

## The People's Support of I&R

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By Alan Lindsey <sup>1</sup>

In 1999-2000, Portrait of America (POA) conducted a series of statewide telephone polls that asked voters if the initiative and referendum (I&R) process was good public policy. POA also conducted a national survey for the Initiative & Referendum Institute (IRI) in the spring of 2001 that asked voters nationally how they felt about the initiative and referendum process. In every case, POA found a majority of voters favor I&R. In fact, only four states had support under 55% (see chart below).

In every state, I&R supporters outnumbered opponents by at least 30% and in 17 states supporters outnumbered opponents by more than 50%. In five states the spread was 60% or more.

In the 24 states where the I&R process already exists, support is significantly higher than in the 26 states that do not have a statewide initiative process. On average, support was 8% higher in states that have I&R. Additionally, POA looked at the opposition to the initiative process and found it was five points lower among people who lived in initiative states than in non-initiative states.

One of the most interesting findings was the correlation between the level of support for I&R and the number of initiatives that appeared on the ballot. States that used the process more frequently in the four years before the survey have higher levels of support for I&R than states where the process was used less frequently. This finding would seem to be at odds with pundits who say voters are overwhelmed by a large number of issues on the ballot and hence dislike the initiative process.

Among states where voters used the initiative process 15 to 29 times, supporters outnumbered opponents by an average of 61%. In states where the process was used three to nine times, the average difference fell to 54% and where two or fewer initiatives were on the ballot the average difference was only 47%.

Where 15 to 29 issues made the ballot support averaged 72%. Where three to nine issues made the ballot support averaged 68%. Where less than two issues made the ballot support averaged only 61%.

The trend is also seen in opposition to I&R. In states with the most citizen-sponsored measures on the ballot (15-29) opposition was only 12%. The group in the middle (3-9 measures) averaged 14% opposition and the group at the bottom (0-2 measures) averaged 16% opposition.

The polling data suggests that greater use of I&R fosters support for the process. POA looked at the results from several perspectives and considered the mean averages cited above as well as the median averages. POA also evaluated the minimum and maximum values in each category. By every measure, support is significantly higher among

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<sup>1</sup> Portrait of America (POA) is a non-profit polling firm. POA President Alan Lindsay has been featured in the national media and is well known for seeking public opinion on many timely and controversial topics of national interest. For more information contact Alan at [alan@portraitofamerica.com](mailto:alan@portraitofamerica.com) or at (919) 280-4342.

I&R states. The 1999-2001 surveys conclusively demonstrate that the experience of voting on initiatives and referendum actually increases support for the process.

### Portrait of America 1999-2000 Statewide Polling <sup>2</sup>

**“In many states, citizens can place initiatives on the ballot by collecting petition signatures. If a majority of voters approve the initiative on Election Day, it becomes law. Is this a good idea?”**

| State          | Percent Yes | Percent No | Percent Differential |
|----------------|-------------|------------|----------------------|
| Alabama        | 57          | 18         | 39                   |
| Alaska         | 70          | 14         | 56                   |
| Arizona        | 71          | 12         | 59                   |
| Arkansas       | 67          | 12         | 55                   |
| California     | 74          | 11         | 63                   |
| Colorado       | 71          | 12         | 59                   |
| Connecticut    | 63          | 16         | 47                   |
| Delaware       | 56          | 21         | 35                   |
| Florida        | 62          | 18         | 44                   |
| Georgia        | 61          | 18         | 43                   |
| Hawaii         | 62          | 20         | 42                   |
| Idaho          | 67          | 16         | 51                   |
| Illinois       | 57          | 18         | 39                   |
| Indiana        | 59          | 17         | 42                   |
| Iowa           | 51          | 19         | 32                   |
| Kansas         | 61          | 16         | 45                   |
| Kentucky       | 61          | 16         | 45                   |
| Louisiana      | 52          | 22         | 30                   |
| Maine          | N/A         | N/A        | N/A                  |
| Maryland       | 66          | 15         | 51                   |
| Massachusetts  | 68          | 14         | 54                   |
| Michigan       | 65          | 16         | 49                   |
| Minnesota      | 61          | 16         | 45                   |
| Mississippi    | 58          | 18         | 40                   |
| Missouri       | 61          | 14         | 47                   |
| Montana        | 69          | 15         | 54                   |
| Nebraska       | 65          | 13         | 52                   |
| Nevada         | 74          | 12         | 62                   |
| New Hampshire  | 61          | 16         | 45                   |
| New Jersey     | 66          | 17         | 49                   |
| New Mexico     | 60          | 19         | 41                   |
| New York       | 54          | 20         | 34                   |
| North Carolina | 52          | 21         | 31                   |
| North Dakota   | 66          | 12         | 54                   |
| Ohio           | 66          | 18         | 48                   |
| Oklahoma       | 60          | 17         | 43                   |
| Oregon         | 69          | 13         | 56                   |

<sup>2</sup> Surveys were conducted telephonically with a 1,000 sampling. Margin of error is +/- 3%.

