

# THE FIELD POLL



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**WHILE MOST CALIFORNIANS SEE THE NEED FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM  
AND WOULD FAVOR A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION TO DO ITS WORK,  
MAJORITIES OPPOSE MANY OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES ON THE  
REFORM AGENDA.**

Over the past year an increasing number of individuals, civic organizations, foundations, media commentators and others in California have been advocating making fundamental changes to the way state government operates. Some have proposed convening a constitutional convention that would bring together hundreds of delegates to re-write the state constitution. Others are supporting efforts to establish a revision commission to do the work of constitutional reform. The number of issues that could potentially be addressed by constitutional reform are wide-ranging, but ultimately all would need voter approval before they can be enacted.

A new statewide survey conducted by *The Field Poll*, with major funding provided by Next 10, examines voter opinions about constitutional reform and a number of reform proposals. The results indicate that a majority sees the need for making fundamental changes to the state constitution and would support calling a constitutional convention to develop the reform proposals. A broad range of voters also express an interest in participating as a delegate to such a convention, if selected.

However, many of the reform proposals that have been proffered by reform advocates are not widely supported by the voting public. For example, by a 52% to 43% margin Californians disapprove of the idea of changing the current two-thirds vote requirement of the legislature to pass a state budget to a simple majority. Majorities also reject amending Proposition 13 to allow the state legislature to increase taxes by a simple majority vote (69%) or to create a split roll property tax system that would tax commercial property at a higher rate than residential property (52%).

In addition, there is relatively little voter support for two recommendations recently put forward by the state-appointed Commission on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economy that call for flattening state personal income tax rates and changing the way California businesses are taxed.

Voters are supportive of two proposed changes to the state's initiative process – increasing the vote requirement needed to approve amendments to the state constitution from a simple majority vote to a two-thirds vote (56%) and requiring initiative sponsors to identify funding sources or areas of the budget to be cut when submitting initiatives that call for additional spending (75%).

These are the top-line findings from the latest *Field Poll* about constitution reform completed among 1,005 California voters in early October.

Questions included in the survey were developed collaboratively between *The Field Poll* and a committee of distinguished political scientists representing the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, the Bill Lane Center for the American West at Stanford University, and the Center for California Studies at California State University, Sacramento, who are also hosting a day-long conference on constitutional reform today, October 14, at the Sacramento Convention Center. Findings from the survey will be presented at the conference. In order to include this series on its latest survey, *The Field Poll* received funding from conference organizers, as well as from Next 10, an independent, non-partisan organization whose mission is to educate, engage and empower Californians to improve the state's future.

Below is a summary of the survey's findings.

- By a 51% to 38% margin voters believe that “fundamental change” needs to be made to the state constitution. Voters who pay a great deal of attention to California government and politics are more inclined than others to feel this way.
- More voters favor changing the state constitution through a deliberative process with proposals submitted to voters as a package (49%) than through separate initiatives that would be placed on the ballot one at a time (40%).
- A 51% to 39% majority prefers a constitutional convention over a revision commission to develop the reform proposals. Although pluralities of voters across all parties prefer a constitutional convention, Republicans are more likely to say this and favor it over a revision commission more than two to one.
- When asked who should serve as delegates to a constitutional convention, greater than six in ten voters (63%) favor including a wide range of individuals – appointed experts, elected delegates and everyday citizens – rather than only one or the other of these groups.
- Most voters say they would either be very likely (32%) or somewhat likely (30%) to serve as a convention delegate if selected and paid under the terms now being considered by convention organizers. This includes paying delegates \$50,000 for up to six months of full-time work away from home. Stated interest in serving as a delegate spans all demographic subgroups of the voting population.

