

What Is Proposition 16 that votes in California and divides Latinos, although it could benefit them

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Body

As of November 3, some 21 million California residents who are registered to vote participate in a historic election in the United States. Factors such as the great polarization in citizenship he chooses between re-electing President Donald Trump or thwarting his desire for a second term and bringing Democrat Joe Biden to the White House make many other issues on the ballot of different states go unnoticed. In the case of California, voters may say yes or no to 12 propositions.

His topics range from stem cells to Uber drivers, from property taxes of more than \$3 million to handling personal information, from youth voting to probation for nonviolent offenders. And among them stands out one because it is the most controversial: Proposition 16, which wants to put affirmative action back into force in the state.

Even among those potential beneficiaries, such as the huge Latino community, there are many doubts, both about the advantages and disadvantages of reinstalling the program. Because in the past California had affirmative action, where by which public institutions—like all levels of municipal governments—and also state universities could consider race, gender, and ethnicity as factors of special importance, to compensate for discrimination imbricated in society by taking staff, hiring, and accepting students. And in 1996 he revoked it with Proposition 209, which endorsed 54% of Californians.

Even among the potential beneficiaries of affirmative action, such as the huge Latino community, there are many doubts about reinstalling california's program until 1996. (Jenna Schoenefeld/The New York Times) (JENNA SCHOENEFELD/)

That measure, which proposition 16 today wants to reverse, was the epitome of an era of deep divisions. Gov. Pete Wilson, supported by other GOP leaders, pushed for an end to affirmative action in California and also two other questioned propositions supported by the electorate: the 187, which deprived undocumented immigrants of public services, and the 227, which banned bilingual education in public schools. They were measures that were described as anti-immigrant and anti-Latino at the time, and to this day they are seen as the most divisive in the history of the state.

The 209 inheritance was immediately seen. Income to state universities and hiring in public jobs stopped considering the impact that factors such as race, ethnicity, sex, and the country of origin could have on the history and merits of a candidate, and that's why they lowered tuition and employment in groups such as African Americans, Latinos, and natives.

However, from 1996 to 2016 "Latinos have become the largest ethnic group in the state, and their share of the electorate has doubled or more, up to about 23%," the Los Angeles Times said. That increase could be significant less than a week after the vote because in 1996 the majority of the 54% that approved proposition 209 was white:

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"A Poll of the Times' urn mouth at the time there that African-Americans, Latinos and Asians were overwhelmingly opposed to the measure, while whites were strongly in favor."

As of November 3, some 21 million California residents, registered to vote, may say yes or no to 12 proposals, in addition to electing president. (REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson) (LUCY NICHOLSON/)

However, there are other factors to consider. For example, white people vote more than Latinos: 65% versus 47 percent. Moreover, while Latinos make up 35% of the Californian population, they account for only 21% of potential voters, both because of their immigration status and a tendency to participate less in elections, according to the California Institute of Public Policy (PPIC).

Division between the Latinos themselves

Although 42 states have affirmative action practices in place, in many of them, as in those that did not vote for them, much is discussed whether a form of "positive discrimination"—as affirmative action is called in some places—is an effective path to eradicating unfair practices so rooted in society that they have become invisible. And Proposition 16 revived that debate in California, in general, and among Latinos in particular.

A survey released by the Latino Community Foundation reflected that among Latinos there is both strong approval and strong rejection of state public offices and universities re-taking into account, after 24 years of not being able to do so, elements such as ethnicity and gender when considering which workers they employ and which students guarantee entry. While the total in favor of proposition 16 reached 47% (19% without a doubt in favour and 28% somewhat in favour), the total against it stood at 44% (26% certainly against and 18% somewhat against).

On the other hand, when asked whether Proposition 16, which rejects 209, would be good or bad for the community, the vast majority of Latinos, 74%, said it would be good: for 36% it would be very good and for 38% it would be a good thing. So why the doubts, and especially the major division, when it comes to voting?

Christian Arana, political director of the Latino Community Foundation, said the Los Angeles Univision channel has difficulty understanding exactly what affirmative action is all about. "It's the way Proposition 16 is drafted," he argued. "The survey found that people are a little confused about the changes it's going to make exactly."

One of the questions deled into understanding the text to be voted on and revealed that only 39% of respondents could correctly describe the purpose of the initiative. But when people were told that because affirmative action was eliminated in 1996, Latinos are more than a third of the state but only one-fifth of students at the University of California increased their approval of Proposition 16.

Arguments for and against

From 1996 to 2016 Latinos have become the largest ethnic group in the state, and their share of the electorate has grown to about 23%. (REUTERS/Mike Blake) (MIKE BLAKE/)

Beyond the figures, ideas about affirmative action maintain the historical controversy that has accompanied them. A very basic summary would indicate that the possibility of creating programs that increase diversity by helping groups that fight against naturalized patterns of discrimination, such as women or Asians, can help reduce inequality and injustice, from the perspective of the opposite, but from the opposite they can legitimize a form of segregation that, even if it is called positive because it favors a group, disadvantages others.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom supports Proposition 16; Democratic vice presidential candidate Kamala Harris; Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein and Democratic Reps Nanette Barragán, Jimmy Gomez and Maxine Waters; Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti; the historic rural workers activist, Dolores Huerta; the Governing Board of the University of California, the Board governor of California Community College, and the California National Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

"Is this proposition the panacea? No, it's not, but it's a good step," Kevin de León, former pro-tempore president of the California Senate and a councillor for the 14th arrondissement of Los Angeles, explained to The Opinion. "It's not going to be enough to repeal 209: public policies, legislative measures and proactive actions are also required," he added.

Ideas about affirmative action are controversial: for some it can help reduce inequality and injustice, for others it can legitimize a different form of segregation.

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Those who oppose Proposition 16 include the California Republican Party, Orange County Board of Supervisory Board holder and Congressional candidate Michelle Steel, and the Alliance for Chinese-American Civic Action. For opponents, Proposition 209 ensures that public employment or college income is nothing more than the merits of candidates, regardless of why they have them or why others don't. If it were revoked and elements such as ethnicity or gender were considered in these decisions, a form of discrimination would be legalized, they argued.

In addition to considering that not all Latinos, African-Americans, Asians, natives or women are at a disadvantage, they ensure that local governments and universities can consider, without being obligatory, elements such as low resources or being the first generation in the country.

Less than a week after the election, a UC Berkeley poll indicated that Proposition 16 may not be approved. (REUTERS/Lucy Nicholson) (LUCY NICHOLSON/)

Ward Connerly, a former member of the State University Board of Directors, who defended proposition 209 24 years ago, told the Los Angeles Times that the 16 "goes against the idea that universities and public bodies should accept a person on the basis of their individual merit." Connerly compared the initiative to the favoritism that Hollywood stars and the rich receive about the recent red carpet scandals in college income. "Neither racial or ethnic preferences, nor the preferences of big shots, correspond to the public confidence we should have on the question of each person being treated fairly," he opined.

It is only a few days before it is known what Californians will decide about it, but a recent survey by Berkeley-based state university showed that Proposition 16, whether because of its lack of clarity in the wording or because of the controversy that the topic has historically generated, might not be approved: 38% of the prosicating said they would vote yes against the 49% who would choose no, and the key to the result seems to reside in 13% undecided.

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