

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

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WHILE AWARENESS IS VERY LOW, VOTERS REMAIN SUPPORTIVE OF THE RACIAL PRIVACY INITIATIVE.

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

The provisions described in the so-called Racial Privacy Initiative which will appear on the next statewide election ballot currently attracts more positive than negative reaction from prospective voters.

In a *Field Poll* completed April 1-6 among a representative statewide sample of 548 likely voters, about one-half (48%) responded that if an election were being held now they would vote to pass the measure. One-third (33%) said they would vote against the initiative and about one-fifth (19%) were undecided.

The official title of the initiative is "Classification by Race, Ethnicity, Color or National Origin." If enacted, it would block state and local governments from classifying people by their race for the purposes of education, contracting and employment.

The initiative is being spearheaded by Ward Connerly, a University of California Regent, who was the chief backer of Proposition 209, the anti-affirmative action initiative which was approved by California voters in the November 1996 election.

The Racial Privacy Initiative has been certified to appear on the next statewide ballot, which most likely will be March 2004. However, the measure could be voted on sooner, should a gubernatorial recall petition qualify for the ballot and a special statewide election were held later this year.

Trend of voter awareness and support

Last year there was considerable media publicity attendant to the Racial Privacy Initiative's signature-gathering phase. An April 2002 *Field Poll* found that about one-fourth (26%) of voters statewide reported having seen or heard something about it at that time. Since then, however, voter awareness of the initiative has receded, with just 11% now reporting some awareness of the measure.

Even though awareness has declined, when voters are read a summary of the initiative's official ballot wording, preferences have not changed during the past year. About half (48%) of registered voters now say they would vote Yes on the measure, 33% would vote No and 19% are undecided. One year ago the results were nearly identical – 48% Yes, 34% No and 18% undecided.

Table 1

**Trend of support/opposition to the Racial Privacy Initiative
(among likely voters)**

	<u>April 2003</u>	<u>April 2002</u>
Would vote YES	48%	48%
Would vote NO	33	34
Undecided	19	18

Subgroup preferences

There are significant differences in voter preferences across subgroups of the state's likely voter population on the Racial Privacy Initiative.

For example, while Republicans favor the initiative 60% to 22%, Democrats are opposed 41% to 37%. Voters under age 40 favor it more than two to one (54% to 28%), while seniors age 60 or older are 39% against and 35% are in favor. White non-Hispanics divide 49% Yes and 32% No, but Latinos are opposed, 42% No and 37% Yes. Conservatives support the initiative 57% to 26%, while liberals are opposed 45% to 35%. Voters living in Northern California outside the Bay Area are lining up in favor 54% to 29%, while San Francisco Bay Area voters split 41% in favor and 37% opposed.

Table 2
Voter reactions to a summary of the main provisions
of the Racial Privacy Initiative
(among likely voters)

	<u>Inclined to vote ...</u>		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
Statewide	48%	33	19
<u>Party</u>			
(.46) Democrats	37%	41	22
(.37) Republicans	60%	22	18
(.17) Non-partisans/others	50%	37	13
<u>Political ideology</u>			
(.36) Conservative	57%	26	17
(.43) Middle-of-the-road	47%	34	19
(.21) Liberal	35%	45	20
<u>Region</u>			
(.26) Los Angeles County	47%	37	16
(.32) Other Southern California	50%	30	20
(.24) San Francisco Bay Area	41%	37	22
(.18) Other Northern California	54%	29	17
<u>Gender</u>			
(.48) Men	53%	31	16
(.52) Women	43%	35	22
<u>Ethnicity</u>			
(.71) White non-Hispanic	49%	32	19
(.15) Latino*	37%	42	21
(.14) Other*	50%	34	16
<u>Age</u>			
(.32) 18-39	54%	28	18
(.40) 40-59	52%	33	15
(.28) 60 or older	35%	39	26

* Relatively small sample size.

Backers and opponents

In public comments reported last year when the initiative drive was being announced, Connerly said that gathering race data does not help people and cannot prove discrimination. He maintains that the government ought not to be profiling people and should be treating them as individuals. Further, he said the state should be blind to color just as it is to religion and sexual orientation.

Kevin Nguyen, who as head of the group funding Connerly's political action committee is listed as the official sponsor of the initiative, also reportedly said that the initiative provides an opportunity to unite the state. With the end of racial divisions, he posits, there would be a greater chance to end discrimination.

Critics say the Racial Privacy Initiative would cripple anti-discrimination efforts in law enforcement, public health, housing, education, banking and other areas. They point out that gathering racial and ethnic data can help the state spot racial disparities among whites, blacks, Hispanics and Asians, which can serve as evidence of discrimination.

Doctors say that diseases such as breast cancer, diabetes and asthma afflict each race differently. They are concerned that if race was eliminated from medical records, a disease cluster among one racial group would be obscured and delay treatment. And, this would adversely affect the work of public health professionals and the police.

Politically sensitive issue

In the 1994 election voters by a large margin approved another highly charged and racially sensitive initiative, Proposition 187, the measure that sought to severely cut back public services provided to illegal immigrants. While both the Prop. 187 election in 1994 and Prop. 209 anti-affirmative action campaign in 1996 were successful at the polls, many believe that their passage have had a negative long-term impact on the state Republican party, which has increasingly been seen by minority voters, especially Latinos, as less inclusive and more insensitive to their needs. Coupled with the growing number of ethnic Californians who are registered to vote, this is thought to have contributed to the greater success of Democrats in this state in recent elections.

Last year it was reported that the Racial Privacy Initiative could have potentially gathered enough signatures to qualify for the November 2002 general election ballot. However, according to sources, Connerly and other backers feared that the initiative would become another wedge issue polarizing voters and reducing the chances of Republican candidates in competitive gubernatorial and legislative contests. To forestall this possibility, the political speculation goes, Connerly deliberately sought to delay its qualification for the 2002 ballot and instead present the measure to voters in the March 2004 primary election, where it would have a lesser effect on statewide candidate races and could potentially benefit from the primary's smaller turnout of voters.

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The results in this report are based on a statewide survey of 548 Californians considered likely to vote in the next statewide election. The survey was completed during the period April 1-6, 2003 by telephone in English and Spanish. Subgroups reported in this release have the following sample sizes: Democrats (237), Republicans (197), non-partisans/others (114), Los Angeles County (139), other Southern California (169), San Francisco Bay Area (128), other Northern California (112), conservatives (199), middle-of-the-road (229), liberals (120), 18-39 (153), 40-59 (233), 60 or older (162), White non-Hispanic (386), Latinos (80), others (75), men (265) and women (283).

According to statistical theory 95% of the time results from the overall sample would have a sampling error of +/- 4.2 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?