

# 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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**BUSH'S JOB RATING HITS NEW LOW IN CALIFORNIA, AS VIEWS ABOUT HIS HANDLING OF IRAQ WAR CONTINUE TO DECLINE. VOTERS WANT TROOP WITHDRAWAL TIMETABLE; FEEL PRESENCE OF U.S. TROOPS HURTS RATHER THAN HELPS CHANCES FOR PEACE IN IRAQ.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

President George W. Bush's approval rating among California voters has dropped to its lowest level since he assumed office six years ago.

Just 26% of voters now approve of Bush's performance in office. This is the lowest approval rating given by Californians to any U.S. president in the past thirty years and is close to the record low assessment given to former President Richard Nixon in August 1974, shortly before he resigned from office.

The public's disenchantment with Bush's handling of the war in Iraq is the chief contributor to his low job marks, with just 24% rating the president's handling of the war positively and 72% rating him negatively.

Majorities of California voters now hold positions diametrically opposed to those advocated by the President with respect to the war. Two-thirds (66%) oppose Bush's decision to send more than twenty thousand additional U.S. troops to Iraq. Six in ten (59%) think the U.S. should set a specific timetable for the withdrawal of troops from Iraq. And, half (50%) believe that the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq decreases the chances of bringing peace and stability to that country, while just 34% feel it increases the chances of peace.

### **Bush's job rating**

Immediately following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 9/11 Bush's job approval in this state soared to their highest level – 74%. Since that time, there has been a steady erosion in his popularity. During late 2002 and 2003 his approval ratings dropped to roughly the 50% level. They declined further in 2004 to about the 40% level, while they dipped to roughly the 30% level in 2005 and 2006.

Last September the President's approval rating stood at 29%. Now, his ratings have declined further to 26%.

Very few Democrats (10%) and non-partisans (21%) approve of Bush's overall performance. However, the President's most recent decline in public standing is attributable to a loss of support among rank-and-file Republicans, with only about half (49%) now approving of Bush's performance, down from 61% last September.

**Table 1**  
**Trend of overall job appraisals of George W. Bush as President**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>March 2007</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>7</b>
September 2006	29%	61	10
July 2006	32%	61	7
Late May 2006	28%	65	7
April 2006	32%	62	6
February 2006	38%	56	6
Late October 2005	34%	60	6
August 2005	38%	55	7
June 2005	36%	56	8
February 2005	41%	56	3
October 2004	43%	54	3
August 2004	41%	55	4
May 2004	43%	52	5
February 2004	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>Party (March 2007)</u>			
Democrats	10%	84	6
Republicans	49%	41	10
Non-partisans/others	21%	72	7

\* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

### Comparing Bush's ratings to other Presidents

All U.S. Presidents see their popularity levels go up and down in response to conditions and events during their terms. While this has been true for each of Bush's six immediate predecessors, none has seen the near fifty-point decline in voter approval that has characterized Bush's tenure over the past six years.

The next closest would be Bush's father, George H.W. Bush, whose approval ratings dropped forty points from a high of 77% in April 1991 to a low of 37% sixteen months later in July 1992.

**Table 2**  
**Californians' lowest ratings of previous U.S. Presidents since Richard Nixon**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<u>George W. Bush (R)</u>			
Lowest – <b>March 2007</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>7</b>
Highest – September 2001	74%	16	10
<u>Bill Clinton (D)</u>			
Lowest - August 1993	45%	52	3
Highest – February 1998	68%	25	7
<u>George H.W. Bush (R)</u>			
Lowest – July 1992	37%	62	1
Highest – February 1991	77%	23	*
<u>Ronald Reagan (R)</u>			
Lowest – March 1982	53%	47	*
Highest – April 1981	74%	18	8
<u>Jimmy Carter (D)</u>			
Lowest – July 1980	33%	66	1
Highest – March 1977	68%	20	2
<u>Gerald Ford (R)</u>			
Lowest – November 1975	47%	51	2
Highest – October 1974	55%	36	9
<u>Richard Nixon (R)</u>			
Lowest – August 1974	24%	70	6
Highest – November 1970	59%	38	3

\* Less than ½ of 1%      (R) denotes Republican      (D) denotes Democrat.

