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# Key Opinion Shifts in California's Recall Election

**Mark Baldassare**

*This blog post from Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO, will be published at 9:00 p.m. Pacific Time on Wednesday, September 1, 2021, to accompany the release of PPIC's new statewide survey. The information in this post—like the survey itself—is embargoed for 9:00 p.m. PT on September 1. Once the post is live, it will be available online at <https://www.ppic.org/blog/key-opinion-shifts-in-californias-recall-election/>.*

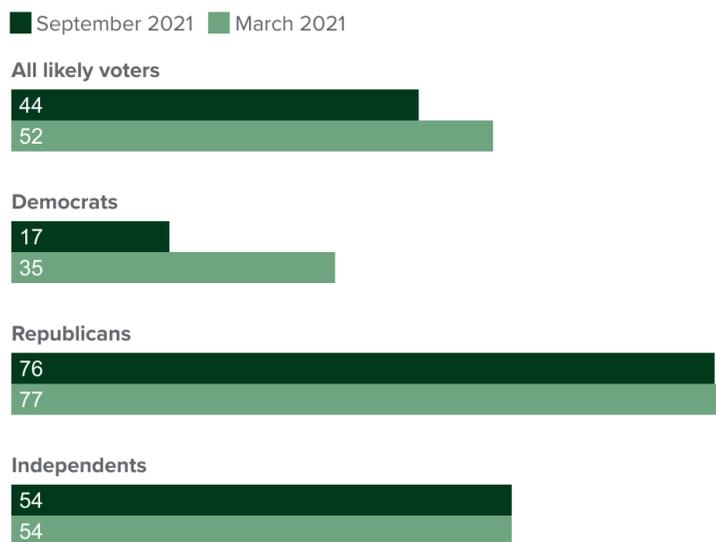
By now, every California voter has received a ballot in the mail for the governor’s recall election. Some have already sent back their ballots, while most are deciding on how to vote and whether they want to be a part of this chapter in California history. As the September 14 special election nears, how have opinions shifted this year, and what does this tell us about the way the political wind is blowing at this stage of the recall election?

Notably, California’s likely voters have held steady on two important measures over the last several months. In the latest [PPIC Survey](#), California likely voters’ support for the recall of Governor Newsom (39% yes, 58% no) continues to fall short of the majority needed for his removal and replacement—a margin that remains similar to the [March](#) and [May PPIC Surveys](#) (40% each). Additionally, the governor’s approval rating is still in positive territory and barely budged this entire year (53% today, 52% [January](#)).

In a clear sign of our hyper-partisan times, Democrats and Republicans are not only deeply divided on these issues but have also shown little change over time in their respective views of Newsom’s leadership. However, there have been marked shifts in key opinions that could have an impact on the propensity to vote—the political wildcard in the final election outcome.

**Is this recall appropriate?** After a summer of political commercials by the anti-recall campaign—with a message that emphasizes the recall’s partisan roots—a shrinking share of California likely voters say the current effort to recall the governor is an appropriate use of the recall process (44% today, 52% March). This decline is most evident among Democratic likely voters (17% today, 35% March), while it is unchanged among independent likely voters (54% today, 54% March). Republican likely voters remain overwhelmingly inclined to say the current recall is appropriate (76% today, 77% March).

### Decrease in likely voters saying this recall is an appropriate use of the process



SOURCE: PPIC Statewide Survey, September 2021.  
FROM: PPIC Blog, September 2021.

**Will the recall make things better?** Another major theme of the anti-recall commercials is the negative impact of changing leaders during the pandemic. Today, a plurality and increasing share of California likely voters say that things in California would get worse if Governor Newsom is recalled (41% today, 34% May). Significant growth in this perception among Democrats (69% today, 55% May) has fueled this increase. The views of independent

likely voters (29% today, 27% May) and Republicans likely voters (8% today, 10% May) have not changed that much. In fact, Republican likely voters are much more likely today to say things would get better if Newsom is recalled (69% today, 55% May). Fewer than half in all other voter groups today—including 37% of independents and 8% of Democrats—agree.

## Increase in likely voters saying things will get worse if Newsom is recalled

■ Would get worse ■ Would get better ■ Would make no difference

Sep '21



May '21



**SOURCE:** PPIC Statewide Survey, September 2021.

**FROM:** PPIC Blog, September 2021.

How does all this compare to the successful recall of Governor Gray Davis? We asked these same questions in [our September 2003 survey](#). At that time, 49% of likely voters said that the recall was appropriate, while 42% said that things would get better and 16% said that things would get worse in California if the governor were recalled. Our survey also showed that 53% said they would vote yes to remove Davis and just 26% approved of the governor's job performance. [That October](#), 55% voted to remove Gray Davis and 49% voted to replace him with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Today, the declining perception among Democratic likely voters that the current recall is appropriate, coupled with the growing belief that the removal of Newsom would lead to things getting worse, are shifts that would help to energize support within the recall opponents' base.

But our September survey shows mixed signals about voter turnout.

One promising sign of voter engagement—both large and representative—is the overwhelming sentiment (70%) among California likely voters that the outcome of the recall vote is very important to them. Strong majorities across partisan groups say the recall outcome is very important (75% Democrats, 67% Republicans, 62% independents). Solid majorities across age, education, gender, income, and racial/ethnic groups and regions also hold this view.

However, when asked if they are more or less enthusiastic about voting than usual, almost half of California likely voters say they are more enthusiastic (47%) while about half are not (30% less enthusiastic, 23% same/neither/don't know). Republican likely voters (54%) and independent (53%) likely voters have a large lead over Democratic (40%) likely voters when it comes to enthusiasm.

Republican candidates have not won in statewide elections since 2006—a losing streak that spans seven general elections. The prospect of a special election with a smaller, unrepresentative turnout—and a GOP replacement candidate who could win with less than majority support—points to a real possibility of a political upset. This possibility gives Republican voters a reason to be more enthusiastic about voting this year. And it puts

pressure on the anti-recall campaign to get out the vote among the dominant Democratic base who strongly oppose the governor's removal.

The world will be watching to see how our 110-year old direct democracy system performs during this latest stress test. And we will continue to track Californians' participation in and their views of the process.

Don't forget to vote!

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