- By a 59% to 33% margin voters think that constitutional reform deliberations should be limited to matters relating to the way government operates rather than including social issues like same-sex marriage.
- However, voters take a different view when asked whether illegal immigration should be included in constitutional reform deliberations. By a 48% to 42% margin, more voters support addressing illegal immigration in these discussions than favor limiting them only to matters relating to government operations.
- Only small proportions of voters favor either of the two recent tax reform recommendations put forward by the state-appointed Commission on the 21st Century Economy. The first proposal, which would flatten state personal income tax rates as a way to counter the big year-to-year swings in taxes collected, is favored by just 23% and 32%, depending on how the proposal is described. The second proposal, which would replace the corporate income tax and state sales tax with a new net receipts tax that would apply to a far broader range of California businesses than is currently covered by the sales tax, receives the support of only 23% of voters.
- Most voters (52%) oppose changing the current two-thirds legislative vote requirement to pass a state budget with a simple majority vote. This compares to 43% who favor making this change. While small pluralities of Democrats and non-partisans support making the change, Republicans oppose this idea nearly three to one.
- Voters are about evenly split over a proposal to impose a strict cap on the amount the state government can spend each year, with 48% approving and 45% disapproving. There are big differences of opinion about this by party.
- There is strong opposition (69% to 27%) to the idea of amending Proposition 13 to allow the state legislature to increase taxes with a simple majority vote.
- A 52% to 37% majority also opposes amending Prop. 13 to tax commercial property at a higher rate than residential property. More voters now oppose the idea of a split roll property tax than have done so in previous *Field Poll* surveys dating back to 1981.
- Most voters (56%) support the idea of increasing the vote requirements needed to approve amendments to the state constitution from a simple majority to a two-thirds majority vote of the people in an election.
- There is broad-based public support (75%) for requiring initiative sponsors to identify funding sources or areas of the budget to be cut when submitting new initiatives that call for additional spending.
- By a 57% to 37% margin voters believe the state can provide about the same level of services by simply eliminating waste and inefficiencies, even if its budget had to be cut by billions of dollars.

- More voters believe that the state's term limits law has helped (51%) rather than hurt (38%) state government.
- By a 49% to 35% margin voters disapprove of the idea to consolidate the 40-member State Senate and the 80-member State Assembly into a single 120-person legislative body.

*Note to Editors:* See attached *California Opinion Index* report for a more detailed accounting of the data referenced in this press release.

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### **About This Report**

#### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 1,005 registered voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish between September 18 and October 5, 2009. In order to test what effect alternative wordings of the questions might have on survey results, some of the questions in this report were asked of random subsamples of about 500 voters each.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected randomly from a statewide list of registered voters in California. Once a voter's name and telephone number had been selected, interviews were attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews were conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file and the preference of the voter. Up to six attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. After the completion of interviewing, the results were weighted to known distributions of registered voters by party and by other demographic and regional characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on sample size. The maximum sampling error for results based on the overall registered voters sample is +/- 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings from each random subsample have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points. The maximum sampling error is based on percentages in the middle of the sampling distribution (percentages around 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (percentages around 10% or around 90%) have a smaller margin of error. While there are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error, the overall design and execution of the survey minimized the potential for these other sources of error. The maximum sampling error will be larger for analyses based on subgroups of the overall sample.

### **Questions Asked**

Thinking about how government in California works... Do you think fundamental changes need to be made to our state constitution or do you think fundamental changes are not needed?

Suppose fundamental changes are going to be made to our state constitution. How do you think these changes should be made... (1) Through separate initiatives put forth by different groups that voters would be asked to approve one by one in elections, or (2) Through a deliberative process, such as a constitutional convention or revision commission, that would put forth a package of proposals submitted for approval to voters in one election?

If a package of proposals to amend our state constitution were to be developed, which type of body would you rather have doing this work... (1) A constitutional revision commission, composed of dozens of experts whose recommendations must be approved by both the legislature and by voters in an election, or (2) A constitutional convention, composed of several hundred delegates who could be either ordinary citizens or experts, and whose recommendations would by-pass the legislature and be submitted for approval directly to voters in an election?

