

## Proposition 16 and Debates About Racial Equity; California Today

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**Highlight:** Wednesday: A deeper dive into the way the debates over ballot propositions reflect Californians' views on race.

### Body

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Wednesday: A deeper dive into the way the debates over ballot propositions reflect Californians' views on race.

Good morning.

In the presidential race, California's 55 electoral votes will almost certainly go to Joseph R. Biden Jr. But Californians have one way of weighing in on questions of national importance — and most likely shaping those conversations for the rest of the country going forward.

Yes, I am once again asking you to think about ballot propositions.

[Read an overview of the statewide ballot.]

While, certainly, the state's ballot initiative system allows for deep-pocketed people (or corporations) with very particular interests to put questions directly to voters, in other instances, it's the state's Legislature putting the measures up for vote.

Such is the case with Proposition 16, which would reverse a ban on considering race, gender or ethnicity in public university admissions and public contracting that was enacted by California voters with a ballot measure in 1996. In other words, it would allow for affirmative action.

In June — about a month after George Floyd was killed in Minneapolis, leading to a nationwide examination of racial inequity in all kinds of institutions — California lawmakers voted to support reversing the ban, sending the question back to the ballot.

Support was widespread among legislators, who had recently seen their constituents pour into the streets, calling for racial justice.

Proponents of reversing the ban say data over the last two decades has shown that it's hurt Black, Latino and Indigenous students in particular; those groups have long been far underrepresented at the state's most prestigious universities.

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As The Los Angeles Times reported recently, if Proposition 16 passes, it would foster state and local programs that could help Black-, Latino-, Asian- and women-owned businesses regain a foothold in the state's multibillion-dollar procurement system.

The measure's "Yes" campaign has endorsements from the governor and top public university officials, and has raised more than \$16 million, compared with just more than \$1 million on the "No" side.

And yet, it's not polling well.

Karthick Ramakrishnan, associate dean of U.C. Riverside's School of Public Policy and director of A.A.P.I. Data, told me that many voters may not know what's at stake, since for more than two decades, it's been verboten in California to consider race, ethnicity or gender in order to boost access to education and work for groups that have been excluded by biased systems.

"Many of these new voters have no idea what affirmative action is," he said.

[Read more about how the incoming chancellor of the Cal State system sees Proposition 16.]

Also, voters who have been active in Black Lives Matter protests "might not be making that connection more generally to systems of racial inequality," Mr. Ramakrishnan said. Voters seem to more closely associate criminal justice reform with combating racism.

That theory will be tested in some of the other ballot measures, including Proposition 20, which proposes cracking back down on some types of crime, and Proposition 25, which would abolish cash bail.

But there are also misconceptions about who is likely to support or oppose Proposition 16, he said.

Opponents of Proposition 16 — including Ward Connerly, the Black businessman who led support for Proposition 209, the 1996 measure that enacted the ban — say that giving preferential treatment to any group is discrimination. Admission to competitive universities, or access to jobs, they say, is a zero-sum game that will force some groups to lose out, although explicit race-based quotas were effectively barred by the Supreme Court more than 40 years ago.

Because Asian-American applicants have become the faces of high-profile legal battles with Ivy League universities over their use of race-conscious admissions, many may assume that opposition to Proposition 16 would be widespread among Asian-American voters in California.

The reality, as Mr. Ramakrishnan and his colleague Jennifer Lee wrote in a recent post on the A.A.P.I. Data site, is much more complicated.

Asian-American voters were significantly more likely to support Proposition 16 than white voters and significantly less likely to oppose it than Latino voters. They were most likely to say they didn't know or were undecided.

That speaks to looming debates about how broad support for addressing racism in theory will translate into policy, Mr. Ramakrishnan said.

"One of the big questions after this election — regardless of who wins," he said, "will be how much appetite there's going to be to prioritize racial equity in the recovery."

Find information about all the propositions, including who's putting money behind which side. [CalMatters | The Los Angeles Times | SFGate | Official voter information guide]

Read more about the election:

- California had accepted more than 4.2 million vote-by-mail ballots as of Monday. But the state is still expecting lots of people to vote in person. Here's what will happen if voters refuse to wear a mask. (Spoiler: They won't be turned away.) [The Los Angeles Times]

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[See The Times's full voter guide for Californians, with information about how, when and where to cast your ballot.]

- Some are Democrats facing Republicans, hoping to further tighten the party's iron grip on the Capitol. Others are Democrat-on-Democrat fights. Here are the most important races for the State Legislature. [Politico]
- False political news in Spanish is pitting Latino voters against the Black Lives Matter movement. [The New York Times]

(This article is part of the California Today newsletter. Sign up to get it by email.)

Here's what else to know today

- A court ruled that San Quentin State Prison hasn't been able to manage a deadly Covid-19 outbreak and that it must cut its population by releasing or transferring about 1,700 inmates. [CBS SF]

Read more about how one decision at San Quentin fueled an outbreak. [The New York Times]

- San Francisco has moved into the least restrictive yellow tier in the state's system, which allows some smaller theme parks and stadiums to reopen. [KQED]
- While San Francisco moved forward significantly, San Diego County narrowly escaped being moved back into the most restrictive tier. It was one of the counties to start in the state's new system in the red tier. [The San Diego Union-Tribune]

If you missed it, here's what to know about the state's tiered reopening plan. [The New York Times]

Read more about requirements for reopening large theme parks. (The county where they're located must be in the yellow tier, which means that Disneyland is still a ways out.) [The New York Times]

- San Francisco is preparing to send teams of fire and health professionals — not the police — to respond to calls about people in crisis. It's a major shift and will be a closely watched experiment. [NPR]
- A lack of a night patrol delayed a response to the devastating Conception scuba boat fire that killed 34 people last year off the Santa Barbara coast. [The New York Times]
- In a much-anticipated lawsuit, the Justice Department accused Google of illegally protecting its monopoly over search and search advertising. Read all about it. [The New York Times]

And Finally ...

Baseball's most powerful agent thinks the World Series should always be held at a neutral site; it would give it more pageantry, like the Super Bowl.

The fans who watched, drive-in style at Dodger Stadium, as their Dodgers crushed the Tampa Bay Rays on Tuesday night might have other thoughts.

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Jill Cowan grew up in Orange County, graduated from U.C. Berkeley and has reported all over the state, including the Bay Area, Bakersfield and Los Angeles — but she always wants to see more. Follow along here or on Twitter.

California Today is edited by Julie Bloom, who grew up in Los Angeles and graduated from U.C. Berkeley.

PHOTO: The U.C.L.A. campus. (PHOTOGRAPH BY Hunter Kerhart for The New York Times FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

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