

NEWS RELEASE

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PPIC STATEWIDE SURVEY: CALIFORNIANS AND THEIR GOVERNMENT

Five Budget Measures Losing: Interest in May Election Ballot Increases and So Does Opposition

PESSIMISM ABOUT STATE CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH NEW OPTIMISM ABOUT NATION

SAN FRANCISCO, California, May 7, 2009—Five of the six propositions on the May special election ballot are trailing among likely voters, according to a statewide survey released today by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) with funding from The James Irvine Foundation. Since March, interest in the election has increased and so has opposition to the five ballot measures. Today, likely voters who are following election news very closely are more inclined than others to say they'll vote no on the propositions.

Of the six measures placed on the May 19 ballot as part of the budget agreement between Governor Schwarzenegger and legislative leaders, only Proposition 1F has the support of a majority of likely voters. And support has slipped even for this measure, which would prevent pay increases for the state's elected officials in deficit years. Seventy-three percent would vote for it today, compared to 81 percent in March.

Proposition 1A—the measure that could limit future deficits and spending through increasing the size of the state's "rainy day" fund—has attracted the most interest from likely voters. But it is opposed by a majority of them (52% no, 35% yes, 13% don't know). Among those who are following election news very closely, opposition is stronger (65% no, 29% yes).

"The voters who are really tuned in are really turned off," says Mark Baldassare, PPIC president, CEO, and survey director. "They see the state's budget situation as a big problem, but so far, they don't like the solution."

The voters most likely to be following news of the special election very closely are older than age 55, men, and those who disapprove of the governor and legislature.

GRIM MOOD BRIGHTENS WHEN VOTERS LOOK TO WASHINGTON

For California residents and likely voters, dissatisfaction with the state of their state is not limited to the next election. They are pessimistic about the California economy, give the governor and legislature approval ratings that hover near record lows, and show less trust in state government than they have ever indicated in a PPIC Statewide Survey. Just 16 percent of likely voters say they can trust the government in Sacramento to do what is right just about always (2%) or most (14%) of the time. Among Californians overall, 23 percent hold this view (4% always, 19% most of the time).

This contrasts sharply with Californians' views of the country as a whole. For the first time since the PPIC Statewide Survey began asking the question in 2003, most Californians (57%) and likely voters (52%) say things in the United States are generally going in the right direction. Even in January, just as President

Obama was taking office, only about a third (32% Californians, 31% likely voters) said the country was headed in the right direction.

MOST SPECIAL ELECTION BALLOT MEASURES COME UP SHORT

When likely voters were read the ballot title and label of the ballot measures, these were their responses:

- **Proposition 1A** (52% no, 35% yes, 13% don't know): Democrats (47%) are much more likely than independents (32%) and more than twice as likely as Republicans (22%) to support the measure. Just 7 percent say Proposition 1A would be very effective in avoiding future budget deficits, and 32 percent say it would be somewhat effective. Latinos are more likely (45%) than whites (32%) to favor the measure.
- **Proposition 1B** (47% no, 40% yes, 13% don't know): More voters oppose than support this measure to require a future payment of \$9.3 billion to local school districts and community colleges. Those who are very closely following election news are opposed, 61 percent to 32 percent. A majority of Democrats (53%) would vote yes and a majority of Republicans (61%) would vote no. Support for the measure falls short of a majority in all of the state's major regions. Latinos offer more support (56%) than whites (34%).
- **Proposition 1C** (58% no, 32% yes, 10% don't know): A solid majority oppose this measure, which would modernize the lottery and allow the state to borrow \$5 billion from future profits to help balance the 2009–2010 budget. Opposition is even stronger among voters who are following election news closely (65% no, 29% yes). Majorities in all regions say they'll vote no, while whites (63%) are more likely than Latinos (42%) to say they will vote no.
- **Proposition 1D** (45% no, 43% yes, 12% don't know): Voters are divided on this measure that would temporarily transfer funds from early childhood education programs to help balance the state budget. A majority of Democrats (54%) support the measure, and a majority of Republicans (56%) oppose it. Opponents (49%) outnumber supporters (39%) among independents. A majority of those following election news very closely are opposed (57% no, 35% yes). Latinos (66%) are much more likely than whites (36%) to be in favor.
- **Proposition 1E** (48% no, 41% yes, 11% don't know): More voters oppose than support this measure to transfer money from mental health services to the general fund to help balance the state budget. Support falls short of a majority across major regions of the state. A majority of Latinos (63%) would vote yes, while most whites (54%) would vote no. Voters who are very closely following election news oppose Proposition 1E by a wider margin (61% no, 35% yes).
- **Proposition 1F** (73% yes, 24% no, 3% don't know): Although support for the measure has slipped, at least two in three voters across all the state's major regions and strong majorities across demographic groups say they would vote yes. Among those closely following the election, 62 percent would vote yes and 36 would vote no.

