

# 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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**ALTHOUGH AWARENESS IS LOW,  
VOTERS ARE INITIALLY SUPPORTIVE OF  
THE RACIAL PRIVACY INITIATIVE.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

California voters are initially lining up in favor of University of California Regent Ward Connerly's "Racial Privacy Initiative" by a nearly three to two margin. The proposed ballot initiative would block state and local governments from classifying people by their race for the purposes of public education, contracting and employment.

In a just-completed statewide *Field Poll* survey, a representative sample of likely voters was asked to react to a summary of the ballot wording of the proposed statewide initiative, which has a good chance of being on this year's November general election ballot. The division of sentiment is 48% in favor, 34% opposed, and 18% undecided.

The campaign group's official sponsor, the American Civil Rights Coalition, recently submitted 980,000 signatures in support of the initiative. Just 670,000 of those names have to be certified as legitimate for the measure to be placed before the voters. Election officials have until June 24 to review the signatures if the proposition is to appear on the November 2002 ballot. If the signature verification process is not completed by that date, the measure would be put over to the March 2004 primary election ballot.

### **Voters favor the initiative**

In the survey taken after the completion of the signature-gathering phase of the initiative and the publicity surrounding the announcement that almost a million signatures had been obtained, just 26% of the likely voters said that they had seen or heard something about it.

All voters, regardless of whether they had any prior knowledge of the ballot proposal, were then read a summary of the initiative's official ballot wording and asked how they would vote if the election were being held now.

The wording used by *The Field Poll* in posing the issue is as follows:

*“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 description, 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?”*

Overall, about half (48%) of likely voters statewide state they would be inclined to vote Yes in this setting, while about one-third (34%) are opposed.

Republicans initially favor the initiative by a greater than two-to-one margin (58% to 26%). A plurality of Democrats also favor the measure, but narrowly – 43% to 37%.

Conservatives also back the initiative by a greater than two-to-one margin, while a plurality of liberals are opposed. Middle-of-the-road voters, who account for 43% of the likely electorate, currently favor the initiative 49% to 30%.

White non-Hispanics and Latinos reacted positively to the measure by an identical 50% to 33% ratio. Black/African-American voters are evenly split – 42% in favor and 41% opposed. A small plurality of Asian and other voters opposes the proposition – 42% No and 35% Yes.

Men currently are backing the initiative five to three, while women support it by a narrower four-to-three margin.

Regionally, a plurality of Bay Area voters opposes the initiative (40% to 34%), while voters living in all other major areas of the state currently favor its passage.

There are also differences in voter preferences by the education level of voters. Those voters who have completed post-graduate level work currently oppose the Racial Privacy Initiative by a 50% to 32% margin. On the other hand, all those with a college education or less favor the initiative by a roughly five to three margin.

**Table 1**  
**Voter reactions to a summary of the main provisions**  
**of the Racial Privacy Initiative**  
**(among likely general election voters)**

	<u>Inclined to vote ...</u>		
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
Statewide	48%	34	18
<u>Party</u>			
(.47) Democrats	43%	37	20
(.37) Republicans	58%	26	16
(.16) Non-partisans/others*	42%	41	17
<u>Political ideology</u>			
(.31) Conservative	59%	26	15
(.43) Middle-of-the-road	49%	30	21
(.26) Liberal	34%	49	17
<u>Region</u>			
(.26) Los Angeles County	55%	30	15
(.30) Other Southern California	55%	31	14
(.16) Central Valley*	46%	35	19
(.22) San Francisco Bay Area	34%	40	26
(.06) Other Northern California*	45%	32	23
<u>Gender</u>			
(.46) Men	53%	33	14
(.54) Women	44%	34	22
<u>Ethnicity</u>			
(.70) White non-Hispanic	50%	33	17
(.16) Latino*	50%	33	17
(.06) Black/African-American*	42%	41	17
(.08) Asian/Other*	35%	42	23
<u>Age</u>			
(.12) 18-29*	51%	29	20
(.21) 30-39	42%	36	22
(.22) 40-49	45%	37	18
(.16) 50-59*	54%	30	16
(.29) 60 or older	50%	33	17
<u>Education</u>			
(.21) High school grad or less	50%	31	19
(.31) Some college/trade school	58%	25	17
(.27) College graduate work	50%	32	18
(.21) Post-graduate	32%	50	18
<u>Tenure</u>			
(.70) Homeowner	48%	37	15
(.30) Renter	52%	27	21

\* Small sample size.

