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## IGS Poll

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## **Majorities believe gun control laws are effective in reducing crime and favor placing greater controls on gun ownership**

*But there has been some slippage in the size of these majorities since 2018.*

By Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*  
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A 56% majority of California voters believe that laws restricting the sale and possession of guns are effective in reducing the amount of crime in their community, while 41% see them as ineffective. Most Californians also believe that the importance of placing greater controls on gun ownership (57%) outweighs Americans' rights to own guns under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment (36%).

However, the sizes of both majorities are less than they were in April 2018, the last time *Berkeley IGS Poll* surveyed Californians about their views about gun ownership. Three years ago, voters felt that state gun control laws were effective in reducing crime by a 60% to 39% margin, and a two-to-one majority (64% to 32%) placed higher importance on imposing controls on gun ownership than on protecting Americans' rights to own a gun.

The latest poll asked voters their opinion of a recent federal judge ruling that the state's assault weapons ban law violated the U.S. Constitution. Opinions on this question were generally in line with their views on the two other gun control questions included in the survey, with 56% disagreeing that the law violates the Constitution and 32% agreeing that it probably does. Another 12% have no opinion.

Similar differences in opinion are also observed across voter subgroups variations on each of these questions. Democrats, women, Coastal county voters, and those living in non-gun owning households are the segments most inclined to believe gun laws are effective in reducing crime, support greater controls on gun ownership and disagree with the federal judge's recent ruling about the state's assault weapons ban law.

These findings come from the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed online last week among a stratified random sample of 5,785 registered voters throughout California.

Said IGS co-director Eric Schickler, “The poll shows continued voter support for gun control, with opinion polarized among many of the same dimensions – party, coastal vs. inland voters – that divide voters across other issues.”

**A 56% majority believes California gun laws are effective in reducing crime, but this is down four points from three years ago**

A majority of California voters (56%) believe that laws restricting the sale and possession of guns are effective in reducing the amount of crime in their community, while 41% think they are not. This includes 24% who feel they are “very effective” and 32% who see them as “somewhat effective.”

The latest findings represent a slight decline in perceptions about the effectiveness of gun laws in reducing crime from an April 2018 *Berkeley IGS Poll* when 60% described them as being effective. The decline in voter perceptions of the effectiveness of gun laws over the past three years was registered among those who believe such laws as “very effective” in reducing crime.

**Table 1a**  
**Trend of Californians’ perceptions of the effectiveness of gun laws in reducing the amount of violent crime in their community**

	July 2021 %	April 2018 %
<b>Effective (net)</b>	<b><u>56</u></b>	<b><u>60</u></b>
Very effective	24	28
Somewhat effective	32	32
<b>Not effective (net)</b>	<b><u>41</u></b>	<b><u>39</u></b>
Not too effective	14	14
Not at all effective	27	25
No opinion	3	1

**Views about the effectiveness of gun laws in reducing crime vary by voters’ party, gender, area of residence and household gun ownership**

Perceptions about the effectiveness of laws restricting the sale and possession of guns in reducing crime vary considerably by voters’ party registration, gender, area of residence and household gun ownership.

For example, while registered Democrats believe such laws are effective in reducing crime by a greater than four to one margin (79% to 19%), Republicans feel otherwise by a virtually identical margin (79% to 18%).

Views about the effectiveness of gun laws in reducing crime also vary based on whether or not guns are present in the household. Greater than two in three voters living in households without guns (68%) believe gun laws are an effective crime deterrent, twice the proportion who feel this way among those living in gun-owning households (34%).

Voters living in the state’s heavily populated coastal counties (i.e., those bordering the Pacific Ocean or San Francisco Bay) are also more likely than voters living in the state’s interior to believe the state’s gun laws are an effective way of reducing crime in their community. In addition, a larger proportion of women (63%) than men (48%) also think California’s gun laws are effective in reducing crime.

When findings from the latest poll are compared to those from the 2018 *Berkeley IGS Poll*, somewhat smaller majorities of Democrats and No Party Preference voters now subscribe to the view that gun laws are effective in reducing crime than felt this way three years ago.

	July 2021			April 2018		
	Effective %	Not effective %	No opinion %	Effective %	Not effective %	No opinion %
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>						
Democrats	79	19	2	83	15	2
Republicans	18	79	3	18	82	*
No party preference /other parties	53	43	4	59	39	2
<b><u>Area of state</u></b>						
Coastal counties	61	36	3	64	35	1
Inland counties	46	52	2	49	50	1
<b><u>Gender</u></b>						
Male	49	48	3	50	48	2
Female	63	34	3	68	31	1
<b><u>Gun in household</u></b>						
Yes	34	64	2	**	**	**
No	68	29	3	**	**	**

\* Less than ½ of 1%

\*\* This demographic was not measured in the April 2018 poll.

