

# 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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**MAJORITIES VIEW PROPOSITION ELECTIONS AS A GOOD THING, BUT SUPPORT HAS EBBED SOMEWHAT OVER TIME. THE VOTING PUBLIC IS TRUSTED MORE THAN ELECTED OFFICIALS IN MAKING IMPORTANT POLICYMAKING DECISIONS.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Over its sixty-four year history, *The Field Poll* has tracked California voter sentiment toward every salient statewide ballot proposition, measuring voter opinion formation and preferences toward 238 different ballot measures.

On the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of California's adoption of the initiative process, the *Poll* updated a time series of questions dating back thirty years that examine how voters here feel about statewide ballot proposition elections.

The following are the survey's main findings:

- While majorities of Californians have long been supportive of statewide ballot proposition elections, in recent years the strength of their support has ebbed somewhat. For example, thirty-three years ago, more voters described statewide proposition elections as a good thing than a bad thing by an overwhelming 83% to 4% margin. However, when voters are asked about this now, the ratio describing them as a good thing to bad thing is just 53% to 13%, with an increasing proportion (26%) offering a mixed assessment.
- The Internet has become voters' chief source of information about statewide ballot measures. Greater than four in ten voters (44%) single out the Internet as their most important information source when considering statewide ballot propositions. This exceeds the proportions citing television (41%), the official state voter information guide (36%) and newspapers (31%). This is marked change from 2004, when the Internet was mentioned by only 17% as voters' main source of information about state ballot propositions.
- Californians have become increasingly convinced that the voting public is more likely than their elected representatives to "consider the broad public interest in making decisions about state government policies and laws." Seven in ten (71%) now feel this way, up from 42% who said this in 1982.

- Voters also think that the voting public rather than their elected representatives “can be trusted more often to do what is right on important government issues” (63% to 24%) and “are better suited to decide upon large-scale government programs and projects” (57% to 33%).
- On the other hand, a 55% to 34% majority believes elected representatives rather than the voting public are “better suited to decide upon highly technical or legal policy matters.”
- There is no consensus about whether the voting public or elected representatives “gives a more thorough review of each particular aspect of a proposed law” or “enacts more coherent and well thought-out government policies.”
- More than twice as many voters believe that the results of most statewide ballot proposition elections come out the way a few organized special interests want (60%) rather than the way most people want (27%). This is a more jaded view than held by voters in 1999 when they were evenly divided on this question.
- By a 56% to 29% margin, voters think their elected representatives rather than the public are “more easily manipulated by special interest groups.” An overwhelming majority of voters (84%) would like to increase public disclosure requirements to more clearly identify the major funders of each ballot measure.
- By a five to three margin (56% to 32%) voters support the proposal, recently approved by the legislature and signed into law last week by the governor, to allow statewide initiatives to only be placed before voters in a November election instead of a primary election.
- Majorities of voters reject two other proposed changes to the initiative process. By a 59% to 33% margin they oppose giving the legislature the right to amend or repeal an initiative four years after its initial approval by voters in an election. They also disapprove 53% to 35% of allowing the legislature to place a companion proposal on the same election ballot after an initiative qualifies, that if approved can amend all or some of the initiative’s provisions.

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**

### **Methodological Details**

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed September 1-12, 2011 among a random sample of 1,001 registered voters in California. In order to cover a broad range of issues and minimize respondent fatigue, many of the questions in this report were asked of a random subsample of 481 registered voters.

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 +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings based on voters included in the random subsample have a maximum sampling error of +/- 4.6 percentage points. 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.

*The Field Poll* was established in 1947 as *The California Poll* by Mervin Field, who is still an active advisor. 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**

As you know California has the initiative process, which enables voters to have issues put on the ballot for voter approval or rejection. Overall, do you think that statewide ballot proposition elections are a good thing for California, a bad thing, or don't you think they make much difference?

In general, do you think statewide ballot proposition elections come out the way most people want or the way a few organized special interest groups want?\*

What is your most important source of information about statewide ballot propositions – television, radio, newspapers, the official voter information guide, the Internet, campaign mailings sent to you, friends and family, or some other source? (ANSWER CAN BE A MULTIPLE)\*

Think for a moment about the two ways that state government policies and laws can be enacted in California – through elected representatives in the state legislature and directly by citizens voting on ballot propositions. Which do you feel (ITEM) – elected representatives or the voting public? (ITEMS READ ONE AT A TIME IN RANDOM ORDER)

- a. generally enacts more coherent and well-thought-out government policies\*
- b. is better suited to decide upon highly technical or legal policy matters\*
- c. gives more thorough review to each particular aspect of a proposed law\*
- d. is better suited to decide upon large-scale government programs or projects\*
- e. is more easily influenced or manipulated by special interest groups\*
- f. can be trusted more often to do what is right on important government issues\*
- g. considers the broad public interest more in making its decisions\*

The state legislature is considering a number of proposals to make changes to the initiative process. As I read each proposal, please tell me whether you favor or oppose it. (items read one at a time in random order) Do you favor or oppose this change?

- a. give the legislature the right to amend or repeal a voter-approved initiative after its passage, after four years have passed\*
- b. after an initiative qualifies for the ballot, give the legislature the right to place a companion proposal on the same ballot that, if approved, would amend some or all of the initiative's provisions\*
- c. increase the public disclosure requirements of initiative sponsors to more clearly identify who are its major funders\*
- d. change election laws so that statewide initiatives can only be placed before voters in a November general election instead of a primary election\*

\* Asked of a random subsample of voters.