

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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CALIFORNIA VOTERS FAVOR LEGALIZING AND TAXING ONLINE POKER GAMBLING.

By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

With state and local government budgets being severely cut, officials across California have been looking for new sources of revenue from both traditional and non-traditional sources. Legalizing and regulating online poker is one avenue that has been among those getting increasing attention from state lawmakers.

Earlier this year State Sen. Lou Correa, D-Santa Ana, introduced a bill to regulate and tax online poker gambling in the state. He contends that the law would add 1,300 jobs and bring in as much as \$1.4 billion in revenue to the state over the next decade. However, action on the bill has been postponed until next January.

A *Field Poll* statewide survey completed this month tested initial voter reaction to the idea of legalizing online poker and having the state tax its proceeds. The findings reveal that voters favor such a move, 53% to 41%.

Frequency of playing poker in an Indian casino or other legally sanctioned establishment

One in five of the voters surveyed (18%) report they have played poker in one of the state's Indian casinos or in another legally sanctioned poker establishment. Patronage is greater among Southern Californians than those in the North. In addition, voters in the 18-39 age group are more likely than older voters to say they have done this.

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Table 1		
Have you ever gone to an Indian casino or other legal poker establishment in California to play poker (among registered voters)		
	Yes	No
Total registered voters	18%	82
<u>Region</u>		
Southern California	22%	78
Northern California	12%	88
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	20%	80
Female	17%	83
<u>Age</u>		
18 – 39	26%	74
40 – 64	14%	86
65 or older	15%	85

Five to four majority favors legalizing online poker

When asked their views about the idea of legalizing and taxing online poker playing and having the state tax its proceeds, Californians are initially supportive by a five to four margin (53% to 41%),

Democrats and non-partisan voters heavily back the idea, while a small plurality of Republicans oppose it. While both men and women approve, men tend to favor it more.

Voters in the 18-39 age group show the greatest support (73% to 25%) for online poker. Middle-age voters have mixed views about it, while voters age 65 or older oppose the idea 57% to 35%.

Those who have played poker in one of the state's legal establishments favor legalization 60% to 27%. But, a 50% to 44% plurality of those who have not played poker in the state's poker playing sites are also supportive.

Table 2			
Voter views about legalizing online poker in California and having the state tax its proceeds (among registered voters)			
	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
Total registered voters	53%	41	6
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	56%	38	6
Republicans	43%	49	8
Non-partisans/others	59%	35	6
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	58%	37	5
Female	49%	44	7
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 39	73%	25	2
40 – 64	48%	44	8
65 or older	35%	57	8
<u>Played poker in casino/other legal poker establishment in California</u>			
Yes*	66%	27	7
No	50%	44	6

* Small sample base.

Background

Poker playing has long been part of California’s history, dating back to the days before it became a state. It was a significant social element of the 1849 gold rush era and has been a continuing source of recreation in the many decades following.

For some time many California cities – now numbering about 100 – have had public places where gambling on poker and other card games are legal. Legal poker playing, along with other forms of gambling, got a big boost late in the latter half of the 20th century when casino gambling was allowed on Indian reservations here and in other states. Today, there are 58 operating Indian casinos in California.

Online poker sites came into being in the U.S. primarily during the past decade. Poker playing while sitting before a computer at home or in other settings has attracted millions of players both across the state and throughout the country.

Individuals do this by first depositing money to an online poker site. Once an account is established, players then contest poker pots via the Internet, with winnings and losses posted to their accounts. Players have the option of withdrawing their winnings at any time or replenishing their accounts when they lose.

Poker playing sites and the banks holding players' funds flourished until 2006 when the federal government cracked down, stating that online poker operations across state lines was illegal. This action stopped the involvement of U.S. banks, which had been processing poker playing deposits and withdrawals. Since then overseas banks have filled this void by processing these transactions.

Just this week a legal action by the U.S. Justice Department again shook the Internet poker world by charging that online poker sites and their banking connections have potentially defrauded thousands of online poker players, with as much as \$300 million in deposits at risk.

Some observers believe that this move will seriously curtail future online poker playing. However, advocates for legalizing online poker playing feel this action could instead serve as a catalyst to speed the process of licensing and regulating legalized online poker playing in California and elsewhere across the country.

Information About The Survey

Methodological Details

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed September 1-12, 2011 among a random sample of 520 registered voters in California.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish using live interviewers working from Field Research Corporation's central location telephone interviewing facilities. 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.

Interviewing was completed on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the overall registered voter sample was weighted to *Field Poll* estimates of the characteristics of the registered voter population in California by region, age, gender and party registration.

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 registered voters sample is +/- 4.6 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.

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 possible sources of error.

Mervin Field, who is still an active advisor, established *The Field Poll* as *The California Poll* in 1947. The *Poll* has operated continuously since then as an independent, non-partisan survey of California public opinion. The *Poll* receives annual funding from media subscribers of *The Field Poll*, from several California foundations, and the University of California and California State University systems, who receive the data files from each *Field Poll* survey shortly after its completion for teaching and secondary research purposes.

Questions Asked

Currently, residents who want to legally gamble by playing poker in California can go to any number of Indian casinos and other designated poker establishments to play. Have you ever gone to one of these kinds of places in California to play poker?

The state legislature is considering a bill that would make it legal for Californians to play poker online over the Internet. The state would then tax its proceeds, and this would potentially add hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues to the state. Do you favor or oppose the idea of making it legal to play poker in California online over the Internet and having the state tax its proceeds?