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## **49% of California voters back legalizing pot, poll finds**

**With 48% opposed, legalization effort faces a difficult challenge, pollster says.**

By John Hoeffel, Los Angeles Times

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Californians likely to vote in November are evenly split over whether to legalize marijuana, with only a small percentage of the electorate still undecided about the controversial issue, according to a poll conducted last week by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California.

The poll, which surveyed 1,168 likely voters, found that 49% think marijuana use should be made legal, 48% do not and 3% do not know, suggesting that the proponents of the legalization measure will have to wage an expensive and persuasive campaign.

Mark Baldassare, the institute's president and pollster, said the results show the legalization campaign faces serious challenges: "It's always hard to start out when you're not even at 50%."

The Tax Cannabis 2010 campaign, which sponsored the initiative, also released a poll Wednesday that found a similar level of support for the measure among registered voters, but with a much higher percentage undecided. Conducted earlier this month by an independent firm, the survey showed 51% of 800 voters support the initiative, while 40% oppose it and 9% are undecided.

"All the polls continue to show that voters remain interested in replacing a failed policy with a more honest, commonsense solution," said Dan Newman, a campaign spokesman.

The campaign's poll also found that about three-quarters of voters say California should control marijuana like alcohol or tobacco. High percentages also say that the initiative would raise tax revenue and save the state money. The initiative would allow cities and counties to legalize and tax marijuana sales.

"That might be an angle," Baldassare said. "What puts this in the range of the possible in the current context is: What does it have to offer in terms of relief of the budget problems?"

John Lovell, a lobbyist for law enforcement organizations who has organized an opposition campaign, said the institute's poll was "very bad news" for legalization proponents. "That means they are not even winning the philosophical argument," he said.

He said his effort, Public Safety First, would inform voters about the drawbacks to legalization. "Once they learn more, then the initiative will go down to a substantial defeat," he predicted.

The institute's poll also examined how different groups of Californians tend to view legalization.

Men favor it; women oppose it. Whites are supportive, while Latinos are not. Voters 54 years and younger support legalization, older voters do not. Support for legalization also increases with income and education.

Democrats and independents back legalization, but Republicans heavily oppose it.

Voters are split in Los Angeles County and the Central Valley, while support is high in the Bay Area and low in Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego counties.