

# 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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**VOTERS NARROWLY FAVOR THE  
'NONE OF THE ABOVE' BALLOT  
CHOICE. MAJORITY OF ALL CITIZENS  
LIKE HAVING THE OPTION OF  
ELECTION DAY REGISTRATION.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Chances are that many voters marking ballots today in local election contests throughout the state are dissatisfied with the candidate choices being offered. A statewide ballot initiative that will appear on the March 2000 election ballot would give such voters an option to register their discontent by voting for a "none of the above" ballot designation.

And while hundreds of thousands of voters will be going to the polls today, there is a large number of other California citizens who may wish to vote but are precluded from doing so because they failed to register by the registration deadline 29 days ago.

In its most recent survey *The Field Poll* measured citizen and voter feelings about these two election issues. One is to what extent voters would like the option of voting for the designation "none of the above" if they are dissatisfied with the candidate choices being offered in an election contest. The other attempted to measure how many citizens who failed to register in time for an election would have voted if they had been given the opportunity of registering on election day, and whether the public supports changing state election laws to allow same day registration and voting.

### **“None of the Above” initiative**

In next March’s primary election, California voters will have the opportunity of deciding whether they want the “none of the above” ballot designation to be listed on all candidate election contests in future elections. Al Shugart, a venture capitalist from Pebble Beach, obtained the necessary signatures to have the measure placed on the ballot.

By allowing voters who don’t like the candidates to vote for “none of the above,” the measure would affect every candidate election in California from president to the state legislature by drawing votes away from the listed candidate options. However, even if “none of the above” receives a large proportion of votes, the election would still be won by the candidate receiving the most votes.

*The Field Poll* finds that a slim plurality of likely voters currently supports the “None of the Above” initiative. The division of opinion is now running 49% to 42% in favor of the proposal, similar to what was found in two previous *Field Poll* measures taken last August and March.

There is not much difference in the way Democrats and Republicans feel about the initiative, with each group favoring it by a narrow margin. However, those who are non-partisan or are members of a minor party like the idea by a two to one margin.

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**Table 1**  
**Trend of voter reaction to “None of the Above” ballot option initiative**  
**after being read a summary of its official ballot description**  
**(among likely voters)**

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	<b><u>Favor</u></b>	<b><u>Oppose</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
<b><u>Statewide</u></b>			
October 1999	49%	42	9
August 1999	52%	42	6
March 1999	48%	44	8
<b><u>October subgroups</u></b>			
Democrats	46%	44	10
Republicans	49%	43	8
Other	60%	31	9

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**Citizens precluded from voting because of not being registered**

Almost one in five (18%) California citizens say that at some point in their lives they found out too late that they were ineligible to vote in an election because they had not registered at least 29 days before an election. Of those who report this, about three-fourths (or 14% overall) say that had they been allowed to register on election day they “very likely” would have voted.

A slightly larger proportion of such voters are Democrats or independents than are Republicans. About 20% of those who identify with the Democratic Party say there was a time in the past when they couldn’t vote because they found out too late that they weren’t registered. This compares to just 12% among self-identified Republicans, and 21% of independents.

**Table 2**

**Proportion of all adult citizens who were precluded from voting at some time in the past because of requirement to register before election and likelihood of voting if allowed to register on election day (among all adult citizens)**

	<u>Statewide</u>	<u>Identify with</u>		
		<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Independents</u>
Not registered, couldn’t vote but wanted to	18%	20%	12%	21%
<u>Likelihood of voting if allowed</u>				
Very likely	14%	14%	10%	17%
Somewhat likely	2	4	2	3
Not too or not at all likely	2	2	*	*
Don’t know	*	*	*	*

\* less than 1/2 of 1%

**Opinions of allowing election day registration**

By a large margin — 55% to 36% — adult citizens in this state think that allowing election day voter registration would be a good idea. However, there are significant variations in support relating to a person’s current registration and voting status. For example, adult citizens not currently registered believe that same day registration and voting is a good idea by an overwhelming 70% to 19% margin. However, among those already on the voter rolls opinions are more divided, with 49% thinking the change would be a good idea and 42% believing it would be a bad idea.

