

Sacramento Residents Approve of Governor Schwarzenegger more than Other Californians, but Dislike How He Handles Education, Healthcare, Budget and Taxes

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(Embargoed until 12:01 a.m., Thursday May 1, 2008)

Once again, California is facing tremendous challenges. The most troubling for residents in the Sacramento region include the massive \$16-billion budget deficit, the housing crisis, record high energy prices, and a weak economy. Ninety-one percent of residents in the Sacramento region think the state budget deficit is a problem; 71 percent report that it is a big problem, and 20 percent state that it is somewhat problematic. When asked about 12 major issues that challenge the region, area residents named high gas prices (74%), the state budget deficit (71%), the economy (56%), and the weak housing market (52%) as the top four serious concerns – more troublesome than traffic congestion (50%), affordable healthcare (43%), carbon dioxide and other air pollution (39%), the quality of public education (38%), affordable housing (36%), their city or county budgets (31%), crime (31%), and flood control (23%, Liu, Schulz, Paone, and Scott 2008).

As officials at all levels of government struggle to balance their books, there is little consensus among the Governor and Capitol lawmakers on how to fix our financial problems. This situation closely resembles the financial uncertainty that occurred in 2003. At that time, California faced a record budget deficit of \$38 billion and a weakened economy due to the bursting of the dot-com bubble and the state electricity crisis. Many Californians were very upset with state officials and held incumbent Democratic Governor Gary Davis partly responsible, eventually recalling Davis and electing Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger. Voters sent the new governor to Sacramento with the hope that he would clean up the state budget mess and restore fiscal responsibility to state government in California.

To address tough issues facing California, Governor Schwarzenegger proposed several reforms in early 2005. After failing to secure legislative support for his new proposals, the Governor called a special election on June 13, 2005. The four propositions on the ballot included increasing the minimum length of service for tenure in the public school system (Proposition 74), changing state minimum school funding requirements along with revising state spending requirements to set aside more funding reserve (Proposition 76), redistricting California's Congressional and Board of Equalization districts (Proposition 77), and limiting the use of public employee labor union dues for political campaign contributions (Proposition 75). These four propositions (Propositions 74, 75, 76, and 77) later became known as *Governor Schwarzenegger's Reform Agenda*.

However, all four ballot measures were defeated in the November 8, 2005 special election.

In 2006, Governor Schwarzenegger turned his attention toward California's aging infrastructure. In his State of the State address, he proposed a comprehensive Strategic Growth Plan that would invest heavily in transportation, education, water, and flood control to prepare California for the 21st century. That year, he was able to work with both Democrats and Republicans in a bi-partisan effort to put several infrastructure bond measures on the ballot while convincing many voters to support the measures in the 2006 election. He was also re-elected with 56 percent of the votes.

Four years have passed since Arnold Schwarzenegger was first elected Governor of California, and the state is once again facing a budgetary crisis. Do the people in the Sacramento region still approve of Arnold Schwarzenegger's performance as Governor? Do they support his vision regarding the state budget, the economy, public education, and healthcare? How does Governor Schwarzenegger fare today compared to Governor Davis in 2003?

According to *The 2008 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region*, Sacramento area residents support Governor Schwarzenegger more than residents across the state. Compared to other Californians (44%, Baldassare, Bonner, Paluch, and Petek March 2008), a larger percentage of people in the Sacramento region (58%) approve of the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger handles his job as Governor. This is consistent with the patterns observed in 2006 (49% in Sacramento vs. 35% in California)<sup>1</sup> and in 2004 (65% in Sacramento vs. 55% in California)<sup>2</sup>. However, these figures are nearly exact opposites of the approval rating held by then-Governor Davis in 2003: 69 percent criticized his overall job performance, and only 24 percent offered a positive rating (Liu and Sheley 2003). Moreover, Davis' job evaluation was more negative in the Sacramento region (24%) than in the state as a whole (33%, Baldassare 2003).

Residents in the Sacramento region approve of Schwarzenegger's overall performance as Governor (58% approve vs. 34% disapprove) more than his management of specific issues, particularly public education (56% disapprove vs. 32% approve), healthcare (54% disapprove vs. 30% approve), the economy (49% disapprove vs. 36% approve), and the state budget and taxes (47% disapprove vs. 39% approve). In fact, except for crime (41% approve vs. 38% disapprove), his approval ratings related to several key issues in this study are in the 30s, including the state budget and taxes (39%), public transportation (38%), the economy (36%), the quality of public education (32%), and healthcare (30%).

