

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 #2108

Release Date: **Wednesday, February 25, 2004**

**BUSH APPROVAL RATING LOWEST
SINCE TAKING OFFICE. KERRY LEADS
IN DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY AND IN
MATCH-UP AGAINST BUSH.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

With a week to go before California's presidential primary election, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry holds a big lead (60% to 19%) over North Carolina Senator John Edwards among likely voters in the contest for California's large number of 371 delegates to this year's Democratic convention.

Over the past month Californians' assessment of the job performance rating of Republican President George W. Bush has declined markedly. In January, 52% approved of the job that Bush was doing and 42% disapproved. Now, that rating has reversed to 43% approve and 51% disapprove, an appraisal that is the worst given him by California voters since Bush first took office in 2001.

The decline in Bush's job ratings has affected his standings against his main Democratic rivals in simulated possible November general election pairings. Bush gets just 41% of the California voters preferences while Kerry receives the support of 53% in one such match-up. In the other, the President is preferred by 42% against Edwards' 51%. Last month Bush was leading in both these match-ups – nine percentage points over Kerry and twelve percentage points over Edwards.

Democratic presidential nomination race

Just prior to last month's Iowa caucuses, Kerry and Edwards each were receiving just single digit support among California Democratic primary voters – 7% for Kerry and 3% for Edwards. At the time, there were four other Democratic candidates leading the field, former Vermont Governor Howard Dean, General Wesley Clark, Connecticut Senator Joseph Lieberman and Missouri Congressman Dick Gephardt. They all have dropped out of the Presidential election contest during the past five weeks.

The preferences of Californians eligible to vote in the state's March 2 presidential primary have changed dramatically since then. At present, 60% prefer Kerry, while 19% support Edwards. Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich places a distant third at 3%, while New York civil rights leader Al Sharpton receives 2% support.

The following table shows the preference trend for the Democratic candidates revealed in six *Field Poll* surveys going back to April 2003.

Table 1
Trend of voter presidential preferences in the March 2 California primary
(among likely voters in the CA Democratic primary)

	<u>Kerry</u>	<u>Edwards</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
February 2004	60%	19	10*	11
January 2004	7%	3	69	21
Late September 2003	9%	1	55	35
Early September 2003	11%	1	54	34
July 2003	15%	4	44	37
April 2003	16%	3	46	35

* Kucinich received 3%, Sharpton 2%, and 5% for other candidates in the February 18-22 survey

Note: 2003 measures conducted among all Democratic registered voters

Primary open to independent voters

Next Tuesday, those California voters who are on the official voter registration rolls as non-partisans will have an opportunity to vote in either the Democratic or Republican primary election. According to the Secretary of State 16% of all registered voters are non-partisans and in its most recent survey, *The Field Poll* finds that 6% of these voters are likely to vote in the Democratic primary next Tuesday.

Those who are registered as Democrats divide 62% for Kerry and 19% for Edwards. Among the non-partisans Kerry gets 43% and Edwards 18%.

There are no very large differences in the preferences for the two candidates among men and women or across the major geographic areas of the state.

Table 2
Presidential preferences in the March 2 California primary
(among likely voters in the Democratic primary)

	<u>Kerry</u>	<u>Edwards</u>	<u>Kucinich</u>	<u>Sharpton</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
Statewide	60%	19	3	2	5	11
<u>Party</u>						
Democrats	62%	19	3	1	4	11
Non-partisans/independents*	43%	18	4	8	12	15
<u>Gender</u>						
Male	67%	18	4	1	3	7
Female	56%	19	3	2	6	14
<u>Region</u>						
Los Angeles County	57%	20	2	2	6	13
Other Southern CA	67%	15	2	1	6	9
San Francisco Bay Area	59%	22	6	2	3	8
Other Northern CA*	58%	16	3	**	4	19

* Relatively small sample base.

** Less than 1/2 of 1%

General election match-ups

When Bush is paired against Kerry and Edwards in simulated general election match-ups, the President trails in both cases. Against Kerry, the President is the choice of 41%, while 53% favor the Massachusetts Senator. When pitted against Edwards, Bush receives 42% support, while the North Carolina Senator garners 51%. These two findings are a reversal of the results found in a *Field Poll* survey last month.

