

## Poll finds weak backing for affirmative action measure

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### Body

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A new poll shows weak support for a statewide ballot measure that would reinstate affirmation action programs in California and repeal a decades-old ban on preferential treatment by public colleges and other government agencies based on race, ethnicity or sex.

The Public Policy Institute of California poll released Wednesday night found that just 31% of likely California voters surveyed said they would vote for the proposal, Proposition 16, while 47% said they oppose it. The remainder, 22%, were undecided.

The poll provides a clear warning sign about the prospects of the proposition less than seven weeks before the Nov. 3 election and evidence that supporters have a lot of work to do before vote-by-mail ballots starting going out in early October, said Mark Baldassare, the institute's president and chief executive.

"Some explaining needs to be done if the proponents have any hopes of seeing this passed in November," Baldassare said. "People are hearing about this for the first time, not knowing where it came from, what it does, who is for it, who is against it."

The ballot measure, which the Legislature placed on the ballot in June, is a proposed amendment to the California Constitution that would repeal Proposition 209, a highly controversial measure approved by voters 24 years ago.

The 1996 measure, supported by then-Gov. Pete Wilson and championed by then-University of California Regent Ward Connerly, sharply divided Californians when it appeared on the ballot and has been a political flashpoint in the state ever since. It prohibited government bodies -- including the UC and California State University systems -- from granting preferential treatment to any individual or group based on race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin in public college admissions and government employment and contracting decisions.

According to the poll, Latino likely voters were evenly split over whether to reinstate government affirmative action programs under Proposition 16 -- with 41% in favor and an equal percentage opposed. Among white voters, 51% said they opposed the proposition, compared with 26% who favored it.

The poll did not provide a detailed breakdown of responses by race, but among those respondents who were neither white nor Latino, 40% supported the measure and 38% opposed it -- within the poll's margin of error.

Republicans overwhelmingly opposed Proposition 15 -- 72%.

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While a plurality of Democrats, 47%, supported the measure, a slim majority were opposed or undecided.

Baldassare suspects that many California voters are unaware of the history of the issue in California as well as the intent of the proposition.

"It seems many people might need a history lesson on Proposition 209 passing in 1996 ... and some clarity on what it does," he said.

A UC Berkeley study released in August found that California's ban on affirmative action significantly harmed Black and Latino students by reducing their enrollment at UC campuses as well as lowering their graduation rates and driving down wages when they entered the workforce. In June, the UC Board of Regents unanimously supported a repeal of Proposition 209.

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