

# Will California Restore Affirmative Action?

Probably Not

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*As everyone knows, over the last couple of decades California has become a one-party Democratic state. Democrats hold a better than three-fourths hyper-majority in the State Assembly and their control is nearly as overwhelming in the State Senate. California has our nation's largest Congressional delegation, and of its 53 members only seven are Republican.*

Not only is every statewide officeholder a Democrat, but no Republican has won such a race in almost 15 years, with many of the recent contests not even featuring a Republican on the November ballot. The once-proud Republican Party of Reagan and Nixon has been reduced to almost total irrelevance.

This same pattern has held in national elections, with Donald Trump losing the 2016 California vote by a remarkable 30 points and the most recent polling data suggesting a similar outcome this November.

Except for tiny Hawaii, California is now America's most heavily non-white state, with our white European population reduced to little more than 30% of the total. But such demographic factors explain only part of those lop-sided 2016 election results since white Californians supported Trump at a rate 20-25 points lower than whites in the rest of the country. If America's entire white national electorate had voted like its Golden State counterpart, Trump would have lost all fifty states, mostly by huge landslides, and suffered by far the greatest electoral disaster in American history. All the Trump-hating pundits would have spent Election Night laughing and saying "I told you so!"

Although liberal domination of California state politics is not quite as absolute as Democratic control, the state is certainly very liberal, with our elected officials supporting all sorts of causes and policies that would be anathema in much of the rest of the country.

Given these political realities and expecting a heavy November turnout, state Democratic leaders believed they had the perfect opportunity this year to undo one of the last hated legacies of Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, the Prop. 209 ban on governmental Affirmative Action, passed into law by a relatively narrow 55% to 45% margin in 1996. Democrats felt quite confident that a full generation of demographic and ideological shifts had totally transformed the electorate, allowing them to win a resounding victory for "racial diversity" at the ballot box.

The plan to restore Affirmative Action became an unstoppable political juggernaut, with the Assembly voting 60-14 and the Senate 30-10 to place Prop. 16 on the November ballot, repealing Prop. 209. The project enjoyed the strong support of popular Gov. Gavin Newsom and nearly all other prominent political leaders, as well as the unanimous backing of the UC