More than eight out of ten Democrats prefer Kerry or Edwards when matched against Bush, while the President is endorsed by a like proportion of support from this state's Republicans. Non-partisan and minor party voters favor the two Democratic contenders.

Table 3
Voter preferences in the November 2004 general election for President
(among registered California voters)

	February 2004	January 2004	February 2004		
			Democrats	Republicans	Non-partisans/ others
Kerry	53%	39%	86%	14%	54%
Bush	41	48	9	83	34
Undecided	6	13	5	3	12
Edwards	51%	36%	82%	14%	50%
Bush	42	48	12	81	37
Undecided	7	16	6	5	13

Decline in Bush's job ratings

President Bush's job ratings in California have declined to the lowest level since taking office more than three years ago.

Currently, 51% of the state's registered voters disapprove of Bush's overall job performance and 43% approve. This is a reversal of how voters felt one month ago, when 52% approved and 42% disapproved of the President's performance.

The President's decline in positive assessments is most pronounced among Democrats. Last month, 62% disapproved and 29% approved. Now, the division is 78% disapproving and 16% approving among Democrats.

A less pronounced shift has occurred among non-partisan voters. Whereas the President received a mixed assessment among these voters last January, now his rating has worsened to 56% disapprove and 38% approve.

Republicans still regard Bush in an extremely favorable light, with 78% approving of his performance in office.

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

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>Total Statewide – February 2004</u>	43%	51	6
January 2004	52%	42	6
September 2003	46%	48	6
August 2003	50%	45	5
July 2003	51%	43	6
July 2002	63%	28	9
January 2002	72%	21	7
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 – February 2004</u>	16%	78	6
January 2004	29%	62	9
September 2003	19%	75	6
August 2003	23%	72	5
July 2003	25%	68	7
July 2002	49%	39	12
January 2002	61%	30	9
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 – February 2004</u>	78%	15	7
January 2004	82%	12	6
September 2003	83%	13	4
August 2003	86%	10	4
July 2003	83%	12	5
July 2002	85%	10	5
January 2002	92%	4	4
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 – February 2004</u>	38%	56	6
January 2004	49%	50	1
September 2003	42%	49	9
August 2003	45%	48	7
July 2003	53%	43	4
July 2002	53%	36	11
January 2002	63%	26	11
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.

Where Bush gets favorable or divided ratings

Bush gets high approval ratings in two policy areas. Six in ten voters (61%) approve of the job he is doing in upholding traditional family values. Another 59% approve of what Bush is doing in reducing the terrorist threat to the U.S.

On taxes California voters are divided, with 46% approving and 45% disapproving of the President's performance.

Table 5
California voter assessments of the job
President Bush is doing in three specific areas
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>Upholding traditional family values</u>			
February 2004	61%	33	6
<u>Reducing the terrorist threat</u>			
February 2004	59%	33	8
September 2003	64%	31	5
<u>Taxes</u>			
February 2004	46%	45	9
September 2003	44%	47	9

Negative ratings in eleven policy areas

Bush gets more negative than positive ratings in eleven other policy areas. Disapproval is greatest (67%) on the issue of his handling of the federal budget deficit. This is followed by his handling of illegal immigration (58% disapproval), health care (56%) and unemployment (55%).

In regard to the President's handling the economy, 53% disapprove and 42% approve.

Slightly more than half (53%) disapprove of the President's treatment of matters relating to California and 52% disapprove of his handling of foreign affairs. Bush also receives a 52% negative rating for his handling of the situation in Iraq. California voters also disapprove of the President's policies on education 51% to 38% and on the environment 50% to 38%.

On the issue of Medicare the proportion of California voters having no opinion is the largest for any of the issues (22%). Among those with an opinion about Bush's performance in handling Medicare, 47% disapprove and 31% approve.

