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## IGS Poll

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***Voters disengaged and largely unenthusiastic about California's upcoming gubernatorial primary election.***

*Two Republicans lead the crowded field of Democrats, but none receives more than 17% support.*

by Mark DiCamillo  
Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

In less than 60 days California voters will be mailed their official ballots to begin voting in the state's top-two primary election to elect a new governor. Yet, according to the results of the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll*, voters remain largely disengaged and unenthusiastic about the candidates and the election. The two candidates receiving the most voters in the primary election will then face off against one another in the November general election.

In a state in which registered Democrats outnumber Republicans greater than two to one, two Republicans are holding a slight lead over eight prominent Democratic candidates in the race. However, voter preferences across the unusually large field are widely scattered with none of the candidates receiving more than a 17% of the vote. According to the latest poll, small business owner Steve Hilton and Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco, currently lead the field, with 17% and 16% of likely voter preferences, respectively, while each of the Democrats trail with even lower vote totals. The top Democrats are Congressman Eric Swalwell with 14%, and former Congresswoman Katie Porter (13%), followed by consumer protection advocate Tom Steyer at 10%. None of five other prominent Democrats in the running is receiving more than 5% of the vote.

The candidates with the greatest movement in voter support over time have been Hilton, whose support increased from 8% to 17% and Steyer, with 10% support compared to 1% last October.

The poll presented voters with each candidate's name, their official job description\* and their party affiliation as they will appear on the ballot. History has shown that these descriptors play a role in guiding voter's preferences, especially in contests where the candidates are not well-known. That is clearly the case in this year's gubernatorial election, as the poll also finds that unusually large proportions of likely voters cannot offer an opinion of the candidates at this late very stage of the election campaign. While the five leading candidates are generally better known than the five trailing candidates, even among the leaders, significant proportions of likely voters have no opinion of the candidates. In addition, among voters who do offer opinions, none is currently receiving a more favorable than unfavorable assessment from the overall electorate.

These findings come from a *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted online March 9-15, 2026, among over 5,019 registered voters, 3,889 of whom are considered likely to vote in the June primary election.

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\* as reported by the candidates to the California Secretary of State

*Table 1*  
**Trend of voter preferences for Governor in California’s  
June primary election among major party candidates**

	<b>March 2026 %</b>	October 2025 %	August 2025 %
<b>Steve Hilton, small business owner (R)</b>	<b>17</b>	8	6
<b>Chad Bianco, Riverside County Sheriff (R)</b>	<b>16</b>	13	10
<b>Eric Swalwell, U.S. Representative (D)</b>	<b>13</b>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>
<b>Katie Porter, consumer protection advocate (D)</b>	<b>13</b>	11	17
<b>Tom Steyer, climate advocate (D)</b>	<b>10</b>	1	<i>NA</i>
<b>Xavier Becerra, voting rights advocate (D)</b>	<b>5</b>	8	9
<b>Antonio Villaraigosa, housing affordability advocate (D)</b>	<b>4</b>	5	4
<b>Matt Mahan, Mayor of San Jose (D)</b>	<b>4</b>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>
<b>Betty Yee, family care navigator (D)</b>	<b>1</b>	3	2
<b>Tony Thurmond, California State Senate Superintendent of Public Instruction (D)</b>	<b>1</b>	1	1
<b>Others/Undecided</b>	<b>16</b>	50	51

*March 2026 results among likely voters in the June primary, prior measures among all registered voters. (D) denotes Democrat, (R) denotes Republican. NA: not asked*

**Voting preferences for governor are highly partisan and ideologically based**

GOP voters, conservatives and those identifying with MAGA, President Donald Trump’s Make America Great Again movement, are underpinning the support of the two leading Republicans, as greater than four in ten of these voter subgroups say they back one or the other of the GOP candidates. By contrast, none of the Democratic candidates receives more than 24% of their party’s voters, with Swalwell, Porter and Steyer dividing up the largest shares. In addition, the preferences of the state’s non-partisan voters are scattered, with none of the candidates receiving more than 15% of their votes.

Only modest differences in voter preferences are observed across the state’s eight major regions and what differences that do exist appear largely based on candidate familiarity. For example, Bianco holds the lead in the Inland Empire region, which includes Riverside County, where he serves as Sheriff. Swalwell and Porter also do best in their home regions, which for Swalwell is the San Francisco Bay Area where he now represents 14th Congressional district, and for Porter is Orange County, from where she served in Congress last year representing the state’s 47 Congressional district.