In addition, there are attitude differences between registered voters who are likely to vote in the March primary and those who are not. Those less likely to vote in March, which includes many voters who vote only infrequently in statewide primary elections, endorse the idea of same day registration 69% to 22%. However, those most likely to vote in the March primary tend to view same day registration as a bad idea (48% to 43%).

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**Table 3**  
**Good or bad idea to change California's election laws**  
**to allow registration and voting on election day**  
**(among all adult citizens)**

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	<u>Good idea</u>	<u>Bad idea</u>	<u>Mixed/ no opinion</u>
Total citizen adults	55%	36	9
<u>Registration/voting status</u>			
Citizen, not registered to vote	70%	19	11
Registered to vote	<u>49%</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>9</u>
Likely voter in primary	43%	48	9
Not a likely primary voter	69%	22	9
<u>Party identification</u>			
Democrats	60%	30	10
Republicans	40%	51	9
Independent/other	59%	32	9

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### **Bill in the legislature**

Prior to 1972 Californians had to be registered 54 days in advance of a primary or general election in order to be eligible to vote. This was later changed to its current 29 days, which was chosen because it was deemed the shortest timeframe within which county registrars would be able to mail out sample ballots, absentee ballots, and ballot pamphlets, as well as verifying registration information to voters.

Last June the Assembly approved a bill proposed by Assemblyman Bob Hertzberg (D-Sherman Oaks) which would allow voters to register to vote right up until election day. The bill would permit previously unregistered citizens to vote on election day so long as they provide proof of residency, such as a driver's license or a utility bill.

Without such proof, they would still be allowed to register and cast ballots but voting officials would count these only as provisional ballots until their residency was confirmed.

Hertzberg and supporters of the bill feel that this change would promote voting and lead to higher participation in California elections.

However, California's chief elections officer, Secretary of State Bill Jones, opposes Hertzberg's proposal because it might lead to situations with some people voting who were not eligible, or would enable others to vote more than once. He prefers that a pilot program be tested in a single special election before the idea is adopted statewide.

### **Effects on participation rate**

Ray Wolfinger, a UC Berkeley political scientist, and author of "Who Votes" says that election day registration in other states has been shown to increase the percentage and number of people who vote. He also maintains that same day registration has not been shown to benefit Democrats more than Republicans, as some Republicans charge. His research, along with others, show that in California, where between one-quarter and one-third of the population changes their address each year, many of those who were previously registered to vote forget to re-register at their new address.

Six states permit voters to register to vote on election day. These states, and their voting participation rates in the November 1996 presidential election, are: Maine (64%), Minnesota (64%), Wyoming (62%), New Hampshire (60%), Wisconsin (60%), and Idaho (59%). California's participation rate among citizen-eligible adults in the 1996 election was 53%. In the 1998 non-presidential election which involved a highly publicized governor's race as well as many controversial ballot proposition contests, voting participation was just 41%, down from 47% in 1994.

Another state, North Dakota, with a population of about 641,000, has no registration requirement at all. The system relies on the belief that local poll workers can recognize everybody who's supposed to be voting. However, any prospective vote can be challenged by an election observer or precinct worker. Turnout in North Dakota typically runs about 60%.

## **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 894 citizens, of whom 688 were registered to vote and 514 could be deemed likely to vote in the March primary election. 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 citizen adult sample have a sampling error of +/- 3.4 percentage points, while findings from the likely voter sample would have a sampling error of +/-4.5 percentage points. Findings from survey subgroups 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**

Has there ever been a time since you've been old enough to vote, when you wanted to vote, but couldn't, because you found out too late that you were not registered to vote at least 29 days prior to the election, which is the law in California?

IF YES: Suppose the state's election law had been different and you were allowed to both register and vote on election day at your local polling place. If that had been the case, how likely is it that you would have voted — very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely or not at all likely?

There has been some talk about the idea of changing California's election laws to enable citizens of voting age to register and vote on election day at their local polling place. How do you feel about this? Do you think allowing same day registration and voting in California would be a good idea or a bad idea?