

# Major Issues Facing Californians

March 2005

## Findings in Brief

- When state residents are asked how concerned they are about fourteen issues facing California today, the “well-being of children” (75%) and “education and the schools” (69%) top the list. The “well-being of seniors” and “health care” receive the next highest level of concern, with 63% extremely concerned about each.
- Compared to prior statewide surveys, concerns about “education and the schools” and “health care” remain at or near the public’s top concerns.\*
- Democrats report higher levels of concern than Republicans about most of the fourteen issues. Despite this, the two top issues of concern to Democrats and Republicans are the same - the “well-being of children” and “education and the schools.”
- While both men and women rate the “well-being of children,” “education and the schools” and the “well-being of seniors” as their top three concerns, women report higher levels of concern than men about most of the issues posed.
- There are no significant differences among younger, middle age and older Californians with regard to the state’s top-ranking issues, with the largest proportions expressing concern about the “well-being of children,” “education and the schools” and “health care.” Residents age 50 or older express greater concern than younger residents about the “war in Iraq,” “health care,” the “state budget deficit,” “the economy,” “illegal immigration” and “energy.”
- Californians who are parents of children under age 18 report higher levels of concern than non-parents about the “well-being of children,” the “cost of living,” “crime and law enforcement,” “taxes” and “terrorism.” Non-parents express somewhat greater concern than parents about “health care,” the “war in Iraq” and the “state budget deficit.” Despite these relative differences, the “well-being of children” and “education and the schools” are the top two issues of concern to both parents and non-parents.
- There are relatively modest regional differences with regard to residents’ degree of concern about each of these issues. The top issue among Northern Californians and Southern Californians, as well as coastal Californians and those living in inland counties, is the “well-being of children.”
- The “well-being of children” is the top concern of both white non-Hispanics and Latinos. Among white non-Hispanics “education and the schools” ranks as the second most important issue, while among Latinos “crime and law enforcement” ranks as the next greatest concern.

\* Note: Some of the issues posed, including “the well-being of children,” “the well-being of seniors” and “the war in Iraq” were included for the first time in 2005.

## Well-being of children and education are top concerns

The “well-being of children” and “education and the schools” top the list of concerns among fourteen issues facing Californians. Three in four (75%) of the state’s adults say they are extremely concerned about the “well-being of children,” while 69% say this about “education and the schools.”

Concerns about the “well-being of seniors” and “health care” are ranked next, with 63% extremely concerned about each. Nearly as many, 62%, are extremely concerned about the “cost of living,” followed by the “war in Iraq” (58%) and “crime and law enforcement” (56%). Slightly more than half of state residents report being extremely concerned about the “state budget deficit” and “the economy.”

Slightly less than half of the public say this about “the environment” (48%), “illegal immigration” (48%), “energy” (47%) and “taxes” (46%). The issue receiving the smallest proportion of concern among the fourteen issues posed was “terrorism” (42%).

**Table 1**

**Level of concern about 14 issues facing California  
(among California adults)**

	Extremely concerned %	Somewhat concerned %	Not concerned %
Well-being of children	75	20	4
Education & the schools	69	23	8
Well-being of seniors	63	31	6
Health care	63	27	10
Cost of living	62	33	5
War in Iraq	58	32	9
Crime/law enforcement	56	36	7
State budget deficit	51	41	7
The economy	51	37	11
The environment	48	39	13
Illegal immigration	48	35	17
Energy	47	43	9
Taxes	46	40	13
Terrorism	42	37	20

Differences between the sum of each item’s percentages and 100% equal proportion with no opinion.

### Trends over time

Among the issues where previous *Field Poll* measures exist, concerns about “education and the schools” and “health care” continue to be among the public’s top concerns. Compared to prior surveys, the public now appears to be somewhat more concerned about the “cost of living.”

A slightly larger proportion also expresses high levels of concern about “energy” in the current survey, compared to the last two statewide surveys in which this item was included.

Findings from the current survey document a continuing drop in the proportion of Californians extremely concerned about “taxes” over the past thirteen years. In 1992, 62% of state residents expressed a high level of concern about this. This declined to 57% in 1997, 51% in 2002 and, in the current survey, now stands at 46%.

Public concerns about “crime and law enforcement” have been lower in the past four years than they were in the 1990s or 1980s.

Note: Some of the issues posed in this year’s survey were included for the first time in 2005 and, therefore, do not have antecedent measures for trend comparison. These included the “well-being of children,” the “well being of seniors” and the “war in Iraq.”

**Table 2**  
Trend of proportions “extremely concerned” about each issue - 1986-2005

	'05	'02*	'97	'92	'89	'86
Well-being of children	75	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Education and schools**	69	68	71	77	64	71
Well-being of seniors	63	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Healthcare***	63	69	59	64	64	59
Cost of living	62	52	50	60	56	57
War in Iraq	58	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Crime and law enforcement	56	52	66	74	71	71
State budget deficit	51	41	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
The economy****	51	46	42	79	38	40
The environment	48	50	52	63	62	63
Illegal immigration	48	49	58	n/a	n/a	53
Energy*****	47	n/a	34	38	61	45
Taxes	46	51	57	62	53	57
Terrorism*****	42	47	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a: not asked in previous surveys.

