

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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WHILE VOTERS STRONGLY BELIEVE THE STATE SHOULD BE SPENDING MORE ON ROAD MAINTENANCE, NO CLEAR CONSENSUS ON HOW TO PAY FOR IT.

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

California voters strongly believe that state and local governments should be spending more money to improve the conditions of its roadways. By a 71% to 14% margin voters want more not less funds to go to the maintenance of existing roads. Voters also favor more spending on new road construction, but by a narrower 48% to 35% margin.

Yet, the poll finds no public consensus on how to pay for this. When asked whether they would support increasing the state gasoline tax by 10 cents per gallon to improve the condition of state roads, voters are evenly divided, with 49% in favor and 48% opposed.

Underlying voter reluctance to back an increase in the gas tax is the widely held view that tax levies on gasoline in California are already higher than in most other states. Statewide three out of four voters (76%) take this view, while just 4% think the state's gas taxes are lower than those in other states.

The poll also finds significant opposition to a proposal to install an electronic device on motor vehicles that would measure the amount of miles driven so taxes could be levied on a per mile basis instead of at the pump. At present, 66% oppose this idea, while only 30% are in favor.

In addition, Californians resist the idea of creating more toll roads as a way to pay for the construction of new highways by a five-to-three margin (55% opposed vs. 38% in favor).

Seven in ten believe state and local governments should be spending more on road maintenance

Seven in ten California voters (71%) think that state and local governments should be spending more on the maintenance of existing roads. Just 14% think less should be spent, while 9% volunteer that spending should be held at current levels. Another 6% have no opinion.

Also favored for more rather than less spending is new road construction. About half (48%) support greater government spending in this area, while 35% say it should be spending less. Another 8% volunteer that spending on new roadways should remain the same and 9% have no opinion.

Table 1		
Voter views about whether state and local governments in California should be spending more or less on the maintenance of existing roads and new road construction (among registered voters)		
	Maintenance of existing roads	New road construction
<u>Should be spending...</u>		
More	71%	48%
Less	14	35
No change (volunteered)	9	8
No opinion	6	9

Divided views about increasing the state gas tax by 10 cents to improve state roads

Californians are divided when asked whether the state should increase gasoline taxes by 10 cents as a way to improve the condition of its roadways. While about half of the state’s voters (49%) favors such a move, 48% are opposed.

Views about increasing the gasoline tax are highly partisan. Nearly two in three Democrats (63%) would support a 10 cents a gallon increase in taxes to improve road conditions. However, Republicans take a contrary view, with 64% opposed to taking such a step. Voters with no party preference divide 45% in favor and 53% opposed.

Table 2			
Increase the state gasoline tax by 10 cents per gallon to improve the conditions of state roads and highways (among registered voters)			
	Support	Oppose	No opinion
Total statewide	49%	48	3
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	63%	35	2
Republicans	33%	64	3
No party preference/other	45%	53	2

California’s gasoline taxes seen as higher than what is charged in most other states

Underlying voters’ reluctance to increase state gasoline taxes is the widely held view (76%) that the levies already being charged on gasoline in California are higher than in most other states. Very few voters (4%) think the state’s gas taxes are lower than most other states, and just 6% think they are about the same. Another 14% have no opinion.

Voter views about this are correct. According to the American Petroleum Institute, at 63.79 cents per gallon, Californians currently pay the second highest combined state and federal gasoline tax rate in the nation, behind only Pennsylvania. The national average is 48.23 cents per gallon.

However, the state Board of Equalization recently announced that at the start of the next fiscal year in July, the state’s portion of the gasoline tax will go down by six cents per gallon under a complex tax agreement called the Fuel-Tax Swap approved in 2010 by the legislature and then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. This will reduce the total amount of gasoline taxes paid by California consumers to 57.79 cents per gallon, still about 10 cents above the national average.

Table 3	
Perceptions of the amount Californians pay in gasoline taxes compared to most other states (among registered voters)	
Compared to most other states, California's gasoline taxes are...	
Higher	76%
About the same	6
Lower	4
Don't know	14

Resistance to increasing the use of toll roads to pay for new highways

Most Californians are opposed to the idea of expanding the use of toll roads to pay for the construction of new highways when tax dollars are not sufficient to pay the costs. Those who oppose taking such a step outnumber those in favor 55% to 38%. While opposition is greater among Republicans (61%) and no party preference voters (58%) than Democrats (50%), pluralities of voters in each group oppose the idea.

