

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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BIG INCREASE AMONG CALIFORNIANS WHO THINK THE COUNTRY IS HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION FOLLOWING OBAMA'S ELECTION. THE PRESIDENT GETS HIGH OVERALL JOB MARKS AND MAJORITIES BACK HIS HANDLING OF THE ECONOMY AND FOREIGN POLICY.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

There has been a sharp reversal in the view that Californians have about the direction of the country following the election of Barack Obama as President.

Last July 75% of this state's voters believed the country was on the wrong track and 15% said it was going in the right direction. Now, in a survey completed last week, there has been a 27-point increase in those who hold a more optimistic view (from 15% to 42%) and a 28-point decline in the proportion who think the country is heading in the wrong direction (from 75% to 47%).

This is the first time in five years that less than half of California's registered voters felt the country was seriously off on the wrong track.

Most of the improvement comes from Democrats and non-partisans who now say the country is moving in the right direction by roughly five to three margins. Republicans, on the other hand, remain very pessimistic about the direction of the U.S.

High initial job approval for Barack Obama

About two in three (65%) of the state's voters approve of the job Obama has been doing as President since taking office on January 20.

Democrats and non-partisans give Obama very positive approval marks – 87% and 69% respectively. Republicans on the other hand hold a different view, with 46% disapproving and just 30% approving.

While Obama’s job performance is viewed favorably by men, women and voters in all age and race categories, he scores highest with women, younger voters, African-Americans and Latinos.

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
Total	65%	21	14
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	87%	4	9
Republicans	30%	46	24
Non-partisans/others	69%	20	11
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 39	72%	13	15
40 – 64	62%	24	14
65 or older	59%	29	12
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	61%	23	16
Female	68%	20	12
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	61%	26	13
Latino	75%	12	13
African-American*	87%	2	11
Asian/other*	56%	22	22

* Small sample base.

Obama’s initial job ratings compare favorably to those of his immediate predecessors

Californians’ first job assessment of Obama as President compares favorably to measures taken by *The Field Poll* for his immediate predecessors early in their first year in office. Obama’s 65% vs. 21% approve to disapprove rating is better than those obtained by George W. Bush (42% approve vs. 44% disapprove), Bill Clinton (50% vs. 46%) and George H. W. Bush (61% vs. 30%). However, early voter impressions of Presidents Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter and John Kennedy were even better than those now obtained by Obama.

Table 2
Comparing Obama's initial job performance rating in California to those of other U.S. Presidents early in their first terms (among registered voters)

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
Barack Obama (March 2009)	65%	21	14
George W. Bush (May 2001)	42%	44	14
Bill Clinton (May 1993)	50%	46	4
George H.W. Bush (April 1989)	61%	30	9
Ronald Reagan (April 1981)	74%	18	8
Jimmy Carter (March 1977)	68%	20	12
Gerald Ford (October 1974)	55%	36	9
John F. Kennedy (February 1961)	76%	11	13

Note: The Field Poll did not obtain job performance ratings for Presidents Nixon and Johnson during the first year of their terms. For surveys conducted prior to 1994 response scales were converted to the current two-point approve/disapprove scale and were based on all adults, not just registered voters.

Obama's handling of the economy viewed favorably

California voters are reacting positively to Obama's handling of the nation's economy, with 62% approving and just 25% disapproving. Democratic voters' approval of Obama's economic performance is at 85%, and 68% of non-partisans also approve. Republicans, on the other hand, are more disapproving (51%) than approving (26%) of Obama's handling of the economy.

Table 3
How Californians rate President Obama's handling of the nation's economy (among registered voters)

	Approve	Disapprove	Undecided
Total	62%	25	13
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	85%	8	7
Republicans	26%	51	23
Non-partisans/others*	68%	22	10

* Small sample base.

Voters support the \$787 billion economic stimulus package, but opinions divide by party

By a 52% to 36% margin California voters approve of the President's \$787 billion economic stimulus package recently passed by Congress. However, there are sharp partisan differences of opinion about this. Democrats approve by nearly a five to one margin (74% approve to 16% disapprove), while Republicans disapprove of the package more than two to one (61% disapprove and 28% approve). Non-partisans are more evenly split (47% approve and 38% disapprove).

Table 4
Californians' views of the \$787 billion economic stimulus package approved by the Congress and signed by President Obama (among registered voters)

	Approve	Disapprove	Undecided
Total	52%	36	12
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	74%	16	10
Republicans	28%	61	11
Non-partisans/others*	47%	38	15

* Small sample base.

Very favorable reaction to Obama's handling of the nation's foreign policy

By a four to one margin (63% to 16%), California voters approve of President Obama's handling of the country's foreign policy thus far.

While 83% of Democrats approve of Obama's foreign policy actions, hardly any (3%) disapprove. Non-partisans are also strongly supportive, with 66% approving and 14% disapproving.

Republicans are evenly divided regarding Obama's performance in foreign affairs, with 32% approving, 35% disapproving and 33% offering no opinion.

Table 5
How Californians rate President Obama's handling of the nation's foreign policy (among registered voters)

	Approve	Disapprove	Undecided
Total	63%	16	21
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	83%	3	14
Republicans	32%	35	33
Non-partisans/others*	66%	14	20

* Small sample base.

Trend of Californians' views about the direction of the country

The following table shows the twenty-one year trend line of California public opinion on the question, "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?"

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)

	Right direction	Wrong track	No opinion
March 2009	42%	47	11
July 2008	15%	75	10
May 2008	17%	75	8
December 2007	24%	67	9
October 2007	24%	63	13
August 2007	26%	64	10
March 2007	26%	64	10
September 2006	30%	57	13
July 2006	30%	60	10
Late May 2006	28%	64	8
April 2006	26%	64	10
February 2006	36%	55	9
Late October 2005	30%	60	10
August 2005	33%	60	7
June 2005	34%	58	8
February 2005	36%	57	7
October 2004	38%	58	4
August 2004	38%	56	6
May 2004	37%	54	9
February 2004	35%	52	13
January 2004	47%	44	9
September 2003	44%	49	7
August 2003	44%	50	6
July 2003	43%	50	7
September 2002	47%	41	12
July 2002	47%	44	9
January 2002	60%	26	14
December 2001	68%	27	5
September 2001 (pre-9/11 attack)	43%	49	8
January 2001	55%	34	11
August 2000	67%	25	8
February 2000	58%	30	12
August 1999	54%	37	9
April 1998	57%	32	11
February 1997	44%	45	11
February 1996	34%	49	17
March 1995	33%	54	13
January 1994	41%	50	9
May 1993	27%	64	9
July 1992	14%	81	5
November 1991	14%	78	7
August 1990	30%	63	7
January 1989	49%	43	8
July 1988	42%	53	5
Party (March 2009)			
Democrats	55%	37	8
Republicans	18%	68	14
Non-partisans/others	51%	34	15

Note: Surveys prior to 1996 conducted among all California adults

– 30 –

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 761 registered voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish between the period February 20 and March 1, 2009. 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. The overall sample was stratified so as to yield interviews with approximately equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans. After the completion of interviewing, the results are weighted to return this sample allocation to the actual distribution of registered voters by party and by various other 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 registered voters is +/- 3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings based on the random subsamples have a maximum sampling error of +/- 5.0 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. 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

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? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE)

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?

Do you approve or disapprove of the 787 billion dollar economic stimulus package recently approved by the Congress and signed into law by President Obama? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE)

Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Obama is doing in handling of the nation's foreign policy? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE)