



CMC-ROSE INSTITUTE POLL COMPARES POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN CA AND NY IN TIME OF CRISIS FOR GOVERNORS

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AN EXCERPT FROM THE STUDY

BY ANNA GREEN '21

The governors of the nation's two largest blue states, California and New York, recently faced accountability moments, as New York Governor Andrew Cuomo resigned his office in August, and California Governor Gavin Newsom survived a recall effort in September.

In a survey of residents of the two states during this period of political upheaval, the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at CMC compared attitudes of California and New York voters toward the power to recall public officials, their governors' performances, and problems facing the states.

Unlike other recent polls that have focused exclusively on the views of California voters regarding Governor Newsom and the recall process leading up to the California recall election, the CMC-Rose Institute Poll provided a comparison of public opinion in these two, large, Democratic states—one of which allows for the recall of elected officials, while the other does not.

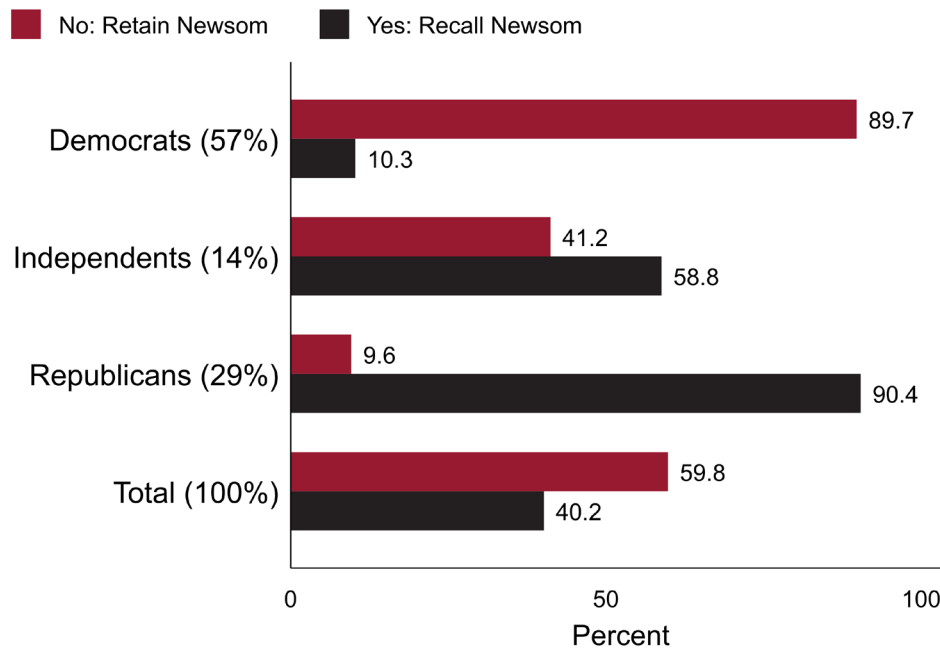
The poll, designed by the Rose Institute and conducted by YouGov, surveyed 2,000 respondents in California and 1,675 in New York between August 30, 2021 and September 10, 2021. Professor J. Andrew Sinclair and Professor Ken Miller, both faculty in the CMC Government Department, developed and oversaw the poll comparing political attitudes in California and New York. CMC students Nohl Patterson '22 and Adhitya Venkatraman '22 led a team of student research assistants contributing to the analysis of the data.

We present below the first section of the report presenting the findings for the California recall. The full report, including a section examining preferences over political institutions and a section looking at how voters assess the outcomes of politics, is available on the Rose Institute's website. Please see roseinstitute.org.

Our survey accurately reflects what transpired in the recall election. We had 1822 “likely” voters among our 2000 California respondents, and have focused our analysis on that group, applying the survey weights YouGov provided for them.⁸ In our data, 59.8% of the likely voters preferred to retain Governor Gavin Newsom in office, voting “No” on the recall. Election returns from the Secretary

of State’s office have “No” obtaining approximately 63.4%, with some vote remaining to be counted.⁹ These results are very similar to Newsom’s 61.9% in the 2018 general election against Republican John Cox and President Joseph Biden’s 63.5% in the 2020 presidential election against former President Donald Trump. The recall election results reflect the partisan divide in California.