Table 4			
Expand the use of toll roads in California for the construction of new roads when tax dollars are not enough to pay the costs (among registered voters)			
	Support	Oppose	No opinion
Total statewide	38%	55	7
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	43%	50	7
Republicans	34%	61	5
No party preference/other	37%	58	5

Greater than two-to-one opposition to using an electronic device in motor vehicles to measure miles driven and use this as an alternate means of assessing taxes

Voters were also asked what they thought of a new proposal to affix an electronic device on motor vehicles to measure the exact amount of miles driven so that the state could assess a fee based on the number of miles driven rather than charging a tax at the pump.

By a greater than two to one margin – 66% to 30% – voters who are owners of motor vehicles reject the idea. Opposition spans all partisan subgroups.

Table 5			
Install an electronic device on motor vehicles to measure the exact amount of miles you drive to enable the state to assess a for road funding based on the number of miles people drive instead of charging for gas taxes at the pump (among registered voters who own a motor vehicle)			
	Support	Oppose	No opinion
Total statewide	30%	66	4
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	38%	59	3
Republicans	21%	74	5
No party preference/other	28%	66	6

Information About The Survey

Methodological Details

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* completed January 26- February 16, 2015 among 1,241 registered voters in California. Interviews were administered by telephone using live interviewers in English, Spanish, Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin and Vietnamese. Most of the questions in this report were included on behalf of Professors Ronald C. Fisher of Michigan State University and Robert W. Wassmer of the California State University, Sacramento as part of questions developed through the Field CSU Academic Fellowship Program.

The survey included supplemental interviews conducted among the state’s rapidly growly Asian American voter populations through funds provided by Professor Karthick Ramakrishnan of the University of California, Riverside as part of the National Asian American Survey project.

Individual voters were sampled at random from listings derived from the statewide voter registration rolls. The supplemental sample of Asian Americans was developed from voter roll listings targeting Chinese American, Vietnamese American and Korean American voters in California based primarily on their ethnic surnames. Once a voter’s name and telephone number had been selected, interviews were attempted with voters on their landline or cell phone depending on the source of the listing from the voter file and the preference of the voter. 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. After the completion of interviewing, the sample was weighted to align it to the proper distribution of voters by race/ethnicity and other demographic, geographic and party registration characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size and the percentage distributions being examined. The maximum sampling error for results from the overall registered voter sample is +/- 3.2 percentage points. These estimates are based on survey findings in the middle of the sampling distribution (i.e., results at or near 50%). Percentages at or near either end of the tail of the distributions (i.e., results closer to 10% or 90%) have somewhat smaller margins of error. There are other potential sources of error in surveys of public opinion besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of this survey sought to minimize these other possible errors.

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 Field Poll* receives financial support from leading California media properties, from 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, as well as from foundations, non-profit organizations, and others as part of the *Poll's* policy research sponsor program.

Questions Included in This Report

Given the amount of roads that exist in California and their condition, should state and local governments in California be spending more or less on the maintenance of existing roads than they do currently?

Given the amount of roads that exist in California and their condition, should state and local governments in California be spending more or less on the construction of new roads than they do currently?

Would you support or oppose the greater use of toll roads in California for the construction of new roads that residents want, when tax dollars are not enough to pay for the costs?

How does the gasoline tax rate in California compare to the gasoline tax rates in most other states? Is California's gasoline tax rate lower, about the same or higher?

Would you support or oppose increasing the state gasoline tax by 10 cents per gallon, if the money is used to improve the conditions of state roads and highways?

Are you the owner of a registered motor vehicle in California? (IF OWNER OF A MOTOR VEHICLE:) Would you support or oppose the installation of an electronic device on your motor vehicle to measure the exact amount of miles that you drive to enable the state to assess an accurate fee for road funding based upon the number of miles driven to replace or eliminate the current gasoline taxes that you pay?