

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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**THIRTY YEARS AFTER ITS PASSAGE,
PROP. 13 REMAINS HIGHLY POPULAR
WITH VOTERS. MOST PROPOSALS TO
CHANGE ITS PROVISIONS FACE STIFF
VOTER RESISTANCE.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

On the thirtieth anniversary of the passage of the landmark 1978 property tax reduction amendment, Proposition 13, voters in this state remain highly supportive of it and its main provisions.

A new study just completed by *The Field Poll* asked California voters a series of questions about Prop. 13 and various proposals that have been made to amend some of its main provisions. The survey questions were developed collaboratively with Professor Jack Citrin, Director of the Institute for Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley, with supplemental funding provided to *The Field Poll* by IGS. Results from the survey are being released today (June 6) at a special one day IGS-hosted conference on the Berkeley campus commemorating the 30th anniversary of the passage of Proposition 13.

The survey's main findings include the following:

- When California voters are asked how familiar they are with the landmark 1978 property tax reduction initiative, Proposition 13, they divide into three camps. About one-third (37%) report being very familiar with it, another third (30%) say they are somewhat familiar, while the remaining third (33%) report being not too or not at all familiar with it. Nearly three times as many homeowners (46%) as renters (16%) are very familiar with Prop. 13. When a homeowner bought their current home is also a big factor, with long-time homeowners more likely to report high familiarity than those who purchased their homes more recently.

- Three decades since its adoption, Prop. 13 remains very popular with voters. Statewide more than twice as many voters (57%) report that they would vote in favor of Prop. 13 if it were up for a vote again today as would vote against it (23%). Support for Prop. 13 is much greater among homeowners (64%) than renters (41%), particularly long-time homeowners. Support reaches 79% among homeowners who bought their present home prior to the passage of Prop. 13.
- When voters are asked their opinion about various proposals that have been made to change Prop. 13, most are rejected by wide margins. For example ...
 - ... A proposal to gradually raise the property taxes of long-time property owners, so the amount they pay is more in line with the amount paid by recent buyers of similarly valued property, is opposed two and one-half to one (66% to 27%).
 - ... A proposal to amend Prop. 13's provision that local governments cannot increase property taxes by more than 2% per year is rejected by an even wider 78% to 17% margin.
 - ... There is strong resistance to the idea of changing the Prop. 13 provision requiring a two-thirds vote of the state legislature to increase taxes, with about seven in ten opposed.
- Voter reactions to the idea of creating a split roll property tax system, whereby residential and commercial properties would be taxed at different rates, depend on how the issue is framed. Voters are divided if this means increasing the property taxes of business and commercial property (47% approve and 44% disapprove). On the other hand, voters approve 61% to 28% if this means lowering the property tax rates of residential property owners.
- Six in ten voters (61%) now describe state and local taxes as being much too high or somewhat high and 37% saying they are about right. These findings are near the thirty-year average result obtained across fifteen separate *Field Poll* measures on this subject since 1977, and are quite similar to the four most recent surveys conducted between 2001 and 2007.
- When asked to specify which state and local taxes they feel are too high, voters most often mention the gasoline tax (32%), the property tax (29%), the state income tax (27%) and the sales tax (22%). No other single tax is cited more than 9%.

These results come from a telephone survey of 1,052 registered voters in California conducted May 17-26, 2008 by *The Field Poll*.

Note to Editors: See attached *California Opinion Index* report for a more detailed accounting of the data referenced in this report.

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 1,052 registered voters statewide. The survey was conducted by *The Field Poll*. The survey questions were developed collaboratively with Professor Jack Citrin, Director of the Institute for Governmental Studies (IGS) at The University of California, Berkeley, with supplemental funding provided to *The Field Poll* by IGS.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish May 17-26, 2008. Up to six 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 respondent fatigue, the overall voter sample was divided into two random subsamples of 502 and 550 registered voters each on some questions.

The overall 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 have 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 depends on the sample size. The maximum sampling error for results based on the overall sample of 1,052 registered voters is +/- 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings from each random subsample have a maximum sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points. The maximum sampling error is based on percentages +/- in the middle of the sampling distribution (percentages around 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (percentages around 10% or around 90%) have a smaller margin of error.

While there are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error, the overall design and execution of the survey minimized the potential for these other sources of error. The maximum sampling error will be larger for analyses based on subgroups of the overall sample.

Questions Asked

Now, I have some questions on the subject of taxes... the questions I have are about state and local taxes, such as state income taxes, sales taxes, property taxes, business and corporation taxes, and state taxes on vehicle registrations, gasoline, tobacco and alcohol.

On the whole, do you feel that the level of state and local taxes that the average citizen like yourself pays are much too high, somewhat high or about right?

Which specific state and local taxes, if any, do you feel are too high? Any others? (DO NOT READ ANSWER CATEGORIES) (ANSWER CAN BE A MULTIPLE)

In general, would you like to see your state and local governments provide more services to the public or provide fewer services to the public? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS: SAMPLE A)

In general, would you like to see your state and local governments provide more services to the public even if it means raising your taxes and fees, or provide fewer services to the public if this means that your taxes and fees will kept at or below current levels? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS: SAMPLE B)

Thirty years ago in 1978 California voters approved Proposition 13, which reduced local property taxes and limited the amount they could be increased each year. How familiar are you with Proposition 13 – very familiar, somewhat familiar, not too familiar or not at all familiar?

(Based on what anything you may have seen, read or heard about Proposition 13,) if Proposition 13 were up for a vote again today, do you think you would vote in favor of it or vote against it?

Because of Proposition 13, property owners are generally taxed at one percent of the purchase price of a property at the time it is sold. However, because most properties have increased in value since Prop. 13 was passed, this means that long-time property owners typically pay much less in property taxes than neighboring properties of similar value that were bought more recently. Would you approve or disapprove of changing Prop. 13 to gradually raise the property taxes of long-time property owners, so that the amount they pay is more in line with the amount being paid by more recent buyers of similarly valued property? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS: SAMPLE A)

Because of Proposition 13, local governments can only increase property taxes by a maximum of two percent per year unless the property is sold. Would you approve or disapprove of changing Prop. 13 to allow your local government to increase property taxes by more than two percent per year? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS: SAMPLE B)

Proposition 13 reduced property taxes on both residential and commercial property. Would you approve or disapprove of changing Prop. 13 to permit business and commercial property owners to be taxed at a higher rate than owners of residential property? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS: SAMPLE A)

Proposition 13 reduced property taxes on both residential and commercial property. Would you approve or disapprove of changing Prop. 13 to permit owners of residential property to be taxed at a lower rate than business and commercial property owners? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS: SAMPLE B)

Proposition 13 generally requires a two-thirds vote of the state legislature to increase taxes. Would you approve or disapprove of changing Prop. 13 to enable the legislature to increase taxes by a simple majority vote? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS: SAMPLE A)

Proposition 13 generally requires a two-thirds vote of the state legislature to increase taxes. Given that the state of California is facing a huge budget deficit estimated to be about 14 to 20 billion dollars, would you approve or disapprove of changing Prop. 13 to enable the legislature to increase taxes by a simple majority vote? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS: SAMPLE B)