

# 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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#### **REACTIONS TO RISING GAS PRICES:**

**MANY ARE CUTTING BACK ON OTHER SPENDING AND TAKING GAS-SAVING ACTIONS. SUPPORT FOR MAINTAINING STATE'S AUTO EMISSIONS STANDARDS, BUT ALSO EXPANDING NUCLEAR POWER AND LNG FACILITIES. OFFSHORE OIL DRILLING AND DRILLING ON GOVERNMENT LANDS OPPOSED.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The steady unrelenting rise in gasoline prices is seen as an increasingly serious problem in this state and has caused two in three Californians (68%) to cut back on their spending in other areas. Many motorists are employing a variety of gas saving measures, such as driving less (78%), buying lower grades of gasoline (67%), and using their more fuel efficient vehicle (59%). Smaller proportions also say they are carpooling more (28%), employees are taking jobs closer to their home or moving closer to their worksite (28%) or adjusting work hours so they are not commuting to the worksite as often (25%). Others report having replaced a car or truck with a more fuel-efficient vehicle (27%), and 17% say they are using public transportation more.

While Californians support a number of energy production measures, including building more nuclear power plants (50% to 41%) and facilities for liquefied natural gas (63% to 19%) in California, by a 70% to 23% margin voters also want the state's auto emissions standards to be maintained. In addition, voters oppose more offshore oil drilling (51% to 43%) or allowing drilling on government lands (52% to 44%).

These are the main findings from a new statewide *Field Poll* completed among a representative sample of 809 California registered voters this week.

**Seriousness of recent gasoline price increases**

The proportion of Californians who describe the recent gasoline price increases as “very serious” has increased from 32% in 2005 to 35% last year to 47% at the present time. Another 34% of voters now say the situation is somewhat serious. Just 19% believe the situation is not serious.

Lower income voters, Latinos, African-Americans and voters living in inland counties are more likely than others to describe the gasoline price situation as very serious.

**Table 1**  
**Seriousness of recent gasoline price increases in California**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Very serious</b>	<b>Somewhat serious</b>	<b>Not serious</b>
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>
March 2007	35%	35	29
August 2005	32%	39	25
<u>Household income (July 2008)</u>			
Less than \$20,000*	70%	22	7
\$20,000 - \$39,999	58%	29	11
\$40,000 - \$79,999	51%	33	15
\$80,000 - \$99,999*	45%	34	21
\$100,000 or more	29%	42	29
<u>Region (July 2008)</u>			
Coastal counties	43%	37	20
Inland counties	57%	28	15
<u>Gender (July 2008)</u>			
Male	43%	35	22
Female	50%	33	16
<u>Race/ethnicity (July 2008)</u>			
White non-Hispanic	40%	38	21
Latino	65%	25	10
African-American*	62%	29	9
Asian/other	46%	30	24

\* Small sample base.

Differences between 100% and the sum of percentages for each row equal the proportion of voters with no opinion.

**Cut backs in other spending areas**

Two in three voters (68%) say recent gas price increases have caused them to cut back in other areas of spending, such as food, clothing and dining out. This is up from 44% who reported cutting back when facing gas price increases last year and 40% said this in 2005.

The segments of voters who are the most likely to report having cut back in other areas of spending are lower income voters, Latinos, African-Americans, voters living in inland counties, and women.

**Table 2**  
**Have the recent gasoline price increases caused you to cut back**  
**other areas of spending, such as food, clothing or dining out?**  
**(among registered voters)**

	Yes, have cut back	No, have not
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>32</b>
March 2007	44%	56
August 2005	40%	60
<u>Household income (July 2008)</u>		
Less than \$20,000*	87%	13
\$20,000 - \$39,999	81%	19
\$40,000 - \$79,999	74%	26
\$80,000 - \$99,999*	65%	35
\$100,000 or more	52%	48
<u>Region (July 2008)</u>		
Coastal counties	65%	35
Inland counties	76%	24
<u>Gender (July 2008)</u>		
Male	62%	38
Female	74%	26
<u>Race/ethnicity (July 2008)</u>		
White non-Hispanic	63%	37
Latino	80%	20
African-American*	86%	14
Asian/other	69%	31

\* Small sample base.

### **How Californians are saving on gasoline expenses**

Californians are doing a number of things to try and save on gasoline expenses. The survey finds that three in four (78%) are now driving less around town or shortening weekend or vacation trips. This is up from 59% who said this in August 2005 following a spike in gasoline prices at that time.

Another two in three (67%) say they are now buying a cheaper grade of gasoline, while another 59% report driving their more fuel efficient vehicle to a greater extent to save on gas.

Somewhat smaller proportions also report taking the following steps to reduce their gasoline consumption:

- Car pooling more to and from work or to shop (28%), up from 20% in 2005.
- Workers reporting taking jobs closer to their home or have moved closer to their worksite (28%).
- Replacing a car or truck with a more fuel efficient vehicle (27%).
- Workers adjusting work hours so they are not commuting to their worksite as often (25%).
- 17% report using public transportation more often, up from 13% who said this in 2005.

**Table 3**  
**Things Californians are doing to save on the amount**  
**of gasoline they consume – 2008 vs. 2005**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Already doing this</b>	<b>Considering doing this</b>	<b>Not doing this/not applicable</b>
<b>"Driving less around town or shortening weekend or vacation car trips."</b>			
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>16</b>
August 2005	59%	10	31
<b>"Buying a cheaper grade of gas."</b>			
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>29</b>
August 2005	N/A		
<b>"Using your more fuel efficient vehicle more frequently."</b>			
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>37</b>
August 2005	54%	4	42
<b>"Carpooling to and from work or to shop."</b>			
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>65</b>
August 2005	20%	7	73
<b>"Moving closer to your job/taking job closer to home." (of those employed outside the home)</b>			
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>60</b>
August 2005	N/A		
<b>"Replaced car or truck with a more fuel-efficient vehicle."</b>			
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>49</b>
August 2005	28%	21	51
<b>"Adjusting work hours so they do not commute as often to their worksite." (of those employed outside the home)</b>			
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>68</b>
August 2005	N/A		
<b>"Using public transit more."</b>			
<b>July 2008</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>69</b>
August 2005	13%	9	78

N/A: Not asked in 2005.

### **Mixed views about energy policy proposals**

Californians hold mixed views about various energy policies now being debated in Sacramento and Washington.

Majorities favor several energy expansion proposals to increase energy production and supply. These include building tanker terminals, pipelines and facilities for liquefied natural gas, supported by a 63% to 19% margin, and building more nuclear power plants in the state, endorsed by a 50% to 41% margin.

On the other hand, seven in ten (70%) favor maintaining California's emissions standards even if this means getting slightly fewer miles per gallon.

In addition, more voters in this state remain opposed to the idea of allowing oil companies to drill more oil and gas wells along the California coast. However the current margin of opposition (51% opposed vs. 43% in favor) is less than it was in the three previous *Field Poll* surveys conducted since 1990.

Opposition has also weakened regarding the idea of relaxing restrictions prohibiting the drilling of oil and gas wells on government parklands and forest reserves. At present 52% of voters oppose this idea, while 44% are in favor. This compares to higher levels of opposition in previous *Field Polls* conducted since 1984.

There are big partisan differences in voter opinions with regard to most, but not all, of these issues. For example, large majorities of Democrats and non-partisans oppose allowing oil companies to drill more offshore oil and gas wells and also object to relaxing restrictions prohibiting oil drilling on government parklands and forest preserves. By contrast, Republicans back both of these proposals by a greater than two to one margin.

Support for building of more nuclear power plants in California also divides voters along party lines. Republicans support this policy by a greater than three to one margin, while a plurality of Democrats are opposed. Non-partisans are supportive but by a narrow margin.

On two of the other energy issues, majorities of Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans are in agreement. These include maintaining the state's auto emissions standards, even if this results in slightly fewer miles per gallon of gasoline and building more liquefied natural gas facilities in California.