### **Pro and con arguments**

In submitting the initiative's signatures, Connerly is reported to have said that "the state should be blind to color, just as it is to religion or sexual orientation." Kevin Nguyen, executive director of the American Civil Rights Coalition backing the initiative, was also quoted as saying, "the initiative is a unique and tremendous opportunity to unite the state and insist that we are all individuals and all Americans, not a Balkanized collection of hyphenated Americans. With the end of racial divisions, we could do a much better job of addressing discrimination."

Critics respond by saying that the ballot measure would jeopardize anti-discrimination efforts in law enforcement, public health, education, and other areas. Racial identification data helps the state to identify whether whites, blacks, Hispanics, Asians and American Indians are treated differently by everyone from loan officers and landlords to teachers and doctors.

A wire service report quoted one critic, Carmen Nevarez, a doctor and medical director at the Berkeley-based Public Health Institute as saying, "It's a little like burning books to me. Why would you take a piece of information that's useful and say it's against the law. Ailments such as breast cancer, diabetes, and asthma afflict each race differently. Eliminating race from the patient's chart could obscure a disease cluster among one racial group and delay its treatment."

### **Effect on 2002 political races**

If the Racial Privacy Initiative does appear on this year's November ballot, it will mark the third time in eight years when California voters have been asked to decide a controversial matter involving race and ethnicity. In each of the two previous cases, the ballot proposition fights had profound effects on the tenor of the candidate races on the same ballot.

In 1994, Republican Governor Pete Wilson endorsed Proposition 187, which reduced government services to illegal immigrants. That measure was approved by a big margin but its provisions were subsequently thrown out by the courts as unconstitutional. However, the campaign was very controversial and many political analysts believe that while Wilson's backing helped him win re-election at the time, his strong support of Proposition 187 served to damage the longer-term prospects of this state's Republican Party by alienating Latino voters in subsequent statewide elections.

Another race-related initiative involved Proposition 209, the anti-affirmative action measure sponsored by Connerly that was approved by voters in 1996. That initiative also roiled the political waters, with some of the effects still being felt.

Political analysts believe that many Democratic and Republican candidates for this year's state and congressional races are uncomfortable with the prospect of running in the same election as the Connerly initiative and possibly having to take a stand on the matter.

While Simon supporters favor the initiative by a large 61% to 25% margin, some Republican leaders are concerned that a Simon endorsement would make it more difficult to broaden his appeal to political moderates and minorities.

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

	<b>Total likely voters</b>	<b>Davis supporters</b>	<b>Simon supporters</b>	<b>Other/ Undecided</b>
<u>Inclined to vote...</u>				
Yes	48%	43%	61%	45%
No	34	40	25	33
Undecided	18	17	14	22

Davis appears to be in an even more delicate position. Right now the Governor's supporters are about evenly divided on the initiative. Therefore, whatever stand the Governor takes risks his alienating a considerate portion of his constituency.

It is not clear at this point when the initiative will be on the ballot. While Connerly had originally targeted the initiative for the November 2002 ballot, he now believes his chances would be better if it were voted on in a lower turnout primary election. It has been rumored that the Connerly group could have turned in enough signatures to pass the one million mark. If that had happened, state election officials would have likely used a simpler and less time consuming sampling method to determine whether there were enough legitimate signatures – virtually assuring that the signature verification process would be completed in time on the November 2002 ballot.

However, with the number of signatures submitted less than one million, this means that signatures will have to be validated individually until 670,000 valid signatures are confirmed. This process requires considerably more time, making less certain its prospects for winning a place on the November general election ballot.

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The results in this report are based on a statewide survey conducted April 19-25, 2002 among a representative sample of 546 California registered voters considered likely to vote in the November general election. The survey was completed by telephone in English and Spanish using a random digit dial sampling methodology.

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall likely voter sample would have a sampling error of +/- 4.5 percentage points, while sampling error estimates of subgroups would be larger. There are many possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sequencing or through undetected errors or omissions in sampling, interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such errors.

### **Questions Asked**

Have you seen, read or heard anything about a proposed statewide initiative 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**?