

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

222 Sutter Street
San Francisco, CA 94108-4411
(415) 392-5763 FAX: (415) 434-2541
EMAIL: fieldpoll@field.com

COPYRIGHT 2003 BY FIELD RESEARCH CORPORATION. FOR PUBLICATION BY SUBSCRIBERS ONLY.

Release #2079

Release Date: **Thursday, July 24, 2003**

VOTERS CONTINUE TO SUPPORT WARD CONNERLY'S RACIAL PRIVACY INITIATIVE.

IMPORTANT: Contract for this service is subject to revocation if publication or broadcast takes place before release date or if contents are divulged to persons outside of subscriber staff prior to release time. (ISSN 0195-4520)

by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

California voters are currently supporting the so-called Racial Privacy Initiative by a 50% to 29% margin. Another one in five voters (21%) are undecided.

The initiative, which qualified for the ballot some time ago, will be voted upon in the next statewide election -- either later this fall if a special gubernatorial recall election is held or in next March's presidential primary election.

The measure would prohibit state and local governments from collecting any racial and ethnic data about individuals. It is sponsored by University of California Regent Ward Connerly, who was also the proponent of Proposition 209, approved by voters in 1996, a measure that did away with public-sector affirmative action programs in California.

The Field Poll has measured voter sentiment on the Racial Privacy Initiative in two previous statewide surveys, and in each about half of voters have supported it, while only about one in three were opposed.

Backers and opponents

In advocating for the Racial Privacy Initiative, Connerly says it will bring the state closer to a race-blind society. He maintains that the government should not be categorizing people by race or ethnicity in the same way it attempts to be blind to a person's religion or sexual orientation.

Critics say that passage of the initiative would cripple anti-discrimination efforts in law enforcement, public health, housing, education, banking and other areas. Health advocates say that gathering racial and ethnic data can help the state spot racial disparities among whites, blacks, Latinos and Asians in regard to diseases such as breast cancer, diabetes, and asthma, which can afflict each race differently.

Trend of voter preferences

The current poll first asked voters whether or not they had seen, read or heard anything about the initiative, and the survey finds just 25% of likely voters reporting some prior knowledge of it.

All voters, regardless of their prior awareness, were then read a summary of the initiative's official ballot description, and were asked how they would vote if the election were being held now. That wording reads as follows:

“This initiative would prohibit state and local governments from using race, ethnicity, color or national origin to classify current or prospective students, contractors, or employees in public education, contracting and employment operations. Exemptions include law enforcement descriptions, prisoner and undercover assignments and actions taken to maintain federal funding.”

Approximately half of the voters in the survey were also read an additional statement summarizing the initiative's official fiscal impact on the state, while the other half was not. This fiscal impact statement read as follows:

“Potential savings to the state range from several million to 10 million dollars per year.”

The current survey finds no significant differences in voter preferences between those read the fiscal impact statement and those who weren't. Overall, 50% said they would vote “yes” if the election were being held today, 29% said they would vote “no” and 21% were undecided.

The following is the trend of voter sentiments toward the initiative in each of three statewide *Field Polls* conducted over the past 15 months.

Table 1
Trend of voter reaction to the official summary
of the Racial Privacy Initiative
(among likely voters)

	<u>Would vote...</u>		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
July 2003	50%	29	21
April 2003	48%	33	19
April 2002*	48%	34	18

* Asked of all registered voters.

Subgroup differences

While there are some differences in voter preferences across subgroups of the state's voting population, they are not very pronounced. For example, while large majorities of Republicans are backing the initiative, pluralities of Democrats and non-partisans also support it but by smaller

margins. In addition, while white non-Hispanic voters favor it two to one, the opinions of the state's ethnic voters are mixed, rather than negative. There are also no large differences in preference by age, gender, or region of the state.

One area where there are substantial differences in opinions of the Racial Privacy Initiative relates to how voters intend to vote in the Davis recall election. Those intending to vote "yes" to recall the Governor favor the initiative greater than three to one (63% to 20%), while those intending to vote "no" on the recall oppose the initiative 42% to 38%.

