

# 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 #2403

**OBAMA'S JOB RATING IMPROVING IN CALIFORNIA. MORE ARE INCLINED TO REELECT HIM. HOLDS BIG LEADS OVER POSSIBLE GOP CHALLENGERS IN GENERAL ELECTION MATCH-UPS.**

Release Date: **Thursday, February 23, 2012**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

President Barack Obama's job rating and his chances of carrying California in his reelection bid this year have improved in recent months according to a new *Field Poll*.

The survey, completed among a random sample of 1,003 registered voters, finds an increasing proportion of Californians rating the President's overall job performance positively. A 53% majority now approves of the job he is doing, while 39% disapprove. This fourteen-point positive to negative ratio is up from smaller two and four point pluralities observed in the fall and winter of last year.

This has been accompanied by an increase in Californians' desire to reelect Obama to a second term. This is manifested best when he is matched against each of the leading candidates running for the GOP nomination in general election simulations. The President currently leads former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney by twenty points (55% to 35%), double his preference margin three months ago. He holds even larger leads of twenty-eight and twenty-three percentage points, respectively, over two other potential GOP rivals, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.

The *Poll* also finds Californians' opinions about the overall direction of the country to be less pessimistic than at any time over the past two years.

### **Obama's job approval rating improving**

For the first time since June a majority (53%) of California voters approves of the job that Obama is doing as President, while 39% disapprove. This fourteen-point edge on the favorable side is better than a four-point margin found last November and a two-point edge in September.

California Democrats give Obama a very positive assessment (77% to 17%). Republicans hold virtually the opposite view, rating the President negatively 19% to 75%. Non-partisans currently view the president's performance more positively (54%) than negatively (36%).

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**Table 1**  
**Trend of Californians' views about the job Barack Obama is doing as President**  
**(among California registered voters)**

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	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>February 2012</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>8</b>
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</u></b> ( <i>February 2012</i> )			
Democrats	77%	17	6
Republicans	19%	75	6
Non-partisan/other	54%	36	10

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### **Californians more inclined to reelect Obama**

Accompanying the increase in Obama's job rating is a rise in voter inclinations to reelect him.

Last November Californians were about evenly divided in their feelings about whether they would support Obama serving another term, with 45% inclined and 44% not inclined to reelect him.

The current poll finds 51% favoring his reelection and 41% disinclined. Further, the proportion of those who say they strongly back his reelection has increased nine points, from 26% in November to 35% now.

**Table 2**  
**Inclination to reelect Barack Obama as President in 2012**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>February 2012</b>	<b>November 2011</b>	<b>September 2011</b>	<b>June 2011</b>	<b>March 2011</b>
<u>Inclined</u>	<b>51%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>49%</b>
Very strongly	<b>35</b>	26	28	N/A	N/A
Somewhat strongly	<b>12</b>	16	17	N/A	N/A
Not strongly	<b>4</b>	3	4	N/A	N/A
<u>Not inclined</u>	<b>41</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>40%</b>
Not strongly	<b>1</b>	3	4	N/A	N/A
Somewhat strongly	<b>9</b>	8	7	N/A	N/A
Very strongly	<b>31</b>	33	33	N/A	N/A
No opinion	<b>8</b>	11	7	11	11

N/A Voters not asked about their intensity of feelings in June and March surveys.

**Obama leads potential Republican challengers by wide margins in general election match-ups**

Last fall and winter, when Obama was pitted against Romney in general election trial heats in California, the President led by margins of ten to thirteen points. Now, Obama’s lead has expanded over the former Massachusetts Governor to twenty points – 55% to 35%.

When matched against Santorum and Gingrich, the President is preferred by even bigger margins. Against Santorum, Obama leads by twenty-eight points, 60% to 32%, while he holds a 56% to 33% advantage over Gingrich.

**Table 3**  
**2012 general election trial heats between Obama**  
**and selected GOP candidates**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>February 2012</b>	<b>November 2011</b>	<b>September 2011</b>
<u>Obama vs. Romney</u>			
Obama	<b>55%</b>	50%	51%
Romney	<b>35</b>	40	38
Undecided	<b>10</b>	10	11
<u>Obama vs. Santorum</u>			
Obama	<b>60%</b>	N/A	N/A
Santorum	<b>32</b>		
Undecided	<b>8</b>		
<u>Obama vs. Gingrich</u>			
Obama	<b>56%</b>	55	N/A
Gingrich	<b>33</b>	35	
Undecided	<b>11</b>	10	

N/A: Not asked.

