

THE FIELD POLL



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VOTERS FAVOR SPENDING CUTS OVER TAX INCREASES TO REDUCE STATE BUDGET DEFICIT. NARROWLY REJECT ALLOWING THE LEGISLATURE TO APPROVE STATE BUDGETS BY A SIMPLE MAJORITY. FAVOR RAISING THE VOTER THRESHOLD NEEDED FOR AMENDING THE STATE CONSTITUTION

California voters favor spending cuts over tax increases as the primary means of dealing with the state's projected \$20 billion budget deficit. Statewide 50% prefer that the state's budget deficit be closed either entirely or mostly through spending cuts. Just 13% favor doing so solely or mostly through tax increases. Another 29% favor an equal mix of spending cuts and tax hikes.

By a margin of 47% to 43%, voters narrowly reject the idea of permitting the legislature to approve state budgets with a simple majority vote instead of the two-thirds supermajority now required. Views about this proposal divide sharply along partisan lines.

On the other hand, voters support 51% to 37% a proposal to replace the simple majority vote threshold now needed by voters to approve amendments to the state constitution with a two-thirds supermajority. Pluralities of Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans favor this proposal.

The poll also finds that nearly two in three registered voters (63%) do not feel the state government responds to the needs of people like them. Yet, 75% believe that California can deal with its major issues without making fundamental changes to the state constitution if lawmakers are more willing to compromise and work together.

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll*. The survey was co-sponsored by Next 10, an independent, non-profit organization based in San Francisco, along with Stanford University's Bill Lane Center for the American West, UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies and Sacramento State's Center for California Studies. These universities are working with Next 10 to launch a non-partisan website, www.californiachoices.org, to inform Californians about possible constitutional reforms that voters might be asked to consider in state elections this year.

Closing the state budget deficit

Half of the state's registered voters (50%) would prefer closing California's projected \$20 billion deficit either entirely or mostly through spending cuts. This compares to just 13% who favor reducing the budget shortfall solely or mostly through tax increases. Another 29% support a balanced approach with an equal mix of spending cuts and tax increases, while 8% have no opinion.

Republicans are more likely than Democrats and non-partisans to favor spending cuts as the primary means for reducing the budget deficit, with 70% of GOPers favoring this approach. Among Democrats 36% support closing the deficit primarily through spending cuts, 35% favor an equal mix of spending cuts and tax increases, while 22% would do so mainly through tax increases. Among non-partisans 46% prefer a mainly spending cuts approach, 33% favor an equal mix of spending cuts and tax increases and 12% would primarily employ tax increases.

Table 1
How voters would prefer closing California's \$20 billion budget deficit
(among registered voters)

	Total statewide	Democrats	Republicans	Non-partisans/ others
Spending cuts only	31%	20%	49%	26%
Mostly spending cuts	19	16	21	20
Equal mix of spending cuts/ tax increases	29	35	20	33
Mostly tax increases	9	16	2	8
Tax increases only	4	6	2	4
No opinion	8	7	6	9

State government not responding to voters' needs

By a greater than two to one margin (63% to 28%) California voters maintain that state government does not respond to the needs of people like themselves. Large majorities of Democrats and Republicans hold this view, although Republicans are most likely to say this.

Voters living in the state's inland counties are also more likely than coastal county voters to feel state government is not responsive to their needs.

Table 2
**Does California government respond to the needs of
people like you and your family?
(among registered voters)**

	Yes, does respond	No, does not respond	No opinion
Total statewide	28%	63	9
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	30%	61	9
Republicans	17%	74	9
Non-partisans/others	38%	54	8
<u>Region</u>			
Coastal counties	31%	58	11
Inland counties	20%	75	5

**Fundamental constitutional changes not needed to deal with the state’s major issues if
lawmakers are more willing to compromise**

Two statements were read to voters in this survey about the need for fundamental changes to be made to the state’s constitution to deal with the state’s major issues. The two statements posed were as follows:

- (1) *“In order to deal with the major issues facing California, we need to make fundamental changes to our state constitution.”*
- (2) *“We could deal with the major issues facing California without changing our constitution if state lawmakers were more willing to compromise and work together.”*

The results indicate that by a nearly four-to-one margin (75% to 20%) voters believe that the state could deal with its major problems without fundamental constitutional changes if lawmakers were more willing to work together.