If a constitutional convention or revision commission is created to rewrite our state constitution, should its discussions be strictly limited to matters relating to the way government operates or should it also be allowed to propose changes to social issues, like same sex marriage? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS)

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Suppose a constitutional convention was created to rewrite our state constitution, who should be the delegates taking part in this convention... (READ IN RANDOM ORDER, WITH 4 BEING READ LAST)? (1) Appointed experts on constitutions and California government, (2) Delegates selected by voters in an election, (3) Everyday citizens randomly selected from the voter rolls and DMV registration lists, or (4) A combination of these?

Suppose a constitutional convention included everyday citizens and you were randomly selected to be a delegate. Assuming that delegates were required to work full-time over a six-month period in another city and were paid up to \$50,000, how likely is it that you would be willing and able to serve the state as a delegate to this convention – very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely or not at all likely?

Proposition 13 reduced property taxes on both residential and commercial property. Would you approve or disapprove of changing Prop. 13 to permit business and commercial property owners to be taxed at a higher rate than owners of residential property?

(THE FOLLOWING THREE QUESTIONS WERE ASKED IN RANDOM ORDER)

Proposition 13 generally requires a two-thirds vote of the state legislature to increase state taxes. Would you approve or disapprove of changing Proposition 13 to enable the legislature to increase state taxes by a simple 50 percent majority vote?

The California state constitution can be amended by placing an initiative on the statewide election ballot, and obtaining a simple 50 percent majority of those voting in the election to approve the amendment. Would you approve or disapprove of replacing the 50 percent majority vote requirement with a two-thirds vote requirement for voters to pass constitutional amendments?

The California state constitution requires that a two-thirds vote of the state legislature to pass a state budget. Would you approve or disapprove of replacing the two-thirds vote requirement with a simple 50 percent majority vote for the state legislature to pass a budget?

Some people have proposed that any initiative requiring new spending that goes on the ballot for voter approval must identify either a new source of funding or the cuts that would have to be made to finance the initiative. Do you approve or disapprove of this idea?

Under current term limits laws, a legislator is allowed to serve six years in the California State Assembly and eight years in the State Senate. Some people say that term limits improve government by bringing in new legislators who have fresh ideas. Others say that term limits worsen the performance of government by removing experienced legislators. Do you think term limits have helped or hurt the California state government? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS)

Some have proposed changing the California State Constitution so that the two houses of the state legislature, which includes the Senate and its 40 members, and the Assembly with its 80 members, are consolidated into one house, so that the legislature operates as a single 120-person body. Would you approve or disapprove of making this change to the state constitution?

The state government has been facing large budget deficits over the past several years. Some people believe that by simply eliminating waste and inefficiencies our state government can provide roughly the same level of services that it currently does, even if its budget has to be cut by 20-25 billion dollars. Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat or disagree strongly with this view?

Some people say the only way for California to avoid frequent budget crises is to amend the state constitution to impose a strict cap or upper limit on the amount the state is allowed to spend each year. Others say this wouldn't allow the state enough flexibility to provide the services people might need or demand when circumstances change. Would you approve or disapprove of amending the state constitution to impose a strict cap on the amount the state could spend each year?

A state-appointed tax commission was recently given the task of trying to reduce the wild swings in the amount of money collected by the state's personal income tax system. Their proposal would reduce the number of tax brackets from six to two, by raising the tax rate applicable to lower income earners from 1.25 to 2.75 percent, reducing the tax rate applicable to higher income earners from 9.55 to 6.5 percent and eliminating all other brackets. Would you approve or disapprove making this change? (ASKED OF A RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS)

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The tax commission has also proposed phasing out the state's corporate income tax and the state sales tax, and replacing it with a more broad-based tax on businesses that would apply to all goods and services produced in California including Internet, entertainment and travel services, as well as all legal, medical and professional services not currently subject to the sales tax. Would you approve or disapprove making this change?