| State          | Percent Yes | Percent No | Percent Differential |
|----------------|-------------|------------|----------------------|
| Pennsylvania   | 63          | 23         | 40                   |
| Rhode Island   | 57          | 22         | 35                   |
| South Carolina | 58          | 19         | 39                   |
| South Dakota   | 75          | 09         | 66                   |
| Tennessee      | 55          | 19         | 36                   |
| Texas          | 63          | 16         | 47                   |
| Utah           | 71          | 11         | 60                   |
| Vermont        | 58          | 21         | 37                   |
| Virginia       | 57          | 20         | 37                   |
| Washington     | 75          | 10         | 65                   |
| Washington DC  | 59          | 16         | 43                   |
| West Virginia  | 60          | 17         | 43                   |
| Wisconsin      | 55          | 19         | 36                   |
| Wyoming        | 68          | 14         | 54                   |

**Initiative & Referendum Institute National Survey <sup>3</sup>  
Conducted by Portrait of America on 04/29/01 - 5/01/01**

In 24 states, citizens can propose laws by petitioning. This is called a "citizen's initiative." Do you favor such a process in your state?

|                    | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |       | Race  |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                    |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+   | White | Black | Other |
| Yes                | 67.8% | 67.9%  | 67.7% | 73.7% | 69.9% | 65.7% | 65.9% | 61.9% | 70.0% | 56.8% | 65.2% |
| No                 | 13.2% | 15.2%  | 11.4% | 12.0% | 11.5% | 13.5% | 16.4% | 12.8% | 12.4% | 20.9% | 11.5% |
| Not sure           | 18.6% | 16.5%  | 20.7% | 13.5% | 18.3% | 20.7% | 17.7% | 25.0% | 17.2% | 22.3% | 23.3% |
| Declined to answer | .3%   | .4%    | .2%   | .9%   | .4%   | .0%   | .0%   | .3%   | .4%   | .0%   | .0%   |

Should there be a similar process where citizens can place laws on the ballot nationwide?

|                    | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |       | Race  |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                    |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+   | White | Black | Other |
| Yes                | 56.7% | 56.3%  | 57.1% | 64.2% | 58.0% | 57.9% | 55.9% | 44.3% | 56.4% | 62.9% | 53.7% |
| No                 | 20.9% | 25.2%  | 17.0% | 19.4% | 18.4% | 23.1% | 22.5% | 21.7% | 22.2% | 19.5% | 15.3% |
| Not sure           | 21.7% | 18.1%  | 25.0% | 15.0% | 22.3% | 19.0% | 21.6% | 33.7% | 20.9% | 17.6% | 29.1% |
| Declined to answer | .6%   | .4%    | .8%   | 1.4%  | 1.4%  | .0%   | .0%   | .3%   | .5%   | .0%   | 1.8%  |

All other things being equal, which do you think is more likely to produce laws that are in the public interest; When the law is adopted by the legislature, or when the voters adopt the law.

|  | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |     | Race  |       |       |
|--|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
|  |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+ | White | Black | Other |

<sup>3</sup> Survey was conducted telephonically with a 1,000 sampling. Margin of error is +/- 3%.

|                    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| By the legislature | 20.4% | 25.1% | 16.0% | 19.2% | 19.0% | 16.6% | 21.2% | 27.3% | 22.3% | 13.4% | 16.1% |
| By the voters      | 65.5% | 61.3% | 69.3% | 69.4% | 62.4% | 72.3% | 65.4% | 55.7% | 64.0% | 77.2% | 64.2% |
| Not sure           | 13.6% | 13.0% | 14.1% | 9.9%  | 17.9% | 11.1% | 13.2% | 16.9% | 13.3% | 9.4%  | 18.7% |
| Declined to answer | .5%   | .5%   | .5%   | 1.5%  | .7%   | .0%   | .2%   | .0%   | .5%   | .0%   | 1.1%  |

President bush has proposed a 1.6 trillion dollar tax cut. The US Senate passed a smaller tax cut. Should we let the voters choose between them in a national referendum?

|                    | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |       | Race  |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                    |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+   | White | Black | Other |
| Yes                | 55.0% | 52.0%  | 57.7% | 63.2% | 56.0% | 56.8% | 51.1% | 44.5% | 54.1% | 58.7% | 56.3% |
| No                 | 31.9% | 39.1%  | 25.2% | 25.5% | 34.1% | 29.2% | 36.7% | 35.4% | 33.5% | 25.3% | 28.4% |
| Not sure           | 12.6% | 8.7%   | 16.2% | 10.5% | 9.2%  | 14.0% | 11.2% | 19.9% | 11.9% | 14.4% | 15.3% |
| Declined to answer | .6%   | .2%    | .9%   | .8%   | .7%   | .0%   | .9%   | .3%   | .5%   | 1.6%  | .0%   |

Should the legislature impose additional regulations on citizen petitions?

