

# 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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Release #2306

Release Date and Time: **6:00 a.m., Thursday, April 30, 2009**

**WHILE CALIFORNIA VOTERS PREFER SPENDING CUTS TO TAX INCREASES TO RESOLVE THE STATE BUDGET DEFICIT, MAJORITIES OPPOSE CUTBACKS IN TEN OF TWELVE SPENDING CATEGORIES.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

In a wide-ranging interview with a representative sample of California registered voters about the state budget deficit, *The Field Poll* finds voters holding a number of strong views and beliefs.

Findings include:

- A large majority prefers resolving the state budget deficit mostly through spending cuts than through tax increases.
- Few voters say they are willing to raise their own taxes in order to balance the budget.
- There is strong support for maintaining the two-thirds super majority vote in the legislature to enact tax increases. A smaller majority also rejects the idea of lowering the threshold to a simple majority vote under the condition that any new tax increases be offset by a corresponding reduction in other tax revenues.

Yet, when asked to make the difficult choices about which programs to cut, voters are not as definitive.

- Majorities oppose cutbacks in ten of twelve major categories of state spending, including the three largest – the public schools, health care and higher education.
- There is majority support for making budget cutbacks in only two program areas – state prisons and corrections and state parks and recreation.

While generally decrying tax increases, majorities support increasing a number of taxes that are selective as to whom they would effect. On the other hand, California voters oppose taxes that would have a more broad-based impact.

- Three in four voters (74%) favor increasing taxes on millionaires.
- Three in four support increasing two so-called “sin taxes” – the state tobacco tax and the state alcohol tax. Majorities also endorse several other forms of sin taxes that are not currently taxed, including a special tax on the sale of pornography, which an overwhelming 80% support, and legalizing marijuana and taxing its proceeds, supported by 56%.
- However, only about one in four favors increasing state gasoline taxes to reduce the deficit (27%) or the idea of expanding the sales tax to include goods and services not currently covered (25%).
- About one in three (37%) back the proposal to increase taxes on business property.

These are the main findings from a new *Field Poll* of 901 registered voters conducted April 16-26 about the state budget deficit. The California HealthCare Foundation provided additional grant funding to include additional questions on health programs that could be affected by the deficit.

**Spending reductions favored over tax increases**

A two-thirds majority of registered voters (67%) would rather that the state’s budget deficit be resolved mostly through spending cuts than through tax increases. This proportion is slightly greater than a 63% majority who felt about this last May.

Greater than eight in ten Republicans (83%) and nearly two in three non-partisans (65%) favor resolving the deficit mostly through spending cuts. Even a majority of Democrats (57%) holds this view.

	<b>Mostly spending cuts</b>	<b>Mostly tax increases</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>10</b>
May 2008	63%	26	11
<b><u>Party registration (Late April 2009)</u></b>			
Democrats	57%	33	10
Republicans	83%	11	6
Non-partisans/others	65%	24	11

### **Maintain two-thirds legislative majority to enact new taxes**

Voter sentiment favoring spending reductions is similar to their preferences about requiring a two-thirds majority vote in both the Assembly and State Senate before any new taxes can be enacted. Overall seven in ten registered voters (70%) favor the two-thirds vote rule.

How partisans divide on this issue also closely parallels their overall views on spending cuts vs. tax increases. Greater than eight in ten Republicans (84%) and 72% of non-partisans favor this requirement. Even a majority of Democrats (58%) is in favor.

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	58%	38	4
Republicans	84%	14	2
Non-partisans/others	72%	22	6

Sentiment on this issue changes somewhat when voters are asked whether they would approve of a simple majority under the condition that any tax increases be offset by an equivalent reduction in other tax revenues. A slim majority of voters (51%) opposes enacting new taxes with a simple majority in this setting, while 40% would favor this.

A slight plurality of Democrats (48% to 41%) favors the simple majority rule under these conditions. However, Republicans remain opposed by a 67% to 27% margin. Non-partisans are more divided, with 49% opposed and 43% in favor.

