

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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LARGE MAJORITY BELIEVES CONGRESS IS DOING A POOR JOB. RATING OF OWN REPRESENTATIVE MORE POSITIVE. EVEN DIVISION IN GENERIC VOTE TEST. MANY SAY THEY WILL BE VOTING AGAINST THEIR INCUMBENT THIS FALL.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

California voters continue to hold very unfavorable views about the way Congress is doing its job. A huge majority (71%) disapproves of the job performance of the nation's lawmakers, while only 19% approve. The current reading is the second lowest appraisal ever given the Congress since *The Field Poll* began measuring congressional job ratings nearly twenty years ago.

By contrast, voters hold more positive assessments of the job performance of their own representative in Congress, with 45% approving and 31% disapproving.

When asked which party's congressional candidate they will be voting for in the November general election, California voters prefer Democratic candidates over GOP candidates by a narrow three-point margin, 44% to 41%. When asked if they would vote to re-elect their current representative in Congress, 40% say they would, while another 40% say they'll be voting for someone else.

These are the findings of the latest *Field Poll* conducted June 22 – July 5 among representative samples of the state's registered and likely voter populations.

Trend in Congress' job ratings

California voters' current 19% approve vs. 71% disapprove job rating of the Congress is actually a little higher than was found last March when a record low (12%) of Californians viewed the Congress positively and 79% held a negative view.

The last time that more California voters approved rather than disapproved of Congress' job was seven years ago in April 2003 when the findings were 50% approve and 39% disapprove. However, in each of twelve subsequent poll measures since then, more Californians have given the Congress negative ratings.

| Table 1 | | | |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Trend of Californians' views of the job performance of the U.S. Congress (among registered voters) | | | |
| | Approve | Disapprove | No opinion |
| July 2010 | 19% | 71 | 10 |
| March 2010 | 12% | 79 | 9 |
| January 2010 | 24% | 66 | 10 |
| October 2009 | 23% | 66 | 11 |
| 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 |
| Party (July 2010) | | | |
| Democrats | 27% | 62 | 11 |
| Republicans | 9% | 86 | 5 |
| Non-partisans/others | 18% | 71 | 11 |

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.

Ratings of voters' own Congressional representative more positive than negative

Previous surveys have shown that, no matter how negatively voters feel about the Congress overall, they tend to think more positively of their own House member.

This survey bears out that history. When asked to evaluate the job their own representative is doing in Congress, voter appraisals are somewhat more positive than negative – 45% approve and 31% disapprove.

In congressional districts where the House member is a Democrat 48% approve and 28% disapprove. In Republican districts voters also have a favorable view of their representative but the margin is not as large – 42% approve and 35% disapprove.

Table 2
Job performance rating of voters' own congressional representative
(among registered voters)

| | Approve | Disapprove | No opinion |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Total – July 2010 | 45% | 31 | 24 |
| <u>Congressional district</u> | | | |
| Democratic districts | 48% | 28 | 24 |
| Republican districts | 42% | 35 | 23 |
| <u>Party registration</u> | | | |
| Democrat | 52% | 26 | 22 |
| Republican | 37% | 45 | 18 |
| Non-partisan/other | 42% | 24 | 34 |

Generic vote test for Congress

The current poll also attempted to gauge the preferences of likely voters in the state's upcoming congressional election. To do this, *The Field Poll* administered what is called a "generic vote test." The sample of likely voters in next November's general elections was asked which party's candidate they would vote for in their own congressional district if the election were being held today.

The results show that on a statewide basis, the Democrats now have only a small three-point preference lead, 44% to 41%, with 15% undecided. This finding represents a big change from last January when support for Democratic candidates outnumbered support for Republican candidates by eighteen points, 50% to 32%.

California has fifty-three members in the House of Representatives – 34 are held by Democrats and 19 by Republicans.

The voting preferences of Californians living in districts held by Democrats and those held by Republicans are mirror images of one another. For example, a 56% majority of voters living in districts held by Democrats say they intend to support the Democratic candidate for Congress in November. On the other hand, 56% of voters living in GOP held districts say they will be supporting the Republican candidate this fall.