Table 6
California voter assessments of the job
President Bush is doing in eleven specific areas
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Approve</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>The federal budget deficit</u>			
February 2004	67%	27	6
September 2003	57%	33	10
<u>Illegal immigration</u>			
February 2004	58%	27	15
<u>Health care</u>			
February 2004	56%	32	12
September 2003	50%	36	14
<u>Unemployment</u>			
February 2004	55%	33	12
September 2003	57%	34	9
<u>His treatment of matters relating to CA</u>			
February 2004	53%	29	18
September 2003	57%	29	10
<u>The economy</u>			
February 2004	53%	42	5
January 2004	46%	49	5
September 2003	55%	39	6
August 2003	50%	43	7
July 2003	53%	43	4
September 2002	44%	48	8
July 2002	41%	49	10
April 2002	38%	55	7
December 2001	35%	57	8
<u>Foreign affairs</u>			
February 2004	52%	42	6
September 2003	49%	46	5
<u>Handling the situation in Iraq</u>			
February 2004	52%	43	5
January 2004	45%	51	4
September 2003	52%	40	8
August 2003	44%	52	4
April 2003	37%	60	3
<u>Education</u>			
February 2004	51%	38	11
<u>The environment</u>			
February 2004	50%	38	12
September 2003	48%	39	13
<u>Medicare</u>			
February 2004	47%	31	22
September 2003	50%	28	22

Doubts about Bush

Only about four in ten California voters (38%) feel that Bush is a leader they can trust, while six in ten (61%) say they have doubts and reservations about him.

The proportion of voters having doubts and reservations about Bush is greatest among Democrats (87%) and non-partisans/others (67%). This compares to 25% of Republicans also have doubts and reservations about the President.

Less than half of both men (40%) and women (36%) in this state say they have trust in the President.

Table 7
Is George W. Bush a leader you can trust or
do you have some doubts and reservations?
(among California registered voters)

	<u>Have doubts/ reservations</u>	<u>Can trust</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Statewide –	61%	38	1
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	87%	12	1
Republicans	25%	74	1
Non-partisans/others	67%	31	2
<u>Gender</u>			
Men	59%	40	1
Women	62%	36	2
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	58%	41	1
Latino	63%	36	1
Black/African-American	81%	15	4
Asian/other	66%	32	2

U. S. on wrong track

For the first time since President Bush took office, a majority of California voters (52%) feel the country is seriously off on the wrong track, while just 35% think it going in the right direction.

Today's reading is the most negative since September 1992, when Bush's father was in the White House.

Table 8				
Are things in the U.S. generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?				
(among registered California voters)				
		<u>Right direction</u>	<u>Wrong track</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
February 2004		35%	52	13
January 2004		47%	44	9
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
<u>Party</u>				
Democrats	Feb. 2004	18%	72	10
	Jan. 2004	34%	58	8
Republicans	Feb. 2004	62%	25	13
	Jan. 2004	67%	23	10
Non-partisans/others	Feb. 2004	25%	58	17
	Jan. 2004	40%	50	10

Information About the Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a cross-section sampling of 958 registered voters in California. In order to increase the sample of voters in the upcoming March 2 Democratic primary, additional interviews were conducted among these voters, bringing the total number of Democratic primary voters to 497. Interviews were conducted by telephone in English and Spanish February 18-22, 2004. Up to five attempts was made to reach a randomly selected voter at each number dialed. After the completion of interviewing, the sample was weighted to *Field Poll* estimates of the state's total registered voter population.

According to statistical theory, results from the overall sample of 958 registered voters have a sampling error of +/-3.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings among Democratic primary voters have a sampling error of +/-4.5 percentage points. 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, sequencing or through omissions or errors in sampling, 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?

Do you think George W. Bush is a leader you can trust or do you have some doubts and reservations?

(ASKED OF DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY VOTERS ONLY:) In California's March 2nd primary election for President, the candidates include (NAMES READ IN RANDOM ORDER). If California's Democratic primary for President were being held today, for whom would you vote – (RE-READ LAST NAMES) or someone else?

I am going to read some possible match-ups between Democratic and Republican candidates for President in the November 2004 presidential election. For each pairing, please tell me which candidate you would choose if the election for President were being held today. What about... (PAIR READ, ASKING:). If the election were being held today and these were the candidates for President, who would you prefer? (SEE RELEASE FOR PAIRS READ)

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. (AREAS READ IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Bush is doing in this area? (SEE RELEASE FOR AREAS READ)