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**Table 3**  
**Voter reaction to changing the 2/3 majority vote to a simple majority if other tax revenues are reduced by a corresponding amount at the same time (among registered voters)**

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	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>9</b>
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	48%	41	11
Republicans	27%	67	6
Non-partisans/others	43%	49	8

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### **Voter priorities for cutting spending programs**

While favoring budget cutbacks over tax increases in principle, voters have a difficult time identifying which specific state program areas to cut to reduce the deficit. When presented with twelve major categories of state spending, a majority supports spending cutbacks in only two areas. These include state prisons and correctional facilities, favored by a 59% to 38% margin, and state parks and recreational facilities, backed by a narrow 51% to 47% margin.

There is now somewhat greater voter support for budget cutbacks in these two areas than there was last year and in 2002 when a similar series of questions was asked.

At the other end of the spectrum 70% or more oppose spending cuts in three areas. They include law enforcement and police (74%), the public schools (73%) and health care programs for low income Californians and the disabled (72%).

Voters also oppose reducing state funding of four other spending categories by margins of greater than two to one or more. Included in this group are higher education (67% to 31%), child care programs (66% to 30%), mental health programs (66% to 31%) and water storage and supply facilities (63% to 31%).

Majorities of voters also oppose budget cutbacks in three other areas of spending. These are environmental regulation (56%), public transportation (55%), and state road and highway building and repair (54%).

The current poll finds a slight uptick in voter support for cutting some of these ten program areas compared to earlier measures, although none receives majority support.

**Table 4**  
**Trend of voter support or opposition to making cuts to each of twelve**  
**areas of state spending to reduce the state budget deficit**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b><u>State prisons and correctional facilities</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>3</b>
May 2008	46%	50	4
July 2002	46%	49	5
<b><u>State parks and recreational facilities</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>2</b>
May 2008	38%	59	3
July 2002	41%	55	4
<b><u>State road and highway building and repair</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>3</b>
May 2008	36%	62	2
July 2002	37%	59	4
<b><u>Public transportation</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>2</b>
May 2008	30%	67	3
July 2002	34%	62	4
<b><u>Environmental regulation</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>4</b>
May 2008	39%	56	5
July 2002	40%	55	5
<b><u>Water storage and supply facilities</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>6</b>
May 2008	29%	64	7
July 2002	27%	65	8
<b><u>Mental health programs</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>3</b>
May 2008	24%	73	3
July 2002	25%	72	3
<b><u>Higher education, including public universities, colleges and community colleges</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>2</b>
May 2008	28%	71	1
July 2002	32%	66	2
<b><u>Child care programs</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>4</b>
May 2008	26%	70	4
July 2002	25%	70	5
<b><u>Health care programs for low income Californians and the disabled</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>2</b>
May 2008	20%	77	3
July 2002	21%	76	3
<b><u>The public schools</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>2</b>
May 2008	20%	80	*
July 2002	20%	78	2
<b><u>Law enforcement and police</u></b>			
<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>3</b>
May 2008	26%	71	3
July 2002	23%	74	3

\* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

**Voters unwilling to increase their own taxes to resolve the deficit**

By a roughly three-to-two margin (58% to 40%) voters say they are not willing to increase their own taxes to help the state balance its budget.

Republicans reject this approach more than four to one (81% to 19%). Non-partisans also oppose paying higher taxes but by a narrower 52% to 45% margin. By contrast, a small majority of Democrats (53%) supports increasing their own taxes to help the state balance its budget.

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>2</b>
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	53%	45	2
Republicans	18%	81	1
Non-partisans/others	45%	52	3

**Support for increasing specific types of taxes that are selective as to whom they would effect**

Voters hold a wide range of views with regard to their degree of support or opposition to various tax-increase proposals, supporting some and rejecting others.

Most of the tax proposals that receive majority support are those that are selective as to whom they would effect. For example, creating a special tax on the sale of pornography is supported by 80%, increasing state income taxes on individuals earning more than \$1 million a year is favored by 78%, increasing state tobacco taxes is backed by 75% and hiking state alcohol taxes is approved by 74%.

Four other revenue-producing ideas also generate significant support among voters. They include legalizing marijuana for recreational use and taxing its proceeds (56%), creating an oil severance tax on oil drilled in California (54%), collecting state sales taxes from California who buy products from out-of-state sellers on the Internet (51%) and creating a carbon tax on gasoline diesel and jet fuel based on the amount of greenhouse gases each fuel emits when burned (45%).

