

NEWS RELEASE

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PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND THEIR GOVERNMENT

Whitman, Brown Deadlocked—Boxer Holds Narrow Lead

HALF OF VOTERS FAVOR LEGALIZING MARIJUANA, FEWER FAVOR LOWERING BUDGET THRESHOLD—THEY'RE DIVIDED ON SUSPENDING AB 32

SAN FRANCISCO, September 29, 2010—A month before the election, the races for California governor and U.S. senator are close and many likely voters are still undecided, according to a survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) with funding from The James Irvine Foundation.

In the governor's race, Democrat Jerry Brown (37%) and Republican Meg Whitman (38%) are locked in a virtual tie among likely voters with 18 percent undecided. In the U.S. Senate race, incumbent Democrat Barbara Boxer (42%) leads Republican Carly Fiorina (35%) by 7 points, with 17 percent undecided.

A sluggish national economy, double-digit unemployment, and a record-long state budget crisis are very much on the minds of Californians as the election approaches. Unconvinced by reports that the recession ended last year, nearly all residents (89%) say the state is in a recession. Asked to name the most important issue facing people in California, 62 percent say jobs and the economy—nearly matching the record-high 63 percent who gave this answer in February 2009. More than four in 10 residents say they are very concerned or somewhat concerned that they or someone in their family could lose a job in the next year. Californians' views of state and federal elected officials are reflected in approval ratings that are at or near record lows. And a significant number of likely voters are unhappy with the choice of candidates in the governor's race as well. Only 45 percent are satisfied.

Of four ballot propositions included in the PPIC survey, just one exceeded the 50 percent threshold of support needed for passage, and it barely did so: Proposition 19, which would legalize marijuana and allow it to be regulated and taxed in California (52% would vote yes, 41% no, 7% undecided).

"Neither the candidates nor the ballot measures have captured the imagination of the California electorate," says Mark Baldassare, PPIC president and CEO. "There's consensus about the problems, and voters are looking for a game-changer. They don't see one on this ballot."

MORE INDEPENDENTS FAVOR WHITMAN

The survey—completed just before a series of televised debates between the candidates—reveals a governor's race that remains close among likely voters, as it was in July (34% Whitman, 37% Brown, 23% undecided). Independents were divided in July (30% Brown, 28% Whitman, 30% undecided) but have shifted toward Whitman (38% Whitman, 30% Brown, 19% undecided). Whitman is favored more by Republicans (71%) than Brown is by Democrats (63%).

IS EXPERIENCE IN BUSINESS OR POLITICS MORE IMPORTANT? VOTERS DIVIDED

The elections for governor and U.S. Senate offer Californians a choice between seasoned politicians and former heads of large corporations. What is more important: experience in government or experience running a business? Likely voters are evenly divided (44% experience in elected office, 43% experience running a business). Partisan affiliations are key: 63 percent of Democrats value experience in elected office more and 68 percent of Republicans value experience running a business more. Independents are more likely to favor experience in office (46%) to experience in business (39%).

In an election year in which campaign financing has emerged as a prominent issue, the PPIC survey asked whether voters view more positively candidates who use mostly their own money for campaigning or those who use mostly money collected from supporters. A majority (56%) have a more positive view of candidates who use money mainly from supporters. Most Democrats (63%) and independents (56%) hold this view, as do a plurality of Republicans (44%).

BOXER LEADS WHILE HER APPROVAL RATING DROPS

In contrast to the governor's race, 64 percent of likely voters say they are satisfied with their choices in the U.S. Senate race. The Senate contest was closer in July (39% Boxer, 34% Fiorina, 22% undecided) than in the current survey, completed just before the second debate between the candidates. Independent likely voters are divided in their support (34% Fiorina, 32% Boxer, 20% undecided), while they favored Boxer slightly in July (35% Boxer, 29% Fiorina, 25% undecided). Boxer has the support of more Latinos (49% Boxer, 19% Fiorina) and women (45% Boxer, 31% Fiorina), while men (39% Boxer, 40% Fiorina) and whites (38% Boxer, 41% Fiorina) are split.

At the same time, incumbent Senator Boxer's approval rating among all adults is 41 percent, matching her record low in March 2008. Across parties, her approval rating has dropped since May among Democrats (67% today, down 10 points), independents (41%, down 12 points), and Republicans (7%, down 6 points). Disapproval of her job performance is at a new high of 45 percent.

APPROVAL OF FEINSTEIN, OBAMA, CONGRESS DECLINE

Senator Dianne Feinstein's approval rating among Californians has also tied her record low of 44 percent, first reached in March 2008. Her disapproval rating is at a record-high 39 percent.

