

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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**CALIFORNIANS INCREASINGLY
NEGATIVE ABOUT BUSH, THE
CONGRESS AND THE
DIRECTION OF THE U.S.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Californians are taking an increasingly negative view of the job performance of the President, the Congress and the direction of the U.S.

California voters' job appraisal of President George W. Bush has reached a new low, with nearly two in three (62%) disapprove of the job he is doing as the country's chief executive, while just one in three (32%) approve. In the sixth year of his tenure, these are the poorest ratings that Bush has ever received from this state's voters, and are among the lowest ever given to a sitting President in California.

Californians' views of the U.S. Congress have also turned decidedly negative, with 66% disapproving and 24% approving. This represents a significant decline in Congressional job performance over the past two years.

Voters also have a very dismal opinion as to the overall direction of the country – 64% believe the U.S. is seriously off on the wrong track and just 26% see it going in the right direction. This is the poorest assessment that Californians have given of the country's direction since 1992.

Bush's overall job appraisal reaches new low

During the first nine months of Bush's presidency in 2001 voters here were about evenly divided in their appraisal of the job he was doing. However, following the September 11 terrorist attacks that year Bush's job approval rose dramatically, reaching into the mid-seventy percent range. While still viewed more positively throughout 2002, his ratings began to fall. By the fall of 2003 Californians were again evenly divided in their appraisals of the President. Two years ago a pattern where disapproval was larger than approval began to emerge. Now it has reached a new low – 32% approving of his performance and nearly twice as many (62%) disapproving.

Almost nine in ten (85%) Democrats and two in three (64%) non-partisans disapprove of Bush's overall job performance. By contrast, six in ten Republicans (59%) approve of Bush and 32% disapprove.

Table 1
Trend of overall job appraisals of George W. Bush as President
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Approve</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
April 2006	62%	32	6
February 2006	56%	38	6
Late October 2005	60%	34	6
August 2005	55%	38	7
June 2005	56%	36	8
February 2005	56%	41	3
October 2004	54%	43	3
August 2004	55%	41	4
May 2004	52%	43	5
February 2004	51%	43	6
January 2004	42%	52	6
September 2003	48%	46	6
August 2003	45%	50	5
July 2003	43%	51	6
July 2002	28%	63	9
January 2002	21%	72	7
September 2001 (post-9/11 attack)	16%	74	10
September 2001 (pre-9/11 attack)	48%	41	11
May 2001	44%	42	14
<u>Party (April 2006)</u>			
Democrats	85%	11	4
Republicans	32%	59	9
Non-partisans/others	64%	30	6

* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

Bush's job ratings among the lowest ever recorded by *The Field Poll*

The current very low job appraisals that Californians have of President Bush are among the lowest – though not the lowest – given to a sitting U.S. President since *The Field Poll* regularly began measuring presidential job approval in the late 1970's. Bush's current 62% to 32% negative appraisal is now comparable to those given his father, George Herbert Walker Bush, in July 1992 and to Jimmy Carter in July 1980, near the end of their tenures as President. However, they are still better than those given President Richard Nixon immediately before his resignation.

The following table represents the lowest job performance ratings of every U.S. President since Nixon as measured by *The Field Poll*.

Table 2
Californians' lowest ratings of previous U.S. Presidents since Richard Nixon
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Approve</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>George W. Bush (R)</u> April 2006	62%	32	6
<u>Bill Clinton (D)</u> May 1995	44%	43	13
<u>George H.W. Bush (R)</u> July 1992	62%	37	1
<u>Ronald Reagan (R)</u> March 1982	47%	53	*
<u>Jimmy Carter (D)</u> July 1980	66%	33	1
<u>Gerald Ford (R)</u> November 1975	51%	47	2
<u>Richard Nixon (R)</u> August 1974	70%	24	6

* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

Bush's handling of the Iraq war at an all-time low

Three years ago Bush, as Commander-in-Chief of the nation's military forces and with the concurrence of Congress, invaded Iraq. Initially, majorities of California voters approved of Bush's handling of the war, but within months opinions began to change. Since May 2004 and continuing to February of this year, a relatively stable six in ten Californians disapproved of Bush's handling of the war in Iraq. Now, the proportion of Californians disapproving of his performance in handling the war has reached a new high (65%).

Democrats overwhelmingly (83%) disapprove of how Bush is handling the war in Iraq and a greater than two to one margin of non-partisans also disapprove (68% to 26%). A majority of Republicans approve, but only narrowly (56% to 41%)

Table 3
Trend of voter appraisals of the job President Bush is doing
in handling the war in Iraq
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Approve</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
April 2006	65%	31	4
February 2006	61%	35	4
Late October 2005	64%	33	3
August 2005	60%	34	6
June 2005	60%	36	5
February 2005	58%	39	3
October 2004	60%	37	3
August 2004	61%	36	3
May 2004	60%	37	3
February 2004	52%	43	5
January 2004	45%	51	4
September 2003	52%	40	8
August 2003	44%	52	4
April 2003	37%	60	3
<u>Party (April 2006)</u>			
Democrats	83%	13	4
Republicans	41%	56	3
Non-partisans/others	68%	26	6

Majority critical of Bush's handling of the economy

Californians' perceptions of Bush's job performance in handling the nation's economy, while not as negative as his ratings on the war in Iraq, are still substantially unfavorable. Almost six in ten (57%) disapprove of the job Bush is doing in regards to the economy, while just 36% approve.

