

# 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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**NEAR UNIVERSAL AGREEMENT THAT THE CALIFORNIA ECONOMY IS IN BAD TIMES. FOR THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR MAJORITIES REPORT BEING FINANCIALLY WORSE OFF THAN THEY WERE IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The extremely bleak appraisal that California voters have had about the state's economy over the past several years continues. According to the latest *Field Poll* nearly all of the state's registered voters (95%) describe California as being in economic bad times, very similar to what was reported last March.

Weighing down current voter sentiments about the economy are big concerns that voters have about unemployment. At present, about eight in ten voters (79%) describe unemployment in the state as a very serious problem, similar to the previous record high proportion of 80% who said this in 1992 when the state was also in the midst of a severe recession.

For the third consecutive year a majority of California voters (59%) report being worse off financially than they were in the previous year. In no previous period over the past fifty years have majorities of Californians reported declining economic fortunes over a multi-year timeframe.

Voters are evenly divided about where the state's economy is heading in the coming year. At present, 29% expect economic conditions in the state to improve, 39% foresee no change, while 29% anticipate a further worsening. Voters hold similar mixed views when asked about the state's job outlook for the coming year, with 31% expecting job opportunities to improve, 40% seeing no change and 25% fearing a worsening of the employment picture.

When asked about their own financial expectations for the coming year, slightly more voters (27%) believe they will be better off than worse off (18%). However, by far the largest proportion (48%) anticipates no change in their own economic well-being.

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll* conducted January 5-17 by telephone among a random sample of 1,232 California registered voters. The January survey was the first conducted by the *Poll* that sought to expand its representation of the state's ethnic voter population. Additional interviews were conducted to enable the results to be representative not only of the state's white non-Hispanic, Latino and African-American voters, but also California's growing Chinese-American, Korean-American and Vietnamese-American voting populations. Interviewing was completed in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese – based on the preference of the voter.

New America Media, California's and the nation's largest collaboration of ethnic news organizations and journalists, provided supplemental funding for this effort, made possible through grants from the James Irvine Foundation, the PG&E Foundation, the Blue Shield of California Foundation and the San Francisco Foundation.

### **Near universal agreement that California is in economic bad times**

Nearly all California voters (95%) describe the state's economy as being in bad times, while just 2% say it is in good times.

This view is shared across voters of all racial and ethnic subgroups of the registered voter population.

**Table 1**  
**Perceived state of California's economy**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Bad times</b>	<b>In-between/mixed</b>	<b>Good times</b>
<b>2010 (January)</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>
2009 (March)	96%	2	2
2008	86%	8	6
2007	52%	26	20
2005	49%	21	24
2004	53%	22	24
2003	75%	12	11
2002	56%	21	20
2001	22%	7	69
2000	13%	10	71
1999	11%	14	72
1998	15%	16	65
1997	42%	23	33
1996	57%	20	19
1995	72%	16	11
1994	81%	14	5
1993	91%	6	3
1992	93%	4	2
1991	85%	8	5
1990	47%	20	30
1989	24%	18	55
1988	21%	19	59
1987	22%	24	51
1986	15%	22	59
1985	19%	16	62
1984	22%	25	50
1983	77%	11	10
1982	60%	23	16
1981	54%	19	24
1980	56%	21	21
1979	41%	17	40
1978	26%	26	42
<b>Race/ethnicity (2010)</b>			
White non-Hispanic	97%	2	1
Latino	91%	2	6
African-American	95%	2	2
Chinese-American	92%	6	2
Korean-American	90%	9	*
Vietnamese-American	94%	1	4

\* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

(In this and in other succeeding tables, trend data prior to 1993 are based on all adults. Differences between 100% and the sum of each year's percentages equal the proportion with no opinion.)

**Record proportion considers unemployment in California very serious**

About eight in ten voters (79%) describe unemployment in California as very serious, similar to the previous record high of 80% observed in 1992 in the midst of another serious economic downturn. While large majorities of voters across all ethnic populations considers unemployment very serious, African-American and Latino voters are somewhat more likely to feel this way than others.

	<b>Very serious</b>	<b>Somewhat serious</b>	<b>Not serious</b>
<b>2010 (January)</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2</b>
2009 (March)	76%	20	4
2008	39%	42	15
2004	35%	43	19
2003	33%	52	12
2002	30%	48	18
1995	48%	44	7
1994	74%	22	3
1993	76%	22	2
1992	80%	18	2
1991	68%	27	4
1990	29%	40	28
1989	23%	35	39
1988	21%	40	36
1987	28%	45	25
1986	26%	50	22
1985	30%	43	24
1984	40%	45	14
1983	71%	24	5
1982	54%	36	9
1981	34%	45	18
<b>Race/ethnicity (2010)</b>			
White non-Hispanic	78%	18	2
Latino	84%	13	3
African-American	87%	10	2
Chinese-American	63%	32	3
Korean-American	69%	26	2
Vietnamese-American	70%	26	4

**Majorities report being financially worse off than the previous year**

For the third consecutive year, majorities of California voters say they are financially worse off now than they were in the previous year. Statewide, 59% report this compared to just 16% who say they are now financially better off. Another 25% say they has been no change in their financial well-being in the past year. Declining personal financial fortunes are reported by large majorities of voters in all ethnic subgroups, and are greatest (72%) among Vietnamese-Americans.

