

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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SOME IMPROVEMENT IN CALIFORNIANS' VIEW OF CONGRESS, BUT A MAJORITY STILL DISAPPROVES. REBOUND IN SPEAKER PELOSI'S JOB RATING.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

California voters are less critical of the U.S. Congress than they have been in recent years. However, a majority still disapproves of the job that the nation's lawmakers are doing overall.

In its most recent statewide survey, *The Field Poll* found 53% of state voters disapproving and 34% approving of Congress' job performance overall. This compares to more negative ratings that consistently hovered around 65% throughout 2007.

In addition, Californians offer a much more positive assessment of the job performance of Congressional Democrats than GOP lawmakers. Statewide 52% approve and 38% disapprove of the job Democrats are doing in the Congress. By contrast, the job Congressional Republicans are doing is viewed negatively by a nearly three to one margin (65% disapprove vs. 24% approve).

The *Poll* also finds Californians' ratings of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have improved. Nearly half (48%) of voters now say they approve of the job Pelosi is doing while 35% disapprove. This compares to a more negative than positive assessment in three previous *Field Poll* surveys conducted in 2007 and 2008.

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll* measuring California attitudes toward the U.S. Congress.

Trend of voter impressions of the Congress

California voters continue to view the job the U.S. Congress is doing in negative terms (53% disapprove vs. 34% approve). However, this assessment represents a change from even lower ratings observed throughout most of 2007.

Views of the Congress are highly partisan, with Republicans and non-partisans more critical of its performance than Democrats.

Table 1
Overall job performance of the U.S. Congress
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
March 2009	34%	53	13
December 2007	20%	66	14
October 2007	22%	64	14
August 2007	20%	66	14
March 2007	35%	50	15
May 2006	23%	64	13
April 2006	24%	66	10
August 2004	33%	52	15
April 2003	50%	39	11
April 2002	48%	39	13
January 2002	54%	33	13
December 2001	57%	32	11
May 2001	51%	38	11
January 2001	53%	35	12
August 2000	54%	34	12
June 2000	40%	48	12
February 2000	42%	42	16
October 1999	30%	60	10
March 1999	37%	54	9
August 1998	57%	33	10
August 1997	38%	51	11
February 1997	36%	46	18
June 1996	38%	59	3
February 1996	25%	68	7
September 1995	36%	58	6
May 1995	44%	51	5
September 1994	33%	62	5
July 1992	24%	71	5
January 1992	32%	67	1
<u>Party (March 2009)</u>			
Democrats	51%	33	16
Republicans	14%	79	7
Non-partisans/others	30%	57	13

Note: For measures conducted prior to 1997, original surveys used a five-point response scale, which has been converted to a two-point approve/disapprove scale for comparative purposes. In addition, surveys conducted prior to 1997 were completed among a cross-section of all California adults, not just registered voters.

Views of Congressional Democrats and Republicans

Californians have a much more favorable view of the job performance of Congressional Democrats than of GOP lawmakers. About one-half (52%) of the state's voters approve of the job being done by the Democrats in Congress, while 38% disapprove. By contrast, the job ratings given to Republican members are much more negative than positive – just 24% approving and 63% disapproving.

This represents a considerable improvement in voters' appraisal of Congressional Democrats over the past year and a half. By contrast, the negative view that voters have of Congressional Republicans has not changed over this same time period.

Registered Democrats tend to give high marks to their party's congressional delegation and low marks to the Republicans. While Republican voters strongly disapprove of the job being done by Democratic Congressional members, they also disapprove of the performance of GOP legislators.

Table 2
Job performance of the Democrats in Congress
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
March 2009	52%	38	10
December 2007	30%	56	14
October 2007	34%	51	15
August 2007	33%	54	13
March 2007	47%	40	13
August 2004	32%	50	18
April 2003	40%	46	14
April 2002	46%	39	15
May 2001	51%	37	12
January 2001	57%	31	12
June 2000	46%	39	15
<u>Party (March 2009)</u>			
Democrats	76%	18	6
Republicans	19%	70	11
Others/non-partisans	52%	31	17

Table 3
Job performance of the Republicans in Congress
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
March 2009	24%	63	13
December 2007	23%	63	14
October 2007	20%	64	16
August 2007	19%	69	12
March 2007	19%	70	11
August 2004	32%	52	16
April 2003	46%	42	12
April 2002	42%	45	13
May 2001	42%	47	11
January 2001	49%	39	12
June 2000	32%	55	13
<u>Party (March 2009)</u>			
Democrats	24%	67	9
Republicans	28%	59	13
Others/non-partisans	19%	60	21

Views of Nancy Pelosi

Democrat Nancy Pelosi, the current Speaker of the House of Representatives, has represented California's Eighth District which includes most of San Francisco since 1987. She is the first woman in American history to lead a major party in the U.S. Congress. Prior to being elected Speaker in 2007, Pelosi had been the House Minority Leader.

The Field Poll first began measuring how California voters felt about Pelosi's job performance in April 2003 when she was House Minority Leader. At that time 34% approved and 25% disapproved of her performance, with 41% having no opinion. Assessments of Pelosi improved shortly after she became Speaker in early 2007, with 48% approving and 27% disapproving.

However, views about Pelosi's performance declined over 2007 and 2008, with 30% approving and 39% disapproving in May 2008.

The current survey shows a rebound in Pelosi's approval ratings following the 2008 elections, which broadened Democratic control of both houses of Congress and saw their party re-capture control of the presidency. Now about half of the state's registered voters (48%) approve and 35% disapprove of Pelosi's performance as House Speaker.

Table 4
Job performance of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
March 2009	48%	35	17
May 2008	30%	39	31
December 2007	35%	38	27
October 2007	35%	40	25
August 2007	39%	37	24
March 2007	48%	27	25
August 2004*	37%	29	34
April 2003*	34%	25	41
<u>Party (March 2009)</u>			
Democrats	63%	20	17
Republicans	20%	60	20
Non-partisans/others	58%	28	14

* Asked with regard to Pelosi's role as House Minority Leader.

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 by party to yield approximately equal numbers of interviews with registered Democrats and Republicans. After the completion of interviewing, the results were weighted to return the disproportionate sample allocation of voters 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 761 registered voters is +/- 3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings from the questions asked of 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

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job?

(ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS)

What about the Democrats in Congress? Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congressional Democrats are doing their job?

What about the Republicans in Congress? Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congressional Republicans are doing their job?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Nancy Pelosi is handling her job as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives?