

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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BETTER JOB RATINGS FOR BUSH AS VOTER PERCEPTIONS OF HIS HANDLING OF THE ECONOMY AND IRAQ IMPROVE.

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

California voter perceptions of improvements in President George W. Bush's handling of the economy and the situation in Iraq have boosted his overall job rating from what it was last fall.

In a statewide survey completed January 5-9, 52% of this state's registered voters now approve of Bush's job performance overall, while 42% disapprove. This rating is up from the 46% approve and 48% disapprove result found last September.

Most of the improvement in Bush's overall job rating is due to a moderation in the previously very negative appraisals of the President's performance by Democratic voters. Last September, 75% of this state's Democrats said they disapproved of the job Bush was doing and just 19% approved. Now, 62% of the Democrats disapprove and 29% approve.

Table 1
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</u> – January 2004	52%	42	6
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> – January 2004	29%	62	9
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> – January 2004	82%	12	6
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> – January 2004	49%	50	1
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.

Bush's handling of economy

Assessments of the job President Bush is doing in handling the nation's economy grew increasingly negative throughout 2002 and 2003, to where by the end of September of last year 55% disapproved and 39% approved.

However, Bush's economic performance ratings have now rebounded, with a slightly larger proportion now approving (49%) than disapproving (46%).

Partisans are poles apart in their view of Bush's performance on the economy. Among Democrats, 70% disapprove, while 76% of Republicans approve. Non-partisans and others are evenly split – 48% approving and 48% disapproving.

Voters in the state's two largest metropolitan areas, Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area, are highly disapproving of the job Bush is doing on the economy. However, in the nine Southern California counties outside of Los Angeles sentiment runs two to one in support of Bush's economic performance. A majority of residents living in Northern California outside the Bay Area also approve of Bush in this area.

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

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
January 2004	49%	46	5
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 (Jan. 2004)</u>			
Democrats	27%	70	3
Republicans	76%	16	8
Non-partisans/others	48%	48	4
<u>Region (Jan. 2004)</u>			
Los Angeles County	37%	56	7
Other Southern California	63%	34	3
San Francisco Bay Area*	34%	61	5
Other Northern California*	58%	33	9

* Relatively small samples.

Iraq situation

Last September, 52% of California voters had a negative view of the President's performance in dealing with the war in Iraq, while 40% had a positive perception. The current poll finds an improvement in voters' assessments in this area, with 51% now rating his performance positively and 45% negatively.

Eight in ten (81%) Republicans approve of Bush's handling of the situation in Iraq, while two-thirds (67%) of Democrats disapprove. A majority (55% to 42%) of non-partisans also disapprove of Bush's performance in regards to Iraq.

Table 3
Appraisal of the job Bush is doing handling the situation in Iraq
(among registered California voters)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
January 2004	51%	45	4
September 2003	40%	52	8
August 2003	52%	44	4
April 2003	60%	37	3
<u>Party registration (Jan. 2004)</u>			
Democrats	30%	67	3
Republicans	81%	13	6
Non-partisans/others	42%	55	3

Iraqi war decision and the toll it is taking

Notwithstanding Bush's higher ratings in handling the Iraqi situation, the Iraqi war continues to be a very divisive issue for the President. At present, about as many Californians (47%) believe Bush was wrong in his original decision to go to war as feel he made the right decision (49%).

In addition, a plurality of voters (50%) think the war in Iraq is not worth the toll it is taking in American lives and other costs, while 43% take the opposite position. Last August, these proportions were about reversed, with 49% saying the cost in lives and money spent on the war was worth the cost, while 45% believing it was not.

On both of these questions Republicans and Democrats hold widely different views. In addition, men tend to be more approving than disapproving of Bush, while a majority of women hold negative views on this.

Table 4			
Did the President make the right decision or the wrong decision when he declared war on Iraq? (among registered California voters)			
	<u>Right decision</u>	<u>Wrong decision</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
January 2004	49%	47	4
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	29%	67	4
Republicans	79%	16	5
Non-partisans/others	40%	58	2
<u>Gender</u>			
Men	57%	40	3
Women	42%	54	4

Table 5			
Is the war in Iraq worth the toll it has taken in American lives and other kinds of costs? (among registered California voters)			
	<u>Yes, worth the costs</u>	<u>No, not worth it</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
January 2004	43%	50	7
August 2003	49%	45	6
<u>Party registration (Jan. 2004)</u>			
Democrats	23%	72	5
Republicans	72%	18	10
Non-partisans/others	37%	60	3
<u>Gender (Jan. 2004)</u>			
Men	54%	41	5
Women	33%	59	8

Terrorism threat

In respect to the job the U.S. is doing in reducing the threat of terrorism in this country, about one in four voters in this state (24%) feel things are going very well. Counterbalancing this is a negative view held by 22% who believe things are not going well at all. Slightly more than half (52%) of voters take a moderate position and feel the nation's war on terrorism is going somewhat well.

While there is some difference among partisans on this question, it is not as great as it is on some of the other issues measured. Men and women appear to hold similar views on how well the U.S. government is doing in reducing the terrorist threat.

Table 6
How well do you think the U.S. government is doing in
reducing the threat of terrorism in this country?
(among registered California voters)

	<u>Very</u> <u>well</u>	<u>Somewhat</u> <u>well</u>	<u>Not</u> <u>well</u>	<u>No</u> <u>opinion</u>
January 2004	24%	52	22	2
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	16%	55	29	*
Republicans	35%	55	8	2
Non-partisans/others	25%	41	33	1
<u>Gender</u>				
Men	25%	53	20	2
Women	24%	50	24	2

* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

Direction of the country

Californians are also about evenly split on whether things in the U.S. are generally going in the right direction or whether they are seriously off on the wrong track. At present, 47% say the country is headed in the right direction, while 44% see it on the wrong track. Californians have remained closely divided on this broad measure in six different measures taken since July 2002.

While a majority of Democrats (58%) and half of non-partisans (50%) think things are seriously off on the wrong track, Republicans feel the U.S. is moving in the right direction by a three to one margin (67% to 23%).

Table 7
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>
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
October 1988*	42%	53	5
<u>Party (January 2004)</u>			
Democrats	34%	58	8
Republicans	67%	23	10
Non-partisans/others	40%	50	10

* Asked of all California adults

Information About the Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a telephone survey conducted January 5-9, 2004 in English and Spanish among a random sample of 400 registered voters in California. Sampling was completed by means of random digit dialing, which selects telephone exchanges within all area codes serving California in proportion to population. Within 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. Up to five attempts was made to reach a randomly selected voter at each number dialed. After the completion of interviewing, the sample was adjusted slightly to Field Poll estimates of the state's total registered voter population.

According to statistical theory, results from the overall sample of 400 registered voters have a sampling error of +/- 5.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings from subgroups have a somewhat larger sampling error range.

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 approve or disapprove of the job President Bush is doing in handling the nation's economy?

Do you approve or disapprove of the job President Bush is doing in handling the war in Iraq?

In your view, is the war in Iraq worth the toll it has taken in American lives and other kinds of costs, or isn't the war worth the costs?

Do you think President Bush made the right decision or the wrong decision when he declared war on Iraq?

In general, how well do you think the U.S. government is doing in reducing the threat of terrorism in this country – very well, fairly well, not too well or not well at all?