

# 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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**SCHWARZENEGGER GETS HIGH JOB APPROVAL RATING. VOTERS EXPECT STATE FINANCES TO IMPROVE NEXT YEAR BUT BELIEVE TAXES WILL NEED TO BE RAISED.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

California voters are very approving of Arnold Schwarzenegger's performance as Governor after six months in office. Almost two in three voters (65%) approve of the job that Schwarzenegger is doing and just 23% disapprove.

In two previous *Field Poll* surveys the job that the new Governor was doing was viewed very favorably, but this latest measure finds his ratings higher than any received by his two immediate predecessors, and approaching the record highs given two former Governors.

During the past forty-five years six men – three Democrats and three Republicans – other than Schwarzenegger have served as Governor. A Republican, George Deukmejian, received the highest rating of any Governor when in August 1985, during his third year in office, 72% of Californians approved of his performance.

While he was in his second year in office, Democrat Jerry Brown in March 1976 achieved a 69% approval rating. Gray Davis, another Democrat and the man who preceded Schwarzenegger, was viewed favorably by 62% during the second year of his first term.

Republican Ronald Reagan's job approval rating reached 60% in February 1969 after he assumed office in 1967. The best rating for another Republican Governor, Pete Wilson was 53% in June 1991. Democrat Pat Brown's highest approval mark was 51% in a June 1959 survey, after he had been in office for just six months.

In the current survey Republicans are overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of Schwarzenegger (89% approve), although pluralities of both Democrats (48%) and non-partisans (58%) also rate the Governor favorably.

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
May 2004	65%	23	12
February 2004	56%	26	18
January 2004	52%	27	21
<u>Party (May 2004)</u>			
Democrats	48%	38	14
Republicans	89%	5	6
Non-partisans/others	58%	23	19
<u>Highest approval ratings for past California Governors</u>			
Gray Davis (D) – Feb. 2000	62%	20	18
Pete Wilson (R) – June 1991	53%	40	7
George Deukmejian (R) – Aug. 1985	72%	25	3
Jerry Brown (D) – March 1976	69%	25	6
Ronald Reagan (R) – Feb. 1969	60%	31	9
Pat Brown (D) – June 1959	51%	22	27

*Note: Job ratings of Governors prior to Davis were measured using a three or five-point response scale and were converted to the current two-point approval-disapproval scale for comparative purposes.*

### **Exceeding expectations**

Most voters (64%) say they believe Schwarzenegger is doing a better job as Governor than they expected. Just 11% think he is doing a worse job, while for 15% he has met their expectations.

Three out of four Republicans (77%) feel the Governor is doing better than expected, and just 2% think he is doing a worse job than expected. By a wide margin (55% to 17%) Democrats also concede that Schwarzenegger is doing a better than worse job than they anticipated. Non-partisans and those affiliated with other parties are also pleased – 60% saying the Governor is doing a better job and just 16% say a worse job than what they envisioned before he was elected.

	<u>Better job</u>	<u>Worse job</u>	<u>About as good</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
All voters	<u>64%</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>10</u>
Democrats	55%	17	17	11
Republicans	77%	2	14	7
Others	60%	16	14	10

### **Legislature's job appraisal**

While the ratings voters give to state legislature have improved slightly in recent months, they remain in a trough that has existed for some time. Just 27% approve of what the legislature is doing and 52% disapprove. The 52% disapproval percentage is down from 58% found in February, 62% in January and 67% in July of last year.

Republicans are most critical of the legislature's performance (63% to 21%). Pluralities of Democrats disapprove (45% to 33%). Twice as many non-partisans disapprove as approve of the legislature's overall performance (50% to 25%).

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**Table 3**  
**Trend of voter appraisals of the job the state legislature is doing**  
**(among registered voters)**

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	<b><u>Approve</u></b>	<b><u>Disapprove</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
May 2004	27%	52	21
February 2004	26%	58	16
January 2004	23%	62	15
July 2003	19%	67	14
April 2003	31%	51	18
September 2002	35%	46	19
July 2002	45%	36	9
April 2002	39%	41	20
January 2002	40%	36	24
<b><u>Party</u></b> (May 2004)			
Democrats	33%	45	22
Republicans	21%	63	16
Non-partisans/others	25%	50	25

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### **Governor vs. legislative leaders**

If there were major disagreements between the Governor and the state legislature on matters relating to the state budget, more voters are inclined to support Schwarzenegger (47%) than the legislature (29%). Republicans are quite one-sided in choosing the Governor (79%) over leaders of the legislature (5%) in any disagreements. By relatively small margins, pluralities of Democrats and non partisans would back legislative leaders over the Governor.