The region's perception of the Governor varies by county of residence, race, and income; however, those differences are less pronounced when we examine only the registered voters. Republicans (75%) are the most likely to approve of the overall job performance of Arnold Schwarzenegger. He also enjoys a great deal of endorsement from

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<sup>1</sup> Liu, Hayes, Breeding, and Papin 2006 and Baldassare 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Liu and Meyer 2004 and Baldassare 2004.

independents and voters from other parties (60%). However, Democrats are split on the issue of the Governor's performance, with 47 percent expressing favorable views and 44 percent holding the opposite opinion. More than half of Republicans also think the Governor has the right ideas when it comes to the issues of crime (55%), the state budget and taxes (53%) and the economy (51%), but they remain divided on how he deals with public education (41% approve vs. 46% disapprove) and healthcare (39% approve vs. 39% disapprove). The overwhelming majority of Democrats, on the other hand, criticize how he tackles public education (68%), healthcare (64%), the economy (58%), and the state budget and taxes (58%). More than half of the independents and other voters also dislike the way he handles healthcare (58%), the economy (54%), and public education (52%).

What follows are more detailed results from *The 2008 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region*, conducted from February 16 to March 2, 2008, by the Institute for Social Research (ISR), California State University, Sacramento.

### **Governor Schwarzenegger enjoys more support from Sacramento than the rest of the state**

Arnold Schwarzenegger is more popular in the Sacramento region than he is in California as a whole. Fifty-eight percent of residents in the Sacramento region approved of the way Schwarzenegger was handling his job as the Governor at the time we conducted our interviews from February 16 to March 2. However, two recent statewide surveys by the Public Policy Institute of California indicated that even in January, only 50 percent of the residents in California shared this positive view, and by March, that number had been further reduced to 44 percent (Baldassare, Bonner, Paluch, and Petek January 2008 and March 2008).

This is very similar to the political landscape in 2006. A statewide survey by the Public Policy Institute of California found that in February 2006, 35 percent of the residents in California were happy with the way the Governor was doing his job (Baldassare February 2006), compared to nearly half of Sacramento region residents (49%) who felt positive about his job performance (Liu, Hayes, Breeding, and Papin 2006).

This trend also holds true for his overall job performance in 2004 (55% approve in California vs. 65% approve in Sacramento)<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the Governor's approval rating in the region has improved almost 10 percentage points over February 2006 (58% in 2008 vs. 49% in 2006). This 58 percent approval rating is only slightly lower than his highest rating of 65 percent which he received in February 2004 - soon after he replaced then-Governor Davis in the historic California 2003 recall election.

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<sup>3</sup> Liu and Meyer 2004 and Baldassare 2004.

This situation represents the opposite of what happened to then-Governor Davis in 2003. At that time, California was also faced with a record budget deficit and a weak economy. Unlike Governor Schwarzenegger who is still enjoying the majority of support in the Sacramento region (58% approve), area residents were very unhappy with then-Governor Davis' overall job performance. Approximately seven out of ten residents (69%) disapproved of his job performance, and only 24 percent supported him (Liu and Sheley 2003). The evaluation of then-Governor Davis in the Sacramento region (24%) was more negative in the region than the state as a whole (33%, Baldassare February 2003).

Governor Davis' approval rating wasn't significantly different in 2002 when only 36 percent of area residents approved of his performance as the state's Governor (Liu 2002). This percentage was much lower than figures representing California as a whole. According to the statewide Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) Survey in February 2002, half of the residents (51%) in the state endorsed his job performance at that time (Baldassare 2002).

Governor Schwarzenegger's approval rating from residents in the Sacramento region does not appear to be affected that much by the massive state budget deficit, the housing crisis, and the weak economy. Even among those who rate these issues as big problems, the Governor retains high marks. Fifty-seven percent of those who believe high gas prices and the weak housing market are big concerns, 56 percent of those who think the state budget deficit is a big problem, and 52 percent of those who report the economy is very problematic still approve of Schwarzenegger's overall performance as Governor.

