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Majority of voters believe Black Californians continue to be affected by the legacy of slavery, yet cash reparations face headwinds.

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

The latest Berkeley IGS Poll finds that 60% of California voters feel that the legacy of slavery is affecting the position of the state's Black residents today, with 27% see it having a great deal of impact, 20% some, and 13% a little. This compares to 31% who do not think it has any impact at all.

The opinions of Democrats and liberals diverge considerably from those of Republican and conservative voters. Two in three or more of the state's Democrats and liberals see the legacy of slavery as affecting the positions of Black residents a great deal or some, while about two in three Republicans and conservatives take the opposite view and think this legacy does not have any impact at all on today's Black Californians.

Still, the poll finds that reparations for Black Americans faces strong headwinds as most California voters (59% to 28%) oppose the state Reparations Task Force's recommendation to make cash payments to the descendants of enslaved Blacks currently living here. In addition, most of those opposed (44%) say they are strongly opposed to the idea. Democrats and liberals are themselves divided on the issue of making cash payments to the Black descendants of slaves now living in the state. By contrast, Republicans and conservatives are nearly unanimous in their opposition, and they are joined by political moderates and No Party Preference voters who are also opposed nearly two to one.

And while Black voters are most likely to back the idea of cash payments, 76% to 16%, the poll also finds that Latinos and Asians are significantly less likely than Blacks and whites to have heard of the efforts of the California Reparations Task Force, with only 46% of Latinos and 50% of Asians displaying awareness, compared to 73% of Black and white respondents.

IGS Co-Director Cristina Mora notes that "the findings reveal the racial and political contradictions of California voters. While many can empathize with the plight of Black Americans, not all of these feelings will translate into support for policies that address longstanding racial harms. And though this might be an information issue for some groups, the fact that even liberals are divided indicates that campaigns for racial redress will face a steep uphill climb."

Most voters agree that the legacy of slavery is affecting the position of Black Californians

When asked how much the legacy of slavery is affecting the position of its Black residents today, 60% feel that the legacy of slavery is affecting the state’s Black residents, with 27% see it having a great deal of impact, 20% some, and 13% a little. This compares to 31% who do not think it has any impact at all.

The opinions of Democrats and liberals diverge considerably from those of Republican and conservative voters on this issue. Two in three or more of the state’s Democrats and liberals see the legacy of slavery as affecting the positions of Black residents a great deal or some, while about two in three Republicans and conservatives take the opposite view and think this legacy does not have any impact at all on today’s Black Californians.

The majority of Black voters agree that the legacy of slavery is having a major impact, with 72% believing it affects them a great deal. By contrast, white, Latino, and Asian American voters hold much more divided views about this.

While large majorities of women and younger voters believe the legacy of slavery is impacting the position of the state’s Black residents today, pluralities of men and older voters do not see it having any impact at all.

Table 1

**How much does the legacy of slavery affect the position of Black Californians today?
(among California registered voters)**

	A great deal %	Some %	A little %	Not at all %
Total registered voters	27	20	13	31
Democrat	39	28	13	13
Republican	6	7	12	69
No Party Preference/others	24	19	16	29
Strongly conservative	9	4	10	71
Somewhat conservative	9	12	12	61
Moderate	20	22	17	29
Somewhat liberal	34	32	16	9
Strongly liberal	57	24	8	5
White non-Hispanic	24	21	15	33
Latino	24	21	10	32
Asian/Pacific Islander	22	23	16	27
Black	72	13	6	7
Female	30	24	11	24
Male	23	16	16	38
18-29	32	22	14	20
30-39	30	20	15	27
40-49	25	20	11	34
50-64	24	18	13	35
65 or older	23	22	13	35

Differences between 100% and the sum of percentages represents the proportion of voters with no opinion.

Voters hold mixed and highly partisan views about whether California is doing enough to ensure that its Black residents have a fair chance to succeed

Voters are divided when asked whether they think the state of California is doing enough to ensure that its Black residents have a fair chance to succeed. Statewide 29% of voters feel the state is doing too little, 26% feel it is doing about the right amount, and 22% feel it is doing too much. Another one in four (23%) has no opinion.

