

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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Release #2144

Release Date: **Saturday, October 16, 2004**

CALIFORNIA VOTERS DIVIDED ON WHETHER TO KEEP ITS WINNER- TAKE-ALL ELECTORAL VOTE ALLOCATION METHOD.

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

In the upcoming November 2 presidential election, the winner of California's popular vote, by whatever margin, will get all of this state's fifty-five electoral votes. The loser gets nothing.

This "winner take all" system of allocating electoral votes in each state was fashioned by the nation's founding fathers more than two centuries ago. Since then, there have been attempts to change the electoral college system, but few have gone very far.

In its most recent survey, *The Field Poll* asked California voters whether the state should keep its winner-take-all system or change it to a proportional allocation system based on the percentage of popular votes each candidate receives.

The results show that voters are split on this issue, with 47% in favor of keeping the current winner-take-all system and 42% supporting a change to a proportional allocation.

Democrats are much more inclined than Republicans or non-partisans to favor maintaining the current winner-take-all allocation method, 52% to 35%. Republicans and non-partisans are slightly more supportive of changing this to a proportional allocation.

Table 1
**Voter reaction to proposal to change the way California allocates its
electoral votes in Presidential elections in California**
(among registered voters)

	Keep current winner-take-all <u>system</u>	Change to a proportional allocation <u>system</u>	No <u>opinion</u>
Total voters	47%	42	11
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	52%	35	13
Republicans	42%	45	13
Non-partisans/others	46%	49	5

Former Democratic vice-president Al Gore outpolled Bush by a twelve-point margin in California in the 2000 presidential election. Since then, all independent public polls, as well as the many private partisan polls, have shown that the state continues to show a significant lead for the Democrat Kerry. As a result, neither Kerry nor Bush find it necessary to devote much of their scarce campaign resources to California.

Critics of the winner-take-all electoral vote allocation system say that if it were changed to a proportional allocation of electoral votes, this would make all states competitive because a candidate would win some electoral votes in direct proportion to his share of the popular vote in that state.

Some years ago the states of Nebraska and Maine modified their state's winner-take-all method. Nebraska awards two of its five electoral votes to the presidential candidate getting the most votes, while the remaining three electoral votes are allocated to the winner of the popular vote in each of its three Congressional Districts. Maine employs a similar type of system in the allocation of its four electoral votes.

Each of the other forty-eight states, as well as the District of Columbia, uses the winner-take-all system. However, Colorado voters will be asked on November 2nd whether they wish to change their system to proportional allocation. And, should it be approved, its provisions call for it applying to the 2004 vote in that state.

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on interviews conducted among a random sample of 600 registered voters in California. Interviews were conducted by telephone in English and Spanish September 24-29, 2004. Sampling was carried out using random digit dial methodology which gives all voters, including those whose phone number is listed and unlisted, an equal chance of being contacted. Up to four attempts were made to reach a randomly selected voter at each number dialed. After the completion of interviewing the overall sample was weighted to Field Poll estimates of the state's total registered voter population.

According to statistical theory, the overall results for each proposition have a sampling error of +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. These are other possible sources of error in any survey in addition to sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sequencing or through omissions or errors in sampling, interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

Questions Asked

As you know, in presidential elections each state has a certain number of electoral votes. California has 55 out of a national total of 538. If a presidential candidate wins a state's popular vote, he gets all of the state's electoral votes. There has been a suggestion that California change the way it allocates its electoral votes, so that electoral votes be allocated according to each candidate's share of the state's popular vote. For example, if a candidate were to win 51% of California's popular votes, he would win 51% of the state's electoral votes. Do you think California should change the way it allocates its electoral votes so that they are divided according to each candidate's share of the popular vote, or should we keep the state's current winner-take-all system?