**“Do you approve of the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as Governor of California?”**

*Historical Comparison in Sacramento and California*

	Approve	Disapprove	Don't Know
<b>2008</b>			
Sacramento	58%	34%	8%
California (January) <sup>1</sup>	50	44	6
California (March) <sup>2</sup>	44	49	7
<b>2006</b>			
Sacramento <sup>3</sup>	49	45	6
California <sup>4</sup>	35	53	12
<b>2004</b>			
Sacramento <sup>5</sup>	65	24	11
California <sup>6</sup>	55	26	19

<sup>1</sup> Baldassare, Bonner, Paluch, and Petek January 2008

<sup>2</sup> Baldassare, Bonner, Paluch, and Petek March 2008

<sup>3</sup> Liu, Hayes, Breeding, and Papin 2006

<sup>4</sup> Baldassare 2006

<sup>5</sup> Liu and Meyer 2004

<sup>6</sup> Baldassare 2004

**“Do you approve of the way Gray Davis is handling his job as Governor of California?”**

*Historical Comparison in Sacramento and California*

	Approve	Disapprove	Don't Know
2003			
Sacramento <sup>1</sup>	24%	69%	7%
California <sup>2</sup>	33	60	7
2002			
Sacramento <sup>3</sup>	36	53	11
California <sup>4</sup>	51	42	7

<sup>1</sup>Liu and Sheley 2003

<sup>2</sup>Baldassare 2003

<sup>3</sup>Liu and Sheley 2003

<sup>4</sup>Baldassare 2003

**“Do you approve of the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as Governor of California?”**

*Comparison among People with Different Perceptions of the High Gas Prices*

	A Big Problem	Somewhat Problematic	Not a Problem	Don't Know
Approve	57%	62%	64%	60%
Disapprove	35	28	34	20
Don't know	8	10	2	20

*Comparison among People with Different Perceptions of the Weak Housing Market*

	A Big Problem	Somewhat Problematic	Not a Problem	Don't Know
Approve	57%	61%	63%	42%
Disapprove	35	30	31	39
Don't know	8	9	6	19

*Comparison among People with Different Perceptions of the State Budget Situation*

	A Big Problem	Somewhat Problematic	Not a Problem	Don't Know
Approve	56%	65%	71%	53%
Disapprove	36	28	18	27
Don't know	8	7	11	20

*Comparison among People with Different Perceptions of the Economy*

	A Big Problem	Somewhat Problematic	Not a Problem	Don't Know
Approve	52%	66%	67%	56%
Disapprove	39	26	28	22
Don't know	9	8	5	22

## **Governor's overall popularity contrasts with low approval on some key issues**

Although nearly 60 percent (58%) of Sacramento area residents approve of the Governor's overall job performance, their evaluation of his approach to many key issues in this study is much less positive. A majority of area residents object to his handling of public education (56% disapprove vs. 32% approve) and healthcare (54% disapprove vs. 30% approve), and almost half respond negatively to his plans for the economy (49% approve vs. 36% disapprove) as well as the state budget and taxes (47% disapprove vs. 39% approve). With the exception of a slightly higher rating on the issue of crime (41% approve vs. 38% disapprove), Governor Schwarzenegger's approval ratings for all key issues in this survey remain in the 30 percent range (state budget and taxes 39%, public transportation 38%, the economy 36%, public education 32%, and healthcare 30%).

Although his overall job approval rating increased from 49 percent in 2006 to 58 percent in 2008, approval ratings related to some key issues such as public education (32% approve in 2008 vs. 31% approve in 2006), the state budget (39% approve in 2008 vs. 37% approve in 2006), and public transportation (38% approve in 2008 vs. 39% approve in 2006) show little change from 2006. When compared to 2004, the negative ratings for the Governor's management of all the key issues surveyed in this study have increased. For example, in 2004, 51 percent of people in the Sacramento region supported the way the Governor handled the state budget (51% approve vs. 33% disapprove). A turnaround occurred in 2006 when 50 percent of regional residents failed to endorse Governor's ideas for the budget (50% disapprove vs. 37% approve). In 2008, 47 percent still offer a negative response to the Governor's budgetary leadership (47% disapprove vs. 39% approve). This trend also holds true for public education (30% disapproved vs. 45% approve in 2004 and 56% disapprove vs. 32% approve in 2008).

