

# 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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**WHILE SCHWARZENEGGER'S JOB RATING REMAINS FAVORABLE, THE LEGISLATURE'S IS NOT. CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR INITIATIVE TO CHANGE THE STATE'S TERM LIMITS LAW.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

There has been a modest easing in the very favorable job approval rating that voters have of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Currently, a 57% to 31% majority approves of his overall performance in office, down slightly from a 60% approve and 29% disapprove found last March.

On the other hand, voter opinions of the legislature have declined markedly. At present, just 33% approve of the job it is doing, while 51% disapprove. This contrasts with previous improvements in voter assessments late last year and earlier this year, following many years of mostly negative job ratings.

Voters' previous optimistic view of the direction that the state was heading has also taken a negative turn. Last March, 52% thought the state was going in the right direction and 38% believed it was on the wrong track. Now, opinions divide 42% right direction and 45% wrong track.

While seven out of ten (70%) voters support the idea of limiting the terms of California's elected officials, likely voters in next February's primary election also support, by a 59% to 39% margin, an initiative that would modify the state's term limits law.

These are the findings of the latest *Field Poll* survey of California voters completed last week.

### **Schwarzenegger's job ratings remain positive**

There has been only a slight easing in the relatively high opinion that voters have of the overall job that the governor is doing. Fifty-seven percent now approve of Schwarzenegger, while 31% disapprove. In March Schwarzenegger's approval rating hit a three-year high at 60% and a three-year low in disapproval at 29%.

The view that Republicans have of the governor is very favorable – 69% approve and 33% disapprove. A plurality of Democrats (48%) approve of Schwarzenegger’s performance, while 39% disapprove. Non-partisans are quite positive in their assessments of the governor, with 57% approving and 30% disapproving.

	<b><u>Approve</u></b>	<b><u>Disapprove</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
<b>August 2007</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>12</b>
March 2007	60%	29	11
September 2006	48%	37	15
July 2006	49%	40	11
May 2006	41%	46	13
April 2006	39%	47	14
February 2006	40%	49	11
October 2005	37%	56	7
August 2005	36%	52	12
June 2005	37%	53	10
February 2005	55%	35	10
September 2004	65%	22	13
August 2004	65%	22	13
May 2004	65%	23	12
February 2004	56%	26	18
January 2004	52%	27	21
<b><u>Party (August 2007)</u></b>			
Democrats	48%	39	13
Republicans	69%	33	8
Non-partisans/others	57%	30	13

### **Big drop in legislature’s job rating**

Last March, for the first time in four years, slightly more voters approved (42%) of the legislature's job performance as disapproved (40%). This represented a big improvement over much lower job performance ratings found by *The Field Poll* between 2003 and 2006.

Now, voter perceptions of the job that the legislature is doing have turned negative, with just 33% approving and 51% disapproving.

Democrats are split in their appraisal of the legislature – 40% approve and 43% disapprove. By contrast, Republicans overwhelmingly disapprove (66% to 33%). Non-partisans also hold a more negative than positive view (30% approve and 45% disapprove).

**Table 2**  
**Trend of voter appraisals of the job the state legislature is doing overall**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>August 2007</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>16</b>
March 2007	42%	40	18
September 2006	34%	46	20
May 2006	26%	51	23
April 2006	28%	56	16
February 2006	31%	48	21
October 2005	26%	58	16
August 2005	27%	54	19
June 2005	24%	57	19
February 2005	34%	52	14
September 2004	33%	46	21
August 2004	33%	49	18
May 2004	27%	52	21
February 2004	26%	58	16
January 2004	23%	62	15
July 2003	19%	67	14
April 2003	31%	51	18
2002 (average)	40%	40	20
2001 (average)	43%	37	20
2000 (average)	48%	25	27
1999 (average)	45%	28	27
1998 (average)	45%	33	22
1997 (average)	38%	40	22
1996 (average)	41%	49	10
1995 (average)	34%	59	7
1993 (average)	28%	64	8
1992 (average)	32%	64	4
1990 (average)	45%	48	7
1988 (average)	57%	36	7
1983 (average)	43%	49	8
<u>Party (August 2007)</u>			
Democrats	40%	43	17
Republicans	22%	66	12
Non-partisan/other	36%	45	19

*Note: Measures prior to 1996 conducted among all adults using a three- or five-point response scale, which was converted to the current two-point approve/disapprove scale for comparative purposes.*

**Continuing strong support for term limits**

As they have for the past ten years, a very large majority of California voters believe that the terms of elected officials should be limited. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans all feel this way.

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**Table 3**  
**Trend of voter attitudes about limiting the terms of**  
**elected officials in California**  
**(among California registered voters)**

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	<b><u>Terms should be limited</u></b>	<b><u>Allow to run for as many terms as wanted</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
<b>August 2007</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>
March 2007	66%	28	6
February 2002	67%	29	4
January 2002	64%	31	5
September 2001	62%	33	5
May 1997	65%	30	5
<u>Party (August 2007)</u>			
Democrats	64%	33	3
Republicans	79%	17	4
Non-partisans/others	65%	29	6

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### **Early support for initiative to amend term limits law**

While continuing to favor the idea of limiting the terms of elected officials, likely voters in next February's primary election support an initiative to modify the state's term limits law. An initiative likely to appear on the February 5<sup>th</sup> presidential primary ballot will ask voters to reduce the total years a legislator can serve in both legislative houses from 14 to 12 years, but allow legislators to serve their entire 12 years in either the Assembly or the Senate. By a 59% to 30% margin, likely voters support this proposal. This represents a slight increase in support from last March when the initiative was favored 53% to 39%. Currently, majorities of Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans are backing the proposed initiative.

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**Table 4**

**Voter preferences toward the "Limits on Legislators' Terms in Office" initiative reducing the total years a legislator can serve in the Assembly and Senate from 14 to 12 years, but allowing them to serve their entire 12 years in either house (among likely voters in the February 2008 primary)**

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	<u>Inclined to vote...</u>		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
<b>August</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>11</b>
March	53%	39	8
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	54%	33	13
Republicans	67%	25	8
Non-partisans/others	57%	33	10

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**Initiative's provision allowing legislative leaders to avoid being termed out not much of a factor**

One consequence of the new term limits initiative, should it pass, is that many current legislators, including the present leaders in the Senate and Assembly, would avoid being termed out of office next year. This is because the initiative contains a provision allowing legislators to serve up to 12 years in the legislative body in which they are currently serving, and while many have served a total of 12 years in both houses, they have not reached this threshold where they currently serve.

After voters were informed of this and asked what effect this would have on their support or opposition to the initiative, more than two-thirds (68%) say this has no effect on their opinion of the initiative. This compares to one in eight (13%) who say this information makes them less inclined to support the initiative, while as many (14%) say it makes them more inclined to support it.

**Table 5**  
**Impact that the initiative's "transition period" (allowing current legislators including leaders of the State Senate and Assembly to avoid being termed out of office) has on support for the initiative (among likely voters in the February 2008 primary)**

	<b><u>More inclined to support</u></b>	<b><u>No effect</u></b>	<b><u>Less inclined to support</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
<b>August 2007</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>
March 2007	19%	55	22	4
<b><u>Party</u></b>				
Democrats	12%	73	9	6
Republicans	13%	60	21	6
Non-partisans/others	18%	70	7	5
<b><u>Preferences toward the initiative</u></b>				
Yes voters	15%	68	13	4
No voters	12%	69	16	3
Undecided	11%	69	6	14

**Direction of the state takes a negative turn**

Between the period July 2006 through March 2007, more Californians felt the state was heading in the right direction rather than thought it was seriously off on the wrong track. Now, that former positive assessment has changed, with 45% saying the state is on the wrong track and 42% believing it is going in the right direction.

**Table 6**  
**Overall direction that California is heading**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<u>Right direction</u>	<u>Wrong track</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>August 2007</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>13</b>
March 2007	52%	38	10
September 2006	49%	36	15
July 2006	47%	41	12
May 2006	32%	57	11
April 2006	28%	56	16
February 2006	31%	55	14
October 2005	30%	63	7
August 2005	30%	57	13
June 2005	28%	60	12
February 2005	35%	53	12
September 2004	46%	38	16
May 2004	37%	51	12
February 2004	35%	54	11
August 2003	16%	76	8
July 2003	18%	75	7
April 2003	26%	65	9
September 2002	33%	54	13
January 2002	41%	50	9
2001 (average)	43%	50	7
2000 (average)	58%	35	7
1999 (average)	52%	34	14
1998 (average)	48%	42	10
1997 (average)	36%	54	10
1996 (average)	39%	49	12
1995 (average)	32%	57	11
1994 (average)	21%	70	9
1993 (average)	11%	83	6
1992 (average)	7%	90	3
1989 (average)	50%	42	8
1988 (average)	52%	43	5
<u>Party (August 2007)</u>			
Democrats	45%	41	14
Republicans	39%	50	11
Non-partisan/other	42%	47	11

*Note: Surveys prior to 1996 conducted among all California adults, not just registered adults.*

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 1,029 registered voters statewide. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish August 3-12, 2007. Up to eight attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize voter fatigue, the statewide voters sample was divided into two random subsamples of 536 and 493 voters each on some of the questions. Voter preferences regarding the term limits initiative were asked of 848 likely voters in the February 2005 presidential primary, while several of the other questions about term limits were asked of random subsamples of this population.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected at random from a statewide list of registered voters in California. When drawing samples from registration-based lists, *The Field Poll* stratifies the sample by region and age to insure that the poll includes adequate representations of voters across each major region of the state and across different age categories. Once a voter's name and telephone number has been selected, interviews are attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews can be conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the results are weighted slightly to *Field Poll* estimates of the demographic and regional characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on sample size. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from findings based on the overall sample of 1,029 registered voters are subject to a sampling error of +/- 3.2 percentage points. Findings from the likely voter sample have a sampling error of +/- 3.5 percentage points, while findings from the random sub-samples have a sampling error of +/-4.5 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, the sequencing of questions, the rigor with which sampling procedures are implemented, as well as other factors.

### **Questions Asked**

(ASKED OF RANDOM SUBSAMPLES OF ALL VOTERS) Things about things here in this state, do you think things in California are generally going in the right direction or do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?

(ASKED OF ALL REGISTERED VOTERS) Do you approve or disapprove of the way Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as Governor of California?

(ASKED OF RANDOM SUBSAMPLES OF ALL VOTERS) Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the California state legislature is doing its job?

(ASKED OF RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF LIKELY VOTERS) Do you feel that state legislators and elected officials in California should be limited in the number of terms they are allowed to serve in office, or should they be allowed to run for as many terms as they choose?

(ASKED OF ALL LIKELY VOTERS) Have you seen, read or heard anything about a statewide ballot proposition having to do with term limits that will likely appear on the February 2008 primary election ballot?

(ASKED OF ALL LIKELY VOTERS) (As you know) this proposition is called the "Limits on Legislators' Terms in Office" initiative. It reduces the total amount of time a person may serve in the state legislature from 14 years to 12 years and allows a person to serve a total of 12 years either in the Assembly, the Senate or a combination of both. It provides a transition period to allow current members to serve a total of 12 consecutive years in the house in which they are currently serving, regardless of any prior service in another house. If the election were being held today, would you vote Yes or No on this proposition?

(ASKED OF RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF LIKELY VOTERS) Because the initiative permits a transition period for current members, many of the leaders in the State Senate and Assembly, including Senate President Don Perata and Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez would avoid being termed out of office next year if the proposed term limits initiative passes. Does this make you more inclined to support the initiative, less inclined to support it or does it have no effect on you?