

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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MAJORITIES OF CALIFORNIANS SUPPORT CUTTING JUST TWO OF FOURTEEN AREAS OF STATE SPENDING TO REDUCE THE BUDGET DEFICIT.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

When Californians are asked which of fourteen areas of state government spending they would favor cutting to help reduce the budget deficit, majorities support making cutbacks in just two areas – state prisons/corrections and state parks/recreational facilities. In two other spending areas – environmental protection and public transportation – voters are divided, with about as many favoring cuts as opposing them.

There is now somewhat greater voter backing for making spending cuts in each of these areas than was the case in previous *Field Poll* measures conducted over the past two years ago.

On the other hand, majorities of voters continue to oppose reducing state spending in ten other areas, including some of the largest expenditures in the budget, such as the public schools, health care programs, higher education and law enforcement.

These are the findings from a *Field Poll* conducted March 9 – 15 among a random sample of the state's registered voters. The California HealthCare Foundation provided grant funding to include this question series on this latest statewide survey and also did so for each of the two prior *Field Poll* surveys referenced in this report.

Table 1
Current voter support or opposition to making cuts to fourteen areas of state spending to help reduce the state budget deficit (among registered voters)

| | Favor cuts | Oppose cuts | No opinion |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| State prisons and correctional facilities | 56% | 41 | 3 |
| State parks and recreational facilities | 52% | 45 | 3 |
| Environmental regulation | 48% | 48 | 4 |
| Public transportation | 48% | 49 | 3 |
| State road and highway building and repair | 44% | 53 | 3 |
| Public assistance programs for low-income families with dependent children | 40% | 57 | 3 |
| Child care programs | 38% | 59 | 3 |
| Water storage and supply facilities | 33% | 61 | 6 |
| Mental health programs | 31% | 65 | 4 |
| Law enforcement and police | 31% | 67 | 2 |
| Higher education including public universities, colleges and community colleges | 28% | 70 | 2 |
| Health care programs for low-income Californians and the disabled | 26% | 71 | 3 |
| Public assistance programs for the elderly and the disabled | 21% | 77 | 2 |
| The public schools | 20% | 79 | 1 |

Comparisons to earlier measures

The Field Poll measured voter opinions about making cutbacks in major state spending areas at two previous intervals over the past two years – in April 2009 and May 2008.

A comparison of the current findings to those obtained two years earlier when the state’s large budget deficit first became evident shows that more voters now support making spending cuts in many of these areas, although in most cases support remains short of a majority. These include:

- state prisons and correctional facilities (56% now vs. 46% in 2008)
- state parks and recreational facilities (52% vs. 38%)
- environmental regulation (48% vs. 39%)
- public transportation (48% vs. 30%)
- state road and highway building and repair (44% vs. 36%)
- child care programs (38% vs. 26%)
- mental health programs (31% vs. 24%)
- law enforcement and police (31% vs. 26%)
- health care programs for low-income Californians and the disabled (26% vs. 20%)

There has been no significant change in support for making cutbacks in three other areas:

- water storage and supply facilities (33%, not significantly greater than 29% in 2008)
- higher education (28% now vs. 28% in 2008)
- the public schools (20% vs. 20%).

Note: The March 2010 Field Poll assessed voter support or opposition to making cutbacks in two spending categories not previously measured – public assistance programs for low-income families with dependent children and public assistance programs for the elderly and the disabled.

Table 2
Trend of voter support for cutting specific state program areas
to help reduce the budget deficit (2008 – 2010)
(among registered voters)

| | March 2010 | April 2009 | May 2008 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| | % | % | % |
| State prisons and correctional facilities | 56 | 59 | 46 |
| State parks and recreational facilities | 52 | 51 | 38 |
| Environmental regulation | 48 | 40 | 39 |
| Public transportation | 48 | 43 | 30 |
| State road and highway building and repair | 44 | 43 | 36 |
| Public assistance programs for low-income families with dependent children | 40 | N/A | N/A |
| Child care programs | 38 | 30 | 26 |
| Water storage and supply facilities | 33 | 31 | 29 |
| Mental health programs | 31 | 31 | 24 |
| Law enforcement and police | 31 | 23 | 26 |
| Higher education including public universities, colleges and community colleges | 28 | 31 | 28 |
| Health care programs for low-income Californians and the disabled | 26 | 26 | 20 |
| Public assistance programs for the elderly and the disabled | 21 | N/A | N/A |
| The public schools | 20 | 25 | 20 |

2008 Field Poll conducted May 17-26, 2008 among random samples of either 502 or 550 registered voters in California.

2009 Field Poll conducted April 16-26, 2009 among random samples of either 449 or 452 registered voters in California.

N/A: Not asked.

Partisan differences exist about making state spending cuts

Republicans are more likely than Democrats and non-partisans to identify areas of state spending where they would support state spending cutbacks. For example, majorities of GOPers endorse making cutbacks in six separate areas:

- environmental regulation (70%)
- state parks and recreation (56%)
- public transportation (56%)
- public assistance programs for low-income families with dependent children (55%)
- child care programs (52%)
- state prisons and correctional facilities (51%)

By contrast, there is only one spending category where a majority of Democrats line up in favor of making cuts – state prisons and correctional facilities (61%). And, there are only two areas in which majorities of non-partisans favor making budget cutbacks – state parks and recreational facilities (55%) and state prisons and correctional facilities (52%).

Table 3
Voter support for cutting fourteen areas of state spending to help reduce the state budget deficit – by party registration (among registered voters)

| | Total | Democrats | Republicans | Non-partisans/ others |
|---|-------|-----------|-------------|--------------------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| State prisons and correctional facilities | 56 | 61 | 51 | 52 |
| State parks and recreational facilities | 52 | 47 | 56 | 55 |
| Environmental regulation | 48 | 38 | 70 | 37 |
| Public transportation | 48 | 43 | 56 | 47 |
| State road and highway building and repair | 44 | 46 | 45 | 40 |
| Public assistance programs for low-income families with dependent children | 40 | 32 | 55 | 34 |
| Child care programs | 38 | 30 | 52 | 34 |
| Water storage and supply facilities | 33 | 32 | 32 | 34 |
| Mental health programs | 31 | 24 | 41 | 31 |
| Law enforcement and police | 31 | 34 | 22 | 38 |
| Higher education including public universities, colleges and community colleges | 28 | 20 | 41 | 25 |
| Health care programs for low-income Californians and the disabled | 26 | 20 | 38 | 23 |
| Public assistance programs for the elderly and the disabled | 21 | 16 | 30 | 19 |
| The public schools | 20 | 13 | 34 | 14 |

Information About This Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed March 9-15, 2010 among a random sample of 503 registered voters in California.

The Field Poll received grant funding from the California HealthCare Foundation (CHCF) to include these items onto its latest survey. CHCF also provided funding to *The Field Poll* to conduct similar surveys of California registered voters in both 2008 and 2009.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish with live interviewers working from Field Research's central location telephone interviewing facility. Up to eight attempts were made to reach, screen and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. Interviewing was completed either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. In this survey 17% of all interviews were completed through a cell phone contact. After the completion of interviewing, the overall sample was weighted to align it to its proper statewide proportions by party registration, region, 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 +/- 4.5 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

As a way to reduce California's budget deficit, the governor and the state legislature may need to make cuts to various areas of state government spending. I am going to read some of these and for each, please tell me whether you favor or oppose making cuts to this area of state spending. (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Do you favor or oppose making cuts to this area in order to reduce the state budget deficit? (SEE RELEASE FOR ITEMS READ)