**Table 4**  
**Trend of voter opinion about various energy-related policies**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>"The building of tanker terminals, pipelines and facilities for liquefied natural gas should be allowed in California."</b>			
<b>2008 (July)</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>
2005	61%	22	17
1984	61%	24	15
1981	66%	19	15
1980	65%	21	14
1978	70%	21	9
<b>Party (July 2008)</b>			
Democrats	51%	27	22
Republicans	77%	11	12
Non-partisan/other	64%	17	9
<b>"The building of more nuclear power plants should be allowed in California."</b>			
<b>2008 (July)</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>9</b>
1990	38%	56	6
1984	33%	61	6
1981	40%	55	5
1980	41%	53	6
1979	37%	55	8
1978	51%	44	5
1977	63%	24	13
1976	69%	19	12
<b>Party (July 2008)</b>			
Democrats	41%	50	9
Republicans	64%	26	10
Non-partisan/other	48%	43	9
<b>"California's automobile emissions standards should be maintained even if it means getting slightly fewer miles per gallon of gasoline."</b>			
<b>2008 (July)</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7</b>
2005	75%	22	3
1984	74%	21	5
1981	65%	31	4
<b>Party (July 2008)</b>			
Democrats	70%	23	7
Republicans	72%	23	5
Non-partisan/other	67%	25	8

*Note: Poll results prior to 1985 based on all California adults.*

**Table 4 (cont'd)**  
**Trend of voter opinion about various energy-related policies**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<hr/>			
"Oil companies should be allowed to drill more oil and gas wells in state tidelands along the California seacoast."			
<hr/>			
<b>2008 (July)</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>6</b>
2005	39%	56	5
2001	38%	56	6
1990	32%	62	6
1984	43%	53	4
1981	49%	45	6
1980	56%	38	6
1979	57%	38	5
1978	51%	43	6
1977	49%	40	11
<hr/>			
<u>Party (July 2008)</u>			
Democrats	31%	61	8
Republicans	63%	32	5
Non-partisan/other	35%	58	7
<hr/>			
"Current government restrictions prohibiting the drilling of oil and gas wells on government parklands and forest reserves should be relaxed."			
<hr/>			
<b>2008 (July)</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>4</b>
2005	38%	59	3
1990	35%	59	6
1984	36%	60	4
1981	43%	53	4
1980	35%	56	9
<hr/>			
<u>Party (July 2008)</u>			
Democrats	33%	62	5
Republicans	65%	32	3
Non-partisan/other	34%	60	6
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*Note: Poll results prior to 1985 based on all California adults.*

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 809 California registered voters. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish July 8-14, 2008. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize possible respondent fatigue, the overall sample was divided into two random subsamples of 422 and 387 registered voters on some questions. Up to six attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected at random from a statewide list of registered voters in California. Once a voter's name and telephone number has been selected, interviews are attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews are 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 were weighted slightly to align the overall sample to characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depends on the sample size. The maximum sampling error for results based on the sample of 809 registered voters is +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The maximum sampling error for results based on either of the two random subsamples is +/- 4.9 percentage points.

The maximum sampling error is based on percentages in the middle of the sampling distribution (percentages around 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (percentages around 10% or around 90%) have a smaller margin of error. The maximum sampling error will be larger for analyses based on subgroups of the overall sample. While there are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error, the overall design and execution of the survey minimized the potential for these other sources of error.

### **Questions Asked**

The price of gasoline has been increasing in California in recent months. How serious a problem does the recent increase in gasoline prices create for you and your household – very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious?

Have the recent increases in gasoline prices caused you and your family to cut back on other areas of spending, such as food, clothing or dining out?

(ASKED OF A RANDOM SAMPLE OF VOTERS)

I am going to read some proposals that have been made that attempt to deal with the rising cost of energy. For each please tell me whether you agree or disagree. (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Do you agree or disagree? (SEE RELEASE FOR STATEMENT READ)

(ASKED OF A RANDOM SAMPLE OF VOTERS)

I am going to read some things that people can do to save on the amount of gasoline they consume. As I read each one, please tell me if you are already doing this, are considering doing this or not doing this. (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Are you already doing this, are you considering doing this, or are you not doing this? (SEE RELEASE FOR ITEMS READ)