**Similar decline in the majority view that it is more important to place greater controls on gun ownership than to protect 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights to own guns**

The poll also finds that many more Californians attach more importance to passing laws to place greater controls on gun ownership (57%) than it is to protect Americans’ rights to own guns under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment (36%). However, the majority saying this is also down from a larger 64% to 32% majority who felt this way in a 2018 *Berkeley IGS Poll*.

Similar subgroup differences are observed on this question. While greater than eight in ten Democrats (81%) place greater importance on imposing greater controls on gun ownership, 79% of Republicans feel it is more important to protect Americans’ 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights.

Voters in gun-owning households also attach more importance to protecting 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights than on imposing greater controls on gun ownership than those living in households where no guns are present. Female voters and those residing in the state’s highly populated Coastal counties are also much more likely than men and those living in the state’s interior to believe that imposing greater controls on gun ownership is more important than protecting the rights of gun owners.

Declines in the majorities of voters placing more importance on imposing greater gun control laws than on protecting the rights of gun owners are observed broadly across all major subgroups of the voter population.

**Table 2**  
**Which is more important – imposing greater controls on gun ownership**  
**or protecting 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights to own guns**  
**(among registered voters)**

	July 2021			April 2018		
	Imposing greater controls on gun ownership %	Protecting 2 <sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights to own guns %	No opinion %	Imposing greater controls on gun ownership %	Protecting 2 <sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights to own guns %	No opinion %
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>4</b>
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>						
Democrats	81	13	6	89	9	2
Republicans	15	79	6	22	76	2
No party preference /other parties	53	38	9	62	32	6
<b><u>Area of state</u></b>						
Coastal counties	62	31	7	69	28	3
Inland counties	44	49	7	52	44	4
<b><u>Gender</u></b>						
Male	48	44	8	57	39	4
Female	65	29	6	71	26	3
<b><u>Gun in household</u></b>						
Yes	34	60	6	**	**	**
No	60	32	8	**	**	**

\*\* This demographic was not measured in the April 2018 poll.

**A majority of Californians disagree with a recent federal judge ruling that the state’s assault weapons ban law is unconstitutional**

Last month a federal judge invalidated California’s three-decade-old law that bans the sale of assault weapons, ruling that it violated the nation’s 2nd Amendment right to bear arms. The state immediately appealed, and an appeals court has since put the decision on hold.

When voters are asked whether they believe the state’s assault weapons ban law violates the U.S. Constitution, 56% feel it does not, while 32% think it does. Another 12% offered no opinion.

Similar subgroups differences are observed on this question as are seen in the other two gun-related questions included in the poll. For example, eight in ten Democrats think the assault weapons ban is constitutional, while seven in ten Republicans disagree. And, while most voters living in gun-owning households feels the state’s assault weapons ban law is unconstitutional, by a greater than three-to-one margin those living in households where a gun is not present feel the law is constitutional.

Women and voters living in the state’s more populous coastal counties are also more likely than men and inland county voters to feel California’s law banning the sale of assault weapons ban is constitutional.

**Table 3**  
**Do you believe California’s law banning the sale of assault weapons**  
**violates the U.S. Constitution?**  
**(among registered voters)**

	No %	Yes %	No opinion %
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>12</b>
<b><u>Party registration</u></b>			
Democrat	79	11	10
Republican	17	70	13
No party preference/ other parties	53	33	14
<b><u>Area of state</u></b>			
Coastal counties	61	27	12
Inland counties	46	43	11
<b><u>Gender</u></b>			
Male	50	41	9
Female	63	23	14
<b><u>Gun in household</u></b>			
Yes	39	52	9
No	66	21	13

**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. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The poll was administered online in English and Spanish July 18-24, 2021, among a stratified random sample of 5,795 registered voters in California. The survey distributed 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 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 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 survey results 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 sample of registered voters are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

### **Question wording**

When it comes to gun ownership laws, which do you think is more important: (1) protecting Americans' 2nd Amendment right to own guns (2) imposing greater controls on gun ownership?

How effective do you think stronger laws restricting the sale and possession of certain types of guns would be in reducing the amount of violent crime in your community?

Last month a federal judge invalidated California's three-decade-old ban on assault weapons ruling that it was unconstitutional on the grounds that it violated the nation's 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment rights to bear arms. The state has appealed that ruling and an appeals court has put the ruling on hold. In your opinion, do you believe that California's assault weapons ban law violates the U.S. Constitution?

### **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 copy of the detailed tabulations to this report or a listing of past poll reports issued by the poll, please visit <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.