**“Now I am going to read you a list of issues  
Governor Schwarzenegger has to deal with.”**

		Approve	Disapprove	Don't know
Public education	2008	32%	56%	12%
	2006	31	59	10
	2004	45	30	25
Healthcare	2008	30%	54%	16%
	2006	n/a	n/a	n/a
	2004	n/a	n/a	n/a
The economy	2008	36%	49%	15%
	2006	n/a	n/a	n/a
	2004	n/a	n/a	n/a
The state budget	2008	39%	47%	14%
	2006	37	50	13
	2004	51	33	16
Taxes	2008	39%	47%	14%
	2006	44	41	15
	2004	51	29	20
Crime	2008	41%	38%	21%
	2006	n/a	n/a	n/a
	2004	n/a	n/a	n/a
Public transportation	2008	38%	34%	28%
	2006	39	35	26
	2004	32	20	48
Overall job performance	2008	58%	34%	8%
	2006	49	45	6
	2004	65	24	11

**Governor receives more support in suburbs and from white and higher income residents**

Although the Governor enjoys a great deal of overall support in the Sacramento region, his overall job approval rating varies by household income and race. Those with incomes of \$75,000 or more (65%) and white residents (64%) more likely to find the governor’s leadership exemplary than people with income of less than \$30,000 (49%) and non-white residents (45%). Non-white residents are evenly divided, with 45 percent approving and 44 percent disapproving. Those with incomes of less than \$30,000 a year are also somewhat split: 49 percent like him, while 42 percent are less enthusiastic.

Regional support for the Governor also differs a great deal by county or city of residence. Seventy-one percent of residents from Placer County approve of the Governor’s overall job performance. Sixty-three percent of respondents from El Dorado County and 59 percent from other places in Sacramento County also share this positive view. However, only 51 percent of residents in the City of Sacramento endorse the Governor, and 40 percent disapprove of how he is doing as Governor.

Residents in the City of Sacramento are least supportive of the way the Governor deals with public education (63% disapprove vs. 27% approve), healthcare (60% disapprove vs. 27% approve), the economy (57% disapprove vs. 29% approve), and the state budget and taxes (52% disapprove vs. 33% approve). Almost half of the residents in the City of Sacramento (48% disapprove vs. 33% approve) also criticize how the Governor handles crime, whereas almost half of the people in El Dorado (51% approve vs. 28% disapprove) and in other places of Sacramento County (47% approve vs. 35% disapprove) think he does a good job. People from Yolo County are also more likely to reject the way the Governor deals with public education (59% disapprove vs. 27% approve) and healthcare (58% disapprove vs. 28% approve).

**“Do you approve of the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as Governor of California?”**

*Comparison among People with Different Household Incomes*

	Less than \$30,000	\$30,000 to Less than \$75,000	\$75,000 or more
Approve	49%	58%	65%
Disapprove	42	34	27
Don't know	9	8	8

*Comparison between Whites and Other Racial Groups*

	Whites	Other Racial Groups
Approve	64%	45%
Disapprove	29	44
Don't know	7	11

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*Comparison among the Four Counties in the Sacramento Region*

	El Dorado	Placer	Sacramento	Yolo
Approve	63%	71%	55%	55%
Disapprove	31	24	36	34
Don't know	6	5	9	11

*Comparison between the City of Sacramento and Other Places in Sacramento County*

	City of Sacramento	Other Places in Sacramento County
Approve	51%	59%
Disapprove	40	31
Don't know	9	10

**“Now I am going to read you a list of issues  
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		Approve	Disapprove	Don't know
<b>Public education</b>				
	El Dorado	31%	51%	18%
	Placer	37	48	15
	Yolo	27	59	14
	Sac. County	32	57	11
	Sac. City	27	63	10
	Other places	37	51	12
<b>Healthcare</b>				
	El Dorado	27%	52%	21%
	Placer	29	51	20
	Yolo	28	58	14
	Sac. County	30	55	15
	Sac. City	27	60	13
	Other places	33	50	17
<b>The economy</b>				
	El Dorado	36%	45%	19%
	Placer	42	39	19
	Yolo	41	41	18
	Sac. County	33	53	14
	Sac. City	29	57	14
	Other places	38	49	13
<b>Budget and taxes</b>				
	El Dorado	48%	40%	12%
	Placer	40	44	16
	Yolo	37	47	16
	Sac. County	37	49	14
	Sac. City	33	52	15
	Other places	41	45	14
<b>Crime</b>				
	El Dorado	51%	28%	21%
	Placer	45	33	22
	Yolo	38	28	34
	Sac. County	39	42	19
	Sac. City	33	48	19
	Other places	47	35	18
<b>Public transportation</b>				
	El Dorado	38%	27%	35%
	Placer	37	28	35
	Yolo	36	36	28
	Sac. County	38	37	25
	Sac. City	39	38	23
	Other places	35	36	29

**Governor is well-liked by Republicans, Independents, and voters from other parties**

Regional support for the Governor varies most among the registered voters. Republicans (75%) are the most inclined to approve of Governor Schwarzenegger’s overall job performance. He also receives the endorsement from the majority of independents and voters from other parties (60%). However, Democrats in the region are evenly divided: 47 percent approve but another 44 percent hold the opposite view of the Governor’s overall job performance.

