

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

550 Kearny Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94108-2527
(415) 781-4921 Fax: (415) 434-2541
E-mail: fieldpoll@field.com

COPYRIGHT 1999 BY THE FIELD INSTITUTE. FOR PUBLICATION BY SUBSCRIBERS ONLY.

Release #1935

**FAVORABLE VIEW OF JOB
PERFORMANCES OF CLINTON,
DAVIS, FEINSTEIN, BOXER, AND
STATE LEGISLATURE. CONGRESS
IS SEEN IN A POOR LIGHT.**

Release Date: **Friday, October 22, 1999**

IMPORTANT: Contract for this service is subject to revocation if publication or broadcast takes place before release date or if contents are divulged to persons outside of subscriber staff prior to release time. (ISSN 0195-4520)

By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The latest *Field Poll* survey completed October 8–17 asked Californians how they rate some of their elected political leaders. The poll finds the following results:

- While the public is somewhat divided in its personal regard for Bill Clinton, he still gets very positive marks for the job he is doing as President.
- Gray Davis continues to receive very high approval ratings for the job he is doing as Governor.
- The job performances of Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer are also seen in a favorable light.
- While the public was evenly divided in its appraisal of how the state legislature was doing about two years ago, their perception of that body improved last year and it continues to be on the favorable side in the current poll.
- However, the view that Californians have of the job Congress is doing has declined significantly during the past fourteen months.
- There continues to be a greater disposition among voters statewide to favor a Democrat rather than a Republican in next year's Congressional races.

Clinton's job performance ratings

President Clinton continues to receive very positive job approval ratings among the California public, with 62% approving his performance and 29% disapproving. Yet, the public's personal regard for him is mixed, as 42% have an unfavorable opinion and 53% a favorable opinion of the President.

Table 1a
Trend of approve/disapprove job ratings of Bill Clinton as President
(among registered voters)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
October '99	62%	29	9
August '99	65%	30	5
March '99	68%	28	4
1998 (average)	65%	29	6
1997 (average)	57%	31	12
1996 (average)	56%	35	9
1995 (average)	45%	43	12
October '94	50%	39	11
<u>October '99 subgroups</u>			
Men	62%	29	9
Women	61%	29	10
Democrats	84%	12	4
Republicans	29%	63	8
Other	57%	35	8

Table 1b
Trend of personal regard for President Bill Clinton
(among registered voters)

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
October '99	53%	42	5
August '99	55%	42	3
February '98	58%	38	4
February '97	65%	32	3
September '96	61%	35	4
December '95	60%	37	3
October '92	54%	35	11
<u>October '99 subgroups</u>			
Democrats	78%	19	3
Republicans	24%	71	5
Others	53%	38	9

Governor Gray Davis' job performance ratings

Public approval of the job Davis is doing is now running better than two to one (56% to 24%). While there has not been much change in his approval level over three separate *Field Poll* measures conducted this year (58% in March, 61% in August and now 56%), the proportion who disapprove of his performance in office has doubled since March (from 12% to 24% now).

Table 2
Trend of approve/disapprove job ratings of Gray Davis as Governor
(among California adults)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
October '99	56%	24	20
August '99	61%	22	17
March '99	58%	12	30
<u>October '99 subgroups</u>			
Men	55%	25	20
Women	56%	22	21
Democrats	66%	18	16
Republicans	43%	37	20
Other	46%	27	27

View of Senator Dianne Feinstein's Job Performance

Public opinion of Feinstein has been somewhat volatile since she took office. When she was the target of a heavy negative advertising campaign during her bitter election battle against Republican Michael Huffington in 1994, a plurality of Californians disapproved of her performance in office. After winning re-election that year her job marks improved. Now, her 51% approval vs. 25% disapproval rating is among the best appraisals she has received in office.

Table 3
Trend of Dianne Feinstein's
job performance ratings as U.S. Senator
(among all adults)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
October '99	51%	25	24
August '99	44%	27	29
March '99	55%	22	23
February '98	52%	25	23
November '97	43%	34	23
August '97	47%	29	24
May '97	49%	32	19
February '97	48%	27	25
October '94	38%	45	17
<u>October '99 subgroups</u>			
Men	52%	29	19
Women	50%	22	28
Democrats	73%	14	13
Republicans	34%	47	19
Other	44%	35	21

Appraisal of Senator Barbara Boxer's Job Performance

Boxer has won two closely fought election battles in 1992 and 1998. While more Californians have approved than disapproved of the job Boxer is doing as U.S. Senator, her ratings have generally not been as high as Feinstein's. Currently, 47% approve and 29% disapprove of the job Boxer is doing. This is one of the best readings she has received in office.