**Table 3**  
**Trend of Californians' personal financial well-being compared to one year ago**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Worse off</b>	<b>No change</b>	<b>Better off</b>
<b>2010 (January)</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>
2009 (March)	59%	23	18
2008	63%	23	14
2007	33%	30	37
2005	31%	28	41
2004	27%	32	41
2003	36%	26	38
2002	35%	30	35
2001	27%	26	47
2000	18%	28	54
1999	16%	35	49
1998	16%	30	54
1997	27%	31	42
1996	27%	35	38
1995	34%	32	34
1994	31%	32	37
1993	45%	26	29
1992	50%	24	26
1991	47%	28	25
1990	30%	28	42
1989	27%	27	46
1988	27%	23	50
1987	25%	26	49
1986	20%	28	52
1985	19%	27	54
1984	21%	24	55
1981	42%	25	33
1979	41%	28	30
1978	24%	35	41
1977	30%	36	34
1976	39%	33	28
1974	43%	29	28
1973	28%	33	39
1971	35%	36	29
1970	33%	33	34
1966	18%	45	37
1961	19%	41	40
<b>Race/ethnicity (2010)</b>			
White non-Hispanic	58%	26	16
Latino	62%	23	15
African-American	56%	24	20
Chinese-American	56%	29	15
Korean-American	56%	30	14
Vietnamese-American	72%	19	9

**Voters have mixed views about where the state's economy is headed in 2010**

Voters are about evenly divided about where the state's economy is heading over the next twelve months. While 29% expect things to improve economically, 39% see things remaining about the same and another 29% expect things to worsen. These findings represent a slight improvement from recent years when more voters expected the state's economy to get worse than better over the coming year.

Asian-American voters, particularly Vietnamese-Americans, are more likely than others to believe the worst of the state's economic downturn is over.

**Table 4**  
**Expectations for the California economy over the next 12 months**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Will get worse</b>	<b>Stay the same</b>	<b>Will get better</b>
<b>2010 (January)</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>29</b>
2009 (March)	41%	27	29
2008	43%	34	19
2007	35%	35	25
2005	30%	42	22
2004	14%	39	44
2003	30%	35	30
2002	18%	42	36
2001	40%	43	14
2000	16%	53	21
1999	14%	58	24
1998	10%	53	29
1997	14%	44	37
1996	12%	46	38
1995	21%	44	32
1994	20%	39	38
1993	22%	38	38
1992	36%	38	22
1991	35%	37	22
1990	48%	32	10
1989	30%	49	15
1988	24%	53	18
1987	19%	54	24
1986	12%	47	36
1985	12%	40	42
1984	6%	40	50
1983	10%	30	58
1982	22%	39	35
1981	29%	36	32
<b>Race/ethnicity (2010)</b>			
White non-Hispanic	30%	41	27
Latino	29%	36	33
African-American	35%	30	33
Chinese-American	15%	41	38
Korean-American	14%	49	29
Vietnamese-American	16%	25	48

### **Divided views about jobs outlook for the coming year**

California voters also hold divided views about the outlook for job opportunities in the state for the coming year. Three in ten voters (31%) take an optimistic view and believe job opportunities will improve, 25% believe they will worsen, while 40% foresee no change.

Chinese-Americans and Vietnamese-Americans appear to be a little less pessimistic about employment opportunities than the state's other ethnic populations.

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**Table 5**  
**Will job opportunities in California get better, stay the same  
or worsen in the coming year**  
**(among registered voters)**

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	<b>Worsen</b>	<b>No change</b>	<b>Get better</b>
<b>Statewide (January 2010)</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>			
White non-Hispanic	25%	43	29
Latino	25%	35	38
African-American	29%	34	36
Chinese-American	16%	38	37
Korean-American	22%	44	24
Vietnamese-American	16%	34	38

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*Note: Not asked in previous surveys.*

### **Most Californians anticipate little change in their own financial situation next year**

About half of California voters (48%) anticipate no change in their own financial situation in the coming year. Among those who foresee a change, slightly more (27%) expect an improvement in their economic well-being than see things getting worse (18%).

Personal financial expectations for the coming year are generally similar across the state's major racial and ethnic subgroups, although Latinos, African-Americans and Vietnamese-Americans appear to be a little more optimistic than others that things will improve.

