type of information is more evenly distributed across the age cohorts. The poll also finds sizable differences in the use of Instagram for obtaining election-related news between native born (25%) and naturalized citizens (12%).

Use of the most popular social media channels to obtain election-related news is generally greater among voters of color than by white voters. Men are more likely than women to be using YouTube and X (Twitter), while women are more frequently users of Facebook and Instagram. By contrast, there are no large differences in the use of social media as a source of election news by party affiliation.

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Some of the social media sites that have relatively small usage overall, still appear to have significant influence among voter subgroups. For example, while Kakao did not register significantly statewide, 8% of all Korean American voters, and 15% of those whose dominant language is Korean, report using the app for election-related news, greater than their usage of Instagram and X. And while WeChat is used by just 1% of the state's voters overall for election-related news, 13% of Chinese Americans and 31% of those who dominant language is Chinese, reporting using WeChat for getting this type of information, similar to the percentage of these voters using FaceBook for this purpose.

Table 2b
Use of the most popular social media for getting news and election related information across subgroups of the state's registered voters

	YouTube %	Facebook %	Instagram %	X (Twitter) %	TikTok %
Total registered voters	**26**	**23**	**22**	**19**	**15**
Age					
18-29	41	18	44	35	37
30-39	30	25	34	22	18
40-49	23	29	20	19	12
50-64	21	23	15	14	7
65 or older	18	20	6	8	4
Gender					
Female	20	25	25	14	17
Male	32	20	19	24	12
Race/ethnicity					
White	21	21	20	17	9
Latino/Hispanic	29	24	27	17	22
Black/African American	37	31	28	24	20
Asian/Pacific Islander *(net)*	<u>34</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>19</u>
Chinese American	38	23	18	20	19
Vietnamese American	24	28	13	13	17
Korean American	37	21	18	11	8
Other AAPI	32	29	31	31	24
Nativity					
Native born citizens	25	22	25	20	16
Naturalized citizens	28	25	12	14	10
Party registration					
Democrat	23	22	25	18	16
Republican	28	26	20	20	10
No Party Pref./other	29	22	19	19	15

Six in ten of those using social media to get news and information on election-related issues say misinformation, disinformation, and accuracy is a major problem

A 60% majority of California voters who receive election-related news and information from social media say that misinformation, disinformation and accuracy is a major problem for them. Another 22% describe this as a minor problem, while just 11% say it is not a problem.

Democrats and No Party Preference social media users are more likely than Republican users to also say this is a major problem. In addition, voters with no more than a high school education are less likely to say misinformation is a major problem for them (49%) compared to those who have attended some college or trade school (60%), college graduates (64%) or those with a postgraduate education (66%).

"Over 80% of Californians who get their news from social media worry that what they are seeing is not truthful or accurate. Our information ecosystems are in danger, and everyone knows it," said Jonathan Mehta Stein, Executive Director of California Common Cause. "These enormously powerful technologies that shape so much of our lives and our democratic conversation ought to be governed by a wider range of stakeholders – including government, civil society and industry – so they operate in our collective interest."

Table 3
How much of a problem is misinformation or disinformation and not knowing whether the election-related news they get on social media is accurate and truthful
(among voters who use social media to obtain news on election-related issues)

	A major problem %	A minor problem %	Not a problem %	No opinion %
Total statewide	**60**	**22**	**11**	**6**
Party registration				
Democrats	65	21	8	7
Republicans	49	24	20	7
No party pref./others	60	23	10	7
Education				
High school graduate or less	49	26	13	11
Some college/trade school	60	21	13	6
College graduate (B.A.)	64	22	10	4
Post-graduate education	66	20	10	4

General use of TikTok varies widely across California voter subgroups

Slightly more than a third of the state's registered voters (38%) say they have occasionally used TikTok for any reason, with 13% saying they access the site very often, 12% using it somewhat often or now and then, while another 13% say they use it only rarely.

Both the general use of TikTok and the frequency of its use varies considerably across the state's voter population. The largest differences relate to voters' age and race/ethnicity. For example, most voters ages 18-29 (59%) use TikTok, and 33% of this younger age cohort say they use it very often. Usage and frequency of use declines across each of the older age cohorts, and is lowest among seniors ages 65 or older, with only 21% using it and just 2% using it very often.

Similar large differences are seen between white voters and voters of color. While just 28% of white voters are TikTok users, usage increases to 58% among the state's Black voters, 51% among Latinos, and 45% among Asian American or Pacific Islander voters. In addition, about one in five (21%) of the state's Black and Latino voters use TikTok very often, as do 16% of the state's Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, compared to just 8% of the state's white voters.

Democrats, No Party Preference voters, and women are also somewhat more likely than Republicans and men to be TikTok users.

Table 4
General usage of TikTok by California registered voters and frequency of use

	Don't use TikTok %	Use TikTok %	Very often %	Somewhat often/now and then %	Only rarely %
Total registered voters	**62**	**38**	**13**	**12**	**13**
Age					
18-29	41	59	33	14	12
30-39	55	45	18	17	10
40-49	59	41	14	11	16
50-64	66	34	7	12	15
65 or older	79	21	2	8	11
Gender					
Female	57	43	16	14	13
Male	66	34	11	10	13
Race/ethnicity					
White	72	28	8	9	11
Latino/Hispanic	49	51	21	17	13
Black/African American	42	58	21	17	20
Asian/Pacific Islander *(net)*	<u>55</u>	<u>45</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>
Chinese American	51	49	16	16	17
Vietnamese American	61	39	11	10	18
Korean American	72	28	7	10	11
Other AAPI	51	49	21	14	14
Party registration					
Democrats	58	42	17	13	12
Republicans	73	27	8	11	8
No Party Pref./other	57	43	13	14	16

Two-to-one support among California voters for the U.S. government's proposed ban on the use of TikTok in the U.S., but those who use TikTok are opposed

By a two-to-one margin (57% to 29%), California voters overall say they support the recent U.S. government legislation that effectively bans the use of TikTok in the U.S. unless the company separates itself from its Chinese owners and sells its shares to U.S. operators within the coming year.

However, opinions vary dramatically between TikTok users and non-users. For example, non-users of TikTok support the ban four to one (67%-17%), while Tik Tok users are opposed 49% to 39%. In addition, opposition increases to 69% among voters who use TikTok very often.

Opinions about banning the use of TikTok in the U.S. generally follows usage patterns, with older voters, white voters, and Republicans, who generally use TikTok less, voicing greater support for the legislation, while fewer younger voters and voters of color, who tend to use TikTok more, are supportive.

Table 5

California voter reactions to recent U.S. government legislation that effectively bans the use of TikTok in the U.S. unless TikTok separates itself from its Chinese owners

	Support %	Oppose %	No opinion %
Total registered voters	**57**	**29**	**14**
TikTok use & frequency of use			
Don't use TikTok	67	17	16
TikTok users *(total)*	<u>39</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>11</u>
Very often	23	69	8
Somewhat often	42	50	8
Now and then	44	37	19
Rarely	52	35	13
Age			
18-29	35	51	13
30-39	45	39	16
40-49	55	28	17
50-64	63	22	15
65 or older	74	15	11
Race/ethnicity			
White	64	25	11
Latino/Hispanic	49	33	18
Black/African American	45	33	21
Asian/Pacific Islander *(net)*	<u>49</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>15</u>
Chinese American	33	49	18
Vietnamese American	65	18	17
Korean American	64	25	11
Other AAPI	50	36	14

Most heavy users of TikTok say they would be very upset if its use in the U.S. is banned

While TikTok users overall offer mixed opinions when asked how upset they would be if the use of TikTok was effectively banned in the U.S., most heavy users (56%) say they would be very upset. By comparison, relatively small proportions of those who access the site less frequently say they would be very upset.

Table 6

Extent to which TikTok users would be upset if access to TikTok is effectively banned in the U.S., overall and by frequency of use

	Very upset %	Somewhat upset %	Not too upset %	Not at all upset %	No opinion %
Total TikTok users	**28**	**18**	**16**	**35**	**4**
Frequency of TikTok use					
Very often	56	19	12	10	3

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Somewhat often	28	23	22	22	5
Now and then	10	23	24	37	6
Rarely	7	11	13	65	4

Voter concerns about potential Chinese government threats U.S. users of TikTok

California voters express concerns about possible threats that Chinese government ownership of TikTok poses to U.S. users. For example, 55% say they are very concerned and 21% somewhat concerned about the possibility that the Chinese government could "use algorithms to shape the kinds of information that TikTok viewers in the U.S. see by censoring or promoting certain types of content or to spread propaganda or misinformation."

Voter concerns are nearly as high, with 49% very concerned and 23% somewhat concerned about the possibility that the Chinese government could "access a significant amount of personal information that TikTok collects from its users in the U.S."

As is the case with other opinions about TikTok, concerns about these threats are greater among less frequent users of TikTok or by non-users than by those using it very often.

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 on behalf of the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund. The poll was administered online May 29-June 4, 2024, in five languages, English, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean languages among 5,095 registered voters throughout California.

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 voters with a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. To accommodate non-English language voters, voters whose voting record indicated that they preferred to have their voting materials sent to them in a Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese or Korean were sent their email invitations in-language asking them to choose which language they preferred to complete the survey. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further email invitations. Voter email addresses were derived from public information contained on the state's voter registration rolls and were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, each voter's email address and all other personally identifiable information included on their voting record were purged from the data file and replaced with an anonymous identification number during data processing. After the completion of data collection, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample to population characteristics of the overall registered vote statewide, and where possible, within each of the state's major regions.

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

Which of the following sources do you rely on to get news and information about election-related issues? Select as many as apply. (ORDER RANDOMIZED)

Do you ever get news and information about election-related issues from any of the following social media sources? Select as many as apply. (ORDER RANDOMIZED)

(IF SOCIAL MEDIA SITES USED FOR NEWS AND ELECTION-RELATED INFORMATION) When using social media sources to obtain news about election-related issues, how much of a problem is misinformation or disinformation, and not knowing whether the information you are receiving is accurate and truthful?

One of the most popular social media platforms is TikTok. Do you ever have occasion to use TikTok? If so, how often?

TikTok, is owned by ByteDance, a company that was founded in China and is reported to have close ties to the Chinese Communist Party. The U.S. government recently passed a new law that would effectively ban the use of TikTok in the U.S. unless the company separates itself from its Chinese owners and sells its shares to U.S. operators within the coming year.   Do you support or oppose the U.S. government effectively banning the use of TikTok in the U.S. if this condition is not met?

(IF TIKTOK USER) If access to TikTok is effectively banned in the U.S, how upset would you be?

How concerned are you about the possibility that the Chinese government could (access a significant amount of the personal information that TikTok collects from its users in the U.S.) (use algorithms to shape the kinds of information that TikTok viewers in the U.S. see, by censoring or promoting certain types of content or to spread propaganda or misinformation)?

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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 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.berekeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll.
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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 $695 million in grants since its founding in 1953.
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