Note: For surveys conducted prior to October 1994, job performance was measured among all adults using a five-point scale, which was converted to the two-point approve-disapprove scale for comparative purposes.

**Bush's handling of the Iraq war**

Voter assessments of Bush's handling of the Iraq war are closely tied to his overall rating. At the start of the war four years ago, 60% of California voters approved of Bush's conduct of the war. That proportion has declined steadily since then to where just 24% now approve.

Just one out of eleven (9%) Democrats and one in six (16%) non-partisans approve of Bush's Iraq war performance. Republicans are now evenly divided (47% approving and 46% disapproving), a significant decline from six months ago when 57% approved and 38% disapproved.

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**Table 3**  
**Trend of voter appraisals of the job President Bush is doing**  
**in handling the war in Iraq**  
**(among California registered voters)**

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	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>March 2007</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>4</b>
September 2006	26%	69	5
July 2006	28%	67	5
April 2006	31%	65	4
February 2006	35%	61	4
Late October 2005	33%	64	3
August 2005	34%	60	6
June 2005	36%	60	5
February 2005	39%	58	3
October 2004	37%	60	3
August 2004	36%	61	3
May 2004	37%	60	3
February 2004	43%	52	5
January 2004	51%	45	4
September 2003	40%	52	8
August 2003	52%	44	4
April 2003	60%	37	3
<u>Party (March 2007)</u>			
Democrats	9%	90	1
Republicans	47%	46	17
Non-partisans/others	16%	80	4

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### **Voter views about what should be done about Iraq at odds with the President's**

The issue of whether the U.S. should set a specific timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq is a contentious issue, and is currently being debated between the President and the Congress. Both houses of the Democratically-controlled Congress recently passed bills that included specific dates next year when the U.S. would begin withdrawing troops from Iraq. Bush has vigorously opposed these actions and has vowed to veto any bills containing a timetable for withdrawal that reaches his desk.

In California a 59% majority of voters now supports the idea of setting a troop withdrawal timetable, up from 48% who felt this way last year. When asked about the President's recent decision to send another 20,000 troops to Iraq in an attempt to secure Baghdad, 66% are opposed and just 29% are supportive.

In addition, by a 50% to 34% margin, voters in this state now believe the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq decreases rather than increases the chances of bringing peace and stability to that country.

Democrats are strongly supportive of setting a withdrawal timetable (74%), are strongly opposed to the President's 20,000-troop surge (85%) and believe that the U.S. troop presence in Iraq decreases the chance for peace and stability (64%).

The views of non-partisans are close to those of Democrats. While a majority of Republicans continues to support Bush's war policies, growing minorities are expressing doubts. While 58% of Republicans support the President's decision to send an additional 20,000 troops to Baghdad, 36% are opposed. Similarly, while 57% oppose the setting of a timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops, 39% of Republicans are opposed. By a two to one margin (57% to 27%) Republicans in this state feel the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq increases rather than decreases chances for bringing peace to that country.

**Table 4**  
**Attitudes toward the war in Iraq**  
**(among California registered voters)**

<b><i>Should the U.S. set a specific time table for when U.S. troops should be withdrawn from Iraq?</i></b>	<b><u>Yes, should</u></b>	<b><u>No, should not</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
March 2007	59%	36	5
March 2006	48%	47	5
<b><u>Party (March 2007)</u></b>			
Democrats	74%	19	7
Republicans	39%	57	4
Non-partisans/others	60%	35	5
<b><i>Favor/oppose President's decision to send another 20,000 troops into Iraq</i></b>	<b><u>Favor</u></b>	<b><u>Oppose</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
March 2007	29%	66	5
<b><u>Party (March 2007)</u></b>			
Democrats	11%	85	4
Republicans	58%	36	6
Non-partisans/others	20%	75	5
<b><i>Does the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq increase or decrease the chance to bring peace and stability to that country?</i></b>	<b><u>Increases</u></b>	<b><u>Decreases</u></b>	<b><u>Neither/ no opinion</u></b>
March 2007	34%	50	16
<b><u>Party (March 2007)</u></b>			
Democrats	20%	64	16
Republicans	57%	27	16
Non-partisans/others	25%	60	15

**Bush's handling of the economy**

Voter approval of Bush's handling of the national economy is also on the decline. At present, just 33% approve of the President's handling of the economy, while 61% disapprove. This is the lowest assessment given Bush in this area.

