

The CALIFORNIA POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL STATEWIDE SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION
ESTABLISHED AND OPERATED BY FIELD RESEARCH CORPORATION SINCE 1946

San Francisco Headquarters
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SALINGER AND CRANSTON NECK-AND-NECK IN LATEST POLL OF DEMOCRATS, MURPHY LEADS GOP

by Mervin D. Field

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The Democratic Senatorial race in California has now become a neck-and-neck affair between Pierre Salinger and Alan Cranston, according to a California Poll survey completed on Saturday, May 23.

Former White House press secretary, Pierre Salinger, has made up some ground which he had lost earlier this month to Alan Cranston. The margin between the two men is now a statistically insignificant one percentage point. Senator Clair Engle, who has withdrawn from the race, but whose name will appear on the ballot, still draws about one in eight Democrat votes at this time.

Latest Poll

The latest standings in this turbulent race were obtained by the California Poll from a cross section survey of 806 registered Democrats conducted between May 20 and 23. The votes of rank and file Democrats today as compared with those obtained in a survey of a similar cross section conducted during the first week in May shows the following trend:

	Date of Survey	
	May 20th to 23rd	May 4th to 9th
Pierre Salinger	31%	27%
Alan Cranston	30	33
Clair Engle	13	17
George McLain	4	6
Other candidates	6	8
Don't know, no choice	16	9

This campaign began in a state of uncertainty over the possibility of incumbent Senator Engle's ability to run again. Great bitterness developed in the struggle for running room by several leading California Democrats, and the situation was further roiled by Salinger's last-minute return from Washington to throw his hat into the ring. Engle's withdrawal came too late to have his name removed from the ballot and several other candidates declared themselves in, so the ballot now contains 12 candidates.

(MORE)

Savage Battle

The contest has now become a savagely fought race between two men representing opposing factions in California Democratic politics. Cranston is being endorsed by Governor Pat Brown, while Salinger is reputed to be backed by Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh. The battle for power thus has large stakes extending far beyond the personal success or failure of either candidate.

On the line also is the prestige of the California Democratic Council, a 70,000 member organization which has endorsed Cranston. During ten years of endorsing candidates, this organization has so far seen every one of its choices win nomination.

In a race this close, the outcome will clearly depend on changes in voter alignment during the last days of campaigning and the degree to which each side is successful in getting voters who support their candidate to turn out.

Republican Senatorial Primary

On the Republican side, George Murphy continues to lead two other rivals, Leland Kaiser and Fred Hall for the GOP Senatorial nomination. However, half of the Republicans are still undecided. and their eventual action could have a major bearing on the final distribution of votes.

In a poll completed May 23rd among a representative cross section of 503 Republicans, the results show:

George Murphy	29%
Leland Kaiser	16
Fred Hall	4
Undecided	51

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(More)

Do Polls "Predict" Elections?

When a pre-election poll turns out to have been within a few percentage points of the final outcome in an election there is almost universal tendency to credit the poll with a "good prediction." Conversely, should an election outcome differ from a pre-election poll, the usual interpretation is that the poll "missed" the election.

While the California Poll has been patted on the back much more often than it has been criticized during the 18 years it has been in operation, we have never claimed to have a crystal ball before an election, and we are uncomfortable about taking credit for having had one after the election.

We would be less than honest if we said we didn't benefit from the publicity that our poll brings, and we are frank to state that this is one of the main justifications we have for maintaining the California Poll. However, we feel that our own interests, and the interests of responsible journalism, are better served by discouraging the use of polls as an election eve "stunt" and placing them instead in the context of factual reports of voter sentiments as of the time they are taken.

Most of our final pre-election surveys have to be terminated a week or more before an election. A lot can happen in the closing days, if not the closing hours, of a campaign. This is when electioneering typically reaches its peak and when candidate personalities, issues, and late hour events have a redoubled impact on voters who are entering the decision zone. Thus, any "prediction" that the poll results will hold up until election day involves the assumption that nothing important will happen in the closing week, days, or hours. Sometimes it doesn't, but often enough it does.

Furthermore, there is no precise formula for measuring such factors as election day turn-out, which can have a tremendous effect on an election outcome. Most systematic polls are representative of all voters, not just those who turn out and actually vote in the contests being measured.

Most major elections are decided by a majority amounting to something under eight percentage points. It is a statistical fact of life that sampling procedures are least precise in this mid-range. The samples that we use are subject to several percentage points tolerance in the 50-50 area, which means that we could easily be on the "wrong side" in a close race without going outside the limits of sampling variance.

Therefore, to make a flat "prediction" that an election result is going to come out precisely the way the survey comes out is simply a form of statistical Russian roulette. A prediction makes better headlines, but it is also a very dangerous way to live and it is not really the proper use of a poll.

If polls have any real value it is *not* for their last-hour predictions, but for such things as their ability to further our understanding of voter behavior, their unique ability to provide timely readings of public opinion on issues in between elections, and their use as a testing ground for research techniques. True, the election outcome tends to test the validity of a poll, but for the reasons we have already stated we don't think the all or nothing evaluation does them justice. Polls don't need "proving" any more; what they need today is more sophisticated understanding and application.

The California Poll was founded in 1946 as a medium for promoting public opinion research. The California Poll is completely independent of all political parties and candidates. Its sole purpose is to report public opinion accurately and objectively. Most of the financial support for the Poll comes from newspapers and television stations that have exclusive rights within the city of publication. The Poll utilizes accepted scientific sampling and questioning procedures in obtaining the data reported in its releases. Representative samples of adults are interviewed at periodic intervals on election issues and other socially important questions of the day. Proportionate numbers of people of both sexes, from all parts of the state, from different sized communities, and of all age, economic, political, and occupation groups are included in the samples. Major surveys are made with samples of 1,200 or more respondents. Interim surveys sometimes are made with smaller samples but not less than 600 interviews.

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