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***Festering problems plaguing the state are weighing down
Newsom's standing with voters, as concerns about Covid recede.
-- Homelessness and crime stand out as areas of greatest criticism --***

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*
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The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds California voters now hold a more critical view of the job Gavin Newsom is doing as governor than they did immediately prior to his successful defeat of last year's recall election. According to the poll, 48% of the state's registered voters approve of the Governor's performance overall, while 47% disapprove.

These ratings compare to more positive appraisals found by the poll in July and September of last year, when 50% approved and 42% disapproved, and are significantly lower than was found in September 2020, when Newsom received a 64% approval rating from the state's voters.

Contributing to voters' more mixed assessment of the Governor are growing concerns of how Newsom is handling several festering problems, such as homelessness and crime, that are now plaguing the state. For example, two in three voters (66%) now rate Newsom as doing a 'poor' or 'very poor' job in his handling of the issue of homelessness. This is up 12 percentage points from 2020, the last time the poll made an assessment. In addition, a 51% majority of voters also downrates the Governor's performance on crime and public safety issues, up 16 percentage points from 2020.

This is taking place at a time when Californians are finally beginning to express optimism that the coronavirus situation is beginning to improve. When asked their opinions about the direction of the coronavirus situation in their own local area, 66% now feel things are improving, while just 27% think the situation is worsening. On the other hand, similarly large majorities believe that crime is worsening both in their own local area and in the state overall. And, by a nearly two-to-one margin voters support changing the 2014 voter-approved ballot measure that reduced penalties for certain types of property crimes,

like shoplifting of items valued at no more than \$950, from potential felonies to misdemeanors.

“These results suggest that some of the same dissatisfaction that's hurting Democrats nationally is affecting Governor Newsom’s popularity in the state,” observed IGS co-director Eric Schickler.

Voters are now more divided in their opinions of Governor Newsom’s performance

Californians are now about evenly divided in their appraisals of Newsom’s overall performance as governor. The latest poll finds 48% of the state’s voters approving, with 16% approving strongly and 32% approving somewhat. However, nearly as many (47%) disapprove, 31% of whom say they disapprove strongly.

This represents a decline in Newsom’s standing with voters over the past year and is significantly lower than the opinions voters had of the Governor during the first two years of his tenure.

Californians’ current more divided assessment of the Governor is coming at a time of greater optimism about the direction of the pandemic, as 66% of voters in the latest poll now feel the situation is improving, while just 27% see the situation as worsening. Ironically, these findings mirror those that Newsom received in January 2021, when concerns about the coronavirus pandemic were cresting.

Table 1a
Trend of the overall job performance of Governor Gavin Newsom
among California registered voters

	Approve (total) %	Approve strongly %	Approve somewhat %	Disapprove (total) %	Disapprove somewhat %	Disapprove strongly %
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

Note: In this and succeeding tables differences between the sum of the percentages and 100% equal the proportion of voters with no opinion.

The decline in the Governor’s job ratings spans a wide range of voter segments

The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds generally lower appraisals of the Governor’s job performance in office across most major voter subgroups since early September, the last time measurements of the Governor were taken. Registering the largest increases in disapproval are voters in the North Coast/Sierras region (+12), a region that has long been critical of the Governor. But growing dissatisfaction with Newsom can also be seen among voters who have been Democratic constituencies, such as those age 30-39 (+9), Democrats (+7), moderates (+6), strong liberals (+6), Los Angeles County voters (+6) Latinos (+6), and Asian Americans (+6).

