

# THE FIELD POLL

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**OBAMA MAINTAINING BIG LEAD OVER ROMNEY IN CALIFORNIA. IMPROVED VIEW OF THE PRESIDENT'S JOB PERFORMANCE AND DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

A new survey of California voters conducted jointly by The Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley and The Field Poll finds the Democratic ticket of Barack Obama and Joe Biden running 24 points ahead of the GOP ticket of Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan 58% to 34%, in this year's presidential election.

Voters view Obama very positively, with 61% holding a favorable view and 36% unfavorable. By contrast, the perception of Romney is more negative than positive – 53% unfavorable and 39% favorable.

There are also decided differences in the images voters have of each party's vice presidential candidates. Voters view Biden favorably 57% to 34%, while impressions of Ryan are 42% unfavorable and 35% favorable.

Californians' assessments of the job Obama is doing as president are now higher than at any time in the past three years. Currently 58% approve and 35% disapprove of the job the President is doing. In addition, there has been a decided improvement in the perception that voters have of the direction of the country. More voters now see the country moving in the right direction (52%) than being on the wrong track (41%).

The survey was conducted September 5-17, 2012 among 1,171 registered voters in California, of whom 891 are considered likely to vote in the November general election.

**Trend of California voter preferences**

Despite the wealth of publicity he gained in defeating a field of GOP primary rivals, his selection of a running mate and being enthusiastically endorsed by the delegates attending the GOP national convention, Romney has not gained any ground in California.

Obama is now the choice of 58% of this state's likely voters, up marginally from 55% in early July. Support for Romney stands at 34%, down marginally from 37% in an early July *Field Poll*.

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**Table 1**  
**Trend of voter preferences for President in California**  
**(among likely voters)**

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	<b>Mid- September 2012</b>	<b>Early July 2012</b>	<b>February 2012</b>
Obama/Biden	<b>58%</b>	55%	55%
Romney/Ryan	<b>34</b>	37	35
Other	<b>2</b>	3	N/A
Undecided	<b>6</b>	5	10

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*Note: February measures conducted among all registered voters. Pairings prior to mid-September did not reference each party's Vice Presidential candidates.*

*N/A: Not asked.*

### **Preferences across geographic and demographic subgroups**

Many of California's recent historical patterns favoring Democratic candidates over GOP candidates across major segments of the voting electorate are apparent in this survey. The Obama/Biden ticket has wide margins of support from registered Democrats and independents, voters living in the state's coastal counties, especially Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area, those under age 40, voters who have completed post-graduate work, and among African-Americans, Latinos and Chinese-Americans.

The only major sub-group where the Romney/Ryan ticket leads is among Republican voters.

**Table 2**  
**Comparing California voter preferences for President**  
**now vs. early July – by subgroup**  
**(among likely voters)**

	<u>Mid-September</u>		<u>Early July</u>	
	<u>Obama/ Biden</u>	<u>Romney/ Ryan</u>	<u>Obama</u>	<u>Romney</u>
<b>Total likely voters</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>34</b>	55%	37
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	89%	8	84%	9
Republicans	14%	78	9%	81
No party preference/others	60%	24	60%	30
<u>Area</u>				
Coastal counties	62%	30	60%	32
Inland counties	48%	45	40%	50
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	66%	27	65%	29
Other Southern California	50%	43	43%	47
Central Valley	48%	48	42%	49
San Francisco Bay Area	67%	22	73%	21
Other Northern California*	61%	27	46%	50
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	56%	36	51%	38
Female	60%	32	58%	36
<u>Age</u>				
18 – 39	65%	27	64%	26
40 – 49	59%	34	56%	34
50 – 64	56%	36	51%	41
65 or older	50%	41	46%	47
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	51%	40	50%	43
Latino	72%	23	66%	22
African-American*	94%	4	88%	2
Asian-American (total)	57%	28	54%	36
Chinese-American	65%	16	**	**
Korean-American	46%	48	**	**
Vietnamese-American	46%	33	**	**
<u>Education</u>				
High school or less	62%	32	51%	41
Some college/trade school	53%	39	47%	41
College graduate	53%	37	60%	34
Post-graduate work	69%	25	61%	32

\* Small sample size.   \*\* Sample sizes too small to be examined separately.  
 Note: Differences between 100% and the sum of preferences for the candidates in each poll equal proportions undecided or volunteering another candidate

**Differing images of the presidential candidates**

Obama has been viewed more favorably than unfavorably by California voters since he first emerged as a leading presidential contender in 2008. The proportion who have a positive perception of him has ranged from a low of 53% last May to a high of 63% shortly before he won the Democratic nomination for President in 2008. At present 61% of likely voters hold a favorable view of Obama, while 36% have a negative impression.