Males tend to favor Hilton and Bianco over their Democratic rivals, while women are dividing their preferences about evenly across the leading candidates. Hilton polls best among older voters, as does Swalwell, although many young voters remain undecided.

The preferences of white voters are closely divided among the top candidates, although Hilton appears to be holding a small lead. Interestingly, Hilton is also outpolling each of his Democratic rivals among Latino voters, as their support for the Democratic candidates is widely scattered and is complicated by the fact with two of the lower tier candidates, Antonio Villaraigosa and Xavier Becerra, are themselves Latinos and are drawing support away from the Democratic frontrunners. In

addition, it is important to note that Latino voters, along with Black and Asian American counterparts, are more likely than whites to be undecided.

*Table 2*  
**Preferences for governor across major subgroups of the state's likely voters**

	Hilton	Bianco	Swalwell	Porter	Steyer	Becerra	Villar-aigosa	Mahan	Others / Undecided
	(R) %	(R) %	(D) %	(D) %	(D) %	(D) %	(D) %	(D) %	%
<b>Total likely voters</b>	17	16	13	13	10	5	4	4	18
<u>Party registration</u>									
(.47)* Democrats	1	1	24	20	15	9	5	5	19
(.29) Republicans	45	44	1	1	1	**	1	1	7
(.24) No Party Pref./other	15	12	8	14	10	3	5	5	29
<u>Political ideology</u>									
(.14) Strongly conservative	49	42	**	**	**	1	1	1	6
(.16) Somewhat conservative	38	40	3	1	3	1	1	2	11
(.25) Moderate	15	15	10	8	11	5	6	7	22
(.20) Somewhat liberal	2	**	23	15	16	8	5	6	23
(.25) Strongly liberal	**	**	23	30	13	7	4	3	20
<u>Other political identifiers</u>									
(.47) Progressive	3	3	21	21	14	8	5	4	20
(.15) Libertarian	29	22	7	6	7	4	3	5	16
(.24) MAGA	47	41	**	**	1	1	1	1	7
<u>Region</u>									
(.24) Los Angeles County	14	12	13	16	10	7	6	4	19
(.09) San Diego County	19	16	12	10	7	8	4	3	19
(.09) Orange County	24	13	13	18	6	3	3	2	18
(.11) Inland Empire	17	32	10	10	10	4	3	1	13
(.06) Central Coast	17	20	13	12	12	3	5	2	16
(.17) Central Valley	19	23	10	11	9	4	3	4	17
(.22) San Francisco Bay Area	16	7	18	12	12	4	4	7	22
(.02) North Coast/Sierras	18	30	12	6	16	1	2	**	16
<u>Age</u>									
(.08) 18-29	5	21	4	10	15	4	8	4	30
(.16) 30-39	9	16	8	20	6	5	5	3	27
(.18) 40-49	13	21	10	15	6	5	6	5	18
(.28) 50-64	20	17	14	10	10	7	3	3	16
(.34) 65 or older	23	13	19	12	12	4	2	4	11
<u>Gender</u>									
(.48) Male	19	18	14	12	8	4	4	5	18
(.52) Female	16	15	13	13	11	6	4	3	19
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>									
(.57) White	19	16	17	15	10	3	2	4	13
(.22) Latino	12	19	7	9	7	11	8	4	22
(.14) Asian/Pacific Isle	16	12	12	12	12	3	3	24	26
(.05) Black/African Amer.	10	10	13	7	19	4	7	3	25

*Subgroup preferences for Yee and Thurmond voters are not shown because of small sample sizes. The sum of subgroup percentages may add to slightly more or less than 100% due to rounding. \* The column to the left of each subgroup is its share of the likely voter sample. \*\* less than 1/2 of 1%.*

## **Voters hold mixed and highly partisan views of the candidates, but many are unable to voice an opinion**

Californians' lack of enthusiasm about the upcoming gubernatorial election is demonstrated when voters are asked to offer their overall impressions of each of the ten major candidates. While the five leading candidates are somewhat better known than the trailing candidates, even among the polling leaders, large proportions of likely voters are unable to offer an opinion.

What's more, among voters who do voice an opinion, overall impressions tend to be either divided or more negative than positive, with none of the candidates achieving more favorable than unfavorable reviews from voters at this stage. For example, Hilton and Bianco, the current polling leaders, are each viewed favorably by less than a quarter of the electorate, while more voters, about a third in each case, offer an unfavorable assessment, while the rest have no opinion.