Figure 1.1: Vote on recalling Governor Newsom by party identification



SOURCE: CMC Rose Institute Poll, Sept. 2021.
NOTE: Likely California voters.

Figure 1.1, above, breaks down the recall vote by “party identification,” how voters choose to describe themselves. Independent voters reporting leaning towards one party or the other are included with voters of that party, as past political science research has tended to support the idea that “leaners” are very similar to partisans. Almost 90% of Democratic identifiers planned to vote “no” in a state dominated by that party (57% of the likely

voters overall). Approximately 90% of Republican identifiers planned to vote “yes,” a mirror image of the Democratic totals, although with a much smaller group of voters (making up only 29% of the electorate). While true, non-leaning, independent voters did favor the recall, this group is not adequately large or uniform to make up for the Democratic Party’s advantage in California.

⁸ The unweighted results are actually quite similar to the weighted ones. Unweighted, “No” wins in this group with 62.2% of the vote. Applying the weights, “No” wins with 59.8% of the vote. It is “best practice” to apply survey weights to this kind of data, though, so we provided weighted data throughout.

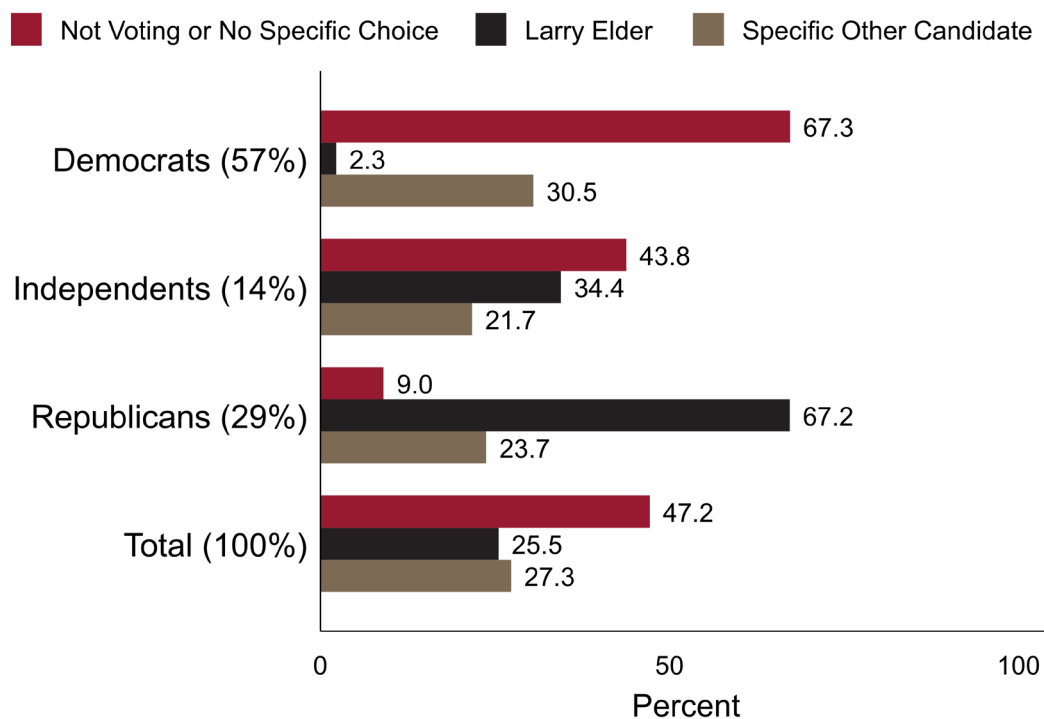
⁹ This is from the California Secretary of State’s election returns as of 9/20/21. <https://electionresults.sos.ca.gov/returns/governor-recall>.