\* 2002 survey conducted among California registered voters.

\*\* In previous surveys, the wording of this item was “the public schools.”

\*\*\* In the 2002 survey, the wording of this item was “health care costs.”

\*\*\*\* In previous surveys, the wording of this item was “the state’s economy.”

\*\*\*\*\* In previous surveys, the wording of this item was “energy supply.”

\*\*\*\*\* In previous surveys, the wording of this item was “terrorism and security”

### Issue rankings among registered voters and partisans

The top concerns of California’s registered voters are similar to those of the overall adult public, with the “well-being of children” (77%) and “education and the schools” (72%) heading the list. The third ranking issue among registered voters is “health care” (64%). This is followed by the “war in Iraq” (61%) and the “cost of living” (59%).

Voters’ hierarchy of concern in relation to the other issues posed is similar to the overall public’s, although a slightly larger proportion of voters than adults express a high degree of concern about the “state budget deficit” and “energy.”

Democrats tend to report higher levels of concern than Republicans about most of the fourteen issues. These include many of top ranking issues, such as the “well-being of children,” “education and the schools,” “health care,” the “war in Iraq,” the “cost of living,” the “well-being of seniors,” as well as the issues of “the economy,” “energy” and “the environment.” On the other hand, larger proportions of Republicans than Democrats are extremely concerned about three issues - “illegal immigration,” which is the third ranking issue among state Republicans, “taxes,” and “terrorism.”

Despite these relative differences, the two top issues among both Democrats and Republicans are the same - the “well-being of children” and “education and the schools.”

**Table 3**  
Proportions “extremely concerned” about each issue among voters and partisans

	Total registered voters	Democrats	Republicans
Well-being of children	77%	85%	73%
Education and the schools	72	78	64
Health care	64	81	52
War in Iraq	61	67	53
Cost of living	59	67	52
Well-being of seniors	58	70	46
State budget deficit	55	60	55
Crime and law enforcement	54	54	55
The economy	54	63	48
Energy	54	67	42
Illegal immigration	48	38	62
Taxes	48	47	55
The environment	46	60	31
Terrorism	41	36	52

Note: Sample sizes of findings from those registered as non-partisan or with other parties are too small to report separately.

### Issue differences by gender

Women report somewhat higher levels of concern than men with regard to many of the fourteen issues posed in the 2005 survey. These include the two top-ranking issues, the “well-being of children,” and “education and the schools,” as well as “health care,” “the war in Iraq,” “the economy,” “the environment,” and “terrorism.”

On the other hand, a slightly larger proportion of men than women report being extremely concerned about the “state budget deficit” and “illegal immigration.”

There are no significant differences in the levels of concern of men and women on the issues of the “well-being of seniors,” the “cost of living,” “crime and law enforcement,” “energy” and “taxes.”

**Table 4**  
Proportions “extremely concerned” about each issue by gender

	Male	Female
Well-being of children	71%	80%
Education and the schools	63	75
Well-being of seniors	61	65
Health care	54	72
Cost of living	60	65
War in Iraq	51	65
Crime and law enforcement	55	57
State budget deficit	56	46
The economy	44	58
The environment	42	53
Illegal immigration	54	43
Energy	46	49
Taxes	43	49
Terrorism	37	48

**Differences across age categories**

There are no significant differences among younger, middle age and older Californians with regard to the state’s top ranking issues, with the “well-being of children,” “education and the schools” and “health care” among their top concerns.

However, there are age-related differences on some of the other issues measured in the 2005 survey. For example, compared to younger adults, larger proportions of residents age 50 or older are extremely concerned about the “war in Iraq,” “health care,” the “state budget deficit,” “the economy,” “illegal immigration” and “energy.” By contrast, younger Californians report higher levels of concern about the “cost of living” and “crime and law enforcement” than do either middle age or older residents.

**Table 5**  
Proportions “extremely concerned” about each issue by age

	18 - 39	40 - 49	50 or older
Well-being of children	74%	76%	77%
Education and the schools	69	67	71
Well-being of seniors	62	63	64
Health care	57	65	70
Cost of living	72	58	54
War in Iraq	52	54	67
Crime and law enforcement	61	50	54
State budget deficit	44	51	59
The economy	46	53	56
The environment	45	49	49
Illegal immigration	45	48	52
Energy	38	48	58
Taxes	41	54	47
Terrorism	40	46	43

**Differences between parents and non-parents**

Californians who are parents of children under age 18 report high levels of concern than non-parents on five of the issues posed in 2005. These include: the “well-being of children,” the “cost of living,” “crime and law enforcement,” “taxes” and “terrorism.” On the other hand, a somewhat larger proportion of non-parents than parents reports being extremely concerned about “health care,” the “war in Iraq,” and the “state budget deficit.”

Despite their relative differences in issue ratings, the “well-being of children” and “education and the schools” are rated as the state’s top two issues by both parents and non-parents.

