

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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**CALIFORNIANS EXPRESS GREATER
DISSATISFACTION WITH THE STATE'S
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM, BUT ARE
SKEPTICAL ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR
HEALTH REFORM THIS YEAR.**

By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

In its latest statewide survey, *The Field Poll* asked California voters about their overall views of the health care system and prospects for reforming the state's health care system. Some of the questions were identical to those asked in a previous *Field Poll* completed last December.

The findings show that a growing majority of voters (69%) express dissatisfaction with the way the health care system is working in California. Yet, by a five to three margin (58% to 36%) voters in this state feel it is unlikely that the governor and legislature will be successful in passing significant health reform this year.

At the same time, there has been a shift in voter preferences as to how best to reform the state's health care system. Last December, a 52% majority of voters supported the idea of making reforms to the health care system within the framework of the current health insurance system by sharing responsibilities among employers, government and business. Now, just 33% favor this alternative. On the other hand, there is growing support for the idea of replacing the current system with a new state government-run system that would cover all Californians. Statewide, 36% of voters now favor this approach, up from 24% who felt this way nine months ago.

There is a direct relationship between voters' growing dissatisfaction with the health care system and the increase in support for creating a government-run system, as voters "very dissatisfied" with the way the health care system is functioning are more likely than others to support a government-run system.

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Voters skeptical that health care reform will be enacted this year

The latest *Field Poll* finds that voters are quite skeptical that health reform will be enacted this year. Only a small proportion (6%) say that this is very likely to occur. Another 30% think it is somewhat likely. This compares to 33% who feel it is not too likely and 25% who say it is not at all likely.

The opinions of Democrats, Republicans and non-partisans do not differ to any great extent, with pluralities of voters in each group believing major health reform is either not too or not at all likely to occur this year.

Table 1
How likely do California voters believe it is that the governor and legislature will be successful in passing major health reform this year (among registered voters)

	Total registered voters	Democrats	Republicans	Non- partisans/ others
Very likely	6% } 36%	4%	8%	6%
Somewhat likely	30	33	24	35
Not too likely	33 } 58%	32	35	30
Not at all likely	25	25	29	20
No opinion	6	6	4	9

Growing voter dissatisfaction with the way the health care system is working

There has been a significant decline in voter appraisals of the way the health care system is functioning in California over the past nine months. Last December more voters (51%) said they were satisfied with the way the health care system was working than were dissatisfied (44%). Now, opinions have turned heavily toward the negative side, with 69% expressing dissatisfaction, including 42% who are very dissatisfied, and just 28% saying they are satisfied.

Table 2
Voter satisfaction with the way the health care system is working in California
(among registered voters)

	<u>August 2007</u>	<u>December 2006</u>
<u>Satisfied</u>	<u>28%</u>	<u>51%</u>
Very satisfied	7	13
Somewhat satisfied	21	38
<u>Dissatisfied</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>44</u>
Somewhat dissatisfied	27	24
Very dissatisfied	42	20
No opinion	3	5

Shift in voter preferences about ways to reform the state's health care system

As Californians' opinions about the functioning of the state's health care system have declined this year, fewer now support reforming the health care system within the current health insurance framework. More favor replacing it with a new state government-run health care system covering all residents.

Last December, the idea of reforming the health care system by sharing responsibilities among employers, government and individuals within the context of the current health insurance system was preferred by a 52% majority. Just 24% supported replacing it with a new state government-run system covering everyone and 18% favored relying on free market competition. When the same question was asked in the current *Field Poll*, 36% of voters now support replacing the current system with a new state government-run system, while just 33% prefer the shared responsibilities approach and 14% opt for the free-marked approach to reform.

Table 3
Voter preferences about ways to improve
the state's health care system
(among registered voters)

	<u>August 2007</u>	<u>December 2006</u>
Replace current system with a new state government-run system covering all Californians	36%	24%
Make reforms within framework of current health insurance system through shared responsibilities by employers, government and individuals	33	52
Rely on free market competition to improve health insurance system	14	18
None/other (volunteered)	8	2
No opinion	9	4

Big differences in health reform preferences across subgroups

There is a direct relationship between dissatisfaction with the health care system and support for creating a new government-run system. Among voters very dissatisfied with the way the health care system is working, nearly half (48%) favor replacing it with a new state government-run system that would cover everyone. This compares to just 19% support for a government-run system among voters who are very satisfied with the current system.

There are partisan and ideological differences in the health reform preferences of voters. Pluralities of Democrats, non-partisans and liberals favor replacing the current system with a government-run system that would cover everyone. By contrast, creating a government-run system is the least attractive of the three alternatives to Republicans and conservatives. They favor either taking a shared responsibilities approach or relying on the free market system. Voters who identify themselves as politically moderate are evenly split between creating a new government-run health care system (34%) and reforming the system by sharing responsibilities among employers, government and individuals within the existing health insurance system (34%).

Table 4
Voter preferences about ways to improve the health care system
by subgroup – August 2007

	<u>Replace with new gov't- run system</u>	<u>Reform current insurance system through shared responsibilities</u>	<u>Rely on free market</u>	<u>None/ other/no opinion</u>
Total registered voters	36%	33	14	17
<u>Satisfaction with health care system</u>				
Very satisfied*	19%	37	35	9
Somewhat satisfied	24%	37	20	19
Somewhat dissatisfied	33%	38	13	16
Very dissatisfied	48%	28	8	16
<u>Party</u>				
Democrats	47%	33	4	16
Republicans	19%	37	29	15
Non-partisans/others	39%	25	12	24
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Conservative	19%	35	31	15
Middle-of-the-road	34%	34	10	22
Liberal	55%	29	4	12

* Small sample base.

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 536 registered voters statewide. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish August 3-12, 2007. Up to eight attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected at random from a statewide list of registered voters in California. When drawing samples from registration-based lists, *The Field Poll* stratifies the sample by region and age to insure that the poll includes adequate representations of voters across each major region of the state and across different age categories. Once a voter's name and telephone number has been selected, interviews are attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews can be conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the results are weighted slightly to *Field Poll* estimates of the demographic and regional characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on sample size. According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from findings based on the overall sample of registered voters are subject to a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points. There are other possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, the sequencing of questions, the rigor with which sampling procedures are implemented, as well as other factors.

Questions Asked

How satisfied are you with the way the health care system is working in California? Are you very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?

As you may know, Governor Schwarzenegger and the state legislature are trying to pass legislation to reform the state's health care system this year. How likely do you think it is that the Governor and the legislature will be successful in passing major health reform this year – very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely?

Which of the following statements is closer to your view of what California should do to improve the state's health care system: (1) Rely on free market competition to improve the current health insurance system; (2) Make reforms within the framework of the current health insurance system, by encouraging shared responsibilities by employers, government and individuals; or, (3) Replace the current system with a new system administered entirely by state government and covering all Californians.