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Proposed gas tax repeal backed five to four. Support tied to voter views about the state's high gas prices rather than the condition of its roads

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The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* finds that by a 52% to 43% margin California voters support a proposed initiative to repeal the state's gas tax law. Repealing the law, which was passed by a two-thirds vote of both houses of the state legislature and signed by Governor Jerry Brown in April, would void the recently enacted price hikes to gasoline, diesel fuels and vehicle registration fees, and eliminate about \$5 billion per year in state revenues devoted to transportation and road repair.

Opinions about the law are strongly held by both repeal supporters and opponents. Nearly all of those backing the law's repeal say they strongly support its repeal, while three quarters of those opposed are strongly opposed.

The poll also finds that while more than three in four voters do not consider the state's road and highways to be in good condition, opinions about the state's roadways are not related to voter preferences on the gas tax initiative. Rather, opinions are strongly linked to voter perceptions of the high price of gasoline in California. Six in ten likely voters feel gas prices paid by motorists here are "much higher" than paid by motorists in other states, and these voters are among the initiative's strongest backers, supporting repeal greater than two to one.

These findings come from the latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* conducted among a random sample of California likely voters in English and Spanish by telephone December 7-16.

Likely voters support repealing the state gas tax law five to four

The survey finds likely voters supporting repeal of the state's recently enacted gas tax law by a five-to-four margin, with 52% backing the law's repeal and 43% opposed.

Opinions about the law and its repeal are strongly held by both supporters and opponents. For example, of the 52% who support repeal, nearly all (46%) do so strongly. Similarly, nearly three in four voters opposed to the initiative say they are strongly opposed to the law's repeal.

Table 1
Opinions about a proposed initiative to repeal the state’s gas tax law
(among likely voters)

	Total likely voters %
Favor repeal	<u>52</u>
Strongly	46
Not strongly	6
Oppose repeal/ keep the law	<u>43</u>
Not strongly	12
Strongly	31
Undecided	<u>5</u>

Big differences in likely voter preferences across population subgroups

Voter preferences about repealing the gas tax law vary considerably across major subgroups of the likely voter population.

The largest differences relate by a voter’s party affiliation and political ideology. Support for repeal is greatest among registered Republicans (81%) and conservatives (80%). By contrast, 60% of Democrats and 70% of liberals oppose the law’s repeal. The state’s independent voters, who are registered as No Party Preference, favor repeal 56% to 39%.

There are also wide regional differences of opinion about the proposed initiative. Voters living in the state’s inland counties support repeal greater than two to one (67% to 29%), while voters in the state’s more populous coastal counties are narrowly opposed, 49% to 45%. San Francisco Bay Area voters display broad opposition to the law’s repeal, opposing it 60% to 34%. On the other hand, majorities of voters living in other parts of Northern California or across Southern California back its repeal.

Support for repeal is also greater among men, voters age 50-64, those with annual household incomes of \$40,000-\$99,999, married voters, and those who are widowed, separated or divorced. Opposition is greatest among likely voters under age 40, singles, and voters with incomes of \$100,000 or more per year. Women, voters age 65 or older, and those with incomes of less than \$40,000 are about evenly divided.

While the state’s African American voters oppose repeal by ten points, majorities of the state’s Latinos (56%) and Asian Americans (53%) support its repeal. White non-Hispanics are more divided, with 51% backing repeal and 45% opposed.

Table 2
Voter opinions about gas tax repeal across major
subgroups of the likely voter population

	Favor repeal %	Oppose repeal %	Undecided %
Total likely voters	52	43	5
Party registration			
Democrats	32	60	8
Republicans	81	17	2
No party preference/other	56	39	5
Political ideology			
Conservative	80	19	1
Moderate	55	41	4
Liberal	22	70	8
Region			
Coastal counties	45	49	6
Inland counties	67	29	4
Region			
Los Angeles County	51	46	3
Other Southern California	58	34	8
San Francisco Bay Area	34	60	6
Other Northern California*	60	36	4
Gender			
Male	57	41	2
Female	48	45	7
Age			
18-39	40	54	6
40-49	52	42	6
50-64	63	34	3
65 or older	48	44	8
Race/ethnicity			
White non-Hispanic	51	45	4
Latino	56	38	6
African American*	40	50	10
Asian American/other	53	39	8
Household income			
Less than \$40,000	47	46	7
\$40,000-\$99,999	56	38	6
\$100,000 or more	47	51	2
Marital Status			
Married	56	41	3
Not married/live together*	41	45	14
Separated/divorced/widow	55	35	10
Single	40	56	4

* small sample base

While voters don't consider the state's roads to be in good condition, opinions about the state roadways don't relate to preferences about the gas tax initiative

The survey also asked likely voters their overall opinion of the condition of the state's roads and highways. The results show that just 21% consider state roadways to be in excellent or good condition, while greater than three in four describe them as being poor or very poor (37%) or in fair condition (41%).

However, perceptions of the condition of the state's roads and highways are not related to voter preferences on the gas tax initiative. According to the poll, support for repealing the gas tax is about the same among voters who consider the state's roads to be in poor or very poor condition (52%) as say they are in fair condition (53%), or describe them as excellent or good (47%).

Table 3
Opinions of the condition of the state's roads and highways and
its relationship to voter preferences on gas tax repeal
(among likely voters)

	Condition of the state's roads/highways		
	Excellent/good	Fair	Poor/very poor
	%	%	%
Total likely voters	21	41	37
<u>Preferences on gas tax repeal</u>	<u>(100%)</u>	<u>(100%)</u>	<u>(100%)</u>
Favor repeal	47	53	52
Oppose repeal	46	44	41
Undecided	7	3	7

Note: Difference between 100% and the sum of percentages of likely voter assessments of the condition of state roads and highways equals proportion with no opinion.

Voter preferences about repeal strongly linked to perceptions of high gas prices in the state

Likely voters were also asked their opinions about gas prices paid by motorists in California compared to those in other states. Responses to this question are very one-sided, with six in ten (61%) maintaining that the gas prices here are "much higher" than paid by motorists elsewhere. Another 27% consider them to be "somewhat higher," while just 6% believe gas prices here about the same or lower than in other states.

Voter perceptions of the state’s high gas prices appear to be a major factor behind support for repeal of the gas tax. Among voters who consider gas prices here to be much higher than in other states, repeal is supported greater than two to one (66% to 31%). By contrast, majorities of voters who say gas prices in California are only somewhat higher, about the same or lower than in other states support the current law and oppose its repeal.

Table 4
Opinions of the gas prices California motorists pay compared to other states and its relationship to voter preferences on gas tax repeal (among likely voters)

	<u>Gas prices paid by California motorists compared to other states</u>		
	Much higher %	Somewhat higher %	About the same /lower %
Total likely voters	61	27	6
<u>Preferences on gas tax repeal</u>	<u>(100%)</u>	<u>(100%)</u>	<u>(100%)*</u>
Favor repeal	66	31	33
Oppose repeal	31	63	58
Undecided	3	6	9

** small sample base*

Note: Difference between 100% and the sum of percentages of likely voter perceptions of gas prices paid by California motorists compared to other states equals proportion with no opinion.

About the Survey

The findings in this report come from a survey completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies, at the University of California, Berkeley among 1,000 California registered voters, including 672 likely voters. The survey was conducted between the period December 7-16, 2017 by telephone in English and Spanish by live interviewers. Voters were randomly sampled from listings of registered voters derived from the state's official registered voter rolls. Up to four attempts were made to reach each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

Interviews were administered by professionally trained and supervised interviewers calling from Davis Research's central location call center in Calabasas (Los Angeles County), California. Interviewing was completed on either a voter's cell phone or a household landline phone depending on the source of the telephone listings from the voter file. In this survey 688 interviews were completed with voters on their cell phone, while 312 completed on a landline phone. After the completion of interviewing, the results from the overall registered voter sample were weighted to demographic, regional and political parameters of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size and the percentage distributions being examined. The maximum sampling error for results from the likely voter sample is +/- 3.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Results based on subgroups of the likely voter sample would be subject to larger margins of sampling error.

Questions Asked

Earlier this year, the state legislature passed and Governor Brown signed into law a new 5 billion dollar per year plan to repair state and local roads and highways. To pay for this, taxes were increased by 12 cents per gallon on gasoline, by 20 cents per gallon on diesel, and vehicle registration fees were raised. Opponents of the law are seeking to qualify an initiative on next year's statewide election ballot to repeal the law. If an initiative like this were on the ballot and you were voting today, would you vote to repeal the law or keep it? **(IF REPEAL OR KEEP, ASK)** Do you feel this way strongly or not strongly?

Generally speaking, how would you describe the condition of the state's road and highways—excellent, good, fair, poor or very poor?

And, how would you compare gas prices paid by motorists in California to those in most other U.S. states – much higher, somewhat higher, about the same, somewhat lower, or much lower?

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 (UC) system's flagship Berkeley campus, it is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS conducts periodic surveys of California public opinion on matters of politics, public policy and public issues through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*, housed within its newly established Citrin Center for Public Opinion Research. For a complete listing of stories issued by the poll go to <https://igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.