

# THE CALIFORNIA POLL

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BOBBY KENNEDY COULD BEAT  
LBJ TODAY IN CALIFORNIA  
FOR 1968 NOMINATION  
by Mervin D. Field

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The popularity of Democratic Senator Robert Kennedy is of such proportions in California that if rank and file Democratic voters were now choosing between him and Lyndon Johnson for president in 1968, the brother of the late President Kennedy would get a plurality of votes.

The possibility that Bobby Kennedy would even make a determined try for the nomination against President Johnson is considered remote. There is no precedent in modern-day history where an incumbent president who wanted another term was denied the nomination by delegates to the national convention.

And even if Bobby Kennedy were to try to make a serious try for the nomination, it is considered unlikely that he could get enough delegate support in view of the President's hold on the party machinery.

### Unique Situation

Nevertheless, it is a unique phenomenon that less than two years after winning an election by landslide proportions an incumbent president finds a member of his own party capable of drawing more votes than he.

The California Poll posed this question to a cross section of Democrats, and to Republicans and other voters as well: "Let's assume you were a delegate to the 1968 Democratic national convention and the Democratic presidential nominees were Lyndon Johnson and New York Senator Robert Kennedy. If you had to make up your mind now, who would you like to see get the nomination--Lyndon Johnson or Robert Kennedy?"

(MORE)

The results:

	<u>Democrats only</u>	<u>All voters</u>
Kennedy	52%	47%
Johnson	41	40
Undecided	7	13

Bi-Partisan Appeal

When paired against leading Republicans who have been mentioned as possible 1968 presidential candidates, Kennedy also demonstrates strong bi-partisan appeal in running better than Johnson in simulated races against prominent Republicans. For example, when Johnson is pitted against George Romney, Republican Governor of Michigan who currently leads among California Republicans as their choice for 1968, the distribution of preference among the representative sample of all voters is: Johnson 48%, Romney 41%, and 11% undecided. However, when Kennedy is pitted against Romney, the margin between the two candidates is much wider: Kennedy 53%, Romney 38%, and 9% undecided.

Against Nixon, Johnson polls 58% of the vote to the former Californian's 34%, with 8% undecided. A Kennedy-Nixon pairing produces a division of 60% Kennedy and 32% Nixon, with 8% undecided.

Unique Position

Robert Kennedy's position in American politics today is unprecedented. He came into prominence when he managed his brother's successful campaign in 1960 for the presidency. At that time he was just 34 years old. Since then he has served as U.S. Attorney General, and, after establishing residence in New York, he unseated a popular incumbent Republican, Senator Kenneth Keating in 1964. He maintains a large Senate staff and is constantly on the move within the country and overseas fulfilling speaking engagements. He has issued a number of position papers on important national issues, and has displayed an obvious desire to acquire more political power. While he has been a controversial figure, today's results in California show that as of now he has a large portion of the public behind him. It is unlikely he will be brash enough to challenge President Johnson's leadership of the Democratic party to the extent of trying for the 1968 nomination, but the possibility cannot be completely ruled out.

An interesting sidelight to the public's appraisal of the Vietnam war is the way they compare the kind of job they think Johnson is doing with the job they feel Senator Barry Goldwater might have done if he had been elected in 1964. In this comparison LBJ comes off rather well. More than one-third (37%) think Barry Goldwater would have done a poorer job than Johnson in handling the Vietnam situation, just 22% think Goldwater would have done better, 28% think he would have done the same kind of job Johnson is doing, and 13% have no opinion.

JFK Better Job

However, by a large margin, Californians feel that if President John Kennedy had lived and were still president he would have done a better job in handling the Vietnam situation than President Johnson is doing.

Compared to the job Johnson  
is doing in Vietnam Kennedy  
would have done --

Better job	57%
Poorer job	5
Same	29
No opinion	9