

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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**EARTHQUAKES FEARED MORE
THAN OTHER NATURAL
DISASTERS, BUT CALIFORNIANS
DON'T SEEM TOO WORRIED.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The 100th anniversary of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake serves as a reminder to all Californians that they live in an area subject to unpredictable, sudden and violent movements of the earth's surface. Reports of minor and not so minor earthquakes, coupled with warnings from scientists that another major quake can be expected to occur in the lifetimes of most residents are part of day-to-day living in California.

The Field Poll has examined how Californians feel about the threat of earthquakes at different intervals over the past twenty-seven years, and these measurements were updated in its latest poll conducted April 3-10. The following are the survey's main highlights:

- When asked about natural disasters, Californians single out earthquakes as the threat they fear most. About six in ten residents (59%) cite the dangers of an earthquake first when considering the dangers of natural disasters, far exceeding concerns about wildfire (17%), floods or mudslides (9%), or tsunamis or tidal waves (7%). Voters in the San Francisco Bay region (76%) and those living in Los Angeles County (70%) are more likely than residents living elsewhere to identify earthquakes as the natural disaster they fear most.
- Nevertheless, two in three Californians (67%) do not think the earthquake threat makes this state a more dangerous place to live than other parts of the country. When asked to compare the earthquake threat to the dangers that other natural disasters present to other places around the country, just 15% feel earthquakes make California a more dangerous place to live. These results are comparable to a 1985 *Field Poll*, when just 13% of residents felt that earthquake dangers made California a more dangerous place to live than other parts of the country, and 62% felt the risk of living here was similar to the dangers of other natural disasters elsewhere.

- Just 9% of Californians attest to worrying a lot about earthquakes, although another 51% say they worry a little about this. This represents a decline in public concern about earthquakes compared to surveys conducted in 1994, 1992 and 1989, although each of these surveys was conducted shortly after a large, damage-causing quake occurred somewhere in the state. Voters in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County appear to be a little more worried than residents elsewhere, with about seven in ten saying they worry a lot or a little about earthquakes.
- Compared to previous *Field Poll* surveys, Californians are now more apt to down rate the likelihood that an earthquake causing major damage will occur in their area. Currently, 35% say it is extremely or very likely that such an earthquake will strike their area, down from a high of 62% who felt this way in 1985. Voters in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County are somewhat more likely than others to feel a major quake is extremely or very likely to occur in their area.
- Most Californians don't see earthquakes as an imminent threat. When asked when they think a major earthquake will next strike their area, just 20% of Californians think this will likely occur within the next five years. This is down from 29% who felt a major quake would occur within five years in 1994. Somewhat larger proportions of voters living in Los Angeles County than voters elsewhere feel that an earthquake causing major damage is likely to strike their area in the next five years.
- Most Californians have an optimistic view about their chances of surviving a major earthquake. Three in four (74%) think they have an excellent or good chance of surviving a major earthquake should one strike their area. These results are generally similar to those found in a 1985 *Field Poll* on this topic.
- Californians now report being a little better prepared to deal with a major earthquake than they were in 1985. Statewide, 71% describe themselves and their families as very or somewhat prepared for a major earthquake, up from 58% who felt this way twenty-one years ago.
- When asked about the specific supplies and preparations they have made for an earthquake, extremely large majorities report having a flashlight (98%), a first-aid kit (86%), a three-day supply of food and water (86%), and a battery powered radio (80%). However, only half (50%) say they have made a family emergency plan, whereby they have arranged for a place for family members to meet or call following an earthquake disaster.

These are the main findings from the latest *Field Poll* of 917 California voters conducted by telephone in English and Spanish April 3-10.

Earthquakes are the natural disaster Californians fear the most

Earthquakes are the natural disaster that a majority of Californians (59%) fear the most. No other natural disaster comes close. Next most frequently cited are wildfires (17%), followed by floods and mudslides at 9%, and tsunamis and tidal waves (7%).

There are wide differences in Californians’ natural disaster fears depending on where one lives in the state. Three in four (76%) voters living in the San Francisco Bay Area and 70% of those living in Los Angeles County fear earthquakes the most. This declines to 54% among those living in Southern California outside of Los Angeles County, 35% in the Central Valley and 34% in parts of Northern California outside the Bay Area.

In Northern California outside the Bay Area wildfires are cited most (42%), while in the Central Valley, many (28%) also fear the threat of floods and mudslides most.

Table 1
Which natural disaster do Californians fear the most?
(among registered voters)

	<u>Earthquake</u>	<u>Wildfire</u>	<u>Flood/ mudslide</u>	<u>Tsunami/ tidal wave</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Total statewide	59%	17	9	7	2	6
<u>Region</u>						
San Francisco Bay Area	76%	9	5	5	1	4
Los Angeles County	70%	11	5	7	2	5
Other Southern California	54%	24	4	7	3	8
Central Valley	35%	18	28	7	2	10
Other Northern California*	34%	42	7	10	2	5

* Small sample base.