Table 4
Trend of Barbara Boxer's
job performance ratings as U.S. Senator
(among all adults)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
October '99	47%	29	24
August '99	41%	34	25
March '99	51%	28	21
February '98	40%	25	35
November '97	38%	34	28
August '97	41%	31	28
May '97	42%	28	30
February '97	45%	30	25
<u>October '99 subgroups</u>			
Men	46%	35	19
Women	47%	24	29
Democrats	65%	19	16
Republicans	23%	56	21
Other	41%	35	24

How the state legislature is viewed

Currently the public approves of the job that the state legislature is doing by a 45% to 26% margin. This rating is on a par with ratings it received during the past two years and is much better than the 39% approve and 37% disapprove mark it received in March 1997.

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Oct. '99	45%	26	29
Aug. '99	47%	28	25
Mar. '99	49%	23	28
Aug. '98	44%	30	26
Mar. '97	39%	37	24
<u>Party (Oct. '99)</u>			
Democrats	53%	24	23
Republicans	39%	35	26
Others	41%	26	33

How Congress is perceived

During the past three years Californians' view of Congress' performance has varied widely. In February 1996 its rating was very negative, with 68% disapproving and 25% approving. During 1997 and 1998 the public's view of the Congress improved substantially to where in August 1998 57% approved and 33% disapproved. Earlier this year, public perceptions again turned negative with 49% disapproving and 41% approving in March. The public's view of the Congress has continued to sour since then, with 50% disapproving and 33% approving of its overall performance.

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
October '99	33%	50	17
March '99	41%	49	10
August '98	57%	33	10
November '97	34%	55	11
August '97	38%	51	11
February '97	36%	46	18
February '96	25%	68	7
<u>Oct. 1999 subgroups</u>			
Democrats	27%	65	8
Republicans	34%	52	14
Other	26%	63	11

Generic ballot test for next year’s House elections

One index of voting sentiment in measuring the relative strength of the two major parties in upcoming House races is the so-called “generic ballot test”. This is where a cross-section of voters statewide (spanning the state’s 52 Congressional Districts) are asked their current party preferences for the House race in their district.

While there are a number of flaws in attempting to accurately reflect the partisan composition of a state’s or nation’s Congressional seats by these generic tests alone, they have in the past more times than not roughly corresponded to election outcomes.

The results of the generic ballot tests taken in the month of October about two weeks before the 1994 and 1996 Congressional elections reasonably foreshadowed the statewide aggregate vote for Congress. No test was made by *The Field Poll* in the months immediately prior to the November 1998 vote, which went heavily Democratic.

The current survey finds that in the generic ballot test Democratic House candidates are preferred over Republican candidates in California by a 42% to 33% margin. This is similar to what was found earlier this year. These data would suggest that if there were Congressional elections occurring next month the Democratic Party would likely win more House seats in California than Republicans. However, Congressional elections won’t occur until November of next year. If recent past history is any guide, voter opinions in regard to Congress can take many turns before the upcoming election.

Table 7
If House of Representatives election were held now
which party’s candidate would you prefer?
(among likely voters)

	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Republican</u>	<u>Other/no opinion</u>
October 1999	42%	33	25
March 1999	42%	33	25
November 1998 vote*	52%	43	5
February 1998	37%	36	27
November 1996 vote*	50%	45	5
October 1996	40%	36	24
September 1996	41%	33	26
June 1996	46%	35	19
February 1996	42%	37	21
November 1994 vote*	48%	49	3
October 1994	41%	37	22
September 1994	36%	33	31
<u>October 1999 subgroups</u>			
Democrats	77%	3	20
Republicans	7%	71	22
Other	37%	21	42

* Aggregate vote for Congress statewide across California’s 52 Congressional districts

Information About the Survey

Sample Details

The results in this report are based on a telephone survey conducted October 8-17, 1999 among a representative statewide sample of 1,001 California adults, including 688 registered voters, of whom 514 are likely to vote in next year's elections. Subgroups reported in this release have the following sample bases: 504 men, 497 women, 312 registered Democrats, 230 registered Republicans, and 146 registered as declined to state or with a minor party. The survey was completed by telephone in English and Spanish using random digit dialing methods.

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall adult sample have a sampling error of +/- 3.2 percentage points. Findings from subgroups of likely voter population would have larger error estimates.

There are many possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sequencing or through undetected errors or omission in sampling, interviewing or data processing. Every effort was made to minimize such errors.

Questions Asked

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as President?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way the Congress is doing its job?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Gray Davis is handling his job as Governor?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way the State Legislature is doing its job?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Dianne Feinstein is handling her job as U.S. Senator?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barbara Boxer is handling her job as U.S. Senator?

I am going to read some names of people who are in public affairs and politics. As I read each name, please tell me whether your opinion of that person is favorable, unfavorable or whether you don't know enough about that person to have an opinion. Is your opinion of Bill Clinton, President, favorable or unfavorable?

In next year's November general election for U.S. House of Representatives, do you plan to vote for the Republican candidate or the Democratic candidate in your district? (IF UNCERTAIN, ASK:) Well, which party's candidate do you lean to at this time?