Yet there are major partisan and ideological differences in opinions about this, with pluralities of Democrats and liberals saying the state is doing too little, while pluralities of Republicans and conservatives believe it is doing too much.

Black voters themselves largely hold to the view that the state is doing too little to ensure that they have a fair chance to succeed, with 73% feeling this way. The state’s other major ethnic populations, on the other hand, are more divided in their opinions about this.

The poll also finds that women and younger voters are somewhat more likely than men and older voters to feel the state is not doing enough for its Black residents.

Table 2

Is the state of California doing too much, too little or about the right amount to ensure that Black residents have a fair chance to succeed? (among California registered voters)

	Too little	About the right amount	Too much	No opinion
	%	%	%	%
Total registered voters	29	26	22	23
Democrat	43	26	9	22
Republican	7	21	51	21
No Party Preference/others	24	30	19	27
Strongly conservative	9	23	49	19
Somewhat conservative	10	23	45	22
Moderate	24	28	22	26
Somewhat liberal	34	32	6	28
Strongly liberal	60	20	*	20
White non-Hispanic	25	27	22	26
Latino	30	25	25	20
Asian/Pacific Islander	21	29	23	27
Black	73	13	3	11
Female	34	26	16	24
Male	24	26	28	22
18-29	34	26	16	24
30-39	34	19	23	24
40-49	30	24	23	23
50-64	25	24	25	26
65 or older	24	34	22	20

* less than 1/2 of 1%

The proposal for making cash reparations to Black Californians faces strong headwinds, although many have yet to hear about the issue

Greater than six in ten voters statewide (62%) say they have heard of the state’s Reparations Task Force that was formed to examine what if anything should be done to compensate the descendants of enslaved Blacks now living in California for their ancestors’ slavery, yet 38% say they haven’t heard or aren’t sure.

Somewhat larger proportions of Republicans and strongly conservative voters report being aware of the task force than Democrats and liberals. Three in four of both white and Black voters report being aware of the task force, while among the Latino and Asian American voters only about half have heard of it.

There are also considerable differences in awareness of the Reparations Task Force by age, with voters 65 or older twice as likely to have heard of the task force as younger voters ages 18-29. Men also report some slightly greater awareness of the task force than women.

Table 3
Awareness of the state’s Reparations Task Force formed to examine what should be done to compensate the descendants of enslaved Blacks for their ancestors’ slavery (among California registered voters)

	Have heard %	Haven’t heard %	Not sure %
Total registered voters	62	28	10
Democrat	58	32	10
Republican	77	14	9
No Party Preference/others	56	33	11
Strongly conservative	76	15	9
Somewhat conservative	68	25	7
Moderate	57	31	12
Somewhat liberal	59	27	14
Strongly liberal	60	33	7
White non-Hispanic	73	21	6
Latino	46	38	16
Asian/Pacific Islander	50	35	15
Black	73	21	6
Female	58	31	11
Male	66	24	10
18-29	39	47	14
30-39	54	35	11
40-49	64	24	12
50-64	68	22	10
65 or older	78	16	8

Voters oppose the task force recommendation of making cash payments to the Black descendants of slaves now living in California

By a two-to-one margin (59% to 28%) the California electorate opposes the Reparations Task Force recommendation to make cash payments to the descendants of enslaved Blacks who currently live in the state. In addition, most of those opposed (44%) are strongly opposed to the idea.

Democrats are about evenly divided on this issue (43% in favor and 42% opposed). Liberal voters also offer mixed views of the recommendation, with 64% of strong liberals favoring the recommendation, while those who identify as moderately liberal are opposed 45% to 35%. This is in sharp contrast to the views of the state’s Republican and conservative voters who are nearly unanimously opposed to the idea. They are joined by the state’s political moderates and No Party Preference voters, about two in three of whom are against making cash payments to these Black residents.

