

Mitchell's Musings 6-6-11: Public Priorities

A short musing for June 6 for two reasons. First, LERA's National Policy Forum is meeting June 6-7 in Washington and I am on the program. Second, the table below makes my message clear enough. Sometimes a table, like a picture, is worth a thousand words.

"Thinking about the state as a whole, what do you think is the most important issue facing people in California today?"

Top four issues mentioned	All Adults	Party			Likely Voters
		Dem	Rep	Ind	
Jobs, economy	57%	57%	51%	49%	52%
State budget, deficit, taxes	11	11	17	16	16
Education, schools	9	13	8	10	11
Immigration, illegal immigration	4	4	5	4	4

The table is from the May 2011 Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) public opinion poll. As usual, the poll asks questions about all kinds of issues, e.g., the state budget. But the fact is that issues other than "jobs/economy" are only distant concerns. If pollsters insist on asking questions about other public issues, of course they will receive responses and these responses will be analyzed and re-analyzed. But it is glaringly obvious that the California public is not losing sleep over the issues that animate politicians or policy wonks.

To me, the table suggests something else. Only when "jobs/economy" problems are resolved will the secondary issues be addressed in a sensible way.

Of course, the PPIC poll is only for California. But despite stereotyped views about Californians elsewhere in the nation, I doubt that the results would be different elsewhere, at least not in states with high unemployment rates.

The full PPIC poll – with details on methodology - is at http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_511MBS.pdf