Table 3
**To deal with the state’s major issues, do we need to make
fundamental changes to the constitution or can this be done
without changing the constitution if lawmakers are more
willing to compromise and work together
(among registered voters)**

	Fundamental constitutional changes needed	Don’t need constitutional changes if lawmakers work together	No opinion
Total statewide	20%	75	5
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	26%	71	3
Republicans	17%	77	6
Non-partisans/others	14%	80	6

Reactions to two governmental reform proposals

Voters in this survey were also asked their opinions about two possible governmental reforms that are currently being discussed. The first deals with the idea of lowering the vote requirement needed for the state legislature to pass a budget, while the second concerns a proposal to increase the threshold needed for voters to approve amendments to the state constitution in statewide elections.

By a 47% to 43% margin voters narrowly reject the idea of reducing the legislative vote requirement needed to approve a state budget from its current two-thirds supermajority to a simple majority vote. Views about this proposal are highly partisan. Democrats favor this idea 54% to 38%, but Republicans are opposed 57% to 31%. Non-partisans also line up against the idea 49% to 38%.

By contrast, by a 51% to 37% margin voters support the idea of replacing the simple majority vote requirement needed for voters to approve amendments to the state constitution to a two-thirds supermajority. There are no significant differences toward this proposal across partisan lines.

Table 4			
Reactions to two governmental reform proposals (among registered voters)			
	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL OF THE STATE BUDGET:			
Replace two-thirds vote requirement with simple majority vote			
Total statewide	43%	47	10
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	54%	38	8
Republicans	31%	57	12
Non-partisans/others	38%	49	13
VOTER APPROVAL OF AMENDMENTS TO THE STATE CONSTITUTION:			
Replace simple majority vote with two-thirds supermajority vote requirement			
Total statewide	51%	37	12
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	49%	39	12
Republicans	51%	36	13
Non-partisans/others	53%	35	12

Information About This Survey

Sample Details

The latest *Field Poll* survey was completed by telephone January 5-17, 2010 among a total of 1,232 registered voters in California. In order to measure the opinions of voters who have historically been less examined in polling in California, the poll's cross section of voters statewide was supplemented with additional interviews conducted among random samples of Chinese-American, Korean-American, Vietnamese-American and African-American voters. The survey was conducted in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese – based on the preference of the voter. This produced samples of about 100 to 175 voters for each of the poll's ethnic voter subgroups.

Up to six attempts were made to reach, screen and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. Interviews were conducted on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file and the preference of the voter.

The main statewide sample was developed by selecting voters randomly from a list of registered voters throughout California. Supplemental samples of Asian-American voters were developed by selecting voters with surnames most associated with these populations and then screening them to determine their ethnic heritage. After the completion of interviewing, the overall sample was weighted to align it to its proper statewide proportions by race/ethnicity and other demographic characteristics of the registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size as well as the percentage distribution being examined. The maximum sampling error estimates for results based on the overall sample is +/- 2.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The maximum sampling error is based on results in the middle of the sampling distribution (i.e., percentages at or near 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (those closer to 10% or 90%) have a smaller margin of error. Findings from subgroups of the overall sample have somewhat larger sampling error levels. There are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of the survey sought to minimize these other sources of error.

Questions Asked

Do you think how government works in California responds to the needs of people like you and your family?

I am going to read two statements. Please tell me which one you agree with more. (1) In order to deal with the major issues facing California, we need to make fundamental changes to our state constitution; or (2) We could deal with the major issues facing California without changing our constitution if state lawmakers were more willing to compromise and work together. Which statement do you agree with more?

California lawmakers face a deep budget deficit again next year, with a gap that may reach \$20 billion between projected revenues and current spending levels. How would you prefer to have this deficit closed – only through tax increases, mostly through tax increases but with some spending cuts, through an equal mix of tax increases and spending cuts, mostly through spending cuts but with some tax increases, or only through spending cuts?

The California state constitution requires a two-thirds vote of the state legislature to pass a state budget. Would you approve or disapprove of replacing the two-thirds vote requirement with a simple 50 percent majority vote for the state legislature to pass a budget?

The California state constitution can be amended by placing an initiative on the statewide election ballot, and obtaining a simple 50 percent majority of those voting in the election to approve the amendment. Would you approve or disapprove of replacing the 50 percent majority vote requirement with a two-thirds vote requirement for voters to pass constitutional amendments?