Other possible steps to increase state tax revenues receive only minority support. They include raising taxes on business property (37%), increasing state gasoline taxes (27%), and expanding the state sales tax to include goods and services not currently taxed, such as entertainment purchases or legal, medical accounting or other professional services (25%).

The idea of increasing the state’s indebtedness by issuing more bonds also receives only 37% support.

**Table 6**  
**Trend of California voters who support increasing**  
**different types of state and local taxes**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Late April 2009</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1983</b>
Create a special tax on the sale of pornography	<b>80%</b>	*	*	*	*	*
Increase state tobacco taxes	<b>75%</b>	75	77	76	80	85
Increase state income taxes on individuals earning more than \$1 million a year	<b>74%</b>	*	*	*	*	*
Increase state alcohol taxes	<b>74%</b>	79	80	73	78	86
Legalize marijuana for recreational use and tax its proceeds	<b>56%</b>	*	*	*	*	*
Create an oil severance tax on oil drilled in California**	<b>54%</b>	*	55	56	52	49
Collect sales taxes from Californians who buy products from out-of-state sellers on the Internet	<b>51%</b>	*	*	*	*	*
Create a carbon tax on gasoline diesel and jet fuel based on the amount of greenhouse gases each fuel emits when burned	<b>45%</b>	*	*	*	*	*
Increase taxes on business property	<b>37%</b>	50	47	54	58	54
Increase the state's indebtedness by issuing more bonds	<b>37%</b>	34	*	*	*	*
Increase state gasoline taxes	<b>27%</b>	*	42	33	35	37
Expand the state sales tax to include goods and services not currently taxed, such as entertainment purchases or legal, medical, accounting or other professional services	<b>25%</b>	*	*	*	*	*

\* Not asked.

\*\* Wording of current proposal differs somewhat from previous measures.

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 901 registered voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish between April 16-26, 2009. The survey was conducted by *The Field Poll* with additional grant funding provided by the California HealthCare Foundation to add questions about the impact of the state budget deficit on health-related programs. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize potential respondent fatigue, the overall registered voter sample was divided into two random sub-samples of 449 and 452 voters each on some questions.

Up to six attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected at random from a statewide list of registered voters in California. Once a voter's name and telephone number has been selected, interviews are attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews can be conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the results are weighted to the actual distribution of registered voters by party and by various other demographic and regional characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on the sample size. The maximum sampling error for results based on the overall sample of registered voters is +/- 3.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings from each random subsample have a sampling error of +/- 4.7 percentage points. The maximum sampling error is based on percentages in the middle of the sampling distribution (percentages around 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (percentages around 10% or around 90%) have a smaller margin of error. While there are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error, the overall design and execution of the survey minimized the potential for these other sources of error. The maximum sampling error will be larger for analyses based on subgroups of the overall sample.

### **Questions Asked**

How would you prefer that the state government deal with its budget deficit, which could range from eight to fifteen billion dollars – mostly through spending cuts or mostly through tax increases?

Do you favor or oppose the requirement that in order to enact new taxes in California both houses of the state legislature must approve of them by a two-thirds majority vote?

Some have proposed changing this rule to allow the legislature to enact new taxes with a simple majority or 50 percent plus one of legislators in both houses so long as they reduce other tax revenues by a similar amount. Do you favor or oppose allowing this change?

As a way to reduce the deficit, the Governor and the state legislature may need to make cuts to various areas of state government spending. I am going to read some of these and for each, please tell me whether you favor or oppose making cuts to this area of state spending. (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Do you favor or oppose making cuts to this area in order to reduce the state budget deficit? (SEE RELEASE FOR ITEMS)

Another way to reduce the budget deficit is for state government to increase tax revenues. I am going to read some ways this could be done. For each please tell me whether you favor or oppose it. (ITEMS READ IN RANDOM ORDER, ASKING:) Would you favor or oppose this as a way to reduce the state budget deficit? (SEE RELEASE FOR ITEMS)