

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 ARE EVENLY DIVIDED ON
WHETHER THE STATE IS MOVING IN
THE RIGHT DIRECTION OR SERIOUSLY
OFF ON THE WRONG TRACK AND
VOLUNTEER REASONS FOR OPINIONS.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

"Thinking about things here in 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?"

With some variations, this broad question as applied to the nation, a state or a city, has appeared in countless surveys conducted by pollsters across the country over the past 20 years. The results from this relatively simple question have proven to have unique value in broadly examining how respondents sum up the many pro and con aspects of the conditions existing in American life today.

The Field Poll has regularly included this question in its statewide surveys year for more than two decades.

Results from the current survey show that California voters are evenly divided, with 42% saying the state is moving in the right direction and 42% believing it is seriously off in the wrong direction.

And, when asked to volunteer their reasons for their position, most frequently volunteered by voters who believe the state is moving in the wrong direction are failures in immigration policies (21%) and poorly performing schools (13%). Among voters who believe the state is heading in the right direction, confidence in the leadership of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (21%) and positive comments made about the state's economy (19%) are cited most.

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll* conducted late last month.

Trend of voter opinions 1988-2007

A review of *Field Poll* findings from this question since 1988 reveals that voters are highly sensitive to changing conditions and its outlook can vary sharply in a matter of months.

Between 2001 and May 2006, in fourteen out of fifteen measurements, have or more of voters believed the state was on the wrong track. In some instances, particularly during 2003 and 2005 when the state political situation was undergoing an unusually high degree of turmoil, very large majorities held a dismal outlook of the state's overall direction.

However, just seven months ago in March, voters were more positive, with 52% believing the state was moving in the right direction and 38% holding a negative view. That appraisal was the most positive assessment offered by voters since December 2001.

Events of the past year have tempered that upbeat assessment to a more mixed view. At present, voters are evenly divided in their assessments, with 42% thinking the state is heading in the right direction and just as many (42%) believing things are seriously off on the wrong track.

Democrats are a little more optimistic about the state's overall direction than Republicans and non-partisans.

Table 1
Overall direction that California is heading
(among registered voters)

	<u>Right direction</u>	<u>Wrong track</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
October 2007	42%	42	16
August 2007	42%	45	13
March 2007	52%	38	10
September 2006	49%	36	15
July 2006	47%	41	12
May 2006	32%	57	11
April 2006	28%	56	16
February 2006	31%	55	14
October 2005	30%	63	7
August 2005	30%	57	13
June 2005	28%	60	12
February 2005	35%	53	12
September 2004	46%	38	16
May 2004	37%	51	12
February 2004	35%	54	11
August 2003	16%	76	8
July 2003	18%	75	7
April 2003	26%	65	9
September 2002	33%	54	13
January 2002	41%	50	9
December 2001	45%	45	10
September 2001 (pre-9/11)	39%	54	7
January 2001	44%	50	6
2000 (average)	58%	35	7
1999 (average)	52%	34	14
1998 (average)	48%	42	10
1997 (average)	36%	54	10
1996 (average)	39%	49	12
1995 (average)	32%	57	11
1994 (average)	21%	70	9
1993 (average)	11%	83	6
1992 (average)	7%	90	3
1989 (average)	50%	42	8
1988 (average)	52%	43	5
Party (October 2007)			
Democrats	46%	39	15
Republicans	41%	44	15
Non-partisan/other	38%	45	17

Note: Surveys prior to 1996 conducted among all California adults, not just registered adults.

Reasons voters give for saying the state is on the wrong track

In this survey, *The Field Poll* followed up with an open-ended question asking respondents to describe in their own words why they thought the state was moving in the right direction or was on the wrong track. Replies were coded into general categories of response and can be compared with those found in October 2005, when a similar follow-up question was asked.

Two years ago, 63% felt the state was on the wrong track, while in the current survey that proportion has dropped to 42%. In 2005 the largest single category of response (28%) given by voters believing that the state was on the wrong track was that they didn't like the governor's policies, or that the state's elected officials weren't doing a good job (23%). The next highest cluster of criticisms had to do with the poor performance of the state's schools (21%).

Today, while a fair number (13%) still cite poorly performing schools as a reason for believing the state is off on the wrong track, much smaller proportions cite a dislike of the governor's policies or the view that elected officials aren't doing a good job. Instead, the largest proportion (21%) offer critical comments about immigration issues, maintaining that the borders are not properly controlled. In 2005, just 6% cited this issue.

Table 2
Why do you believe California is seriously off on the wrong track?
(among registered voters saying California is on the wrong track)

	October <u>2007</u>	October <u>2005</u>
Immigration issues/borders are not controlled	21%	6%
Schools are performing poorly/budgets are being cut	13	21
Not enough jobs/wages are low/economy is not good	9	9
Don't like, oppose the Governor's policies	9	28
Housing market problems/rents too high	8	4
State government is in debt/too much borrowing	7	7
High cost of living	7	7
Taxes are too high, some don't pay their fair share	6	5
Elected officials aren't doing a good job/not addressing the important issues, helping people	6	23
Problems with the health care system/health care costs too much	6	3
State is too liberal, too permissive	5	*
Too much corruption, greed by elected representatives	5	2
Roads need repair/transportation, infrastructure problems	3	*
Other mentions (less than 3% each)	18	20
Nothing specific/no answer	10	4

* Less than 2% each.
 (Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.)

Reasons why the state is moving in the right direction

In October 2005, just 30% believed the state was going in the right direction, compared to 42% in the current survey.

In both surveys, the favorable performance of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger was prominently cited as a reason voters felt the state was heading in the right direction. In 2005, 27% mentioned this, and in the current survey the proportion is 21%. However, in 2005 the belief that the economy was growing was mentioned most (29%). In the current survey, this had declined to 19%.

One reason frequently given two years ago for feeling optimistic about the direction of the state related to the view that the state's finances were improving and its budget deficit was declining (20%). In the current survey, just 3% volunteer this.

By contrast, several topics are cited more often now than in 2005. These include the view that steps are being taken to fight global warming (6%), efforts are being made to improve the schools (5%), there is greater cooperation between the governor and the legislature (5%), and that political leaders are trying to address the issue of health care (4%).

	October <u>2007</u>	October <u>2005</u>
Schwarzenegger is changing things/ providing leadership	21%	27%
The economy is growing/business conditions are good	19	29
The quality of life here is good	11	9
State is doing more to protect the environment; fighting global warming	6	*
They're trying to improve the schools	5	*
Greater cooperation between the Governor and the legislature	5	*
They're trying to address the issue of health care	4	*
State finances improving/reducing the state's budget deficit	3	20
Other mentions (less than 3% each)	18	21
Nothing specific/no answer	20	10

* Less than 2% each.
 (Percentages add to more than 100% due to multiple mentions.)

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 579 registered voters statewide. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish October 11-21, 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.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected at random from a statewide list of registered voters in California. 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 579 registered voters are subject to a sampling error of +/- 3.7 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 things here in 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?

Why do you believe California is moving in the right direction? **(PROBE:)** Any other reasons?

Why do you believe California is seriously off on the wrong track? **(PROBE:)** Any other reasons?