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After the Recall, More Californians Want Changes to the Process

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This blog post from Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO, will be published at 9:00 p.m. Pacific Time on Tuesday, November 9, 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 November 9. Once the post is live, it will be available online at <https://www.ppic.org/blog/after-the-recall-more-californians-want-changes-to-the-process/>.

The [2021 recall election](#) is over and done with. The 62% voting “no” on removing the governor followed the script of the 62% voting for Newsom in the [2018 election](#). The [California exit poll](#) showed that partisans were deeply divided on the recall, while the [September PPIC survey](#) found Democrats and Republicans unwavering in their opinions about Newsom throughout this tumultuous year. In reality, recall results were a foregone conclusion at a time of political polarization in a state where Democrats hold a 22-point edge in [voter registration](#).

If voters haven’t changed their minds about Newsom, have they changed their minds about the recall process itself? Here, we compare and contrast the results of our [July](#) and [November surveys](#) to illustrate a growing consensus that it is time to reform to the 110-year-old California recall election process.

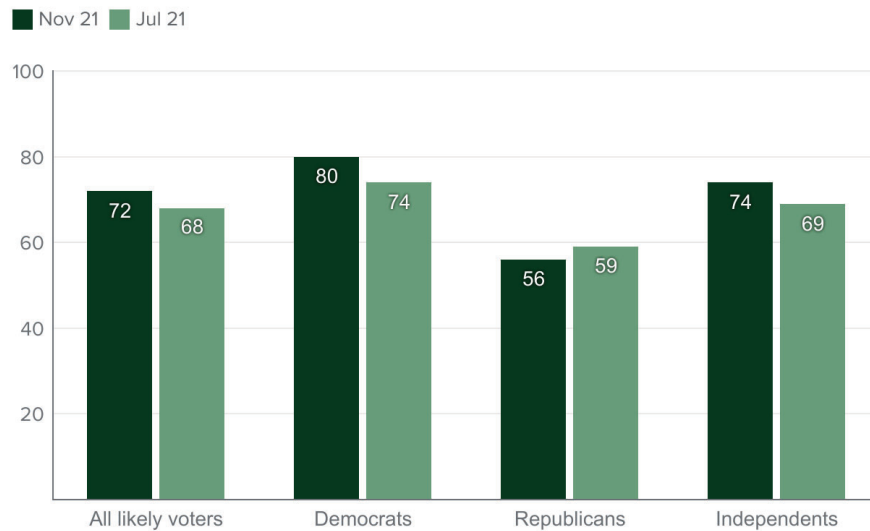
California likely voters have held steady in their strong belief that it is a “good thing” that the California Constitution provides a way to recall the state’s elected officials such as the governor (86% November, 86% July). Today, overwhelming majorities across partisan, regional, and demographic groups have a positive view of the recall process. But a large and growing share also say that the special election to recall Governor Newsom was a “waste of money” (79% November, 69% July). Today, overwhelming majorities across the state’s regions and demographic groups hold this view; nearly half of Republicans do, too (95% Democrats, 47% Republicans, 81% independents).

In this context, 78% of California likely voters now say that the recall election process in California is in need of changes (50% major, 28% minor), while just 21% say it is “basically fine the way it is.” In our July survey, 66% said that the recall process was in need of changes (30% major, 36% minor) and 32% said it is “basically fine the way it is.” Today, majorities across partisan, regional, and demographic groups say changes are needed in the recall process. Partisans differ on the need for major, rather than minor, changes (64% Democrats, 32% Republicans, 43% independents). But what stands out is the 20-point jump in the perception that major changes in the recall process are needed (50% November, 30% July).

We tested three recall reform proposals before and after the election. They all receive majority support among California likely voters in our surveys. One idea has the strongest and most consistent endorsement: a top-two runoff. Today, 72% support the idea of holding a runoff election between the top two replacement candidates if no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote. This is a 4-point increase from the 68% in support of this idea in our July survey. Currently, solid majorities across regions and demographic groups support this reform, as do majorities across partisan groups (80% Democrats, 56% Republicans, 74% independents). Our July survey also showed majority support across partisans (74% Democrats, 59% Republicans, 69% independents). Notably, no replacement candidate had over 50% of the vote in the September election.