Opinions of the President are highly partisan, with 89% of Democrats viewing him positively and 78% of Republicans rating him negatively. Political independents give Obama a greater than two to one positive assessment, 66% to 28%.

<b>Table 3a</b>			
<b>Trend of voter impressions of Barack Obama</b>			
<b>(among likely voters)</b>			
	<b><u>Favorable</u></b>	<b><u>Unfavorable</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
<b><u>Barack Obama, President</u></b>			
<b>Mid-September 2012</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3</b>
Early July 2012	58%	39	3
May 2012	53%	38	9
September 2011	55%	41	4
October 2008	61%	30	9
September 2008	62%	32	6
July 2008	63%	26	11
May 2008	62%	29	9
January 2008	59%	23	15
<b><u>Party registration (Mid-September 2012)</u></b>			
Democrats	89%	9	1
Republicans	20%	78	2
No party preference/others	66%	28	6

*Note: 2012 and 2011 measures prior to early July 2012 and 2008 measures prior to September 2008 were based on registered voters.*

Voter impressions of Romney were generally mixed between the time he first emerged as a leading contender for this year's GOP nomination in June 2011 to May of this year. However since then Californians have taken a more negative than positive view of him. At present 53% of the state's likely voters hold an unfavorable view of Romney, while 39% have a favorable impression.

Partisans hold diametrically opposite opinions of the former Massachusetts Governor. About eight in ten (78%) of Democrats view him negatively, while 81% of Republicans hold a positive opinion. Political independents in this state have a nearly two-to-one negative impression of the GOP presidential nominee (59% to 31%).

**Table 3b**  
**Trend of voter impressions of Mitt Romney**  
**(among likely voters)**

	<b><u>Favorable</u></b>	<b><u>Unfavorable</u></b>	<b><u>No opinion</u></b>
<b><u>Mitt Romney, former Massachusetts Governor</u></b>			
<b>Mid-September 2012</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>8</b>
Early July 2012	36%	55	9
May 2012	40%	44	16
November 2011	38%	39	23
September 2011	34%	40	26
June 2011	38%	34	28
<b><u>Party registration (Mid-September 2012)</u></b>			
Democrats	12%	78	10
Republicans	81%	12	7
No party preference/others	31%	59	10

*Note: Measures prior to early July 2012 were based on registered voters.*

### **Views of Biden and Ryan**

Biden, who has served as the country's vice president since 2009, is seen in a generally positive light in California, with 57% having a favorable opinion and 34% unfavorable.

Ryan, a Wisconsin Congressman who was selected to be the GOP vice presidential nominee last month, has a slightly more negative than positive image among California voters. At present 35% view him favorably and 42% unfavorably.

Opinions of the vice presidential candidates are also highly partisan, with large majorities holding a positive impression their own party's standard-bearer and a negative impression of the opposing party's nominee. Political independents view Biden very positively (62% to 25%), but have a more negative than positive view of Ryan (50% to 29%).

**Table 4**  
**Image ratings of each party's vice presidential candidates**  
**(among likely voters)**

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b><u>Joe Biden, Vice President</u></b>	<b><u>57%</u></b>	<b><u>34</u></b>	<b><u>9</u></b>
Democrats	81%	10	8
Republicans	19%	73	6
No party preference/other	62%	25	13
<b><u>Paul Ryan, Wisconsin Congressman</u></b>	<b><u>35%</u></b>	<b><u>42</u></b>	<b><u>23</u></b>
Democrats	10%	62	28
Republicans	73%	8	19
No party preference/other	29%	50	21

**Improvement in Obama's job rating**

Last fall Obama's job approval rating in California was at its lowest point during his term (46% in September and 48% in November). However, since then there has been a steady increase in the positive appraisals that voters here have of him. Today's survey finds Obama getting the highest job approval rating (58%) since 2009.

Greater than eight in ten Democrats (82%) and 63% of independents approve of the job the President is doing. By contrast, just 20% of Republicans approve, while 76% disapprove.