	February 2022		September 2021	
	Approve %	Disapprove %	Approve %	Disapprove %
Total registered voters	48	47	50	42
Party registration				
Democrat	74	21	77	14
Republican	8	90	7	89
No Party Preference/other	41	51	42	46
Political ideology				
Strongly conservative	12	87	9	86
Somewhat conservative	20	77	17	78
Moderate	47	47	49	41
Somewhat liberal	73	21	76	16
Strongly liberal	77	17	83	11
Region				
Los Angeles County	52	41	54	35
San Diego County	50	46	48	45
Orange County	39	56	42	51
Inland Empire	45	52	44	47
Central Coast	54	41	47	44
Central Valley	39	57	39	53
San Francisco Bay Area	57	37	61	33
North Coast/Sierras	29	71	38	59
Gender				
Male	44	51	46	47
Female	52	42	53	37
Age				

18-29	41	44	40	40
30-39	46	50	47	41
40-49	49	49	49	45
50-64	50	48	51	44
65 or older	54	44	57	40
Race/ethnicity				
White non-Hispanic	43	54	47	50
Latino	55	38	56	32
Asian/Pacific Islander	50	40	51	34
Black	68	24	56	30

Voters most critical of Newsom handling of homelessness and crime/public safety

Voters were also asked to assess the job Newsom was doing in ten specific areas, many of which had been addressed in previous *Berkeley IGS Polls*. The results show that voters offer more negative than positive assessment of the Governor in eight of the ten areas rated. The areas where Newsom receives his poorest marks are his handling of homelessness (66% poor or very poor vs. 11% excellent or good) and his handling of the issue of crime and public safety (51% poor or very poor vs. 20% excellent or good). Both issues have also seen a double digit increase in the proportion of voters offering a negative assessment since 2020.

Yet, Newsom also receives more negative than positive voter appraisals for his handling of six other issues facing the state. These issues, together with the ratio of negative to positive job marks he is given in each area, are as follows:

- state water policies/ the drought (40% poor/very poor vs. 24% excellent/good)
- education and the schools (43% poor/very poor vs. 27% excellent/good)
- managing the state budget surplus (41% poor/very poor vs. 28% excellent/good)
- the wildfire threat (39% poor/very poor and 28% excellent/good)
- health care (39% poor/very poor and 30% excellent/good)
- jobs and the economy (39% poor/very poor vs. 32% excellent/good)

In only two areas, the coronavirus and climate change, do about as many voters give Newsom a rating of excellent or good as offer a negative score of poor or very poor.

Table 2			
Trend of voter assessments of the job Newsom is doing in handling major issues facing the state (among California registered voters)			
	Excellent/good %	Fair %	Poor/very poor %
<u>The coronavirus</u>			
February 2022	39	18	40
January 2021	31	23	43
September 2020	49	19	28
<u>Climate change</u>			
February 2022	32	24	31
September 2020	34	24	24
<u>Jobs and the economy</u>			
February 2022	32	23	39
January 2021	23	23	45
September 2020	29	27	31
<u>Health care</u>			
February 2022	30	24	39
September 2020	31	26	27
<u>Wildfire threat</u>			
February 2022	28	25	39
September 2020	25	24	39
<u>Managing the budget surplus</u>			
February 2022	28	19	41
<u>Education and the schools</u>			
February 2022	27	22	43
September 2020	28	26	32
<u>State water policies and dealing with the drought</u>			
February 2022	24	26	40
<u>Crime and public safety</u>			
February 2022	20	23	51
September 2020	27	25	35
<u>Homelessness</u>			
February 2022	11	18	66
September 2020	11	22	55

NOTE: When results from earlier polls are not shown, the issue category was not measured.

Large majorities think the coronavirus situation is improving, but crime is worsening

Voters in the poll are displaying optimism that the coronavirus situation in both the state and in their own local area is improving. When asked to assess the direction of the pandemic in their own local area, 66% feel the situation is getting better, while just 27% think it is worsening. Similar results are found when voters are asked to assess the direction of the pandemic across the entire state, with 62% saying things are getting better and 31% feeling they are getting worse.

On the other hand, two in three voters (65%) also believe that crime in their own local area has increased over the past year, 34% of whom say it has increased “a lot.” An even larger majority (78%) think the amount of crime across California overall has been on the rise over the past year, with 50% believing it has increased “a lot.” There is also two-to-one support for amending the 2014 voter-approved initiative that reduced penalties for certain types of property crimes, including shoplifting of items valued at no more than \$950, from potential felonies to misdemeanors.