Table 3
If the election for U.S. House of Representatives were held today
in your district, which party's candidate would you prefer?
(among likely voters in the general election)

| | Democratic candidate | Republican candidate | Other/ no opinion | Democratic candidate vote plurality statewide |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---|
| July 2010 | 44% | 41 | 15 | +3 |
| January 2010 | 50% | 32 | 18 | +18 |
| July 2008 | 48% | 28 | 24 | +20 |
| July 2006 | 44% | 36 | 20 | +8 |
| September 2004 | 46% | 35 | 19 | +11 |
| August 2004 | 42% | 35 | 23 | +7 |
| September 2002 | 43% | 39 | 18 | +4 |
| January 2002 | 43% | 40 | 17 | +3 |
| <u>Congressional district (July 2010)</u> | | | | |
| Democratic districts | 56% | 28 | 16 | +28 |
| Republican districts | 30% | 56 | 14 | -26 |

Assessing voters' anti-incumbent sentiments

Voters are evenly divided when asked whether they would be inclined to re-elect their own congressional representative to another term or would vote for someone else. Forty percent of this state's voters indicate they definitely or probably would vote to re-elect their current representative, while an equal proportion (40%) say they definitely or probably would vote for someone else. Another 20% have no opinion at this time.

The inclination to either re-elect or not re-elect the incumbent is similar among voters living in Democratic districts as those living in Republican held districts.

If this inclination of voters is maintained at election time next November, the results would run counter to the historical trend of congressional election outcomes where huge proportions of incumbents are usually re-elected.

Table 4

**Voter inclination to re-elect the congressional representative in their district
(among likely voters in the general election)**

| | Definitely/probably re-elect | Definitely/probably vote for someone else | No opinion |
|-------------------------------|---|--|-----------------------|
| Total – July 2010 | 40% | 40 | 20 |
| <u>Congressional district</u> | | | |
| Democratic districts | 42% | 40 | 18 |
| Republican districts | 39% | 40 | 21 |
| <u>Party registration</u> | | | |
| Democrat | 51% | 32 | 17 |
| Republican | 34% | 46 | 20 |
| Non-partisan/other | 30% | 47 | 23 |

Information About The Survey

Methodological Details

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed June 22 – July 5, 2010 among a representative sample of 1,390 registered voters in California, of whom 1,005 were considered likely to vote in the upcoming November election. In order to cover a broad range of issues and minimize respondent fatigue, the overall sample was divided into two random subsamples of either 485 and 477 likely voters for some of the questions in this report.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone using live interviewers working from Field Research Corporation's central location telephone interviewing facilities. To enable the survey to more closely examine the preferences of California's growing ethnic voter populations, the survey was conducted in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese.

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. Likely voters were identified after interviews were completed with a random sample of California registered voters. Samples were provided by Voter Contact Services, a leading provider of registered voter samples to the survey research industry.

Interviewing was completed on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the registered voter sample was weighted to *Field Poll* estimates of the characteristics of the registered voter population in California by region, age, gender and party registration.

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 likely voters sample is +/- 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Findings from either of the random subsamples of registered voters have a sampling error of +/- 4.8 percentage points. 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.

The Field Poll was established in 1947 as *The California Poll* by Mervin Field and has operated continuously since then as an independent, non-partisan survey of California public opinion. The poll receives annual funding from media subscribers of *The Field Poll*, from several California foundations, and from the University of California and California State University systems, who receive the raw data files from each *Field Poll* survey shortly after its completion for teaching and secondary research purposes.

Questions Asked

(ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF REGISTERED VOTERS)

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

Do you approve or disapprove of the job that your current representative in Congress is doing?

(ASKED OF ALL LIKELY VOTERS)

Thinking about the upcoming November election for House of Representatives in your district, if the election were being held today would you be inclined to vote for the Republican candidate or the Democratic candidate? (IF UNCERTAIN, PROBE:) Well, which party's candidate do you lean towards at this time?

In the election this year for Congress, do you think you will definitely vote to re-elect your current Representative, probably vote to re-elect your Representative, probably vote for someone else, or definitely vote for someone else?