Three measures—Propositions 1C, 1D, and 1E—have direct impact on the 2009–2010 state budget. Less than half of voters see the outcome on these propositions as very important to them (1C 33%, 1D 41%, 1E 37%).

“Proposition 1C is the measure that matters most for next year's budget, and it's in the most trouble,” Baldassare notes.

VOTERS PAYING CLOSER ATTENTION TO ELECTION

Voters are divided over whether the governor and legislature should have called the special election, with half saying it is a good idea and 45 percent calling it a bad one. Democrats (54%) and those who approve

of the governor (62%) are more likely to say the special election was a good idea.

Likely voters' interest in the May ballot has grown since March, with 28 percent today saying they are very closely following election news and 44 percent saying they are following it fairly closely. This is a significant increase from March (18% very closely, 37% fairly closely) and closer to the level of interest likely voters expressed in the last statewide special election, in November 2005 (31% very, 50% fairly). But it falls short of their interest in the 2003 governor's recall election (49% very, 43% fairly) or the November 2008 general election (54% very, 37% fairly).

Likely voters are most interested in Proposition 1A (29%), followed by 1B (18%), and 1F (18%), with fewer than one in 10 expressing interest in Propositions 1C (3%), 1D (7%), or 1E (5%).

LEADERS IN WASHINGTON RATE HIGHER THAN THOSE IN SACRAMENTO

Most likely voters see the state budget situation as a big problem (83%) and say major changes are needed in the budget process (85%). They continue to give those in charge of the state budget poor marks. The governor's approval rating (34%) is near his record low (33%) of March, and his ratings on handling the state budget and taxes sink to a new low of 28 percent among likely voters. The legislature gets an even poorer overall rating (12%) among likely voters, nearly matching its record low in March (11%).

Likely voters are much more upbeat about their leaders in Washington. Sixty-six percent approve of Obama's job performance and 60 percent approve of his handling of the federal budget and taxes. The approval ratings for Congress, while falling short of a majority, have reached the highest levels since PPIC began asking the question in 2005. Among likely voters, 39 percent approve and 53 percent disapprove. Californians overall are more approving: 47% approve, 43% disapprove.

MORE KEY FINDINGS

- **Fewer say state is in serious recession**—page 17

Most Californians (53%) say California is in a serious economic recession, but that percentage has declined 10 points from its peak two months ago (63%).

- **Worried about the mortgage, rent**—page 17

Six in 10 Californians are very concerned (39%) or somewhat concerned (22%) about falling behind on their mortgage or rent payments. Concern was similar in March (39% very, 23% somewhat). While nearly half say they are very (31%) or somewhat worried (16%) that they or someone in their families will lose a job in the next year, the share of Californians who are worried about this has declined 11 points since January (58% January, 47% today).

- **Most view Obama, Congress as a good team**—page 19

Seventy-four percent of Californians say the president and Congress will be able to work together and accomplish a lot this year.

- **Raise taxes or cut services?**—page 20

When it comes to the size of their state government Californians are slightly more likely to prefer paying higher taxes and getting more services (48%) over lower taxes and fewer services (43%). Likely voters, on the other hand, are more likely to prefer lower taxes and fewer services (49% vs. 42% higher taxes, more services).

ABOUT THE SURVEY

This is the 36th survey in the *Californians and Their Government* series and is supported with funding from The James Irvine Foundation. It seeks to examine the social, economic, and political trends that

influence public policy preferences and ballot choices. This is the 98th PPIC Statewide Survey in a series that has generated a database that includes the responses of more than 208,000 Californians. Findings are based on a telephone survey of 2,005 California adult residents interviewed from April 27–May 4, 2009, in English or Spanish. The sampling error for all adults is ± 2 percent. For the 1,080 likely voters, it is ± 3 percent. For more information on methodology, see page 23.

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.

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