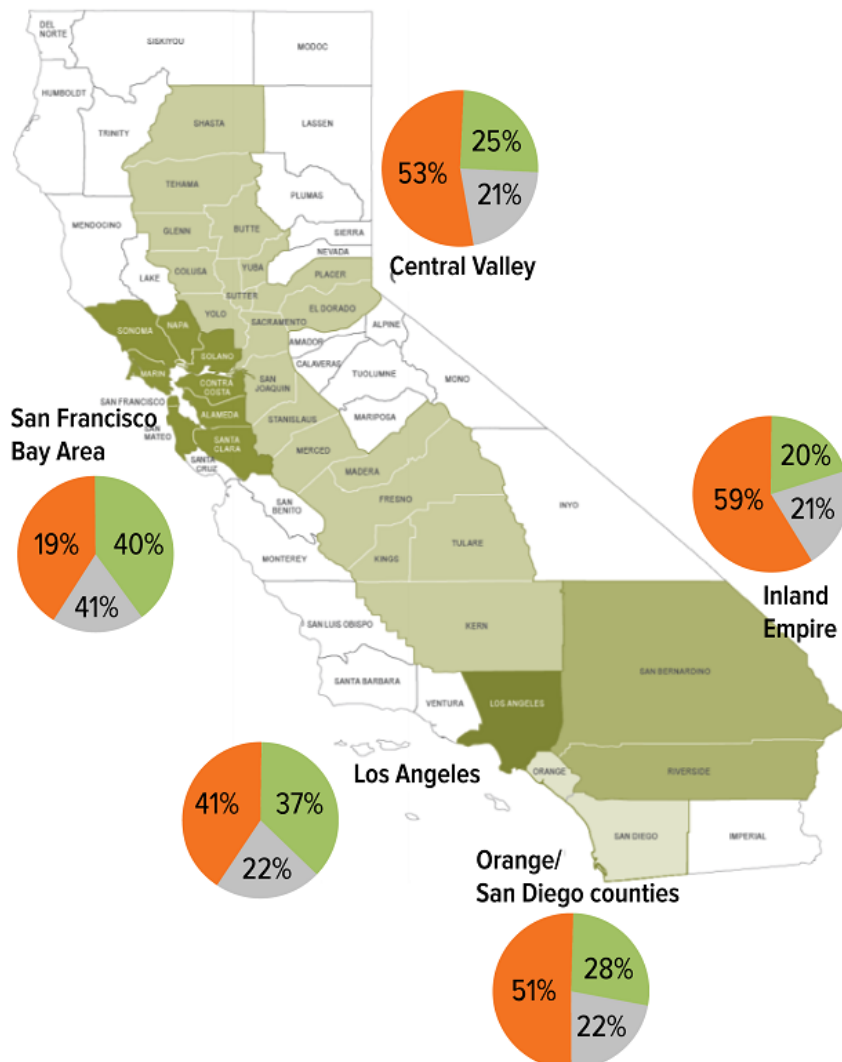
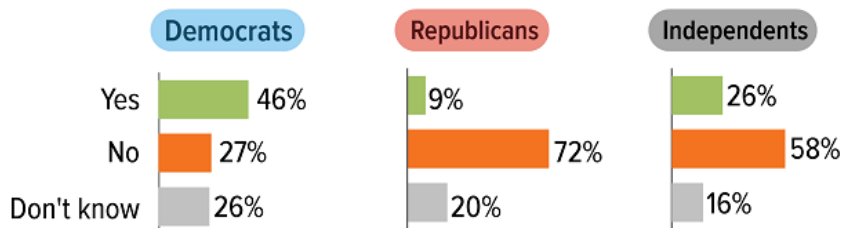
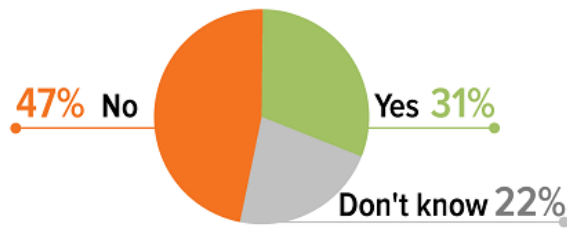
Board of Regents and the heads of all three public higher education systems. Leading sports teams such as the San Francisco Giants and the Golden State Warriors added their endorsements.

California's Attorney-General is a liberal Democrat, and his office provided what seemed like a slam-dunk official title description for the ballot measure: "Allows Diversity as a Factor in Public Employment, Education, and Contracting Decisions." In this day and age, what California voter could possibly oppose "Diversity"?

So much for theory. PPIC, California's leading public policy thinktank, just released [the first major poll](#) on the November vote, and our morning newspapers [revealed](#) that the attempt to restore Affirmative Action [will probably lose](#), perhaps even by a huge landslide.

The traditional rule in California politics is that support for a ballot measure steadily declines as Election Day approaches, with undecideds overwhelmingly breaking No. Therefore, at this stage a successful measure should probably have a lead of at least 10 points. For example, experts believe that Prop. 15—a split-roll tax initiative—appears to be in trouble given its weak 51% support.

Proposition 16 is called the ‘Allows Diversity as a Factor in Public Employment, Education, and Contracting Decisions. Legislative Constitutional Amendment.’ If the election were held today, would you vote yes or no on Proposition 16?



Source: PPIC Statewide Survey September 2020  
Chart by Yuxuan Xie

EdSource

Meanwhile, only 31% of voters are currently backing Prop. 16, aimed at restoring Affirmative Action. Anything might still happen, but those are dismal numbers just a couple of weeks before ballots are mailed out.