With midterm elections approaching, approval ratings for the president and Congress have dropped as well. President Barack Obama's approval rating in the state is at a record-low 52 percent, although Californians feel more favorably toward him than do Americans nationwide (42% approve in a CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll). Californians feel much more negative about Congress: 26 percent approve, similar to Americans nationwide (21% approve in a CBS News/*New York Times* poll). Although Californians are more likely to approve (43%) than disapprove (39%) of their own congressional representative, this approval rating has hit a new low.

About a third of state residents (32%) say the president's economic policies have made economic conditions better, a similar proportion (28%) say his policies have made conditions worse, and 38 percent say there's been no effect or it's too soon to tell. About two-thirds (64%) and solid majorities across parties say Congress and the Obama administration are not doing enough to create jobs.

HALF FAVOR MARIJUANA MEASURE—PROPS. 23, 24, 25 FALL SHORT OF MAJORITY

Among California's likely voters, 52 percent favor the proposition to legalize marijuana. Strong majorities of independent (65%), Democratic (63%), and Latino (63%) likely voters support Proposition 19 when read the full ballot title and label, as do those age 18–34 (70%). Half of voters (49%) say the outcome of Proposition 19 is very important, with those opposed to the initiative feeling stronger about the outcome:

65 percent of those who plan to vote no say the outcome is very important, compared to 42 percent of likely voters who plan to vote yes.

Likely voters are divided on Proposition 23 (43% yes, 42% no, 15% don't know), which would suspend California's air pollution control law (AB 32) until unemployment falls to at least 5.5 percent for a full year. The divide is reflected across parties, regions, and demographic groups. Half of Democrats (48%) would vote no, a plurality of Republicans (45%) would vote yes, and independents are split (43% no, 42% yes).

Proponents of this measure—as well as the other propositions in the PPIC survey—have linked the outcome to economic recovery. Proposition 23's advocates contend that AB 32 will cost the state large numbers of jobs in tough economic times, while opponents say the law encourages growth of green jobs. Asked what impact state actions to reduce global warming will have on jobs, a plurality (41%) of likely voters in the PPIC survey say the result will be more jobs, 24 percent say the number of jobs will not be affected, and 26 percent see fewer jobs as the result.

An overwhelming majority (81%) of likely voters say the outcome of Proposition 23 is very important (45%) or somewhat important (36%) to them, with 53 percent of those who plan to vote yes and 45 percent of those who plan to vote no viewing the outcome as very important.

Three in 10 (30%) likely voters are undecided about Proposition 24 (35% yes, 35% no), which would repeal recent legislation that allows businesses to lower their tax liability. Proposition 24 has neither majority support nor opposition in any political, regional, or demographic group except among likely voters age 18–34 (57% yes). The results of another survey question indicate that most likely voters are not in the mood to raise corporate taxes to ease the state's budget problems: 50 percent oppose raising the state taxes paid by corporations while 42 percent are in favor.

Almost half (48%) of likely voters would vote yes on Proposition 25, while 35 percent would vote no and 17 percent are undecided. The ballot measure would lower the two-thirds vote necessary to pass a budget in the legislature to a simple majority. But it would retain the two-thirds vote requirement to raise taxes. The measure would also require that legislators forfeit their pay and expense reimbursements when the budget is late. Democrats (52%) and independents (53%) are much more likely than Republicans (42%) to favor Proposition 25. Half of likely voters say the vote on Proposition 25 is very important, with supporters and opponents equally likely to hold this view.

MORE KEY FINDINGS

- **State elected leaders get poor ratings, budget troubles seen as big problem**—pages 17, 20
Governor Schwarzenegger's 28 percent approval rating is up somewhat from his record-low 23 percent. The legislature's 16 percent approval is near its record low of 14 percent. Just 31 percent of residents and 30 percent of likely voters approve of the jobs their own legislative representatives are doing. And 80 percent of Californians view the state budget situation as a big problem.
- **Majority favor path to citizenship for illegal immigrant workers**—page 22
Most Californians (66%) say illegal immigrants who have lived and worked in the U.S. for at least two years should be given a chance to keep their jobs and eventually apply for legal status, while 30 percent say these immigrants should be deported to their native countries. Over half of Californians (54%) say immigrants are a benefit to the state and 39 percent say immigrants are a burden.
- **Record-high 52 percent support gay marriage**—page 23
Half of Californians (52%) and likely voters (53%) favor allowing same-sex couples to marry, the highest percentage since PPIC began tracking the issue in 2000. But they are divided (46% agree, 48% disagree) over a federal judge's ruling that Proposition 8—which banned gay marriage—is unconstitutional.

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 2,004 California adult residents interviewed on landlines and cell phones from September 19–26, 2010. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish according to respondents' preferences. The sampling error, taking design effects from weighting into consideration, is ± 3 percent for all adults, ± 3.3 percent for the 1,563 registered voters, and ± 3.6 percent for the 1,104 likely voters. 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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