**Table 6**  
**Personal financial expectations for next year**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Will be better off</b>	<b>No change</b>	<b>Will be worse off</b>
<b>2010 (January)</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>18</b>
2009 (March)	24%	51	19
2008	22%	48	22
2007	32%	49	14
2005	35%	49	12
2004	38%	48	7
2003	36%	48	10
2002	41%	45	8
2001	32%	55	13
2000	44%	53	3
1999	41%	54	5
1998	46%	49	5
1997	40%	50	10
1996	35%	57	8
1995	34%	56	10
1994	40%	48	12
1993	37%	49	14
1992	29%	53	18
1991	30%	53	17
1990	38%	47	15
1989	38%	47	15
1988	40%	51	9
1987	47%	45	8
1986	52%	42	6
1985	50%	42	8
1984	51%	42	7
1981	35%	46	19
1979	25%	40	31
1978	37%	46	17
1977	35%	47	18
1976	37%	45	18
1974	33%	39	28
1973	41%	46	13
1971	37%	44	19
1970	34%	44	22
1966	43%	49	8
1961	48%	46	6
<b>Race/ethnicity (2010)</b>			
White non-Hispanic	24%	49	21
Latino	36%	44	13
African-American	38%	45	9
Chinese-American	26%	51	17
Korean-American	24%	51	17
Vietnamese-American	34%	33	15

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Survey Details**

The latest *Field Poll* survey was completed by telephone January 5-17, 2010 among a total of 1,232 registered voters in California. The survey polled a random cross section of voters statewide and was supplemented with additional interviews conducted among random samples of Chinese-American, Korean-American, Vietnamese-American and African-American voters in the state. The survey was conducted in six language and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese – based on the preference of the voter.

Up to six attempts were made to reach, screen and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. Interviews were conducted on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file and the preference of the voter.

The main statewide sample was developed by selecting voters randomly from a list of registered voters throughout California. Supplemental samples of Asian-American voters were developed by selecting voters with surnames most associated with these populations and then screening them to determine their ethnic heritage. This produced samples of between 100 and 175 voters each for the Latino, African-American, Chinese-American, Korean-American, and Vietnamese-American voter populations. After the completion of interviewing, the overall sample was weighted to align it to its proper statewide proportions by race/ethnicity and other demographic characteristics of the registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size as well as the percentage distribution being examined. The maximum sampling error estimates for results based on the overall sample is +/- 2.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The maximum sampling error is based on results in the middle of the sampling distribution (i.e., percentages at or near 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (those closer to 10% or 90%) have somewhat smaller margins of error. Sampling error estimates for the ethnic voter samples range from +/- 4.8 percentage points to +/- 10.0 percentage points depending on the ethnic group and the percentage distribution being examined. There are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of the survey sought to minimize these other sources of error.

### **Questions Asked**

Would you say that you and your family are financially better off or worse off today than you were a year ago?

Looking ahead, do you think that a year from now you will be better off financially, worse off or just about the same as now?

How would you generally describe economic conditions in California now? Would you say that economically, California is in good times or bad times right now?

What about the next 12 months or so? Do you expect economic conditions in California to get better, get worse or stay the same?

How serious a problem do you think unemployment is in California at this time? Is it very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious?

Looking ahead, do you think job opportunities in California will be better, about the same or worse in the coming year?

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## The Growing Importance of California's Ethnic Voter Populations

- California's registered voter rolls have increased by about 3.7 million during the past twenty years, with nearly 90% of this growth coming from increases in the state's ethnic voter populations.
- Over this period, the proportion of the state's total registered voter population who are Latino or of Asian ancestry has more than doubled, with Latinos increasing from a 10% to a 21% share and Asian-Americans growing from 3% to 8%.

	<u>1990</u> (in 000s)		<u>2010</u> (in 000s)		<u>Change</u>
Total registered voters	<u>13,478</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>17,153</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>+ 3,675,000</u>
White non-Hispanic	10,600	79%	11,000	64%	+ 400,000
Latino	1,350	10%	3,650	21%	+ 2,300,000
Asian-American	450	3%	1,300	8%	+ 850,000
African-American	950	7%	1,050	6%	+ 100,000

*Sources: Totals are the most recent official figures from the California Secretary of State.  
Racial/ethnic subgroup data for each year are Field Poll estimates.*

- The demographic changes that have occurred during recent years are likely to continue into the foreseeable future. These trends underscore the need for obtaining more frequent, reliable poll measurements that can examine and compare the opinions of the state's many diverse ethnic voter populations.
- Beginning with its January 2010 survey *The Field Poll* is seeking to meet this need by supplementing its statewide voter sample with additional interviews among many of the state's largest ethnic voter populations. Interviews are conducted in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese – based on the preference of the voters reached in the surveys.
- This will enable each *Field Poll* report to produce reliable estimates not only among the state's white non-Hispanic, Latino and African-American voters, but also the fast growing Chinese-American, Korean-American and Vietnamese-American voter segments. This will provide policy makers, the media and the public itself with a more complete picture of the views of the state's changing electorate.