Although Newsom’s victory makes the second question moot, our survey also accurately captured both Republican Larry Elder’s lead and the substantial abstention in the replacement election. Overall, Elder led a divided field, obtaining in our survey 48.3% of the vote among the specific candidates we listed, with Democrat Kevin Paffrath in a distant second. This mirrors the early returns; Elder had 47.4% of the actual vote – but with only 2,809,638 votes out of 10,601,811 cast on the first question, or 26.5% when abstention is permitted.¹⁰ In our survey data, allowing for abstention (the most popular response), Elder had 25.5% of the vote. Figure 1.2 presents our results for the second

question, split by party; Elder obtained support from two-thirds of Republicans.

Democrats overwhelmingly intended to abstain or declined to choose from among our alternatives.¹¹ We included a follow-up question asking respondents, no matter how they voted on the second question, to say which person they thought would make the best governor of California. For that question, we included Newsom on the list and forced a choice among the candidates listed. Newsom was the most popular choice by far, with Elder in a distant second place.¹²

Figure 1.2: Vote on replacing Governor Newsom by party identification



SOURCE: CMC Rose Institute Poll, Sept. 2021.
NOTE: Likely California voters.

¹⁰ Current vote totals as of 9/20/21.

¹¹ Our survey included: Doug Ose, Kevin Kiley, Kevin Faulconer, Ted Gaines, Caitlyn Jenner, Larry Elder, Kevin Paffrath, John Cox, and Brandon Ross. We included the full ballot descriptions, so respondents would know that Paffrath and Ross were Democrats. It seems likely that many respondents selecting “some other candidate” instead of making a specific choice ultimately did not select any candidates in the actual election itself.

¹² Newsom’s percentage in this question – 49%, to Elder’s 24% -- reflects his advantage, but may underestimate his support, as not every respondent may have read the question carefully enough to realize Newsom was included.

Table 1.1: Do you agree with any of these statements (in favor of/opposing) recalling Newsom? Respondents could select as many as applied, so column percentages do not add to 100%.

Reasons <i>for</i> .	Recall Vote		Total Percent of likely voters.
	No: Retain Percent of those voting "No."	Yes: Recall Percent of those voting "Yes."	
Newsom is corrupt or hypocritical.	6	71	32
Newsom is not very likeable.	9	41	22
Newsom supports bad policies.	4	73	31
Newsom abuses his authority.	4	72	31
I like a different candidate better.	3	35	16
A conservative governor is better.	2	47	20
Newsom does not listen to people.	4	63	28
People, not politicians, should be in charge.	8	41	21
None of the above.	75	3	46
Reasons <i>against</i> .	Percent of those voting "No."	Percent of those voting "Yes."	Percent of likely voters.
The recall is just partisan politics.	64	4	40
The recall process is flawed/unfair.	51	5	32
I am worried about who might replace him.	70	13	47
Newsom has done a good enough job.	63	4	39
Newsom favors policies I like.	48	1	29
Newsom has done his best.	55	2	34
A liberal governor is better.	37	4	24
Elected officials should get their full term.	27	3	17
None of the Above	3	75	32

We also asked the survey respondents to evaluate several commonly discussed reasons for favoring or opposing recalling Newsom (included in Table 1.1). Respondents were asked to select all of the statements with which they agreed. These choices reflected the partisan and ideological nature of the contest as well.

Among voters favoring recalling Newsom, more than 70% agreed that Newsom was “corrupt or hypocritical,” supported “bad policies,” and “abuses his authority.” Only 35% of the recall supporters selected “I like a different candidate better” – an affirmative, rather than a negative, judgment. While such voters tended not to select any of the reasons for opposing the recall, it is notable that 13% did agree that they were worried about who might replace Newsom – but voted for the recall anyway.

Voters who disapproved of Newsom tended to strongly disapprove of him. In the whole California registered voters sample, 24% strongly approved, 32% somewhat approved, 14% somewhat disapproved, and 30% strongly disapproved. Among Republican identifiers, 75% strongly disapproved, with only 14% somewhat disapproving.

The dislike for Newsom among Republicans was certainly more zealous than his support within his own party: among Democrats, only 38% strongly approved while 46% somewhat approved. Nevertheless, they would vote overwhelmingly for him, and few crossed over into either disapproval category.

Among voters opposing recalling Newsom, the most commonly selected reason was also negative: “I am worried about who might replace him,” at 70%. Newsom did have some positive support, though, with 63% also agreeing that he had “done a good enough job.” The least popular reason was an anti-recall principle (“elected officials should get their full term,” 27%), although 51% thought this particular recall process was flawed or unfair. Most of the ‘no’ voters did not agree with any of the reasons for recalling Newsom, although 9% did concede that Newsom “is not very likeable.”

In pre-election polling, Elder was the clear leader among the replacement alternatives, and much of the media coverage described the recall as a choice between Elder and Newsom. On both the recall

and replacement questions, preferences split among party lines. In a state with a considerable advantage for the Democratic Party, that meant the election was not competitive.

The 2021 recall differed from the 2003 recall in several respects. First, Schwarzenegger had both a unique brand and a more centrist set of ideological positions than Elder. Second, the state was considerably more Republican in 2003. Third, Davis had lost more support among Democrats, who also had a serious replacement option on the ballot. In many ways, the 2021 recall election had more in common with the 2018 gubernatorial election or 2020 presidential election than the 2003 recall, despite the unusual structure of the ballot. ♦



AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR J. ANDREW SINCLAIR

Q: The survey captured data on Cuomo, who resigned, and Newsom, who survived his recall election. What do the survey results tell Governor Newsom about the views of his constituency and policy areas to prioritize during the remainder of his term?

A: Instead of indicating what Governor Newsom’s voters did want, the survey results clearly show what they did not want: Larry Elder and the Republican Party. Seven-in-ten voters supporting Newsom in the recall agreed that they were “worried about who might replace him.” One fairly typical respondent, asked to describe three most important problems, wrote: “Republican racists,” “Covid-19,” and “Climate change and climate change deniers.” With the electorate so polarized, Newsom retains a considerable amount of flexibility over which issues he prioritizes among those broadly favored by Democrats.

Q: Could you explain some of the logistics/mechanics of conducting a survey using YouGov, for people who might not be familiar with the process? How was the data collected?

A: Over the last decade, it has become increasingly common to do public opinion research using online panels of respondents. People who have signed up for YouGov (you can sign up if you want: it’s easy!) get an offer to participate in the survey; YouGov makes these offers in a way that gets the respondents to look like the population of interest. It works really well: we are only about two percentage points off from the recall election result (underestimating Newsom’s support).

Q: California and New York have become known as “solidly blue” states in the past few election cycles, though their economic, geographic, and demographic makeups vary significantly. Is it possible to draw conclusions on their political differences from this report? What, if anything, is the “baseline” for any comparison?

A: In the important political terms, California and New York are quite similar. Both are heavily Democratic states because of the overwhelming support for Democrats within cities - NYC in New York and both the Bay Area and greater Los Angeles in California. Yet, both also have substantial rural areas and large Republican populations. In 2020, Donald Trump got more votes in California than he did in Texas; he also had more votes in New York than he did in Ohio. So there are these large numbers of Republicans in these states that do not have much political power unless they can split the Democratic Party or take advantage of policy failures to win support from independents and disappointed Democrats. We wanted to look at both states, at a time when their Democratic governors were in some political trouble, to see how voters were responding.

Q: How did Rose Institute students contribute to the research process?

A: Rose students provided some invaluable help with the survey, particularly by “coding” (categorizing) the free-response “most important problem” answers. There is nothing like reading through almost 4000 answers to get a sense of what people are thinking about!