**Table 5**  
**Trend of Californians' views about the job Barack Obama is doing as President**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>Mid-September 2012</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>7</b>
Early July 2012	55%	39	6
May 2012	53%	39	8
February 2012	53%	39	8
November 2011	48%	44	8
September 2011	46%	44	10
June 2011	54%	37	9
March 2011	54%	37	9
September 2010	53%	41	6
July 2010	54%	39	7
March 2010	52%	37	11
January 2010	56%	34	10
October 2009	60%	31	9
March 2009	65%	21	14
<b><u>Party registration (Mid-September 2012)</u></b>			
Democrats	82%	12	6
Republicans	20%	76	4
No party preference/other	63%	26	11

### **Improvement in views about the direction of the country**

Californians have had a generally dismal view of the country's direction over the past ten years. Except for a brief period during Obama's first year in office, most of the *Field Poll* surveys conducted between 2003 and July of this year found majority sentiment – often overwhelming – believing the country was on the wrong track.

However, the current survey finds a decided improvement in the thinking of Californians. Now 52% see the nation moving in the right direction, while 41% think it is on the wrong track. In early July these figures were reversed, with 51% saying the country was on the wrong track and just 35% believing it was moving in the right direction.

**Table 6**  
**Are things in the U.S. generally going in the right direction or**  
**do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track?**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<u>Right direction</u>	<u>Wrong track</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>Mid-September 2012</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>7</b>
Early July 2012	35%	51	14
February 2012	38%	52	10
November 2011	19%	70	11
September 2011	21%	68	11
March 2011	33%	56	11
September 2010	34%	55	11
July 2010	33%	53	14
January 2010	41%	49	10
2009 (average)	45%	44	11
2008 (average)	16%	75	9
2007 (average)	25%	65	10
2006 (average)	30%	60	10
2005 (average)	33%	59	8
2004 (average)	38%	53	9
2003 (average)	44%	50	6
2002 (average)	51%	37	12
December 2001	68%	27	5
September 2001 (pre-9/11 attack)	43%	49	8
January 2001	55%	34	11
2000 (average)	63%	28	9
1999 (average)	54%	37	9
1998 (average)	57%	32	11
1997 (average)	44%	45	11
1996 (average)	34%	49	17
1995 (average)	33%	54	13
1994 (average)	41%	50	9
1993 (average)	27%	64	9
1992 (average)	14%	81	5
1991 (average)	14%	78	7
1990 (average)	30%	63	7
1989 (average)	49%	43	8
1988 (average)	42%	53	5
<u>Party registration (Mid-September 2012)</u>			
Democrats	70%	22	8
Republicans	16%	78	6
No party preference/others	61%	31	8

*Note: Surveys prior to 1996 conducted among all California adults.*



## **Information About The Survey**

### **Methodological Details**

This survey was conducted jointly by The Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley and The Field Poll September 6-17, 2012. The findings are based on interviews conducted with 1,171 California registered voters, including 891 voters considered likely to vote in the November 2012 general election. The survey was conducted by telephone using live interviewers in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese.

The overall registered voter sample was supplemented additional interviews among Chinese-American, Korean-American and Vietnamese-American voters to enable the results from these voter subgroups to be compared to those of other racial/ethnic voter populations. Funding for the multi-ethnic samples was provided by the New America Media, through a grant from the Blue Shield of California Foundation.

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. Interviews were completed on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone. In this survey 900 interviews were conducted on a landline phone and 271 were completed through a cell phone contact. After completion of interviewing, the overall sample was weighted to align it to the proper statewide distribution of voters by race/ethnicity and other demographic characteristics of the California registered voter population.

In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize voter fatigue, some of the questions in the survey were asked of a random sample of 568 registered voters. Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend upon its sample size. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall likely voter sample are subject to a maximum sampling error of +/- 3.4 percentage points, while findings from the random subsample have a maximum sampling error of +/- 4.3 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 have a smaller margin of error. Sampling error will be larger for analyses based on subgroups of the overall sample.

### **Questions Asked**

If the presidential election were being held today would you vote for the Democratic ticket of Barack Obama and Joe Biden or the Republican ticket of Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan?

I am going to read the names of some of the candidates running for political office this year. As I read each name, please tell me whether your opinion of that person is favorable, unfavorable or whether you don't know enough about that person to have an opinion. (NAMES AND TITLES READ IN RANDOM ORDER) Is your opinion of (LAST NAME) favorable or unfavorable? (SEE RELEASE FOR NAMES AND TITLES OF CANDIDATES READ)

Thinking about the country overall, do you think things in the U.S. are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things are seriously off on the wrong track? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF REGISTERED VOTERS)

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?