**Table 6**  
Proportions “extremely concerned” about each issue among parents and non-parents

	Parents of child under age 18	
	Yes	No
Well-being of children	80%	73%
Education and the schools	72	68
Well-being of seniors	63	63
Health care	56	68
Cost of living	71	57
War in Iraq	52	61
Crime and law enforcement	62	53
State budget deficit	43	57
The economy	53	51
The environment	47	48
Illegal immigration	51	46
Energy	48	47
Taxes	50	43
Terrorism	50	39

**Regional differences**

There are relatively modest regional differences with regard to residents’ degree of concern about the fourteen issues. The top concern among Northern Californians and Southern Californians, as well as coastal Californians and those living in inland counties, is the “well-being of children.”

A slightly larger proportion of Southern Californians than Northern Californians are extremely concerned about “education and the schools,” “terrorism” and “illegal immigration.” On the other hand, slightly larger proportions of Northern Californians than Southern Californians rate the “well-being of seniors,” the “cost of living,” the “war in Iraq,” “the environment” and the “state budget deficit” as being a big concern.

Residents of coastal counties express proportionately greater concern than inland residents about “health care” and “the environment.” By contrast, significantly larger proportions of inland residents than coastal residents are extremely concerned about “crime and law enforcement,” the “state budget deficit,” “illegal immigration” and “taxes.”

**Table 7**  
**Proportions “extremely concerned” about each issue**  
**by region**

	Southern California	Northern California	Coastal California	Inland California
Well-being of children	75%	76%	74%	79%
Education and the schools	72	65	70	66
Well-being of seniors	61	67	62	66
Health care	62	66	66	57
Cost of living	60	66	61	66
War in Iraq	54	64	59	55
Crime and law enforcement	57	55	53	64
State budget deficit	46	59	48	60
The economy	51	52	51	52
The environment	45	51	51	39
Illegal immigration	51	44	45	57
Energy	47	49	46	51
Taxes	46	46	42	55
Terrorism	46	37	42	44

**Differences by ethnic subgroup**

The “well-being of children” is the top concern of both white non-Hispanics and Latinos. Among white non-Hispanics “education and the schools” ranks as the second most important issue, while among Latinos “crime and law enforcement” ranks as the next greatest concern.

Larger proportions of Latinos express a higher degree of concern than white non-Hispanics with regard to “crime and law enforcement,” the “well-being of seniors,” the “cost of living,” and “terrorism.” There is slightly greater concern among white non-Hispanics than Latinos on the issues of the “war in Iraq” and the “state budget deficit.”

**Table 8**  
**Proportions “extremely concerned” about each issue**  
**by ethnicity**

	White non-Hispanic	Latino
Well-being of children	74%	73%
Education and the schools	67	67
Well-being of seniors	56	68
Health care	61	62
Cost of living	57	67
War in Iraq	60	54
Crime and law enforcement	45	71
State budget deficit	50	43
The economy	49	49
The environment	48	46
Illegal immigration	48	49
Energy	49	39
Taxes	43	45
Terrorism	36	47

*Note: Sample sizes of findings from other racial subgroups are too small to report separately.*

**About the Survey**

The results in this report are based on questions included on the February 2005 statewide Field Poll survey of California adults. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish during the period February 8-17, 2005 among a random sample of 1,009 adults. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize possible respondent fatigue, the overall sample was divided into two approximately equal-sized random sub-samples of 503 and 506 adults each on most of the items measured in this report.

Sampling was carried out using a random digit dial methodology which includes all operating telephone exchanges within all landline area codes serving California households in proportion to population. Within each telephone exchange a random sample of telephone numbers was created by adding random digits to the selected exchange. This permits access to all residential landline telephone numbers, both listed and unlisted. After the completion of interviewing the sample was weighted to census estimates of the state’s adult population by age, gender, and geographic region of the state.

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from each random sub-sample have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points. There are other possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sampling, sequencing or through undetected omissions or errors in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

**Auspices**

The Field Poll is owned and operated by Field Research Corporation, one of the largest general practice public opinion research organizations in the Western United States. Field Research’s staff of more than thirty full-time professional and operations people, together with its large corps of experienced interviewers and its extensive in-house data processing center, provide basic data gathering and data processing services for each Field Poll.

A number of California’s leading news properties help underwrite the operations of The Field Poll as media subscribers. Each newspaper pays an annual fee commensurate with its circulation. All data from all Field Poll studies conducted since 1956 are archived at the University of California and California State University, who also provide funding to The Field Poll on an annual basis.

The Field Poll also accepts grants from foundations, government agencies and others (with the exception of partisan interests or political candidates or campaigns) to conduct ad hoc measures on important state issues. The subjects for study are generally those in areas where The Field Poll’s demonstrated objectivity and professional expertise can contribute to a greater understanding of a problem or issue. As part of its Policy Research Sponsors program, The Field Poll receives annual funding from the California HealthCare Foundation, for coverage of health-related issues and ballot propositions in California. In addition, the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health provided The Field Poll with funding to examine public opinion on issues facing California children in its February 2005 survey.

**Availability of reports**

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