

NEWS RELEASE

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PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND THEIR GOVERNMENT

Voters' Disdain for Leaders, Discontent With Parties a Volatile Mix

WHITMAN BOOSTS PRIMARY LEAD, EDGES PAST BROWN—FIORINA, CAMPBELL TIED

SAN FRANCISCO, March 24, 2010—The California voters likely to go to the polls this year give record-low marks to officials in Sacramento and Washington, and most are unhappy with way the two-party system is working—a combustible combination in a campaign season. These are the results of a survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), with support from The James Irvine Foundation.

For the first time in PPIC survey history, the state legislature's approval rating among likely voters has sunk to single digits—9 percent. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's record-low approval rating of 25 percent hovers near Governor Gray Davis' lowest level before recall (21% in June 2003). Likely voters give their own state legislators a 27-percent rating, close to the record-low 25 percent last December.

Congress gets an approval rating of 14 percent—a 15-point drop since January (29%)—from likely voters in the survey, which was taken during the heated debate about health care reform. Asked to rate the performance of their own representative in the U.S. House, likely voters are more favorable: 44 percent approve. But this is a record low. President Obama fares better, but his approval rating has also dipped to a new low of 52 percent. With jobs and the economy on their minds, just 36 percent say President Obama's economic policies have made the economy better, 31 percent say they've had no effect so far, and 28 percent say they've made conditions worse. In this survey, taken just before the jobs bill passed, 66 percent of likely voters say that Congress and the Obama administration are not doing enough to create jobs.

With partisan battles raging in both Sacramento and Washington, less than half of likely voters are content with the major political parties. Forty-one percent have a favorable impression of the Democratic Party and 31 percent feel favorable about the Republican Party. A third (34%) have a favorable impression of the Tea Party movement, 37 percent have an unfavorable impression, and 29 percent have no opinion. Asked whether the major parties do an adequate job representing the American people or whether they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed, 55 percent see a need for a third party.

“Pessimism about the economy, disdain for the major parties, and low approval ratings for elected officials are creating an unusual amount of political turbulence this election year,” says Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. “The candidates cannot take any voters for granted—regardless of their party identification and past loyalties—because Californians want answers to problems that won't go away.”

WHITMAN HAS 50-POINT LEAD OVER POIZNER, EDGES AHEAD OF BROWN

Meg Whitman has bolstered her lead over Steve Poizner by 20 points since January among likely voters in the Republican primary. Today, 61 percent favor her, compared to 11 percent for Poizner, whose level of

support is unchanged from January (Whitman 41%, Poizner 11%). Far fewer are undecided (25% today, 44% January). Whitman, who has advertised much more heavily on radio and TV than Poizner, has seen a stunning increase in support among women (34% January, 61% today). Republican primary voters include the 12 percent of independent voters who say they will choose a Republican ballot.

In a potential November matchup, Whitman leads Democratic candidate Jerry Brown, 44 percent to 39 percent, with 17 percent undecided. In January, Brown held a similar lead (41% Brown, 36% Whitman, 23% undecided) over Whitman. Although Brown led among independents in January (36% to 28%), Whitman now holds the plurality of support (37% Brown, 43% Whitman). One in five independents (20%) and Democrats (18%) are undecided, compared to 13 percent of Republicans. Brown officially entered the race a week before PPIC began the March survey.

Brown holds a 15-point lead in a potential matchup with Poizner (46% Brown, 31% Poizner, 23% undecided), similar to January (44% Brown, 29% Poizner, 27% undecided). Brown has a 13-point lead among independents (41% Brown, 28% Poizner, 31% undecided).

FIORINA, CAMPBELL IN CLOSE RACE—EACH DEADLOCKED WITH BOXER

The Republican primary race for U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer's seat has tightened since January, when Tom Campbell led both Carly Fiorina and Chuck DeVore among Republican likely voters (27% Campbell, 16% Fiorina, 8% DeVore). Today, Campbell and Fiorina are in a close race (24% Fiorina, 23% Campbell), and DeVore's level of support is unchanged (8%). In this campaign—which has seen little advertising—the largest percentage of likely voters (44%) is undecided, similar to January (48%).

In hypothetical November matchups, incumbent Boxer is deadlocked with Campbell (43% to 44%), with 13 percent undecided. A plurality of independents support Campbell (48% Campbell, 32% Boxer, 20% undecided). Since January, support for Boxer has dropped 10 points among independents, and Campbell's support has increased 11 points. Half of women support Boxer (50% vs. 38% Campbell) and half of men favor Campbell (51% vs. 36% Boxer).

Boxer is in a similarly tight race with Fiorina (44% to 43%), with 13 percent undecided. Among independents, Fiorina leads Boxer (41% Fiorina, 35% Boxer, 24% undecided). Women favor Boxer by 14 points (51% Boxer, 37% Fiorina) and men favor Fiorina by 13 points (49% Fiorina, 36% Boxer).

In a potential race with DeVore, Boxer has a slight lead (46% Boxer, 40% DeVore, 14% undecided). Boxer holds a sizable lead over DeVore among women (53% to 34%) and younger voters (52% to 30%), while DeVore leads among men (47% to 39%).

