

California Republicans less likely to seek COVID vaccine, poll reports

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Republicans in California are about evenly divided on whether or not to get the COVID-19 vaccination, while Democrats and voters with no party affiliation are much more likely to seek it, says a new Berkeley IGS poll. Credit: Wikimedia Commons

As California struggles to bring the deadly COVID-19 pandemic under

control, the state's Republican voters are far less likely to seek a vaccine and express less support for small businesses, health care workers and other at-risk workers, according to a new poll by UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS).

Only 58% of Republican voters surveyed say they are very or somewhat likely to seek the vaccine, compared to 88% among Democrats and 72% among those with no party affiliation. More than one-third of Republicans—37% in all—say they are somewhat or very unlikely to seek the vaccine, compared to 8% of Democrats and 22% of those with no party .

The poll described the Californians' attitudes on the pandemic as "highly politicized," and found that Republicans are more likely to see vaccinations as a matter of personal choice, rather than as a shared responsibility to protect the health of all Californians.

"COVID has brought to the forefront a tension between values about the individual and the community," said IGS co-Director Cristina Mora. But underlying that longstanding partisan disagreement, she said, are racial tensions and even a disagreement about whether the threat of the pandemic is real.

An IGS poll last May found similar partisan divisions: Supporters of then-President Donald Trump were less concerned that they might infect others and more worried about the economy. Voters generally agreed on the importance of washing their hands, but were polarized about other core strategies to slow the spread of the virus, including shelter-in-place orders and the economic lockdown.

Since the early days of the pandemic, the virus has exacted a deadly toll: Nearly a half-million Americans have died, 47,000 of them in California.

The new poll, conducted from Jan. 23-29, suggests that the sharp partisan divisions have persisted, reflecting not just a split in perceptions of COVID-related risk, but a divergence in values about the role of individuals in their communities.

- Financial relief for small businesses: Overall, 52% of California voters favor government aid to small businesses so that they can shut down and protect the owners and employees, while 42% say government should allow businesses to remain open. Among Democrats, 73% favor financial aid. Only 16% of Republicans agree, while eight out of 10 prefer that government allow [small businesses](#) to remain open.
- Hazard pay for at-risk workers: Among Republican voters, 48% support "hazard pay" for grocery store employees, teachers and other front-line workers; 42% are opposed. Such measures win support from 92% of Democrats and 78% of those with no party preference.
- Risks faced by [health care workers](#): 94% of Democrats and 81% of those with no party preference are very or somewhat worried that medical workers will become exhausted and reach their breaking point. Among Republicans, 69% share that concern, while 28% say they're not worried.
- Wearing face masks: Only four in 10 Republicans express worry about people not wearing [face masks](#), compared to 86% of Democrats and 69% of those with no party identification. Among Republicans, 58% say they are not worried about those who don't wear masks. Overall, 70% of voters say they are very or somewhat worried about those who don't wear masks.
- Personal choice vs. community responsibility: Among Democrats, 78% say it is "everyone's responsibility" to get vaccinated to help protect the health of other people, followed by 57% of those with no party preference. Among Republicans, 28% agree, but 69% call it a matter of personal choice.

The medical impacts of COVID-19 have fallen disproportionately on people of color, Mora said, and underlying racial tensions also have a bearing in the survey findings.

"Those who say they're Democrats are much more racially diverse than those who say they're Republicans," she explained. "And if you look at the world, those who are grocery store clerks and those who are teachers—they are much more diverse."

Those underlying tensions, compounded by the pressure of the pandemic, has had the power to creating surprising shifts in party values. For example, she said, "we think of Republicans as pro-[business](#) and pro-small business, and Democrats being less so"—but that's reversed in the new poll.

When Republicans argue that they prefer to support small business by allowing them to remain open, or when they do not support hazard pay for high-risk workers, that may seem a familiar ideological position. But in effect, she said, that goes beyond ideology into a more troubling realm.

"The only way you can have that stance," she said, "is if you don't think this virus is very real."

The latest Berkeley IGS Poll was conducted in English and Spanish from Jan. 23-29 among a random sample of 10,358 registered voters across California.

More information: The troubling political dimension of the coronavirus in California: escholarship.org/uc/item/1zd014bk

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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