Risk of earthquakes no different than risks posed by other natural disasters elsewhere

Two-thirds (67%) of California voters think that earthquake risks here are similar to the risks posed by other natural disasters elsewhere. This compares to 15% who think the threat of an earthquake makes California a more dangerous place to live, while 17% say it presents less of a danger than elsewhere.

There is not a lot of difference in Californians’ opinions about this since 1985, although a slightly smaller proportion now feels the state is less dangerous than other places.

Table 2
Comparing dangers of a major California quake with other natural disasters in other parts of the country (among registered voters)

	<u>Less dangerous</u>	<u>About the same</u>	<u>More dangerous</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Total statewide - 2006	17%	67	15	1
1985	24%	62	13	1
<u>Region (2006)</u>				
San Francisco Bay Area	15%	65	18	2
Los Angeles County	13%	71	14	2
Other Southern California	22%	65	13	*
Central Valley	17%	66	15	2
Other Northern California**	14%	70	15	1

Note: 1985 survey conducted among all California adults.

* Less than ½ of 1%.

** Small sample base.

Earthquake worries lower now

The Field Poll has charted the degree to which Californians worry about earthquakes at different intervals over the past twenty-seven years. During this period several major earthquakes have occurred in the state. The findings from these earlier polls show that it is immediately after a quake when Californians' worries grow.

The current survey, taken in a period of relative earthquake calm, finds just 9% of Californians reporting they worry a lot about earthquakes and another 51% worry a little. This compares to 22% who said they worried a lot about earthquakes in 1994, shortly after the January 1994 Northridge earthquake.

The proportion of voters worrying a lot or a little about earthquakes is greater among residents of the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County than those living elsewhere.

Table 3
Degree of personal worry about earthquakes
(among registered voters)

	Worry a lot	Worry a little	Worry not at all
<u>Total statewide</u>			
2006	9%	51	40
1994*	22%	45	33
1992*	18%	46	36
1989*	18%	49	33
1985	11%	41	48
1983	8%	36	55
1979	5%	34	61
<u>Region (2006)</u>			
San Francisco Bay Area	7%	62	31
Los Angeles County	15%	53	32
Other Southern California	7%	50	43
Central Valley	6%	38	56
Other Northern California**	12%	35	53

Note: Previous surveys conducted among all adults.

* 1994 survey conducted immediately following the January 1994 Northridge earthquake, 1992 survey conducted following the June 1992 Yucca Valley earthquake, and 1989 survey conducted immediately following the October 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

** Small sample size.

Fewer think an earthquake is likely to occur in their area than felt this way in the past

Fewer Californians (35%) now feel it is extremely or very likely that an earthquake causing major damage will occur in their area than felt this way in the past. This is down from a high of 62% who reported feeling this way in 1985.

The belief that it is extremely or very likely that a major earthquake will occur in their area is more prevalent among residents of the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County than residents in other parts of the state.

Table 4
Likelihood of an earthquake causing major damage in your area
(among registered voters)

	<u>Extremely/ very likely</u>	<u>Somewhat likely</u>	<u>Not likely/ not sure</u>
<u>Total statewide</u>			
2006	35%	39	26
1994*	42%	32	26
1992*	37%	34	29
1989*	48%	31	21
1985	62%	27	11
1983	55%	28	11
1979	41%	32	22
<u>Region (2006)</u>			
San Francisco Bay Area	48%	33	19
Los Angeles County	45%	42	13
Other Southern California	30%	46	24
Central Valley	16%	33	51
Other Northern California**	31%	27	42

Note: Previous surveys conducted among all adults.

* 1994 survey conducted immediately following the January 1994 Northridge earthquake, 1992 survey conducted following the June 1992 Yucca Valley earthquake, and 1989 survey conducted immediately following the October 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

** Small sample size.

Major damage-causing quake not seen as imminent

Californians are less likely than they once were that an earthquake causing major damage will occur in their area in the next five years.

Just 20% now feel such an earthquake will occur in their area in the near term. Twelve years ago 29% believed this would be the case.

Voters in Los Angeles County (28%) are more likely, while those in the Central Valley (10%) are less likely than others to feel a major damage-causing quake will occur in their region within the next five years.

Table 5
When Californians expect an earthquake causing major damage to occur in their area (among registered voters)

	<u>Within 5 years</u>	<u>Within 10 years</u>	<u>Within 20 years</u>	<u>After that/ not likely to occur</u>	<u>Can't estimate</u>
Total statewide - 2006	20%	20	13	27	20
1994	29%	16	10	23	22
1992	28%	13	9	30	20
<u>Region (2006)</u>					
San Francisco Bay Area	16%	22	19	19	24
Los Angeles County	28%	18	13	16	25
Other Southern California	22%	20	12	26	20
Central Valley	10%	19	5	53	13
Other Northern California*	16%	11	10	42	21

* Small sample base.