**Obama's expanded lead over Romney largely due to the growing preferences of non-partisans**

Obama's much stronger showing against Romney now compared to last November appears to be primarily due to a sizeable increase in support for the President among this state's non-partisan voters. Three months ago, Obama and Romney were dividing the preferences of these voters about evenly. Now, Obama is preferred by a greater than two-to-one margin, 59% to 27%.

Support for Romney has declined by nine percentage points among Republicans over this period. Romney is also running less strongly among voters living in the state's traditionally Republican areas of the state, such as the inland counties and residents of Southern California outside Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, Obama has significantly increased his lead over Romney among voters in the youngest and oldest age segments, among Latinos, voters living in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and those affiliated with non-Christian religions.

**Table 4**  
**Comparing California voter preferences between Obama and Romney**  
**in February 2012 to November 2011 – by subgroup**

	February 2012		November 2011	
	Obama	Romney	Obama	Romney
<b>Total registered voters</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>40</b>
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	81%	12	80%	10
Republicans	17%	74	13%	83
Non-partisans/others	59%	27	41%	42
<u>Area</u>				
Coastal counties	59%	30	55%	35
Inland counties	46%	46	37%	54
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	66%	26	61%	29
Other Southern California	47%	41	41%	52
Central Valley	43%	47	40%	51
San Francisco Bay Area	67%	25	58%	30
Other Northern California*	50%	43	41%	31
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	54%	36	48%	39
Female	57%	33	51%	42
<u>Age</u>				
18 – 39	64%	29	50%	37
40 – 64	52%	36	55%	30
65 or older	50%	40	38%	56
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	48%	43	44%	49
Latino	68%	21	57%	31
African-American/Asian-American/other	71%	17	67%	14
<u>Religion</u>				
Protestant	40%	50	35%	59
Catholic	60%	32	56%	31
Other religions	75%	15	62%	27
No preference	69%	20	64%	25
<u>Tea Party identification</u>				
A lot	11%	79	11%	83
Some	29%	58	20%	70
Not at all	78%	15	74%	16

\* Small sample size. Note: Differences between 100% and the sum of percentages to each survey equal proportion undecided.

**Californians less pessimistic about the direction of the country**

Last November just 19% of Californians felt the country was headed in the right direction, while 70% believed it was seriously off on the wrong track. Now, voters here take a much less negative view, with 38% saying the country is moving in the right direction and 52% on the wrong track.

Democrats have a much more positive view of the country's direction than either Republicans or non-partisans.

**Table 5**  
**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 California registered voters)**

	<b>Right direction</b>	<b>Wrong track</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>February 2012</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>10</b>
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
<b>Party registration (February 2012)</b>			
Democrats	53%	33	14
Republicans	14%	79	7
Non-partisans/others	39%	52	9

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

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Methodological Details**

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed February 2 – 18, 2012 among a random sample of 1,003 registered voters in California. In order to cover a broad range of issues, some of the questions in this release were asked of a random subsample of either 488 or 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 784 interviews were derived from landline sample listings and 219 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.

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 each of the random subsamples 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**

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

Barack Obama's term as President ends next year. Are you inclined or not inclined to vote to reelect Obama as President? (IF INCLINED OR NOT INCLINED) How strong is your desire (to reelect) (not to reelect) Obama – very strong, somewhat strong or not too strong?\*

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?\*

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ASKED IN RANDOM ORDER)

Suppose that former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney became the Republican nominee and was running against Democrat Barack Obama in the general election for President. If the election were being held today and these were the candidates for whom would you vote for President – Republican Mitt Romney or Democrat Barack Obama?

Suppose that former Pennsylvania Governor Rick Santorum became the Republican nominee and was running against Democrat Barack Obama in the general election for President. If the election were being held today and these were the candidates for whom would you vote for President – Republican Rick Santorum or Democrat Barack Obama?\*

Suppose that former House Speaker Newt Gingrich became the Republican nominee and was running against Democrat Barack Obama in the general election for President. If the election were being held today and these were the candidates for whom would you vote for President – Republican Newt Gingrich or Democrat Barack Obama?\*

\* Asked of a random subsample of registered voters.