More than half of Republicans think the Governor has the right approach when it comes to the state budget and taxes (53%) and the economy (51%). In sharp contrast, 58 percent of Democrats criticize how he has addressed these two important issues. Republicans (55% approve vs. 27% disapprove) and other voters (44% approve vs. 36% disapprove) tend to agree with Governor’s policy on crime, whereas Democrats are more likely to disapprove of how he handles this issue (43% disapprove vs. 33% approve).

Sixty-eight percent of Democrats and 52 percent of other voters disapprove of how the Governor handles public education. Republicans are split over this issue with 41 percent expressing approval and 46 percent standing in opposition to his plan for education. A similar pattern holds true for healthcare. Sixty-four percent of Democrats and 58 percent of other voters don’t think the Governor has a good grip on the issue of healthcare, whereas Republicans are evenly divided (39% approve vs. 39% disapprove).

Republicans (42% approve vs. 26% disapprove) and other voters (42% approve vs. 32% disapprove) are more likely to support how the Governor deals with public transportation, whereas Democrats (30% approve vs. 45% disapprove) are more likely to criticize his performance on the issue.

**“Do you approve of the way that Arnold Schwarzenegger is handling his job as Governor of California?”**

*Comparison among Registered Voters*

	Republicans	Democrats	Other Voters
2008			
Approve	75%	47%	60%
Disapprove	20	44	31
Don’t know	5	9	9
2006			
Approve	79%	28%	41%
Disapprove	18	66	51
Don’t know	3	6	8
2004			
Approve	88%	48%	59%
Disapprove	6	38	29
Don’t know	6	14	12

**“Now I am going to read you a list of issues  
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		Approve	Disapprove	Don't know
Overall job performance	Republicans	75%	20%	5%
	Democrats	47	44	9
	Other voters	60	31	9
Public education	Republicans	41%	46%	13%
	Democrats	23	68	9
	Other voters	33	52	15
Healthcare	Republicans	39%	39%	22%
	Democrats	23	64	13
	Other voters	29	58	13
The economy	Republicans	51%	34%	16%
	Democrats	26	58	16
	Other voters	36	54	11
Budget and taxes	Republicans	53%	33%	14%
	Democrats	28	58	14
	Other voters	41	48	11
Crime	Republicans	55%	27%	18%
	Democrats	33	43	24
	Other voters	44	36	20
Public transportation	Republicans	42%	26%	32%
	Democrats	30	45	25
	Other voters	42	32	26

## Survey methods

The above results are based on part of our seventh annual survey, *The 2008 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region*. This project is a computer-assisted telephone interview of 1,200 adult residents age 18 and older from randomly selected households in the Sacramento region, which includes Sacramento, Yolo, Placer, and El Dorado counties. The objective of this project is to assess the perception of the quality of life and public opinion in the Sacramento region on a wide range of important local and national issues.

More than 40 students conducted phone interviews in English and Spanish from February 16 to March 2, 2008, at the Institute for Social Research, California State University, Sacramento. The sample is quite representative of the four counties in the Sacramento region when compared with the 2000 U.S. Census (9% in the Census vs. 10% in the sample in Yolo County; 9% in the Census vs. 9% in the sample in El Dorado County, 14% in the Census vs. 16% in the sample in Placer County, and 68% residents in the Census vs. 65% in the sample in Sacramento County). The small differences may reflect the changes in the population of the region. The margin of error for the survey in the region is approximately  $\pm 3$  percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. The error for group comparisons would be higher than  $\pm 3$  percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

This survey has compared the Sacramento regional findings with those from other California regions, as well as those from the state and the nation. Data cited regarding the state and other California regions often comes from the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) Statewide Surveys. Nationwide data often comes from Gallup polls.

The College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies (SSIS), the Department of Sociology, the Office of Public Affairs, and the Community Engagement Center at California State University, Sacramento, sponsored this project.

This research is directed by Amy Liu, Ph.D., Department of Sociology and Institute for Social Research, California State University, Sacramento. Dr. Liu is an expert in public opinion polls, and has conducted over 20 surveys in the past ten years, including:

- 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, and 2007 Sacramento State Annual Survey of the Region
- Survey of Iowa Business about Eldercare and Eldercare Needs
- Story County Conservation Board Survey
- Grundy County Youth Needs Assessment

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