Among non-partisan voters not affiliated with either major party, even larger proportions have no opinion of the candidates, and among those offering an opinion their assessments also tend to be either mixed or more negative than positive.

When current assessments of the gubernatorial candidates are compared to those held by voters in the *Berkeley IGS Poll's* last survey in October, with only one or two exceptions, there has been little change in voter appraisals of the candidates.

The candidate receiving the largest increases in voter assessments over the past six months has been Steyer, who months ago began launching a massive television ad campaign that is still very much in progress. Prior to the start of his ad campaign, the October poll found that only about one in three voters (36%) could offer opinion of Steyer, and among those who did, by a two to one margin (24% to 12%) more viewed him unfavorably as favorably. Since then, voter recognition of Steyer has grown considerably to now include 66% of the likely electorate. Yet, more voters in the overall electorate still tend to offer more negative than positive assessments of him by a 37% to 29% margin.

Views of the two leading Republicans have increased but at a smaller rate some over the past six months, with about half of likely voters now offering an opinion. Yet, of those who do give an opinion, each also receives more negative than positive assessments.

Much of this has to do with the partisan lens through which voters are viewing the candidates. For example, nearly all GOP voters offering an assessment view both Republicans positively, whereas the state's Democrats voters view each in a highly negative light. More non-partisan voters also view each Republican unfavorably.

The opposite situation is true for each of the leading Democratic contenders, with majorities or near majorities of Democratic voters viewing each positively, while seven in ten GOP voters offering negative assessments of Swalwell, Porter and Steyer.

The trailing Democrats remain largely unknown to most of the electorate, even among members of their own party. Similar to their opinions of leading candidates, assessments are highly partisan. In addition, each is viewed more negatively than positively, with the exception of Becerra, who receives equal proportions of voters rating him favorably as unfavorably.

Table 3

Voter recognition and image ratings of the major gubernatorial candidates  
now compared to last October

	March 2026 %	October 2025 %	Party Registration					
			Democrats		Republicans		No party pref./other	
			Mar '26 %	Oct '25 %	Mar '26 %	Oct '25 %	Mar '26 %	Oct '25 %
<b><u>Steve Hilton</u></b>								
Favorable	28	19	3	3	73	55	24	13
Unfavorable	36	33	55	49	7	8	34	31
No opinion	36	45	42	48	20	37	41	56
<b><u>Chad Bianco</u></b>								
Favorable	28	23	3	3	71	63	23	18
Unfavorable	33	26	49	41	8	5	33	21
No opinion	39	51	48	56	21	32	44	61
<b><u>Eric Swalwell</u></b>								
Favorable	32	NA	53	NA	3	NA	27	NA
Unfavorable	33	NA	8	NA	75	NA	32	NA
No opinion	35	NA	39	NA	22	NA	41	NA
<b><u>Katie Porter</u></b>								
Favorable	34	26	54	41	3	3	31	21
Unfavorable	37	33	18	15	69	68	35	10
No opinion	29	41	28	44	28	29	34	49
<b><u>Tom Steyer</u></b>								
Favorable	29	12	44	18	4	3	30	10
Unfavorable	37	24	19	11	70	51	33	21
No opinion	34	64	37	71	26	46	37	69
<b><u>Xavier Becerra</u></b>								
Favorable	26	26	42	42	3	5	22	20
Unfavorable	26	22	7	4	59	58	22	20
No opinion	48	52	51	54	38	37	56	60
<b><u>Antonio Villaraigosa</u></b>								
Favorable	20	19	30	29	7	7	29	15
Unfavorable	34	29	22	14	56	59	30	26
No opinion	46	52	48	57	37	34	51	59
<b><u>Matt Mahan</u></b>								
Favorable	15	NA	20	NA	8	NA	15	NA
Unfavorable	21	NA	11	NA	41	NA	17	NA
No opinion	64	NA	69	NA	51	NA	68	NA
<b><u>Betty Yee</u></b>								
Favorable	13	18	20	28	3	4	11	15
Unfavorable	20	22	9	5	44	56	15	18
No opinion	67	60	71	67	52	40	74	67
<b><u>Tony Thurmond</u></b>								
Favorable	11	11	19	18	1	2	9	9
Unfavorable	27	20	10	6	58	48	22	18
No opinion	62	69	71	76	41	50	69	73

March 2026 measures among likely voters, while August 2025 measures among total registered voters. NA=not asked.

