

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

Field Research Corporation

601 California Street, Suite 210
San Francisco, CA 94108-2814
(415) 392-5763 FAX: (415) 434-2541
EMAIL: fieldpoll@field.com
www.field.com/fieldpollonline

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STRONG VOTER SUPPORT FOR THE "END OF LIFE OPTION ACT."

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By Mark DiCamillo, Director, *The Field Poll*

A new statewide *Field Poll* finds broad voter support for the "End of Life Option Act" recently approved by the state legislature that was signed into law by the Governor yesterday. The law allows doctors in California the right to prescribe life-ending drugs that would give terminally ill patients the right to end their own lives. Two in three voters in the poll (65%) favor the new law, while 27% are opposed.

Support is broad-based and spans nearly all major subgroups of the state's voting population. The subgroups displaying strongest support – with seven in ten or more in favor – are liberals, white non-Hispanics, voters with no religious preference or those affiliated with a non-Christian religion, Democrats, and no party preference voters. But, the law is also supported by majorities of Protestants and Catholics, as well as registered Republicans. Least likely to support the bill are political conservatives and born-again Christians.

The current survey also updated a more generic trend question about euthanasia that *The Field Poll* has been including on its periodic surveys of the California public for over thirty-five years. Results show that the proportion of voters who favor allowing terminally ill patients the right to ask for and get life-ending medication (71%) is very similar to levels of support found in each of five previous polls dating back to 1995.

Broad-based support for California's End of Life Option Act

Voters in this survey were read the following summary of the law:

"The state legislature recently approved a bill that allows California residents who are terminally ill and declared mentally competent, and who have been evaluated by two physicians and have submitted written requests to receive a lethal prescription, which they themselves would administer to end their own lives. Do you favor or oppose this new law?"

The results show that 65% of voters statewide favor the law, 27% are opposed and 8% have no opinion.

Support is bipartisan, and includes 70% of both Democrats and no party preference registrants, as well as 55% of Republicans. About two in three both male (67%) and female voters (64%) back the bill. In addition, majorities of voters across all age and racial/ethnic voter segments favor the law.

Support also spans all religious subgroups, with 58% of Protestants and 55% of Catholics in favor. This increases to include over three in four voters affiliated with other religions or having no religious preference. Least likely to support the proposed law are voters who identify themselves as born-again Christians (41%) and political conservatives (47%).

Table 1 Voter opinions of the "End of Life Option Act" allowing terminally ill Californians to receive a lethal prescription to end their own lives (among registered voters)			
	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
Total statewide	65%	27	8
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	70%	23	7
Republicans	55%	39	6
No party preference/other	70%	21	9
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Conservative	47%	47	6
Middle-of-the-road	69%	22	9
Liberal	79%	15	6
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	67%	25	8
Female	64%	29	7
<u>Age</u>			
18-39	66%	25	9
40-64	66%	28	6
65 or older	62%	28	10
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	70%	22	8
Latino	56%	37	7
All others	64%	32	4
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	58%	33	7
Catholic	55%	40	5
Other religions*	78%	14	8
No religious preference	78%	13	9
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
Yes	41%	50	9
No	73%	20	7

* Small sample size.

Trend of California public opinion toward physician-assisted suicide

The Field Poll has been measuring California public opinion on the issue of physician-assisted suicide for over thirty-five years. Between the period 1979-1987, support for granting incurably ill patients the right to ask for and get life-ending medication exceeded two to one. Since then, support has grown, with nearly every survey showing the proportion in favor exceeding those opposed greater than three to one.

The current survey finds 71% of voters in favor of granting incurably ill patients this right, while only 22% are opposed. These findings are very similar to levels of support found in each of five previous polls dating back to 1995.

Table 2 Trend of California public opinion regarding whether incurably ill patients should have the right to ask for and get life-ending medication			
	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
October 2015	71%	21	8
2006	70%	23	7
2005	70%	22	8
1999	75%	20	5
1997	70%	26	4
1995	70%	22	8
1987	64%	27	9
1983	68%	24	8
1979	64%	27	9

Note: Current 2015 poll conducted among California registered voters, while previous surveys were asked of the California adult population.

Note: This story has been updated since Gov. Brown signed the bill into law.

Information About The Survey

Methodological Details

The findings come from a *Field Poll* completed September 17-October 4, 2015 among 1,002 registered voters in California. In order to cover a broad range of issues and minimize voter fatigue, the questions in this report are based on a random subsample of 504 registered voters.

Interviews were administered by telephone using live interviewers in English and Spanish. Individual voters were sampled at random from listings derived from the statewide voter registration rolls. Once a voter's name and telephone number had been selected, interviews were attempted with voters on their landline or cell phone depending on the source of the listing from the voter file and the preference of the voter. In this survey 787 of the interviews were completed with voters on their cell phones, while 215 were completed on a landline or other phone.

Up to six attempts were made to reach, screen and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. After the completion of interviewing, the sample was weighted to align it to the proper distribution of voters by race/ethnicity and other demographic, geographic and party registration characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size and the percentage distributions being examined. The maximum sampling error for results from the overall registered voter sample in this report is +/- 4.5 percentage points. These estimates are based on survey findings in the middle of the sampling distribution (i.e., results at or near 50%). Percentages at or near either end of the tail of the distributions (i.e., results closer to 10% or 90%) have somewhat smaller margins of error. There are other potential sources of error in surveys of public opinion besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of this survey sought to minimize these other possible errors.

The Field Poll was established in 1947 as *The California Poll* by Mervin Field. The *Poll* has operated continuously since then as an independent, non-partisan survey of California public opinion. *The Field Poll* receives financial support from leading California newspapers and television stations, who purchase the rights of first release to *Field Poll* reports in their primary viewer or readership markets. The *Poll* also receives funding from the University of California and California State University systems, who receive the data files from each *Field Poll* survey shortly after its completion for teaching and secondary research purposes, as well as from foundations, non-profit organizations, and others as part of the *Poll's* policy research sponsor program.

Questions Asked

Do you think an incurably ill patient should have the right to ask for and get medication that would painlessly end his or her life?

The state legislature recently approved a bill that allows California residents who are terminally ill and declared mentally competent, and who have been evaluated by two physicians and have submitted written requests to receive a lethal prescription, which they themselves would administer to end their own lives. Do you favor or oppose this new law?