

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

Field Research Corporation

601 California Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94108-2814
(415) 392-5763 FAX: (415) 434-2541
EMAIL: fieldpoll@field.com
www.field.com/fieldpollonline

Release #2399

BROWN'S JOB RATINGS REMAIN POSITIVE IN CONTRAST TO VOTERS' HARSH VIEW OF THE LEGISLATURE'S PERFORMANCE. VOTERS DISLIKE AUTOMATIC BUDGET CUTS PROVISION.

Release Date: **Monday, December 5, 2011**

IMPORTANT: Contract for this service is subject to revocation if publication or broadcast takes place before release date or if contents are divulged to persons outside of subscriber staff prior to release time. (ISSN 0195-4520)

By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Democrat Jerry Brown assumed the governorship for the second time in January, after serving two terms in that office during the 1975-82 period. At year's end, he receives more positive than negative job ratings from voters, with 47% approving and 36% disapproving.

By contrast, voters hold the state legislature in very low regard. Just 22% approve of the job it is doing, while nearly three times as many (62%) disapprove. In addition, by a 68% to 21% margin, voters believe that the state is moving in the wrong direction rather than the right direction.

Voters also express a strong negative reaction to the automatic spending cuts provision included as part of this year's state budget. That provision could trigger as much as \$2 billion in spending reductions to popular programs should, as expected, tax revenues fall short of the estimates made when the budget was approved.

These are the findings from the latest *Field Poll*, completed by telephone in English and Spanish November 15-27 among a random sample of this state's registered voters.

Trend of Brown's job performance rating

Forty-seven per cent of voters now say they approve of the job that Brown is doing as governor at year's end. This falls in the mid-range of the job approval ratings the Governor has received in each of three prior *Field Poll* measurements taken earlier this year.

Last March nearly a third (31%) of voters couldn't give an assessment of Brown's job performance. Now, the proportion of voters unable to offer an opinion has dropped to 17%. However, over this same period, the proportion of voters who disapprove of the Governor's performance has increased from 21% to 36%.

Democrats approve of Brown’s performance in office by a three to one margin – 66% to 19%. A large plurality of non-partisans (48% to 31%) also registers approval. Offsetting this is the view of Republican voters, who disapprove by a 64% to 21% margin.

Brown also receives particularly high marks from voters with a post-graduate education, union members, and those living in the San Francisco Bay Area and other parts of Northern California.

Table 1
Job performance rating of Governor Jerry Brown
(among registered voters)

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
Late November 2011	47%	36	17
September 2011	49%	32	19
June 2011	46%	31	23
March 2011	48%	21	31
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	66%	19	15
Republicans	21%	64	15
Non-partisans/others	48%	31	21
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	49%	30	21
Other Southern California	36%	50	14
Central Valley	48%	40	12
San Francisco Bay Area	59%	20	21
Other Northern California*	62%	21	17
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	49%	38	13
Female	46%	34	20
<u>Union affiliation</u>			
Union member in household	54%	35	11
Non-union household	46%	36	18
<u>Education</u>			
High school graduate or less	45%	36	19
Some college/trade school	38%	47	15
College graduate	49%	33	18
Post-graduate work	61%	24	15

* Small sample base.

How Brown's job ratings compare to those of his predecessors

While favorable, Brown's year-end job ratings are a lot lower than those he received at the end of his first year as governor in 1975. At that time 67% of the state's residents approved of the job he was doing, while 24% disapproved. But, by the end of his tenure in 1982, Brown's approval rating had turned negative, with 43% approving and 54% disapproving.

Brown's immediate predecessor, Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) also was very favorably regarded at the end of his first year in office. After winning a special election in 2003, Schwarzenegger's job marks about a year later were 65% approve and 22% disapprove. However, at the end of his seven-year tenure, Schwarzenegger's standing with voters had plummeted, with only 23% approving and 68% disapproving.

The job performance trajectory of Gray Davis (D) was similar. Davis's ratings at the end of his first year were two to one positive (54% approve and 27% disapprove). But, shortly before he was recalled from office in 2003 70% disapproved and just 22% approved of Davis.

The historical record also shows most other California governors following a similar pattern of being more favorably reviewed during their first year than at the end of their tenures. This characterized the job ratings of Pat Brown (D), Ronald Reagan (R), and George Deukmejian (R), although Deukmejian and Reagan still managed to retain more positive than negative marks at the end of their terms.

Voter assessments of Pete Wilson (R), however, ran counter to the pattern of declining job ratings over the course of his governorship. His ratings toward the end of his first year were more negative than positive, but by the end of his tenure more approved than disapproved of his job performance.

Table 2
Comparing Brown's current job ratings to his predecessors
at the end of their first year in office and toward the end of their tenures

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
<u>Jerry Brown (D) (2011-)</u>			
November 2011	47%	36	17
<u>Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) (2003-2010)</u>			
September 2010	23%	68	9
September 2004	65%	22	13
<u>Gray Davis (D) (1999-2003)</u>			
August 2003	22%	70	8
October 1999	54%	27	19
<u>Pete Wilson (R) (1991-1998)</u>			
August 1998	52%	45	3
September 1991	45%	49	6
<u>George Deukmejian (R) (1983-1990)</u>			
August 1990	53%	45	2
October 1983	59%	35	6
<u>Jerry Brown (D) (1975-1982)</u>			
August 1982	43%	54	3
November 1975	67%	24	9
<u>Ronald Reagan (R) (1967-1974)</u>			
August 1974	53%	42	5
June 1967	58%	33	9
<u>Pat Brown (D) (1959-1966)</u>			
January 1965*	42%	53	5
June 1959	51%	22	27

(D) denotes Democrat, (R) denotes Republican. * represents last Field Poll measure during his governorship.