Table 3
Voter perceptions of the direction of coronavirus pandemic and changes in the amount of crime over the past year in your own local area and in California overall
(among California registered voters)

	Your own area %	California overall %
<u>Direction of the coronavirus</u>		
<u>Getting better</u> (net)	<u>66</u>	<u>62</u>
A lot better	21	17
A little better	45	45
<u>Getting worse</u> (net)	<u>27</u>	<u>31</u>
A little worse	17	17
A lot worse	10	14
<u>Crime over the past year</u>		
<u>Increased</u> (net)	<u>65</u>	<u>78</u>
A lot	34	50
A little	31	28
Stayed about the same	23	13
<u>Decreased</u> (net)	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>
A little	3	2
A lot	1	1

Other Covid-related findings from the poll include the following:

- One in four voters (26%) remain very concerned that they or a family member will become seriously ill from the virus, while 29% are somewhat concerned, with Latinos and Blacks reporting greater levels of concern than others.
- Voters are divided when asked when they think the pandemic will subside enough so that people will not have to take special precautions like wearing masks in

public, with 45% thinking this will happen before the end of this year and 42% believing this will occur in 2023 or later.

Downward trend in voter views of the overall direction of the state

The poll also registers a decline in voters’ overall appraisals of the direction of the state. At present, 36% now believe California is moving in the right direction, while 54% feel it is on the wrong track. This represents a 10-point decline in the proportion of voters who feel the state is moving in the right direction from May 2021, the last time the *Berkeley IGS Poll* asked this question. Table 3 compares the latest findings to those of past statewide *Berkeley IGS Polls*, alongside the annual averages of past statewide surveys completed by *The Field Poll* conducted between 1988 and 2016.

Table 4
Trend of voter assessments of the overall direction of the state of California (1988-present)

	Right direction %	Wrong track %	No opinion %
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

** Less than 1/2 of 1%*

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

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 February 3-10, 2022 among 8,937 California registered voters. In order to cover a broad range of issues, some of the questions reported in this release were based on a random subsample of 4,460 registered voters. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The *Berkeley IGS Poll* is 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 the City of Los Angeles, administered using the same methods, to enable the poll to examine specific issues of interest to voters in that City and to the *Times*.

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 voter registration rolls. Prior to the distribution of emails, the overall sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

To protect the anonymity of survey 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, 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 because of sample stratification and the 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 and findings from the statewide random subsample of registered voters have a sampling error of approximately +/- 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Detailed tabulations reporting the results to each question can be found at the *Berkeley IGS Poll* website at <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.

Question wording

(Asked of the overall sample of 8,937 registered voters)

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

Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the way Gavin Newsom is handling his job as Governor of California?

And how would you rate the job Gavin Newsom is doing in handling each of these issues? *(Ten issues listed in random order) (See release for wording of issues)*

What is your overall impression of the coronavirus situation in California today? And what is your overall impression of the coronavirus situation in your own local area?

How concerned are you that you or someone in your family will become seriously ill from the virus?

When do you think the pandemic will subside enough so that people will not have to take special precautions, like wearing masks, in public settings?

(Asked of a random subsample of 4,460 registered voters)

Next, thinking about crime in the state. Over the past year, do you think that the amount of crime in California has increased a lot, increased some, stayed about the same, decreased some or decreased a lot? What about crime in your own local area? Over the past year, has the amount of crime in your local area increased a lot, increased some, stayed about the same, decreased some or decreased a lot?

As a way to reduce the state's prison population, in 2014 California voters approved a ballot measure that reduced penalties for certain types of property crimes, including shoplifting of items valued at no more than \$950, from potential felonies to misdemeanors. Some people believe that the change has contributed to an increase in these kinds of crimes and because of this now want to amend the law. What is your opinion? Should California amend the law so that these kinds of property crimes are again potentially prosecuted as felonies or should the state leave the law as is so that fewer people are sentenced to prison?

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