

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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INCREASING OPPOSITION TO DRILLING MORE OIL AND GAS WELLS IN STATE TIDELANDS. CALIFORNIANS DIVIDED ON MORE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Voters are now strongly opposed to the idea of drilling more oil and gas wells in state tidelands along the California seacoast. At present, opponents of allowing more offshore drilling outnumber supporters nearly two to one (61% to 31%). This represents a big increase in the extent of voter opposition to offshore oil drilling compared to two years ago when voters were only narrowly opposed (51% to 43%).

Californians are much more divided when it comes to building more nuclear power plants here. Statewide, 48% support the idea of constructing additional nuclear power plants, while 44% are opposed.

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll* updating California voter opinions on these two important energy-related issues. The survey was conducted between the period June 22-July 5 among a representative sample of this state's registered voters.

Increasing opposition to allowing more offshore drilling

The Field Poll has been measuring public opinion on the issue of offshore oil drilling along the California coast since 1977. Between the 1977-1981 period small pluralities of California voters favored allowing more offshore oil and gas drilling in state tidelands. However, a 1984 *Field Poll* showed voter sentiment swinging to the negative side. In five measures taken since then, more voters have opposed than supported allowing more offshore drilling.

The current survey finds that opposition to allowing more offshore oil and gas drilling in state tidelands has increased to a nearly two-to-one margin (61% to 31%). The last time the poll measured opinions on this issue in 2008, 51% were opposed and 43% favored the idea.

Table 1
Trend of voter opinion about drilling more oil and gas wells along the California seacoast (among registered voters)

"Oil companies should be allowed to drill more oil and gas wells in state tidelands along the California seacoast."	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
July 2010	31%	61	8
2008	43%	51	6
2005	39%	56	5
2001	38%	56	6
1990	32%	62	6
1984	43%	53	4
1981	49%	45	6
1980	56%	38	6
1979	57%	38	5
1978	51%	43	6
1977	49%	40	11

Note: Surveys completed prior to 2001 conducted among all California adults.

Big differences by party and across supporters of the gubernatorial and Senate candidates

Opposition to offshore drilling is very strong among Democrats (76%) and non-partisans/others (63%). By contrast, Republicans favor the idea by a 52% to 37% margin.

There are big differences in opinion about offshore oil drilling between the supporters of each of the gubernatorial and U.S. Senate candidates in this year's election. Voters who favor Jerry Brown for Governor and Barbara Boxer for U.S. Senate also strongly oppose this possible action – 87% in Brown's case and 84% in Boxer's. By contrast, a 59% majority of supporters of Meg Whitman for Governor and Carly Fiorina for U.S. Senate favor increased drilling along the coast by nearly two-to-one margins.

Table 2
Voter opinions about drilling more offshore oil and gas wells
along the California seacoast – by subgroup
(among registered voters)

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
Total registered voters	31%	61	8
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	18%	76	6
Republicans	52%	37	11
Non-partisan/other	29%	63	8
<u>Likely voters in November</u>	<u>34%</u>	<u>59</u>	<u>7</u>
Brown supporters for Governor	9%	87	4
Whitman supporters for Governor	59%	33	8
Boxer supporters for U.S. Senate	12%	84	4
Fiorina supporters for U.S. Senate	59%	31	10

Trend of opinions about building more nuclear power plants in California

The Field Poll has been tracking California public opinion about nuclear power over the past 35 years. In 1976 voters overwhelmingly endorsed, by a 69% to 19% margin, the building of more nuclear power plants in this state. For three years afterward majorities of Californians continued to favor the idea.

However, following the 1979 well-publicized accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in Pennsylvania, public opinion here and in other parts of the country turned against the building of more plants. Opposition in California reached its peak in 1984, when 61% opposed and 33% favored the idea.

However, a *Field Poll* survey conducted in 2001, when the state was in the midst of a severe energy crisis, showed a 59% to 36% majority supporting the building of more nuclear power plants. A subsequent 2008 survey showed voters backing the idea 50% to 41%. The current survey finds voters more divided on the issue, with 48% supporting and 44% opposing.

Table 3
Trend of voter opinion about building more
nuclear power plants in California
(among registered voters)

"The building of more nuclear power plants should be allowed in California."	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
July 2010	48%	44	8
2008	50%	41	9
2001	59%	36	5
1990	38%	56	6
1984	33%	61	6
1981	40%	55	5
1980	41%	53	6
1979	37%	55	8
1978	51%	44	5
1977	63%	24	13
1976	69%	19	12

Note: Surveys completed prior to 2001 conducted among all California adults.

Partisan and candidate supporter preferences

Democrats are opposed to building more nuclear power plants, 54% to 38%. Non-partisans divide more narrowly against building more such plants, 48% to 40%. By contrast, Republicans are strongly in favor, 67% to 26%.

Voters who currently favor Democrats Brown for Governor and Boxer for U.S. Senate oppose building more nuclear power plants by margins of 53% to 36% and 57% to 35%, respectively.

Those who support Republicans Whitman for Governor and Fiorina for U.S. Senate are very much in favor of nuclear power plant building – 66% to 29% in the case of Whitman and 73% to 21% among Fiorina supporters.

Table 4
Voter opinions about building more nuclear power
plants in California – by subgroup
(among registered voters)

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
Total registered voters	48%	44	8
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	38%	54	8
Republicans	67%	26	7
Non-partisan/other	40%	48	12
<u>Likely voters in November</u>	<u>52%</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>7</u>
Brown supporters for Governor	36%	53	11
Whitman supporters for Governor	66%	29	5
Boxer supporters for U.S. Senate	35%	57	8
Fiorina supporters for U.S. Senate	73%	21	6

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 registered voters in California. In order to cover a broad range of issues and minimize respondent fatigue, the overall sample was divided into two random subsamples of either 477 and 485 voters when administering these two questions.

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 estimate for results based on each of the two registered voter subsamples is +/- 4.7 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

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Oil companies should be allowed to drill more oil and gas wells in state tidelands along the California seacoast?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The building of more nuclear power plants should be allowed in California?