

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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**CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR DOCTOR-
ASSISTED SUICIDE. MOST WOULD WANT
THEIR PHYSICIAN TO ASSIST THEM IF
THEY WERE INCURABLY ILL AND
WANTED TO DIE.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Over the twenty-seven years that *The Field Poll* has been tracking public sentiment on the issue of doctor-assisted suicide, a large majority of Californians have consistently endorsed the concept.

In a statewide survey completed last month, 70% of all adults and 69% of registered voters believe that incurably ill patients should have the right to ask for and get life-ending medication.

More than six in ten Californians (62%) also say that if they themselves were terminally ill and expected to die within six months, they would want their doctor to be able to assist them in dying.

In addition, majorities support a bill currently in the legislature which would allow terminally ill residents who are mentally competent and have been evaluated by two physicians to request a lethal prescription which they themselves could administer to end their own lives.

Public remains supportive of doctor-assisted suicide

In eight separate statewide *Field Poll* surveys taken since 1979, support for doctor-assisted suicide has consistently ranged between 64% and 75%. In each of the last two years, including the current survey, 70% have favored the practice.

Registered Democrats are overwhelmingly supportive (80%) of this form of euthanasia. While not as many Republicans are in favor, a 59% majority of GOPers still expresses their approval.

There is not a great deal of difference in the approval proportions between men and women, or across different age, race/ethnicity and religious groups, although support for euthanasia is somewhat less among born-again Christians.

Table 1
Should incurably ill patients have the right
to ask for and get life-ending medication?
(among California adults)

	<u>Should</u>	<u>Should not</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
February 2006	70%	23	7
2005	70%	22	8
1999	75%	20	5
1997	70%	26	4
1995	70%	22	8
1987	64%	27	9
1983	68%	24	8
1979	64%	27	9
<u>Registered voters</u>	<u>69%</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>10</u>
Democrats	80%	10	10
Republicans	59%	30	11
Non-partisans/others*	63%	28	9
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	73%	20	7
Female	67%	25	8
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 39	71%	21	8
40 – 64	70%	23	7
65 or older*	64%	27	9
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	70%	21	9
Latino	65%	31	4
Other*	78%	13	9
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	65%	26	9
Catholic	64%	31	5
Other/no preference	80%	13	7
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
Yes	54%	36	10
No	76%	18	6

* Small sample base.

Most would want to have doctor-assisted euthanasia as an option if they were terminally ill

Survey respondents were asked if they were terminally ill and were expected to die within six months whether they would want a doctor to assist them in dying. Statewide, 62% say they would while 33% would not. This is slightly lower than previous surveys, when between 67% and 72% of Californians said they themselves would like this option.

In the current survey Democrats (76%) are somewhat more likely to favor this alternative than Republicans (51%). Women are slightly less willing (58%) than men (65%) to want a doctor to assist them in dying.

Sub-groups of the population where somewhat smaller pluralities would choose this alternative include Latinos (51%), Protestants (56%), Catholics (54%) and born-again Christians (46%).

Table 2
If you yourself were terminally ill and expected to die within
six months, would you want your doctor to be able to
assist you in dying, if you requested it?
(among California adults)

	<u>Should</u>	<u>Should not</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
February 2006	62%	33	5
2005	68%	28	4
1999	72%	24	4
1997	67%	29	4
<u>Registered voters</u>	<u>64%</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>6</u>
Democrats	76%	17	7
Republicans	51%	42	7
Non-partisans/others*	62%	34	4
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	65%	30	5
Female	58%	37	5
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 39	64%	32	4
40 – 64	60%	33	7
65 or older*	59%	36	5
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	65%	29	6
Latino	51%	42	7
Other*	71%	28	1
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	56%	37	7
Catholic	54%	40	6
Other/no preference	76%	21	3
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
Yes	46%	44	10
No	67%	29	4

* Small sample base.

Support for patient-administered suicide bill

A bill currently in the California state legislature calls for allowing California residents who are terminally ill and declared mentally competent, and who have been evaluated by two physicians, to request a lethal prescription, which they themselves could administer to end their own lives. When asked about this proposed law, supporters outnumber opponents by a 57% to 34% margin among all adults, and by an even larger 63% to 28% margin among registered voters.

Most likely to support the law are registered Democrats (77%) and those affiliated with a non-Christian religion or who have no religious preference (76%). Latinos narrowly oppose the law, while born-again Christians and registered Republicans are closely divided.

Table 3
Opinion of a proposed law to allow terminally ill patients
to request a lethal prescription which they could
administer to end their own lives
(among California adults)

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Total adults	57%	34	9
<u>Registered voters</u>	<u>63%</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>9</u>
Democrats	77%	16	7
Republicans	47%	42	11
Non-partisans/others*	60%	30	10
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	61%	31	8
Female	53%	37	10
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 39	57%	35	8
40 – 64	59%	33	8
65 or older*	53%	37	10
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	64%	26	10
Latino	42%	50	8
Other*	62%	32	6
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	56%	37	7
Catholic	54%	40	6
Other/no preference	76%	21	3
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
Yes	46%	44	10
No	67%	29	4

* Small sample base.

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a telephone survey of Californians conducted in English and Spanish. Interviews were completed during the period February 12-26, 2006 among a representative sample of 500 California adults, including 337 registered voters.

Telephone households were sampled using a random digit dial methodology, which randomly selects operating landline telephone exchanges within all area codes serving California households in proportion to population. Within each exchange, a random sample of telephone numbers are created by adding random digits to the selected telephone exchange. This method gives each phone listing an equal chance of being elected and permits access to all landline telephone numbers both listed and unlisted.

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall adult sample have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points.

There are other 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 omission or errors in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

Questions Asked

Do you think an incurably ill patient should have the right to ask for and get medication that would painlessly end his or her life?

A bill in the state legislature calls for allowing California residents who are terminally ill and declared mentally competent, and who have been evaluated by two physicians, to request a lethal prescription, which they themselves would administer to end their own lives. Do you favor or oppose this new proposed law?

If you yourself were terminally ill and were expected to die within six months, would you want your doctor to be able to assist you in dying if you requested it?