<b>Table 4</b>			
<b>If the Governor and leaders in the state legislature disagreed on how to handle the state budget, whose position would you be more inclined to support? (among registered voters)</b>			
	<b><u>The Governor</u></b>	<b><u>Leaders in the state legislature</u></b>	<b><u>Neither/No opinion</u></b>
May 2004	47%	29	24
February 2004	43%	32	25
January 2004	48%	30	22
<b><u>Party (May 2004)</u></b>			
Democrats	28%	45	27
Republicans	79%	5	16
Non-partisans/others	31%	38	31

**View of state finances**

Voters are somewhat evenly divided in their views of the state’s financial situation. One in four (26%) believe that the state is better off than where it was a year ago, and 23% think it is worse off. The largest single block of voters think things are about the same financially. Republicans are somewhat more upbeat in their assessments of the state’s financial situation than are Democrats and non-partisans.

<b>Table 5</b>				
<b>Are state government finances better off, about the same or worse off than they were last year? (among registered voters)</b>				
	<b><u>Better off</u></b>	<b><u>About the same</u></b>	<b><u>Worse off</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
All voters	<u>26%</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>8</u>
Democrats	18%	49	26	7
Republicans	41%	35	17	7
Others	19%	47	27	7

**Optimistic expectations**

About half of all voters (49%) think the financial condition of the state will be better next year. Just 17% say it will be worse off and 28% think things will be about the same. Seven in ten Republicans (72%) expect better times ahead for the state next year. While Democrats and non-partisans are not as confident, they tend to be somewhat more optimistic than pessimistic.

**Table 6**  
**Next year do you expect the financial situation of state government to get better, stay the same or get worse?**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<u>Get better</u>	<u>Stay the same</u>	<u>Get worse</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
All voters	49%	28	17	7
Democrats	35%	35	21	9
Republicans	72%	16	8	4
Others	36%	33	23	8

**Voters believe taxes will have to be raised**

Six in ten voters (62%) believe that taxes will have to be raised in order to resolve the state budget deficit. Almost three in ten (27%) think otherwise.

The proportion of voters who believe that the state's current budget deficit can be resolved without raising taxes has declined some from earlier measures. By a five to one ratio (74% to 15%) Democrats expect to see additional tax levies. A plurality of Republicans (49% to 40%) also hold this view. Non-partisans also strongly believe (61% to 29%) that taxes will have to be raised to resolve the state's budget deficit.

**Table 7**  
**Can the state's budget deficit be resolved without a tax increase or will taxes have to be raised?**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<u>Taxes will have to be raised</u>	<u>Can be resolved without raising taxes</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
May 2004	62%	27	11
January 2004	59%	35	6
July 2003	53%	37	10
April 2003	62%	31	7
<u>Party (May 2004)</u>			
Democrats	74%	15	11
Republicans	49%	40	11
Non-partisans/others	61%	29	10

**Right track – wrong track**

Despite voters’ favorable appraisal of Governor Schwarzenegger and the belief that state finances will get better, a majority (51% to 37%) still feel that things in the state are on the wrong track. This appraisal is not significantly different than that found in February, although it represents an improvement from polls conducted last summer, before the recall election.

**Table 8**  
**Overall direction that California is heading**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b><u>Wrong track</u></b>	<b><u>Right direction</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
2004 (May)	51%	37	12
2004 (February)	54%	35	11
2003 (August)	76%	16	8
2003 (July)	75%	18	7
2003 (April)	65%	26	9
2002 (September)	54%	33	13
2002 (January)	50%	41	9
2001	50%	43	7
2000	35%	58	7
1999	34%	52	14
1998	42%	48	10
1997	54%	36	10
1996	49%	39	12
1995*	57%	32	11
1994*	70%	21	9
1993	83%	11	6
1992	90%	7	3
1989*	42%	50	8
1988*	43%	52	5

\* Surveys conducted among all California adults, not just registered adults.

## **Information About the Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a cross-section sampling of 745 registered voters in California. Interviews were conducted by telephone in English and Spanish May 18-24, 2004. Up to five attempts were 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. Governor Schwarzenegger's overall job approval rating was asked of the full sample. However, in order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize respondent fatigue, the overall sample was divided into two random subsamples of 357 and 388 likely voters each on some questions.

According to statistical theory, results from the overall sample have a sampling error of +/- 3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings from each random subsample have a sampling error of +/- 5.2 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 this state, do you think things in California 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 Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as Governor of California?

Do you think Arnold Schwarzenegger is doing a better job as Governor than you expected or a worse job than you expected?

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the California state legislature is doing its job?

If Governor Schwarzenegger's position on an important issue differed from that of the leaders in the state legislature, whose position would you be more inclined to support – Governor Schwarzenegger's or the leaders in the state legislature?

What is your impression of the financial condition of the state government compared to a year ago? Do you think that financially the state government is better off, about the same or worse off than it was last year?

What about next year? Do you expect that the financial condition of the state government will get better, stay about the same or get worse?

As you may know, the state government is currently trying to deal with a very large budget deficit. Do you think the state's budget deficit can be resolved this year without having to raise taxes or do you think that taxes will have to be raised?