

# 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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Release #2092

Release Date: **Tuesday, September 16, 2003**

## **DECIDEDLY NEGATIVE TURN IN CALIFORNIA VOTERS' VIEW OF BUSH'S JOB PERFORMANCE.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The view that California voters have of the job George W. Bush is doing as President has turned decidedly negative.

For the first time in two years his overall job performance rating is slightly more negative than positive (46% approve and 48% disapprove). In September, 2001, when Bush was rallying the nation following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, his approval rating was 74%, while just 16% disapproved.

When asked to evaluate Bush in twelve specific areas, voters in this state disapprove of the job that Bush is doing in eleven of them, ranging from pluralities of a few percentage points to much bigger double digit margins.

Disapproval of the job the President is doing outweighs approval by nine to twenty-four points in his handling of the environment, the situation in Iraq, the economy, health care, energy policy, reducing unemployment, federal budget deficit, Medicare, and his treatment of matters relating to California. In respect to foreign affairs and taxes, opinions are more divided, with a few percentage points more California voters disapproving than approving.

In only one area, reducing the terrorist threat, do Californians approve of what Bush is doing (66% approve and 31% disapprove).

**Table 1**  
**How Californians view the job President Bush is doing**  
**in each of twelve areas**  
**(among California registered voters)**

|  | <u>Approve</u> | <u>Disapprove</u> | <u>No opinion</u> |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Reducing the terrorist threat                      | 64%            | 31                | 5                 |
| Foreign affairs                                    | 46%            | 49                | 5                 |
| Taxes  | 44%            | 47                | 9                 |
| The situation in Iraq                              | 40%            | 52                | 8                 |
| The environment                                    | 39%            | 48                | 13                |
| The economy  | 39%            | 55                | 6                 |
| Health care  | 36%            | 50                | 14                |
| Energy policy                                      | 34%            | 51                | 15                |
| Reducing unemployment                              | 34%            | 57                | 9                 |
| The federal budget deficit                         | 33%            | 57                | 10                |
| His treatment of matters<br>relating to California | 29%            | 53                | 18                |
| Medicare   | 28%            | 50                | 22                |

**Negative trend in Bush's handling of the economy**

In December 2001, 57% of this state's voters approved and 35% disapproved of the job Bush was doing in handling the nation's economy. Since that time there has been a steady erosion in the favorable regard for his stewardship in this area. Now, 55% disapprove and 39% approve of Bush's performance on economic matters.

There is a wide partisan split on this issue. Democrats disapprove by a margin of 79% to 16%. Republicans view Bush's performance on the economy completely different: 74% approve and 20% disapprove. Among non-partisans/others 63% disapprove and 26% approve.

**Table 2**  
**Appraisal of job Bush is doing handling the nation's economy**  
**(among California registered voters)**

|  | <u>Approve</u> | <u>Disapprove</u> | <u>No opinion</u> |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| September 2003                         | 39%            | 55                | 6                 |
| August 2003                            | 43%            | 50                | 7                 |
| July 2003                              | 43%            | 53                | 4                 |
| September 2002                         | 48%            | 44                | 8                 |
| July 2002                              | 49%            | 41                | 10                |
| April 2002                             | 55%            | 38                | 7                 |
| December 2001                          | 57%            | 35                | 8                 |
| <u>Party registration</u> (Sept. 2003) |                |                   |                   |
| Democrats                              | 16%            | 79                | 5                 |
| Republicans                            | 74%            | 20                | 6                 |
| Non-partisans/others                   | 26%            | 63                | 11                |

### **Disapproval of Iraq situation**

In April of this year, California voters approved of Bush's handling of the Iraq situation by a 60% to 37% margin.

By August approval declined to 52%, while disapproval increased to 44%. Now, voter disapproval of Bush's performance in handling the Iraqi situation exceeds approval by a 52% to 40% margin.

Partisans are also very sharply divided on this matter, with 77% of Democrats disapproving, while among Republicans 70% approve. Non-partisans/others disapprove by a 45% to 37% ratio.

|   | <b><u>Approve</u></b> | <b><u>Disapprove</u></b> | <b><u>No opinion</u></b> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| September 2003                                | 40%                   | 52                       | 8                        |
| August 2003                                   | 52%                   | 44                       | 4                        |
| April 2003                                    | 60%                   | 37                       | 3                        |
| <b><u>Party registration (Sept. 2003)</u></b> |                       |                          |                          |
| Democrats                                     | 17%                   | 77                       | 6                        |
| Republicans                                   | 70%                   | 25                       | 5                        |
| Non-partisans/others                          | 37%                   | 45                       | 18                       |

### **Trend in Bush's overall job appraisal**

Prior to the terrorist attacks in September, 2001, voter regard for Bush's overall performance as President was mixed, with slightly more voters holding unfavorable than favorable opinion. For example, in September 2001, one week prior to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, 48% of California voters disapproved of Bush and 41% approved.

Immediately after the attacks, favorable regard for Bush soared to 74% favorable and 16% unfavorable.

However, over the past two years there has been a steady erosion in the public's regard for Bush to where now 46% approve and 48% disapprove.

The very high regard that Republicans have had of Bush has declined only slightly over this period (from 94% approval in September 2001 to 83% now). However, there has been a precipitous drop in the way Democrats view the President. Where 60% of Democrats approved of Bush immediately after the attacks, the proportion who now feel this way has dropped to 19%.