**Attributes considered important to voters when evaluating the gubernatorial candidates**

Voters were also presented with a long list of candidate attributes and asked which one or two they considered most important to them in a gubernatorial candidate. Topping the list is, “will aggressively fight Trump administration policies,” which 42% of voters select as an important attribute. Cited next most often is the attribute “is progressive in politics” (28%). About one in five voters rate three other attributes as being important are -- “has demonstrated success in government service,” “is self-funded and not beholden to special interests,” and “is conservative in politics.”

When examining the candidate characteristics most important to the voters who are supporting each of the major candidates, most of Hilton’s and Bianco’s voters give high importance to the attributes “is conservative in politics” and “will support Trump administration policies.”

By contrast, large majorities of the voters supporting each of the leading Democratic candidates cite “aggressively fighting Trump administration policies” as an important candidate attribute, with Swalwell supporters somewhat most likely to select this. Another attribute, “is progressive in politics,” is also rated highly important to backers of each of the leading Democrats, with Porter’s supporters most likely to rate it highly. Large proportions of Swalwell’s and Mahan’s backers also consider “has demonstrated success in government service” as an important attribute, while a third of Steyer’s supporters value the attribute, “is self-funded and not beholden to special interests.”

*Table 4*  
**Candidate attributes that likely voters consider important when appraising the gubernatorial candidates**

	Total voters %	Hilton voters %	Bianco voters %	Swalwell voters %	Porter voters %	Steyer voters %	Becerra voters %	Villar-sa voters %	Mahan voters %	Undecided %
Will aggressively fight Trump administration policies	42	2	1	78	64	64	67	62	49	45
Is progressive in politics	28	**	3	43	57	39	42	29	25	34
Has demonstrated success in government service	22	3	12	43	23	13	37	27	48	28
Is self-funded and not beholden to special interests	19	16	15	11	21	34	10	19	14	23
Is conservative in politics	18	50	48	**	1	**	1	1	7	9
Will support Trump administration policies	15	44	40	**	**	**	**	**	**	5
Is not a career politician	12	27	25	1	3	8	**	7	7	10
Vows to lower energy prices	9	14	14	4	4	13	1	10	9	9
Has demonstrated success in business	6	18	6	2	*	8	2	3	4	4
Is supported by labor unions	4	1	1	5	10	2	9	9	5	4
Has a background in law enforcement	5	3	18	5	*	4	11	2	4	3
Is supported by business and high-tech leaders	2	4	2	1	1	1	**	**	9	2
Is a woman	1	**	**	**	5	1	**	2	**	3
Is a person of color	1	**	**	**	**	1	4	3	**	2
Has a large following on social media	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**

*Subgroup preferences for Yee and Thurmond voters not shown because of small sample sizes. \*\* Less than 1/2 of 1%.*

### **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 conducted online in English and Spanish March 9-15, among 5,019 registered voters in California, 3,889 of whom can be considered likely to vote in the state's June primary election. To enable the survey to also obtain voter preferences in the Los Angeles mayoral primary election, the survey included an oversampling of voters in the city of Los Angeles. However, after the conclusion of data collection the overall results were weighted to return the disproportionate sampling of L.A. City voters to actual share of the overall statewide electorate. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

Data collection for the poll was completed by distributing email and text message invitations to stratified random samples of the state's registered voters. Each email or text 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. Reminders were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further invitations.

Samples of the state's registered voters were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., a leading supplier of registered voter lists in California and were derived from information contained on state and local voter registration rolls, which are public documents. The sample was stratified by age and gender to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, the personally identifiable information of each voter that was listed on their voting record was 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 data file to align the overall sample to population characteristics of registered voters both statewide and within major regions of the state.

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 from the overall likely voter sample have a sampling error of about +/-2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

### **Question wording**

Californians will be voting to elect a new Governor in the June primary. If you were voting today, which of the following candidates would be your first choice for Governor? (IF UNDECIDED) If you had to choose, as of today which candidate do you lean toward supporting? (SEE RELEASE FOR NAMES, JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND PARTY AFFILIATIONS OF THE CANDIDATES MEASURED) (ORDER RANDOMIZED)

Regardless of whom you might support for Governor in the 2026 election, please indicate whether you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of each of the following candidates, or don't you know enough about them to say? (SEE RELEASE FOR CANDIDATES MEASURED) (ORDER RANDOMIZED)

When considering the candidates running for Governor this year, which one or two characteristics are most important to you? (SEE RELEASE FOR ATTRIBUTES LISTED) (ORDER RANDOMIZED)

### **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 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, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. Veteran pollster Mark DiCamillo serves as director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll*. For a complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.