Table 2
Voter reactions to the official summary of the
Racial Privacy Initiative – by subgroup
(among likely voters)

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Statewide	50%	29	21
<u>Party</u>			
(.43) Democrats	42%	38	20
(.39) Republicans	62%	18	20
(.18) Independent/others	45%	34	21
<u>Political ideology</u>			
(.34) Conservative	62%	22	16
(.43) Middle-of-the-road	51%	27	22
(.23) Liberal	33%	45	22
<u>Region</u>			
(.22) Los Angeles County	51%	29	20
(.32) Other Southern California	52%	27	21
(.15) Central Valley	55%	27	18
(.25) San Francisco Bay Area	46%	36	18
(.06) Other Northern California*	46%	24	30
<u>Gender</u>			
(.46) Men	55%	30	15
(.54) Women	46%	28	26
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
(.77) White non-Hispanic	54%	26	20
(.12) Latino*	41%	49	10
(.11) All others*	43%	33	24
<u>Age</u>			
(.24) 18-39	49%	34	17
(.23) 40-49	56%	28	16
(.30) 50-64	52%	31	17
(.23) 65 and older	46%	24	30
<u>Familiarity with the initiative</u>			
(.25) Yes, have heard	54%	30	16
(.75) No, have not heard	49%	29	22
<u>Vote on Davis recall</u>			
(.51) Yes voters	63%	20	17
(.43) No voters	38%	42	20

* Relatively small sample size.

Similarities to the 1996 anti-affirmative action initiative, Prop. 209

Current voter preferences toward the Racial Privacy Initiative appear to be following the same pattern of initial support as was seen in the early stages of Connerly's previous race-related initiative, Proposition 209, the California Civil Rights Initiative. That initiative, which called for doing away with all public-sector affirmative action programs, was approved by voters by a 55% to 45% margin in the November 1996 general election.

Surveys conducted by *The Field Poll* in the months leading up to that election showed relatively modest differences across voter subgroups. However, in the final weeks of the election, voter opinions became much more polarized along race, class and party lines. Exit polls conducted on the day of the November 1996 general election found very large subgroup differences in the final vote on Prop. 209. For example...

- While Republicans voted "yes" by an 80% to 20% margin, Democrats voted "no" 68% to 32%.
- White non-Hispanic voters favored Prop. 209 by a 62% to 38% margin. On the other hand, 70% of Latinos, 73% of blacks/African-Americans and 56% of Asians voted "no."
- Voters in Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area, the state's traditional Democratic strongholds, voted no by similar 54% to 46% margins. However, greater than 60% of voters in other parts of the state voted "yes."
- 61% of voters living in households with annual incomes of \$75,000 or more voted "yes," while 61% of those earning less than \$15,000 per year voted "no."

Information About the Survey

Sample Details

The results in this report are based on a statewide survey of 719 Californians considered likely to vote in the next statewide election. The survey was completed during the period July 1-13, 2003 by telephone in English and Spanish. The overall sample was divided into two approximately equal sized subsamples of 346 and 373 likely voters each to test for the effects of the fiscal impact portion of the ballot summary on voter preferences.

According to statistical theory 95% of the time results from the overall sample would have a sampling error of +/- 3.8 percentage points. Findings from subgroups of the overall sample would have larger sampling error estimates. There are many possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sampling or sequencing, or through undetected errors or omissions in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

Questions Asked

Have you seen, read, or heard anything about an initiative that will appear on the next statewide election ballot having to do with the classification of people by race or ethnicity?

(As you know) An initiative has been proposed that would prohibit state and local governments from using race, ethnicity, color or national origin to classify current or prospective students, contractors, or employees in public education, contracting and employment operations. Exemptions include law enforcement descriptions, prisoner and undercover assignments, and actions taken to maintain federal funding. [Potential savings to the state range from several million to 10 million dollars per year.]* If the election were being held today, and this initiative were on the ballot, would you vote yes or no?

* Sentence included on a random subsample of about half of all respondents.