

# 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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### **CALIFORNIANS TURN NEGATIVE ABOUT DIRECTION THE COUNTRY IS HEADING. NO CHANGE IN VERY NEGATIVE APPRAISAL OF THE STATE'S DIRECTION.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

After briefly turning positive last October for the first time in more than five years, Californians once again are taking a negative view about the direction the country is heading. The most recent *Field Poll* finds a plurality of Californians (49%) now believing the country is seriously off on the wrong track, while 41% feel it is moving in the right direction.

Most of the decline in optimism has occurred among Democrats, liberals, young and middle-age Californians and men. Each of these groups held a more positive view about the direction of the country in October than they do now.

The survey also finds no change in voters' previous very negative appraisal of the direction California is heading. At present, 79% of voters now say that the state seriously off on the wrong track while just 14% feel it is moving in the right direction. Three months ago these percentages were nearing identical – 78% wrong track vs. 15% right track.

About three in four voters across virtually all demographic, political and regional subgroups think the state is seriously off on the wrong track.

The latest *Field Poll* was conducted January 5-17 among a random sample of 1,232 registered voters statewide completed in six languages and dialects.

### **Californians offer a more negative appraisal of the direction the country**

Last October more Californians felt the country was moving in the right direction (48%) than thought it was seriously off on the wrong track (41%). This represented Californians' first positive appraisal of the overall direction of the country in more than five years.

However, the current survey finds that voter sentiments have once again become more negative than positive. A plurality (49%) now believe the U.S. is moving in the wrong direction while just 41% say it is on the right track.

Following is the trend of California voter opinions regarding the direction the country over the twenty-two years that *The Field Poll* has been tracking this question.

**Table 1**  
**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>January 2010</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>10</b>
October 2009	48%	41	11
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

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

**Changes in how subgroups of the state's voters view the country's direction**

The recent decline in voter assessments of the direction of the country is most evident among Democrats, liberals, younger and middle-age Californians and men. Each of these subgroups held a much more positive view about the direction of the country last October than they do now.

Also noteworthy is the fact that nearly all voters (95%) who currently identify "a lot" with the tea party movement believe the country is seriously off on the wrong track in the current survey. This subgroup, which represents 12% of all California voters, contrasts starkly with the views of all other voters who hold a slightly more positive than negative view of the country's direction.

**Table 2**  
**Direction U.S. is heading now vs. three months ago – by subgroups**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	January 2010		October 2009	
	Right direction	Wrong track	Right direction	Wrong track
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>41</b>
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	57%	32	68%	23
Republicans	15%	75	21%	69
Non-partisans/others	47%	43	46%	38
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Strongly conservative	9%	85	7%	83
Moderately conservative	32%	58	44%	52
Middle-of-the-road	45%	44	49%	37
Moderately liberal	60%	28	78%	11
Strongly liberal	63%	24	82%	12
<u>Tea party movement</u>				
Identify with it “a lot”	1%	95	N/A	N/A
All others	46%	42	N/A	N/A
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	41%	50	51%	40
Female	41%	48	46%	42
<u>Age</u>				
18 – 39	44%	45	54%	36
40 – 64	38%	51	50%	41
65 or older	41%	48	36%	50
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	36%	55	45%	43
Latino	47%	43	48%	44
African-American	64%	22	80%	15
Chinese-American	51%	30	N/A	N/A
Korean-American	37%	42	N/A	N/A
Vietnamese-American	45%	15	N/A	N/A

N/A: Not asked or sample sizes too small to report separately.

(Differences between 100% and the sum of each survey’s findings equal proportion with no opinion.)

**California voters remain very gloomy regarding about the state’s overall direction**

There has been no change in Californians’ view that the state is seriously off on the wrong track. Statewide 79% of registered voters hold to this view, while just 14% think the state is moving in the right direction. These findings are virtually identical to those found three months ago when *The Field Poll* last posed this question.

**Table 3**  
**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>January 2010</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>7</b>
October 2009	15%	78	7
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

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

**Few subgroup differences regarding the state’s direction**

There are very few significant differences across the state’s major demographic, political and regional subgroups regarding the state’s overall direction. About three in four voters across virtually all subgroups think the state is seriously off on the wrong track, while no more than about one in five believe California is moving in the right direction.

<b>Table 4</b>			
<b>Direction California is heading – by subgroup (among California registered voters)</b>			
	<b>Right direction</b>	<b>Wrong track</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>7</b>
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	17%	75	8
Republicans	11%	85	4
Non-partisans/others	13%	77	10
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	17%	74	9
Other Southern California	11%	82	7
Central Valley	13%	82	5
San Francisco Bay Area	17%	78	5
Other Northern California*	13%	82	5
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	15%	79	6
Female	13%	79	8
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 29	18%	72	10
30 – 39	18%	77	5
40 – 49	14%	81	5
50 – 64	8%	86	4
65 or older	15%	77	8
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	11%	84	5
Latino	20%	73	7
African-American	13%	76	11
Chinese-American	22%	64	14
Korean-American	19%	65	15
Vietnamese-American	21%	38	41

\* Small sample base.

## **About This Report**

### **Sample 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 was conducted in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese – based on the preference of the voter. 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 to permit the poll to examine and compare these voter subgroups. This produced samples of between 100 and 175 voters for each of the poll's ethnic voter subgroups.

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. 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 a smaller margin of error. Findings from subgroups of the overall sample have somewhat larger sampling error levels. 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**

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?