

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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**RECORD LOW JOB RATINGS FOR
STATE LEGISLATURE AS VOTERS SEE
BUDGET DELAY AS INCREASINGLY
SERIOUS. GOVERNOR'S AND
DEMOCRATS' BUDGET PLANS
PREFERRED OVER GOP PROPOSAL.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

As the deadlock in the state's budget negotiations drags on without any resolution, a record low proportion of voters (15%) approves of the job performance of the state legislature. Voters are increasingly concerned about the delay in passing a state budget, with 82% now describing the situation as very serious, up from 68% in July and 58% in December.

When voters are asked to react to three different proposals that have been advanced in Sacramento as ways to resolve most of the estimated \$15.2 billion short-fall, no one proposal is endorsed by a majority, although the plans put forward by the Democrats in the legislature (32%) and by the Governor (31%) are preferred by more voters than those who support a plan supported by GOP legislative leaders (19%).

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll* of a random sample of 504 registered voters completed this week.

All-time low job rating for the state legislature

Just 15% of California voters now approve of the job being done of the state's lawmakers, while 73% disapprove. This is the lowest approval rating ever recorded for the state legislature by *The Field Poll* in repeated measures taken during the past twenty-five years.

Criticism of the legislature crosses party lines, as there are only minor differences in the approval ratings given by Democrats (17%), Republicans (12%) and non-partisans (16%).

Table 1
Trend of voter appraisals of the job the state legislature is doing
(among registered voters)

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
September 2008	15%	73	12
July 2008	27%	57	16
May 2008	30%	57	13
December 2007	39%	42	19
October 2007	38%	40	22
August 2007	33%	51	16
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>Previous record low</u>			
July 1992	23%	73	4

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.

Voters view budget delay as increasingly serious

At the end of last year, when it became clear that California would be facing a massive deficit in the 2008-09 fiscal year, about six in ten voters (58%) interviewed by *The Field Poll* viewed the deficit situation as a very serious matter. As the weeks and months have dragged on without any resolution, an increasing majority of voters have come to view the situation as very serious. In the current survey 82% take this position, up from 68% in July.

There are no significant partisan differences among rank-and-file voters as to the perceived seriousness of the matter. Greater than three in four Democrats (82%), Republicans (84%) and non-partisans (78%) each view the budget deficit as a very serious matter.

	Very serious	Somewhat serious	Not serious	No opinion
Statewide - September 2008	82%	13	4	1
July 2008	68%	24	5	3
December 2007	58%	32	5	5
Party (Sept. 2008)				
Democrats	82%	13	4	1
Republicans	84%	10	5	1
Non-partisans/others	78%	18	4	*

* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

Voter preferences regarding the three major budget proposals

Various proposals have been advanced to deal with the state's projected \$15.2 billion deficit. Over the past two months they have been reduced to three basic alternatives, each of which is aimed at taking care of most of the shortfall.

One proposal offered by Democratic legislators calls for reducing \$6 billion in state spending and raising about \$8 billion in revenues by increasing state income taxes of high-income individuals and businesses. A Republican proposal would cut spending by about \$11 billion and borrow about \$2 billion from future state lottery proceeds. The Governor's alternative would cut spending by about \$8 billion and increase revenues by about \$5 billion by hiking the sales tax one cent on the dollar.

Voters in this survey were read each of the proposals and asked which they favored the most. Only the basic elements of each proposal were posed without any reference to who was backing them.

In this context, the Democratic legislative proposal (32%) and the Governor's plan (31%) each receive about the same level of support, while fewer (19%) favor the Republican plan. One in seven voters (14%) volunteer that they favored none of the three proposals and another 4% have no opinion.

Registered Democrats and non-partisans are more likely to support the Democratic plan. Registered Republicans are more supportive of the Governor’s proposal than they are of the legislative Republicans’ proposal.

Table 3
Voter reactions to three proposals made to resolve
the state budget deficit
(among registered voters)

	Total	Democrats	Republicans	Non- partisans/ others
Cut spending by about \$6 billion and raise income taxes on high-income earners by about \$8 billion	32%	38%	18%	40%
Cut spending by about \$8 billion and raise the sales tax one cent on the dollar by about \$5 billion	31	30	36	24
Cut spending by about \$11 billion and borrow about \$2 billion from future state lottery proceeds	19	17	27	13
None (volunteered)	14	12	14	17
No opinion	4	3	5	6

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 504 registered voters statewide. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish between the period September 5-9, 2008. 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. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize voter fatigue, the overall voter sample was divided into two random subsamples on some of the questions.

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 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 depends on the sample size. The maximum sampling error for results based on the overall sample of 504 registered voters is +/- 4.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. 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. 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. The maximum sampling error will be larger for analyses based on subgroups of the overall sample.

Questions Asked

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the California state legislature is doing its job?

As you know, by law a state budget is supposed to be approved by the legislature and signed by the Governor no later than July 1 each year. However, this year there is still no agreement on the budget as the Governor and state legislature are trying to resolve a deficit of about 15 billion dollars.

How serious a problem do you think it is for the Governor and the state legislature to be taking so long to reach an agreement on the state budget – very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious?

I am going to read three different proposals have been made to resolve most of the state's \$15 billion budget deficit, and please tell me which you would favor the most. (PROPOSALS READ IN RANDOM ORDER) Which proposal do you favor the most?

- Reduce state spending by about \$8 billion from education, health, corrections and other program areas and raise taxes by about \$5 billion by temporarily increasing the state sales tax by one cent on the dollar
- Reduce state spending by about \$6 billion from education, health, corrections and other program areas and raise taxes by about \$8 billion by increasing state income taxes on high income individuals and businesses
- Reduce state spending by about \$11 billion from education, health, corrections and other program areas and borrow about \$2 billion from future state lottery revenues