Black voters themselves back the idea of cash payments 76% to 16%, with most strongly in favor. However, this contrasts with the views of Latino and Asian-American voters, who oppose making cash payments to the state’s Black descendants of slaves greater than two to one. Even larger proportions of white voters (65%) are opposed, of whom 51% are strongly opposed.

Table 4
Opinions of the Reparations Task Force recommendation to make cash payments to the Black descendants of slaves now living in California (among California registered voters)

	Favor	<i>Strongly</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	Oppose	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Strongly</i>	No opinion
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total registered voters	28	11	17	59	15	44	13
Democrat	43	17	26	42	19	23	15
Republican	3	1	2	91	6	85	6
No Party Preference/others	24	9	15	63	17	46	13
Strongly conservative	9	4	5	87	5	82	4
Somewhat conservative	10	4	6	85	12	73	5
Moderate	20	9	11	66	17	49	14
Somewhat liberal	35	9	26	45	21	24	20
Strongly liberal	64	27	37	21	13	8	15
White non-Hispanic	25	7	18	65	14	51	10
Latino	24	9	15	59	16	43	17
Asian/Pacific Islander	23	8	15	59	20	39	18
Black	76	51	25	16	6	10	8
Female	30	13	17	52	16	36	18
Male	24	8	16	66	13	53	10
18-29	34	12	22	47	18	29	19
30-39	33	17	16	51	13	38	17
40-49	27	13	14	63	16	47	10
50-64	25	9	15	63	12	51	12
65 or older	23	6	17	69	16	53	8

Reasons given for being opposed to making cash payments

Voters who oppose the idea of making cash payments to the descendants of the Black descendants of slaves now living in California were asked to identify their main reasons for doing so and two reasons stand out from among five alternatives presented.

These include: “it’s unfair to ask today’s taxpayers to pay for wrongs committed in the past,” cited by 60% and “it’s not fair to single out one group for reparations when other racial and religious groups have been wronged in the past (53%).

Both Democratic and Republican voters opposed to making cash payments, as well as the state’s non-partisan voters, identify these two arguments as their main reasons for their opposition..

Table 5

Reasons for opposing making cash payments to the descendants of the Black descendants of slaves now living in California (among registered voters opposed to making such payments)

	%
It’s unfair to ask today’s taxpayers to pay for wrongs committed in the past	60
It’s not fair to single out one group for reparations when other racial and religious groups have been wronged in the past	53
Proving who is eligible for reparations and how much they would be owed would be too complicated	23
Reparations are a national issue and not one that a single state should try to take on	20
The payments would cost the state too much	19
Other sources (volunteered)	14

Percentages add to more than 100% because of multiple mentions.

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 August 24-29, 2023 among 6,030 California registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The survey was administered 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 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 the distribution of emails, the overall sample was stratified by age and gender in an attempt to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, voters' email addresses and all other personally identifiable information derived from the voter rolls were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample of registered voters responding to the survey to population characteristics of the state's registered voters.

The sampling error associated with the results from the survey are difficult to calculate precisely due to the effects 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

Would you say that the state of California is doing too much, too little, or about the right amount to ensure that Black residents have a fair chance to succeed?

How much, if at all, do you think the legacy of slavery affects the position of Black people in California today – a great deal, some, a little, not at all?

Have you seen, read, or heard about the state's Reparations Task Force that was formed to examine what, if anything, should be done to compensate the descendants of enslaved Blacks now living in California for their ancestors' slavery?

One of the Reparations Task Force's recommendations calls for the state government to make cash payments to the descendants of enslaved Blacks depending on how many years a person has lived in California. Do you favor or oppose this recommendation – favor strongly, favor somewhat, oppose somewhat, oppose strongly?

(IF OPPOSED) What are the main reasons why you oppose California making cash payments to the descendants of enslaved Blacks living in the state? (SEE RELEASE FOR REASONS 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. Professor Eric Schickler and Associate Professor Cristina Mora are IGS's co-directors.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.