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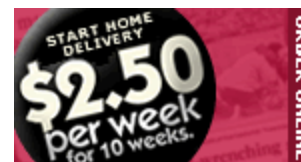
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## Politics

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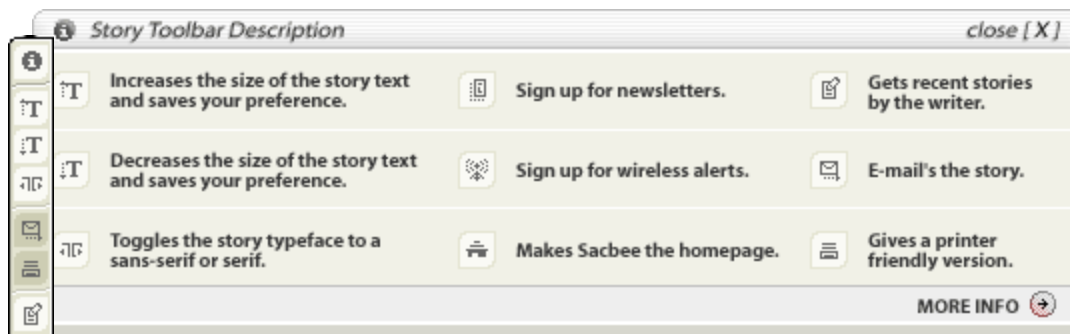
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### Support for lower vote threshold on budget has big 'if'

Voters oppose the idea by itself but warm to it as part of bigger package.

**By John Hill -- Bee Capitol Bureau**  
*Published 2:15 a.m. PDT Thursday, September 18, 2003*

More than six in 10 California voters back a proposed ballot measure that would lower the voting threshold for passing budgets and raising taxes and hold lawmakers more accountable in the process, according to a statewide poll released Wednesday.

But they are far more skeptical of the proposal if they are told only of the voting threshold provisions -- which will be the focus of the opposition campaign.



The initiative, likely to be on the March ballot, would reduce the percentage of lawmakers' votes required by the state constitution to pass a budget and related tax measures from two-thirds to 55 percent. The California secretary of state's office has until Oct. 23 to verify the signatures submitted last month.

The measure would also halt paychecks to lawmakers and the governor if they failed to approve the budget by the constitutional deadline of June 15. Legislators would not be allowed to leave town or consider other bills until the budget was passed, unless the governor declared an emergency.

The Field Poll released Wednesday asked one group of registered voters if they would vote for the proposition with all its provisions, including lowering the vote required to pass the budget. Another group was asked only if they would support an initiative that lowered the vote threshold.

The two questions resulted in dramatically different results. With all the provisions, 61 percent said they were inclined to vote in favor and 38 percent were against.

With just the vote threshold provision, 38 percent were in favor and 44 percent against.

"I think voters want a comprehensive package in making legislators more accountable for a timely and responsible budget," said Anthony Wright, one of the organizers of the initiative, which is backed by public employee unions, local governments and advocates of people who get state services. "People realize there's no one solution to our budget woes."

But Larry McCarthy, president of the California Taxpayers' Association, drew a much different conclusion. The association is leading the opposition to the initiative.

McCarthy said the poll shows that most voters don't like the core public policy change contained in the initiative.

"They put all this window dressing on their real object, which is to make it easier to raise taxes in California," he said. "We think that when voters understand that this initiative is only about raising taxes, there will be a strong negative reaction."

The state budget has regularly been late as the Democrats and Republicans haggle over spending and taxes. Proponents of the initiative argue that it would allow the majority party to get the budget passed on time and then suffer the heat if voters don't like it. Opponents say it would break down a crucial safeguard against runaway taxes.

The telephone survey of 649 voters was conducted Sept. 3-7 and has a sampling error of plus or minus 5.8 percentage points.

Also Wednesday, one of the groups supporting the budget initiative picketed outside a state building against coming layoffs of state workers. The California State Employees Association said the layoffs, a probable result of the budget signed last month, will result in longer lines at Department of Motor Vehicle offices, delays in highway projects and slower service for people who depend on state programs.

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#### About the Writer

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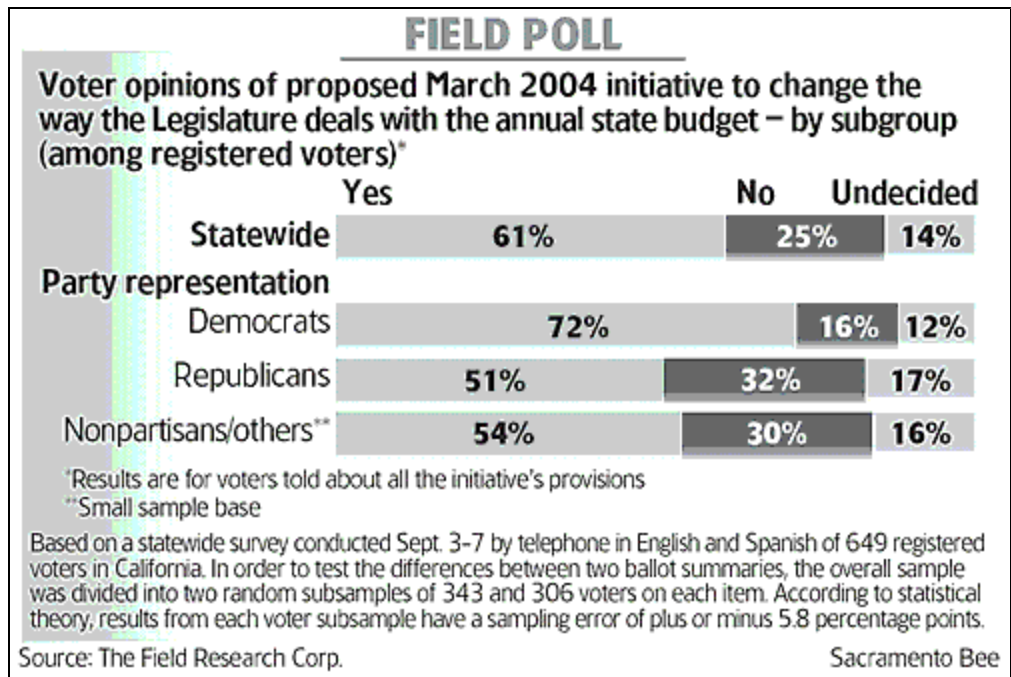
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