Among non-partisan/others, there has also been a big decline in favorable opinion, but not to the same extent as among Democrats. In September 2001 (post 9/11 attack), non-partisans were approving of Bush by 70% to 20%. Now, 49% disapprove and 42% approve.

**Table 4**  
**Overall job appraisal of George W. Bush as President**  
**(among California registered voters)**

|                                    | <u>Approve</u> | <u>Disapprove</u> | <u>No opinion</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <u>Total – Statewide</u>           |                |                   |                   |
| September 2003                     | 46%            | 48                | 6                 |
| August 2003                        | 50%            | 45                | 5                 |
| July 2003                          | 51%            | 43                | 6                 |
| September 2002                     | 57%            | 34                | 9                 |
| July 2002                          | 63%            | 28                | 9                 |
| April 2002                         | 62%            | 31                | 7                 |
| January 2002                       | 72%            | 21                | 7                 |
| December 2001                      | 76%            | 19                | 5                 |
| September 2001 (post-9/11 attack)* | 74%            | 16                | 10                |
| September 2001 (pre-9/11 attack)   | 41%            | 48                | 11                |
| May 2001                           | 42%            | 44                | 14                |
| <u>Democrats</u>                   |                |                   |                   |
| September 2003                     | 19%            | 75                | 6                 |
| August 2003                        | 23%            | 72                | 5                 |
| July 2003                          | 25%            | 68                | 7                 |
| September 2002                     | 37%            | 49                | 14                |
| July 2002                          | 49%            | 39                | 12                |
| April 2002                         | 44%            | 47                | 9                 |
| January 2002                       | 61%            | 30                | 9                 |
| December 2001                      | 62%            | 32                | 8                 |
| September 2001 (post-9/11 attack)* | 60%            | 27                | 13                |
| September 2001 (pre-9/11 attack)   | 20%            | 70                | 10                |
| May 2001                           | 22%            | 65                | 13                |
| <u>Republicans</u>                 |                |                   |                   |
| September 2003                     | 83%            | 13                | 4                 |
| August 2003                        | 86%            | 10                | 4                 |
| July 2003                          | 83%            | 12                | 5                 |
| September 2002                     | 87%            | 10                | 3                 |
| July 2002                          | 85%            | 10                | 5                 |
| April 2002                         | 91%            | 5                 | 4                 |
| January 2002                       | 92%            | 4                 | 4                 |
| December 2001                      | 96%            | 3                 | 1                 |
| September 2001 (post-9/11 attack)* | 94%            | 4                 | 2                 |
| September 2001 (pre-9/11 attack)   | 74%            | 15                | 11                |
| May 2001                           | 73%            | 16                | 11                |
| <u>Non-partisans/others</u>        |                |                   |                   |
| September 2003                     | 42%            | 49                | 9                 |
| August 2003                        | 45%            | 48                | 7                 |
| July 2003                          | 53%            | 43                | 4                 |
| September 2002                     | 51%            | 45                | 4                 |
| July 2002                          | 53%            | 36                | 11                |
| April 2002                         | 50%            | 43                | 7                 |
| January 2002                       | 63%            | 26                | 11                |
| December 2001                      | 70%            | 20                | 10                |
| September 2001 (post-9/11 attack)* | 71%            | 11                | 18                |
| September 2001 (pre-9/11 attack)   | 28%            | 58                | 14                |
| May 2001                           | 40%            | 47                | 13                |

\* September 2001 post-attack measure conducted among all adults.

**Direction of country**

There has not been much change in the views of California voters when asked whether the country was heading in the right direction or seriously off on the wrong track.

In three measures taken this year including this one, a small plurality thinks the country is on the wrong track. Three years ago, in August 2000, voter sentiment was much more positive – 67% said the country was going in the right direction and 25% believe it was on the wrong track

|                                  | <b><u>Right<br/>direction</u></b> | <b><u>Wrong<br/>track</u></b> | <b><u>No<br/>opinion</u></b> |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 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                            |
| June 1996                        | 34%                               | 49                            | 17                           |
| September 1992                   | 16%                               | 82                            | 2                            |
| October 1988*                    | 42%                               | 53                            | 5                            |

\* Asked of all California adults

## **Information About the Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a telephone survey conducted September 3-7, 2003 in English and Spanish among a random sample of Californian registered voters. A representative sample of 1,014 California adults were initially screened yielding interviews with 649 registered voters. In order to cover a range of issues and still minimize possible respondent fatigue, the overall sample was divided into two random subsamples of 343 and 306 voters each on those items asking voters to assess the job performance of President Bush in twelve specific areas.

Sampling was conducted by means of random digit dialing, which selects telephone exchanges within all area codes serving California in proportion to the population. From each exchange a random sample of telephone numbers was created by adding random digits to the telephone exchange selected, permitting access to both listed and unlisted telephones. After the completion of interviewing, the survey results were weighted slightly to *Field Poll* estimates of the state's total registered voter population.

According to statistical theory, results from the overall registered voter sample have a sampling error of +/- 4.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, while findings from each voter subsample have a sampling error of +/- 5.8 percentage points. Results from subgroups have somewhat larger sampling error ranges.

There are other possible sources of error in any survey in addition to sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sampling, sequencing or through omissions or errors in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

### **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?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as President?

I am going to read some issues facing the country and for each please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of the job President George W. Bush is doing in this area. (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Bush is doing in this area? (EACH ITEM ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS) (SEE RELEASE FOR ITEMS READ)