

# 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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**VOTER PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
DIRECTION OF THE STATE CONTINUE  
TO WORSEN. SOME IMPROVEMENT  
IN VIEWS ABOUT THE DIRECTION  
OF THE COUNTRY.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

California voters hold very different views about the direction of the state versus that of the nation. By a whopping five to one ratio (78% to 15%) voters living here believe California is seriously off on the wrong track rather than moving in the right direction. This current assessment represents a continuing decline in voters' previous very negative appraisals offered earlier this year and throughout 2008.

However, opinions are quite different when it comes to Californians' views about the direction the country is headed. In this respect more voters (48%) now believe the U.S. is moving on the right path as say it is heading in the wrong direction (41%). This represents an improvement in Californians' assessments in the direction of the country from March.

### **Increasing numbers think the state is on wrong track**

Just 15% of voters hold a positive view about the direction the state is headed, while more than five times as many (78%) believe the state is seriously off on the wrong track. There has been a steady increase in the proportion of voters with a negative opinion of the state's direction over the past couple of years.

Public opinion on this issue appears to be quite sensitive and very volatile. The most optimistic view that Californians have had of the direction of the state during the past two decades occurred in August 2000 when by a 58% to 35% margin more voters believed the state was going in the right direction. As bad as voter appraisals are now, their assessments were even lower during the period 1992-93, when as many as nine in ten Californians rated the state's overall direction negatively.

**Table 1**  
**Are things in California generally going in the right direction or**  
**do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<u>Right direction</u>	<u>Wrong track</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>October 2009</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>7</b>
March 2009	18%	73	9
September 2008	22%	70	8
July 2008	21%	68	11
May 2008	23%	68	9
December 2007	43%	47	10
October 2007	42%	42	16
August 2007	42%	45	13
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
December 2001	45%	45	10
September 2001 (pre-9/11)	39%	54	7
January 2001	44%	50	6
August 2000	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 (October 2009)</u>			
Democrats	19%	76	5
Republicans	7%	86	7
Non-partisan/other	17%	73	10

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

**Improving views about the direction of the country, but views are highly partisan**

From early 2004 through the end of last year, majorities of California voters consistently believed that the country was seriously off on the wrong track.

However, early this year after the election of Barack Obama as President, that extreme negative view eased somewhat. A March 2009 *Field Poll* found that the proportion feeling the U.S. was on the wrong track had declined to 47% from 75% in July 2008.

Things have improved further in the current survey. Now, more California voters (48%) are of the mind that the country is moving in the right direction than feel it is on the wrong track (41%).

Opinions about the direction the country is headed are highly partisan. California Democrats now say the U.S. is moving in the right direction by a nearly three to one margin (68% to 23%). Republicans hold an opposite view and believe the country is off on the wrong track greater than three to one (69% to 21%). A 46% to 38% plurality of non-partisans feel things in the U.S. are moving in the right direction.

**Table 2**  
**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)**

	<b>Right direction</b>	<b>Wrong track</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>October 2009</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>11</b>
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
<b>Party (October 2009)</b>			
Democrats	68%	23	9
Republicans	21%	69	10
Non-partisans/others	46%	38	16

Note: Surveys prior to 1996 conducted among all California adults.

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### **About This Report**

#### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 1,005 registered voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish between September 18 and October 5, 2009. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize potential respondent fatigue, the overall registered voter sample was divided into two random sub-samples of 509 and 496 voters each on the two questions included in this report.

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 had been selected, interviews were attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews were conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file and the preference of the voter. 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. After the completion of interviewing, the results were weighted to known distributions of registered voters by party and by other demographic and regional characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on the sample size. The maximum sampling error for the findings from each random subsample have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 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**

(ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS)

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?

Thinking about 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?