An overwhelming majority of likely voters favor a top-two runoff election

% in favor of a top-two runoff election

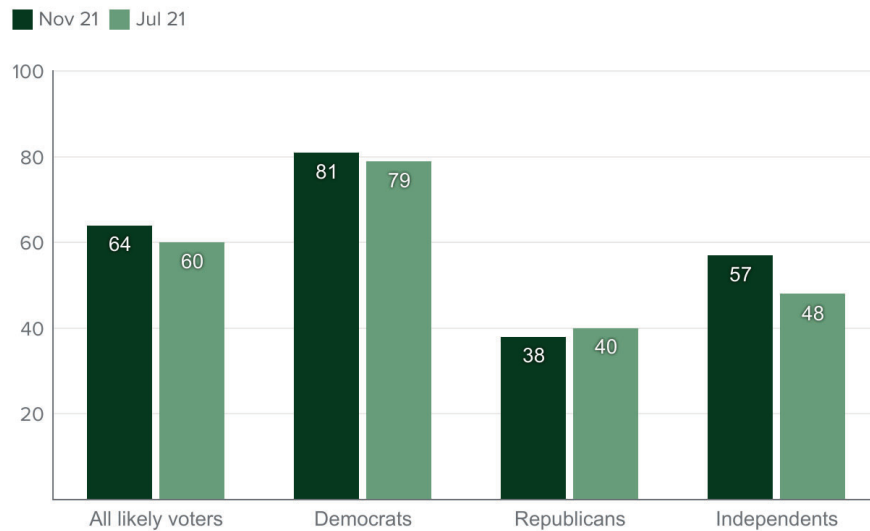


SOURCE: PPIC Statewide Survey, November 2021 (n=1,542) and July 2021 (n=1,117).
FROM: PPIC Blog, November 2021

Another reform idea with majority support: changing the reason for holding a recall election. Currently, an elected official may be recalled for any—or no—reason. Sixty-four percent of California likely voters support making a change so that an elected official could be recalled only for illegal or unethical activity—a 4-point increase from the 60% in support in our July survey. Today, majorities across regions and demographic groups support making illegal or unethical activity the only reason for a recall. Partisans are divided about this change (81% Democrats, 38% Republicans, 57% independents), as they were in our July survey (79% Democrats, 40% Republicans, 48% independents).

A solid majority of likely voters favor being able to recall elected officials only for illegal or unethical activity

% in favor of recalling elected officials only for illegal or unethical activity

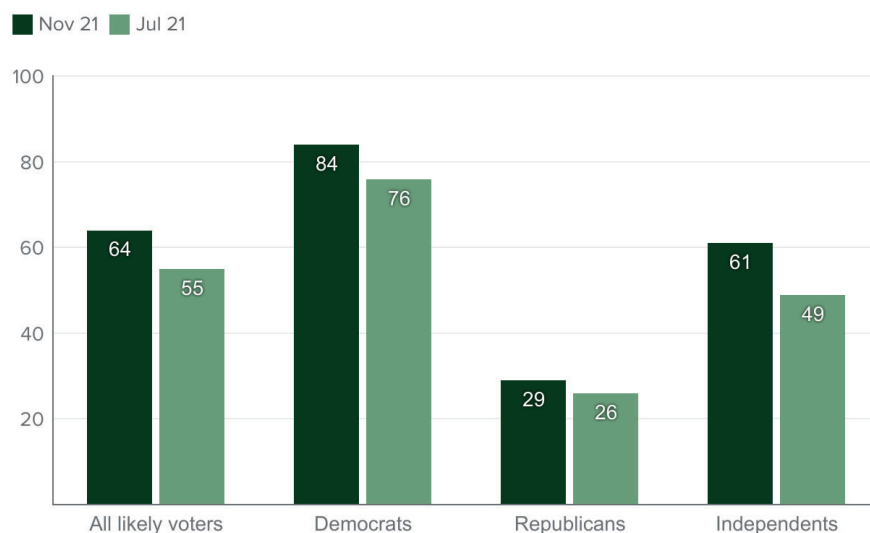


SOURCE: PPIC Statewide Survey, November 2021 (n=1,542) and July 2021 (n=1,117).
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A third reform possibility that receives majority support is raising the signature requirement from 12% to 25% of the total votes cast in the previous election for that office. Sixty-four percent would support the higher signature requirement—a 9-point increase from the 55% in support in our July survey. Today, majorities across regions and demographic groups are in favor of this reform. Partisans are divided (84% Democrats, 29% Republicans, 61% independents), as they were in our July survey (76% Democrats, 26% Republicans, 49% independents).

A solid majority of likely voters favor changing the recall signature requirement

% in favor of raising the recall signature requirement



SOURCE: PPIC Statewide Survey, November 2021 (n=1,542) and July 2021 (n=1,117).
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In another sign of the appetite for change after the September recall, 70% of California likely voters are in favor of creating a bipartisan commission that would hold public hearings and make recommendations for a state proposition on improving the recall process for the November 2022 ballot. Majorities across regions and demographic groups, and nearly half of Republicans (82% Democrats, 48% Republicans, 70% independents), are in favor of this idea. This fall, the Little Hoover Commission and legislative committees are holding hearings on reforming the California recall process.

Asking state voters to make changes to the California Constitution is always a heavy lift, especially in these divisive times when election reforms may be viewed cynically, as partisan maneuvers for political gain. Nonetheless, state leaders should seize the moment and give the voters a chance to weigh in on improvements to the California recall process. A large and growing share of California likely voters now say they know “a lot” or “some” about how the state’s recall process works (81% November, 61% July). But voters can have short memories and the 2021 recall may soon be forgotten. Right now, the window is open for reform, and the November 2022 election ballot is only a year away.