Note: Surveys prior to 1996 were conducted among all adults. In addition, response scales from these surveys were converted from their original five-point scale to the current two-point approve/disapprove scales for comparative purposes.

State legislature ratings remain dismal

Over the past six months, the percentage of voters who approve of the state legislature's performance has remained at a very low level – in the low twenties, while those disapproving has been in the low to mid-sixties.

Currently 22% of voters approve, while 62% disapprove, of the job the legislature is doing. These ratings are similar to those received in each of the last two *Field Polls*, but are not as bad as the 10% approve and 80% disapprove found in September last year.

Table 3
Trend of voter appraisals of the job the state legislature is doing
(among registered voters)

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
Late November 2011	22%	62	16
September 2011	20%	65	15
June 2011	23%	64	13
March 2011	16%	70	14
September 2010	10%	80	10
July 2010	16%	74	10
March 2010	13%	78	9
January 2010	16%	72	12
October 2009	13%	78	9
April 2009	14%	74	12
March 2009	18%	72	10
September 2008	15%	73	12
July 2008	27%	57	16
May 2008	30%	57	13
2007 (average)	38%	43	19
2006 (average)	30%	50	20
2005 (average)	28%	55	17
2004 (average)	28%	53	19
2003 (average)	25%	59	16
2002 (average)	40%	40	20
2001 (average)	43%	37	20
2000 (average)	48%	25	27
1999 (average)	45%	28	27
1998 (average)	45%	33	22
1997 (average)	38%	40	22
1996 (average)	41%	49	10
1995 (average)	34%	59	7
1993 (average)	28%	64	8
1992 (average)	32%	64	4
1990 (average)	45%	48	7
1988 (average)	57%	36	7
1983 (average)	43%	49	8
Party registration (Late Nov. 2011)			
Democrats	28%	58	14
Republicans	9%	75	16
Non-partisans/others	29%	55	16

Note: Surveys prior to 1996 were conducted among all adults. In addition, response scales from these surveys were converted from their original five-point scale to the current two-point approve/disapprove scales for comparative purposes.

Voters dislike automatic spending cuts provision included as part of the state budget

Last summer Brown and the legislature approved a state budget for the current fiscal year that included a hoped for \$4 billion increase in tax collections. However, last month the Legislative Analyst's Office reported that revenue will likely be about \$3.7 billion short of expectations. A provision in the budget requires that if a shortfall of this magnitude were to exist by year's end, it would trigger automatic reductions in state spending of about \$2 billion.

In this survey voters were asked how they felt about the budget's automatic spending cuts provision, which would impact spending in many popular program areas, including the K-12 schools, higher education and health care.

By a 65% to 26% margin voters think including this provision into the budget was a bad idea. Responses to this question are nearly identical to those obtained by *The Field Poll* last September when a similar question was asked.

Voters' strong negative reaction to the automatic spending cuts provision spans party lines.

Table 4
**Views of the state budget's automatic spending cuts provision
that would reduce K-12 schools, higher education and health care budgets
should tax revenues not meet original budget assumptions
(among registered voters)**

	Good idea	Bad idea	No opinion
Late November 2011	26%	65	9
September 2011	24%	66	10
<u>Party registration</u> (<i>Late Nov. 2011</i>)			
Democrats	20%	74	6
Republican	34%	58	8
Non-partisan/others	27%	60	13

Voters think state on wrong track by greater than three to one margin

By a greater than three to one margin (68% to 21%), Californians believe the state is seriously off on the wrong track rather than moving in the right direction. This assessment is similar to each of three other assessments obtained by *The Field Poll* earlier this year, but is slightly higher than those observed in 2009 and 2010.

Table 5
Are things in California generally going in the right direction or
do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?
(among registered voters)

	Right direction	Wrong track	No opinion
Late November 2011	21%	68	11
September 2011	24%	65	11
June 2011	23%	67	10
March 2011	26%	64	10
September 2010	12%	81	7
July 2010	13%	79	8
January 2010	14%	79	7
October 2009	15%	78	7
March 2009	18%	73	9
September 2008	22%	70	8
July 2008	21%	68	11
May 2008	23%	68	9
December 2007	43%	47	10
October 2007	42%	42	16
August 2007	42%	45	13
March 2007	52%	38	10
September 2006	49%	36	15
July 2006	47%	41	12
May 2006	32%	57	11
April 2006	28%	56	16
February 2006	31%	55	14
2005 (average)	31%	58	11
2004 (average)	39%	48	13
2003 (average)	20%	72	8
2002 (average)	37%	52	11
2001 (average)	43%	50	7
2000 (average)	58%	35	7
1999 (average)	52%	34	14
1998 (average)	48%	42	10
1997 (average)	36%	54	10
1996 (average)	39%	49	12
1995 (average)	32%	57	11
1994 (average)	21%	70	9
1993 (average)	11%	83	6
1992 (average)	7%	90	3
1989 (average)	50%	42	8
1988 (average)	52%	43	5
Party registration (Late Nov. 2011)			
Democrats	27%	59	14
Republicans	8%	85	7
Non-partisans/others	24%	61	15

Note: Surveys prior to 1996 conducted among all California adults, not just registered adults.

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, the questions in this release were asked of a random subsample of 515 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. In this survey 775 interviews were derived from landline sample listings and 225 from cell phone listings. 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 random subsample of voters asked these questions have a maximum sampling error of +/- 4.5 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

Do you think things in California are generally going in the right direction or do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Jerry Brown is handling his job as Governor of California?

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way the California state legislature is doing its job?

One of the provisions included in this year's state budget is that if state tax revenues in the first half of the year fall short of a certain target, this would trigger automatic spending cuts in program areas like k-12 education, higher education and health care. Do you think that including this provision into the state budget agreement was a good idea or a bad idea?