MAJORITY FAVOR PROPOSITION 14

Asked about another of their June ballot choices, a majority of likely voters (56%) say they will vote yes on Proposition 14, the measure to change the primary election process, while 27 percent would vote no and 17 percent are undecided. This constitutional amendment would allow voters to choose a candidate regardless of political party, with the top two vote-getters proceeding to the general election even if both are from the same party.

PPIC uses the official ballot title and summary to measure opinion about initiatives. After a judge ordered a change in the Proposition 14 language during the survey period, we began asking the question with the new ballot wording. The survey produced similar results in both versions of the question. Before the language change, 60 percent said they would vote yes and 24 percent said they would vote no.

FOR FIRST TIME, 50 PERCENT OF CALIFORNIANS FAVOR SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Among all Californians, residents are more likely to favor (50%) than oppose (45%) same-sex marriage for the first time in the PPIC Statewide Surveys. Support among all adults has never surpassed 45 percent

since the question was first asked in January 2000. There are clear partisan divisions: majorities of Democrats (64%) and independents (55%) are in favor, and most Republicans (67%) are opposed.

There is much more consensus on the issue of gays and lesbians in the military. In the wake of Obama's announcement that he would like to repeal the federal "don't ask, don't tell" policy passed in 1993, 75 percent of Californians say that gays and lesbians should be allowed to serve openly in the military.

HALF SUPPORT HEALTH CARE REFORM—PARTISAN SPLIT IS STRONG

In the survey, conducted before the passage of the health care reform bill, half of Californians (50%) say they support the changes being debated, similar to responses each time this question has been asked in the past (52% December 2009, 51% September 2009). Opinion is sharply divided along party lines: 70 percent of Democrats support the changes to the health care system and 76 percent of Republicans are opposed. A strong majority of Californians (69%) support one of the chief provisions of the bill, requiring that all Americans have health insurance with the government providing aid to those who cannot afford it.

BIG MAJORITIES BACK IMMIGRATION REFORM

President Obama has indicated that he will pursue immigration reform in 2010, and this issue has already emerged in the gubernatorial campaign. A strong majority of Californians (69%) say U.S. immigration policy is in need of major changes, and voters across party lines concur.

Most (70%) say illegal immigrants who have been living and working in the United States for at least two years should be allowed to keep their jobs and eventually apply for legal status, while 25 percent believe those immigrants should be deported back to their native countries, a similar finding to the six other times the question has been asked.

A majority of adults (54%) believe that immigrants are a benefit to California because of their hard work and job skills, while 39 percent feel immigrants are a burden because they use public services. In the 13 times PPIC has asked the question, more Californians have said immigrants are a benefit than a burden. But party line divisions are stark on this question: 64 percent of Democrats and 52 percent of independents view immigrants as a benefit, and 68 percent of Republicans view them as a burden.

MORE KEY FINDINGS

- **Jobs and economy tops list of concerns**—pages 7, 9

Fifty-seven percent choose this as the top issue, followed by education (12%), the state budget (11%), health care (3%), and immigration (3%). Half are very concerned (31%) or somewhat concerned (19%) that they or someone in their family will lose a job in the next year. Most are very concerned (41%) or somewhat concerned (23%) about having enough money to pay their rent or mortgage.

- **Most see budget as a big problem but are divided about how to fix it**—page 10

Asked how they would prefer to deal with the state's budget deficit—which 77 percent view as a big problem—equal proportions would prefer to deal with it mostly through spending cuts (39%) or a mix of spending cuts and tax increases (38%).

- **California's Main Street wants more Wall Street regulation**—page 18

Most Californians (58%) support stricter federal regulations on the way banks and other financial institutions conduct their business.

- **Optimism about Afghanistan**—page 20

Nearly half of Californians (48%) say the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan is going very well (10%) or fairly well (38%), 16 points higher than in December (6% very well, 26% fairly well). A majority of likely voters say things are going well (55% today, 33% December).

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The PPIC Statewide Survey has provided policymakers, the media, and the general public with objective, advocacy-free information on the perceptions, opinions, and public policy preferences of California residents since 1998. This survey is part of a series that examines the social, economic, and political trends that influence public policy preferences and ballot choices. It is supported with funding from The James Irvine Foundation. Findings are based on a telephone survey of 2,002 California adult residents interviewed on landlines and cell phones from March 9–16, 2010. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, according to respondents' preferences. The sampling error is ± 2 percent for all adults, ± 2.5 percent for the 1,574 registered voters, ± 3 percent for the 1,102 likely voters, and ± 5 percent for the 410 Republican primary likely voters who were asked questions about the senate and governor's races. It is ± 4 for the 628 likely voters interviewed about Proposition 14 starting on March 12. For more information on methodology, see page 25.

Mark Baldassare is president and CEO of PPIC, where he holds the Arjay and Frances Fearing Miller Chair in Public Policy. He is founder of the PPIC Statewide Survey, which he has directed since 1998.

PPIC is dedicated to informing and improving public policy in California through independent, objective, nonpartisan research on major economic, social, and political issues. The institute was established in 1994 with an endowment from William R. Hewlett. As a private operating foundation, PPIC does not take or support positions on any ballot measure or on any local, state, or federal legislation, nor does it endorse, support, or oppose any political parties or candidates for public office.

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