Seventy-eight percent of Democrats and 70% of non-partisans now disapprove of the President's economic job performance. By contrast, Republicans remain supportive by a 61% to 34% margin.

**Table 5**  
**Trend of voter appraisals of the job President Bush is doing**  
**in handling the economy**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>March 2007</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>6</b>
September 2006	35%	57	8
July 2006	38%	52	10
April 2006	36%	57	7
February 2006	41%	53	6
Late October 2005	35%	60	5
August 2005	38%	54	8
June 2005	37%	57	6
February 2005	38%	56	6
October 2004	40%	55	5
August 2004	41%	54	5
May 2004	42%	53	5
February 2004	42%	53	5
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 (March 2007)</u>			
Democrats	16%	78	6
Republicans	61%	34	5
Non-partisans/others	23%	70	7

**U.S. on the wrong track**

About two out of three (64%) Californians feel the country is now seriously off on the wrong track, while just 26% think it is heading in the right direction.

This equals the very negative assessment that voters gave to the direction of the country last April and is the most pessimistic assessment registered by *The Field Poll* during the past fourteen years. The largest proportion who thought the country was on the wrong track occurred in 1992, when 82% felt this way.

Substantial majorities of Democrats (77%) and non-partisans (67%) feel the country is on the wrong track. And, in this instance, they are joined by a plurality of Republicans (46%).

**Table 6**  
**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 California registered voters)**

	<u>Right direction</u>	<u>Wrong track</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>March 2007</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>10</b>
September 2006	30%	57	13
July 2006	30%	60	10
Late May 2006	28%	64	8
April 2006	26%	64	10
February 2006	36%	55	9
Late October 2005	30%	60	10
August 2005	33%	60	7
June 2005	34%	58	8
February 2005	36%	57	7
October 2004	38%	58	4
August 2004	38%	56	6
May 2004	37%	54	9
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
2000 (average)	67%	25	8
1999 (average)	54%	37	9
1998 (average)	57%	32	11
1997 (average)	44%	45	11
1996 (average)	34%	49	17
1995 (average)	33%	54	13
1994 (average)	41%	50	9
1993 (average)	42%	50	8
1992 (average)	16%	82	2
<u>Party (March 2007)</u>			
Democrats	16%	77	7
Republicans	40%	46	14
Non-partisans/others	22%	67	11

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 1,093 registered voters statewide. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish March 20-31, 2007. Up to eight attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize voter fatigue, some of the questions in this report were asked of a random subsample of 523 registered voters.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected at random from a statewide list of registered voters in California. When drawing samples from registration-based lists, *The Field Poll* stratifies the sample by region and age to insure that the poll includes adequate representations of voters across each major region of the state and across different age categories. Once a voter's name and telephone number has been selected, interviews are attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews can be conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the results are weighted slightly to *Field Poll* estimates of the demographic and regional characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on sample size. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from findings based on the overall sample of registered voters are subject to a sampling error of +/- 3.1 percentage points, while findings from the random subsample have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points. There are other possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, the sequencing of questions, the rigor with which sampling procedures are implemented, as well as other factors.

### **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 war in Iraq?

(ASKED OF RANDOM SUBSAMPLE)

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

Do you favor or oppose President Bush's recent decision to send another 20,000 troops into Iraq to try and gain control of Baghdad?

Do you think the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq increases or decreases the chances of bringing peace and stability to that country?

Do you think the U.S. should or should not set a specific timetable for when U.S. troops will be withdrawn from Iraq?