The demographic distribution of support also tells an interesting story. Whites are probably one-third or less of California residents, but for reasons of age and naturalization, they still constitute a slight majority of likely voters, and only 26% of whites support Prop. 16. It appears that most white California Democrats refuse to support Affirmative Action.

Latinos are California's largest group, currently representing 40% of the total population and perhaps eventually rising to an outright majority according to some projections. Only 41% of Latinos seem to support Affirmative Action.

Asians have been the group most strongly opposed to the restoration of Affirmative Action, fearing that racial discrimination would exclude their children from Berkeley, UCLA, and other top UC campuses, and a few years ago their vocal opposition had blocked a previous attempt to repeal Prop. 209. PPIC polls normally break out their Asian numbers, but in this instance Asians and blacks were lumped together, registering a combined 40% support for Prop. 16. Perhaps PPIC feared that revealing Asians (and blacks) as extreme outliers on this divisive issue would produce bitter feelings. Since Asian respondents outnumbered blacks by more than 2-to-1 and probably showed very little support for Prop. 16, it seems likely that black support for Affirmative Action was overwhelming, probably in the 60-70% range.

The low level of Hispanic support for Affirmative Action may surprise many rightwingers, but it makes perfect sense. The overwhelming majority of Hispanics work in the private sector, often in small businesses where most or all of the other employees are also Hispanic. If you and most of your coworkers are Hispanic, Affirmative Action is simply meaningless.

Prop. 209 had required color-blind university admissions since 1996, but Hispanic students have nonetheless still done rather well over the last couple of decades, actually overtaking whites in University of California admissions [a few years ago](#), though still heavily outnumbered by Asians at Berkeley and UCLA. Hispanic families seem quite satisfied with this situation, and have provided no grassroots support for restoring Affirmative Action in university admissions.

With the exception of a tiny sliver of "professional Hispanics" who have made an entire career out of their ethnicity, Affirmative Action has never historically been much of a Hispanic issue. Indeed, [I once noted](#) the strong support Pete Wilson had received in his first 1990 campaign for governor.

Although Hispanic and Asian numbers had been growing steadily for years, their support for Republicans had been growing as well, and by the early 1990s, a GOP candidate could regularly expect to receive around one-third or more of the Hispanic vote and half that of the Asian. For example, Pete Wilson's narrow 1990 gubernatorial victory over Dianne Feinstein, which significantly relied upon his criticism of "racial quotas," was achieved with 53 percent of the white vote, 47 percent of the Hispanic vote, and 58 percent of the Asian vote according to the prestigious California Field Poll used by the New York Times, though others placed his ethnic totals lower.

By contrast, the issue has always been heavily associated with blacks, who represent just

6% of California's population but nonetheless still seem to receive a greatly disproportionate share of the high-profile "diversity" slots, including the vast financial rewards of plum positions in Hollywood and Silicon Valley.

Political analysts seemed quite surprised by the PPIC poll results, including the low Latino support for Affirmative Action. But they should have remembered the blue-collar Reagan Democrats of the 1980s, who turned against their traditional political party over similar issues. Perhaps over the last generation, more and more Latinos have come to associate "diversity" with stories of friends or relatives sometimes unfairly losing promotions to blacks whom they regarded as less competent.

For obvious reasons, these sorts of "politically-incorrect" private sentiments may not be readily apparent to our political elites, Latino or otherwise. Such individuals spend their time ensconced in the State Capital, working with liberal lobbyists, donors, and political operatives, who provide an entirely different view of the world. And as a result, certain polling numbers may continue to mystify them.

Back in the mid-1990s I remember having lunch with Pat Buchanan in DC. At one point, I mentioned that America's rapidly-growing Hispanic population had an obvious and natural political leader, based upon such strong affinities in political ideology, cultural traits, personal background, and religion. But fate took a different turn, and Buchanan missed playing his historic role.

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