

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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CONGRESS' JOB RATING REMAINS IN DEEP TROUGH. FAILURE OF CONGRESSIONAL SUPER COMMITTEE IS REINFORCING VOTERS' LONG-STANDING NEGATIVE VIEW OF THAT BODY.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Californians' long-standing disapproval of Congress' job performance has apparently solidified by the failure of the bipartisan super committee to reach an agreement to reign in the country's huge budget deficit.

Results of a survey completed this week reveal that 84% of California voters now disapprove of the job that Congress is doing, while just 10% approve.

The fact that a special Congressional committee, dubbed the super committee, composed of twelve members of Congress – six from each party – spent several months in deliberation and were unable to come up with an acceptable debt-reduction plan is seen as serious situation by more than nine in ten voters.

While Californians direct more blame to Republicans than Democrats for the committee's failure, the largest proportion (51%) believe that both parties share the blame equally.

The public has little hope that increasing the party strength of either the Democrats or the Republicans in next year's elections will improve the country's economic problems.

Congressional job ratings remain at historic lows

Over the past twenty years *The Field Poll* has periodically measured Californians' appraisal of the job performance of the U.S. Congress. The results have shown the public holding an unfavorable view of that legislative body more times than not, with an occasional positive reading. However, for the last five years voters here have consistently disapproved of Congress by huge margins.

The results of the current survey exemplify the deep trough of public appraisal that Congress has been in. At present, just 10% of California voters approve of the job the Congress is doing, while 84% disapprove, very similar to the record low assessment given that body last September.

Californians' hugely negative assessment exists among voters of all political stripes – Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans.

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
Late November 2011	10%	84	6
September 2011	9%	86	5
March 2011	17%	71	12
September 2010	19%	72	9
July 2010	19%	71	10
March 2010	12%	79	9
January 2010	24%	66	10
October 2009	23%	66	11
March 2009	34%	53	13
December 2007	20%	66	14
October 2007	22%	64	14
August 2007	20%	66	14
March 2007	35%	50	15
May 2006	23%	64	13
April 2006	24%	66	10
August 2004	33%	52	15
April 2003	50%	39	11
April 2002	48%	39	13
January 2002	54%	33	13
December 2001	57%	32	11
May 2001	51%	38	11
January 2001	53%	35	12
August 2000	54%	34	12
June 2000	40%	48	12
February 2000	42%	42	16
October 1999	30%	60	10
March 1999	37%	54	9
August 1998	57%	33	10
August 1997	38%	51	11
February 1997	36%	46	18
June 1996	38%	59	3
February 1996	25%	68	7
September 1995	36%	58	6
May 1995	44%	51	5
September 1994	33%	62	5
July 1992	24%	71	5
January 1992	32%	67	1
Party (Late Nov. 2011)			
Democrats	10%	85	5
Republicans	8%	86	6
Non-partisans/others	13%	81	6

Note: For measures conducted prior to 1997, original surveys used a five-point response scale, which has been converted to a two-point approve/disapprove scale for comparative purposes. In addition, surveys conducted prior to 1997 were completed among a cross-section of all California adults, not just registered voters.

Super committee failure seen as very serious

Earlier this year a specially drawn bi-partisan Congressional committee – six Democrats and six Republicans – was charged with coming up with a plan to reduce to some extent the nation’s budget deficit. However, last week when the deadline for coming up with a legislative package had been reached, the committee disbanded in failure.

More than nine in ten California voters (92%) see the super committee’s failure as a serious matter – 75% very serious and 17% somewhat serious.

There is little difference in views about the seriousness of the situation across party lines, with more than nine in ten voters of all political stripes describing the inability of the lawmakers to come up with a deficit reduction plan as a serious matter.

Table 2				
How serious a problem is it that the Congressional super committee was unable to reach agreement on how to reduce the nation's budget deficit? (among California registered voters)				
	<u>Total</u>	Party registration		
		<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Non-partisans/ others</u>
Very serious	75%	74%	75%	77%
Somewhat serious	18	21	15	17
Not serious	6	5	8	4
No opinion	1	*	2	2

* Less than 1/2 of 1%

Who is to blame for super committee’s failure?

About half (51%) of California voters feel that both the Republican and Democratic contingent should share equally in the blame for the super committee’s failure. Among the rest, by a 32% to 14% margin more voters here think the Republicans should receive a greater share of the blame than the Democrats.

Large proportions of Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans think both parties should share equally in the blame for the super committee’s demise.

Table 3
Which party is more to blame for the failure of the Congressional super committee to reach an agreement on the deficit?
(among California registered voters)

	Total	Party registration		
		Democrats	Republicans	Non-partisans/ others
Who's more to blame?				
The Republicans	32%	56%	8%	23%
The Democrats	14	3	31	9
Both equally	51	41	56	62
No opinion	3	*	5	6

* Less than 1/2 of 1%

Many think increasing the party strength of either the Democrats or the Republicans in Congress next year won't help improve the economy

Many Californians place little hope in Congress's ability to improve the country's economic problems no matter which party prevails in the 2012 Congressional elections.

When asked whether they felt the country would have a better chance of solving its economic problems by electing more Democrats or more Republicans to Congress next year, the largest single group (40%) say neither, believing it would not make much difference in helping the economy.

Among those who think that the outcome of the Congressional elections would make a difference, 31% of Californians think electing more Democrats would be better for the economy, while 26% think electing more Republicans would help.

Table 4
Will the country have a better chance of solving its economic problems if more Democrats or more Republicans were elected to Congress in 2012?
(among California registered voters)

	More Democrats	More Republicans	Not much difference	No opinion
Total statewide	31%	26	40	3
Party registration				
Democrats	57%	4	37	2
Republicans	4%	58	34	4
Not-partisan/others	22%	27	51	*

* Less than 1/2 of 1%

Information About The Survey

Methodological Details

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed November 15-27, 2011 among a random sample of 1,000 registered voters in California. In order to cover a broad range of issues and minimize respondent fatigue, questions in this release were asked of random subsamples of voters.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish using live interviewers working from Field Research Corporation's central location telephone interviewing facilities. In this survey 775 interviews were derived from landline sample listings and 225 from cell phone listings. 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 +/- 3.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings based on voters included the random subsample have a maximum sampling error of +/- 5.8 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

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job?

This week the Congressional super committee in charge of putting together a package to reduce the nation's large accumulated budget deficit was unable to reach agreement. How serious a problem do you think this is for the country – very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious or not at all serious?

Who do you blame more for the failure of the Congressional super committee to reach an agreement on the deficit – the Democrats, the Republicans or both equally?

After next year's elections, do you think the country would have a better chance of solving its economic problems if more Democrats were elected to Congress, more Republicans were elected to Congress, or wouldn't it make much difference?