|                    | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |       | Race  |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                    |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+   | White | Black | Other |
| Yes                | 22.1% | 23.4%  | 21.0% | 29.9% | 22.8% | 20.3% | 18.3% | 17.2% | 22.0% | 18.9% | 25.7% |
| No                 | 50.3% | 53.8%  | 47.0% | 45.1% | 46.4% | 53.3% | 54.0% | 54.1% | 50.8% | 51.3% | 46.7% |
| Not sure           | 27.0% | 22.4%  | 31.3% | 24.5% | 29.9% | 26.1% | 26.8% | 28.5% | 26.8% | 28.2% | 27.6% |
| Declined to answer | .5%   | .4%    | .7%   | .4%   | .9%   | .3%   | .9%   | .3%   | .5%   | 1.6%  | .0%   |

Should there be a national referendum before sending troops into a foreign conflict, where the United States has not been attacked?

|                                   | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |       | Race  |       |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                   |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+   | White | Black | Other |
| Should be national referendum     | 41.4% | 38.0%  | 44.5% | 56.7% | 39.7% | 35.3% | 30.8% | 41.9% | 38.2% | 56.2% | 46.5% |
| Should not be national referendum | 45.5% | 52.4%  | 39.1% | 32.2% | 43.9% | 53.8% | 55.3% | 44.2% | 48.8% | 36.4% | 34.7% |
| Not sure                          | 12.5% | 9.4%   | 15.3% | 10.7% | 15.0% | 10.6% | 13.0% | 13.4% | 12.4% | 5.8%  | 17.9% |
| Declined to answer                | .7%   | .2%    | 1.1%  | .4%   | 1.4%  | .3%   | .9%   | .5%   | .5%   | 1.6%  | .9%   |

If an organization supported a measure that would improve the way government works which group would be more receptive to the idea, the legislature, or the voters?

|  | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |     | Race  |       |       |
|--|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|
|  |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+ | White | Black | Other |

|                    |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Legislature        | 13.5% | 14.0% | 13.0% | 16.0% | 11.9% | 11.7% | 13.1% | 14.3% | 12.5% | 20.9% | 12.5% |
| Voters             | 59.6% | 63.5% | 56.0% | 60.4% | 49.8% | 64.9% | 61.2% | 62.1% | 59.4% | 56.9% | 63.0% |
| Equally likely     | 17.7% | 14.9% | 20.3% | 15.8% | 24.7% | 14.5% | 16.8% | 16.8% | 18.3% | 9.8%  | 20.6% |
| Not sure           | 8.8%  | 7.5%  | 10.1% | 7.7%  | 12.9% | 8.9%  | 7.6%  | 6.8%  | 9.5%  | 10.8% | 3.9%  |
| Declined to answer | .4%   | .1%   | .6%   | .0%   | .7%   | .0%   | 1.3%  | .0%   | .3%   | 1.6%  | .0%   |

If an organization supported a measure that would harm your state, which group would be more receptive to arguments against the measure: the legislature, or the voters?

|                    | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |       | Race  |       |       |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                    |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+   | White | Black | Other |
| Legislature        | 20.6% | 23.8%  | 17.6% | 30.2% | 17.9% | 15.3% | 16.0% | 22.1% | 20.6% | 19.0% | 21.7% |
| Voters             | 61.5% | 59.5%  | 63.3% | 55.0% | 59.2% | 68.4% | 66.8% | 58.6% | 61.7% | 65.2% | 57.5% |
| Equally likely     | 12.6% | 12.1%  | 13.1% | 10.6% | 16.0% | 11.8% | 12.3% | 13.0% | 13.0% | 8.3%  | 14.4% |
| Not sure           | 4.8%  | 4.3%   | 5.3%  | 4.2%  | 6.6%  | 4.1%  | 4.0%  | 5.3%  | 4.5%  | 4.3%  | 6.5%  |
| Declined to answer | .5%   | .4%    | .7%   | .0%   | .4%   | .5%   | .9%   | 1.0%  | .2%   | 3.2%  | .0%   |

Generally speaking, when legislators propose regulations on petitioning, are they generally trying to protect the public, or are they trying to preserve their own power?

|                      | Total | Gender |       | Age   |       |       |       |       | Race  |       |       |
|----------------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                      |       | Men    | Women | 18-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50-64 | 65+   | White | Black | Other |
| Protect the public   | 16.4% | 17.6%  | 15.3% | 18.8% | 15.8% | 12.5% | 17.3% | 17.5% | 17.7% | 13.0% | 12.5% |
| Preserve their power | 66.9% | 68.7%  | 65.3% | 67.2% | 64.0% | 72.3% | 66.0% | 64.6% | 66.4% | 75.0% | 63.1% |
| Not sure             | 16.2% | 13.5%  | 18.6% | 13.6% | 19.8% | 14.6% | 15.8% | 17.6% | 15.5% | 10.4% | 24.5% |
| Declined to answer   | .5%   | .2%    | .8%   | .4%   | .4%   | .5%   | .9%   | .3%   | .4%   | 1.6%  | .0%   |

As the polls above indicate, the citizen's support for the initiative process is strong and since its inception the citizens have desired to preserve it. Numerous polls and surveys prove this point – all of which can be found at [www.iandrinstitute.org](http://www.iandrinstitute.org). Additional information regarding these polls can be found at [www.portraitofamerica.com](http://www.portraitofamerica.com).