Views of the President's economic performance are highly partisan. Greater than three in four Democrats (77%) rate Bush negatively on the economy, while just 15% approve. Republicans are of a different mind, with a majority (59%) approving and 34% disapproving. Non-partisans divide 53% disapprove and 40% approve.

Table 4
Trend of voter appraisals of the job President Bush is doing
in handling the economy
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Approve</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
April 2006	57%	36	7
February 2006	53%	41	6
Late October 2005	60%	35	5
August 2005	54%	38	8
June 2005	57%	37	6
February 2005	56%	38	6
October 2004	55%	40	5
August 2004	54%	41	5
May 2004	53%	42	5
February 2004	53%	42	5
January 2004	46%	49	5
September 2003	55%	39	6
August 2003	50%	43	7
July 2003	53%	43	4
September 2002	44%	48	8
July 2002	41%	49	10
April 2002	38%	55	7
December 2001	35%	57	8
<u>Party (April 2006)</u>			
Democrats	77%	15	8
Republicans	34%	59	7
Non-partisans/others	53%	40	7

Highly critical view of the U.S. Congress

Californians are also highly critical of the overall job performance of the U.S. Congress. Currently, two-thirds (66%) disapprove of its job performance, while just 24% approve. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and non-partisans register disapproval of the job that our lawmakers are doing in Washington.

Table 5			
Overall job performance of the U.S. Congress (among California registered voters)			
	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Approve</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
April 2006	66%	24	10
August 2004	52%	33	15
April 2003	39%	50	11
April 2002	39%	48	13
January 2002	33%	54	13
December 2001	32%	57	11
May 2001	38%	51	11
January 2001	35%	53	12
2000 (Average)	41%	45	14
1999 (Average)	57%	34	9
1998 (Average)	40%	44	16
1997 (Average)	54%	34	12
1996 (Average)	60%	36	3
1995 (Average)	51%	44	5
1994 (Average)	62%	32	6
1993 (Average)	65%	33	2
1992 (Average)	69%	30	1
<u>Party (April 2006)</u>			
Democrats	73%	17	10
Republicans	58%	32	10
Non-partisans/others	66%	24	10

Note: For surveys conducted prior to 1997, job performance was measured among all adults using a five-point scale, which was converted to the two-point approve-disapprove scale for comparative purposes.

Proportion saying U.S. heading in wrong direction highest since 1992

Almost two in three voters (64%) feel that the direction of the country is seriously off on the wrong track, while only in four (26%) feel it is moving in the right direction. Not since 1992, when the country was mired in a prolonged recession, have so many Californians taken such a negative view of the direction of the country.

Eighty-one percent of Democrats believe the U.S. is on the wrong track. Republicans are almost evenly divided on this question – 44% saying the country is moving in the right direction and 45% feeling it is on the wrong track. By a 61% to 28% margin non-partisans also see the country heading in the wrong direction.

Table 6
Are things in the U.S. generally going in the right direction, or
do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Wrong track</u>	<u>Right direction</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
April 2006	64%	26	10
February 2006	55%	36	9
Late October 2005	60%	30	10
August 2005	60%	33	7
June 2005	58%	34	8
February 2005	57%	36	7
October 2004	58%	38	4
August 2004	56%	38	6
May 2004	54%	37	9
February 2004	52%	35	13
January 2004	44%	47	9
September 2003	49%	44	7
August 2003	50%	44	6
July 2003	50%	43	7
September 2002	41%	47	12
July 2002	44%	47	9
January 2002	26%	60	14
December 2001	27%	68	5
September 2001 (pre-9/11 attack)	49%	43	8
January 2001	34%	55	11
2000 (average)	25%	67	8
1999 (average)	37%	54	9
1998 (average)	32%	57	11
1997 (average)	45%	44	11
1996 (average)	49%	34	17
1995 (average)	54%	33	13
1994 (average)	50%	41	9
1993 (average)	50%	42	8
1992 (average)	82%	16	2
<u>Party (April 2006)</u>			
Democrats	81%	10	9
Republicans	45%	44	11
Non-partisans/others	61%	28	11

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of Californians registered to vote. Interviewing was conducted in English and Spanish between the period April 3- 7, 2006. A total of 729 California adults were reached and screened by telephone, of whom 462 reported being registered to vote.

Telephone households were sampled using a random digit dial methodology, which randomly selects operating landline telephone exchanges within all area codes serving California households in proportion to population. Within each exchange, random samples of telephone numbers are created by adding random digits to each selected telephone exchange. This method gives each phone listing an equal chance of being selected and permits access to all landline telephone numbers both listed and unlisted.

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall registered voter sample have a sampling error or +/- 4.8 percentage points. There are other possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sampling, or sequencing or through undetected omissions or errors in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

Questions Asked

Thinking about the country overall, do you think things in the U.S. are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as President?

Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Bush is doing in handling the nation's economy?

Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Bush is doing in handling the war in Iraq?

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress is doing its job?