Note: Previous surveys conducted among all adults.

Optimism about surviving a major quake

Three in four Californians (74%) feel they have an excellent or good chance of surviving a major earthquake should one strike their area. Just 4% feel they have only a poor or very poor chance of living after a quake, while 19% rate their chances as fair.

This generally optimistic view is fairly consistent across all major parts of the state, and is similar to opinions voiced in a 1985 *Field Poll*, when the question was last asked.

Table 6
Chances of surviving a major earthquake in your area (among registered voters)

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor/ very poor</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Total statewide - 2006	34%	40	19	4	3
1985	39%	39	17	5	*
<u>Region (2006)</u>					
San Francisco Bay Area	39%	41	12	3	5
Los Angeles County	29%	39	23	5	4
Other Southern California	32%	42	18	4	4
Central Valley	33%	41	23	3	*
Other Northern California**	49%	28	20	3	*

* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

** Small sample base.

Note: Previous survey conducted among all adults.

Are residents prepared?

One in six (17%) Californians describe themselves as being very prepared for a major earthquake, another 54% say they are somewhat prepared, while 28% admit to being not prepared at all. As mixed as these assessments are, they indicate that Californians now say they are a little better prepared than they were in 1985, when 41% said they were not at all prepared for a major earthquake.

Table 7
How prepared are you and your family for a major earthquake?
(among registered voters)

	<u>Very prepared</u>	<u>Somewhat prepared</u>	<u>Not prepared</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Total statewide - 2006	17%	54	28	1
1985	12%	46	41	1
<u>Region (2006)</u>				
San Francisco Bay Area	16%	54	28	2
Los Angeles County	14%	59	27	*
Other Southern California	19%	55	25	1
Central Valley	13%	51	34	2
Other Northern California**	27%	37	36	*

* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

** Small sample base.

Note: Previous survey conducted among all adults.

Supplies and preparations made in the event of an earthquake

Extremely large majorities of Californians say that in the event of a major earthquake, they have available supplies such as a flashlight (98%), a first-aid kit (86%), a three-day supply of food and water (86%) and a battery-powered radio (80%). On the other hand, only half of Californians (50%) say they have a family emergency plan, whereby they have arranged for a place for family members to meet or call after an earthquake or disaster.

There is not a lot of variation across the state's major regions regarding the supplies residents have or family plans made in the event of a major earthquake.

Table 8
Supplies/preparations of Californians in the event of a major earthquake
(among registered voters)

	<u>Flashlight</u>	<u>First-aid kit</u>	<u>3-day supply of food/water</u>	<u>Battery-powered radio</u>	<u>Family emergency plan</u>
Total statewide	98%	86%	86%	80%	50%
<u>Region</u>					
San Francisco Bay Area	98	83	83	76	48
Los Angeles County	97	83	87	84	50
Other Southern California	98	89	88	79	53
Central Valley	99	91	84	80	50
Other Northern California*	98	82	94	82	41

* Small sample base.

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 by telephone in English and Spanish between the period April 3- 10, 2006. A total of 1,431 California adults were reached and screened by telephone, of whom 917 reported being registered to vote. The sample sizes of the registered voter subgroups reported in this release are as follows: San Francisco Bay Area (186), Los Angeles County (205), Other Southern California (301), Central Valley (169) and other Northern California (56).

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 of +/- 3.3 percentage points. The sampling error estimates applicable to subgroups of the registered voter population would be larger. 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

Next, I am going to read some types of natural disasters that sometimes threaten Californians – wildfire, flood or mudslide, earthquake, tsunami or tidal wave, or something else? (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER) Of these, which one do you personally fear the most?

The next few questions are about earthquakes. First, when comparing the likelihood of a major earthquake in California with other natural disasters that strike other parts of the country, do you think that the chances of a major earthquake makes California a more dangerous place to live, a less dangerous place to live or is it generally about the same as other places?

How much do you personally worry about earthquakes – a lot, a little or not at all?

How likely do you believe it is that an earthquake causing major damage will occur in your general area – extremely likely, very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely or not at all likely?

When do you think such a quake might occur – in the next year or two, within five years, within ten years, within twenty years or after that?

What do you think your own chances are of surviving a major earthquake that struck your area? Would you say your chances of surviving are excellent, good, fair, poor or very poor?

How prepared would you say you and your family are for a major earthquake – very prepared, somewhat prepared, not too prepared or not at all prepared?

I am going to read some actions people can take to prepare for an earthquake. Please tell me which apply to you and your household. (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER) Do you or does your household have (SEE RELEASE FOR ITEMS READ)?