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April 1, 1999 — Study #424

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Most Know Little About the Proposed New City Charter

■ When city voters were given more information about the changes that will take place if and when the proposed new city charter is passed, more are inclined to vote yes than no, but there is still a substantial 'Don't know.'

Charter Reform

If the electorate in the city of Los Angeles had to vote on the new city charter today, it would be a difficult decision for them to make. Virtually no one has heard, read or seen anything about the proposed new charter. And when they were read some of the provisions of the new charter, such as strengthening the mayor's power, creating a citywide system of advisory neighborhood councils and limiting Civil Service protection for some top city officials, a third were still undecided as to how they would vote. Forty-five percent of the electorate say they would vote yes on the revised charter, while 23% would vote no. Those voters living on the Westside of the city were more likely to vote yes, 57% (16% would vote no), than voters in the Valley at 50% (21% would vote no), Central L.A. at 40% (28% would vote no) and Southern L.A. at 35% (24% would vote no).

Voters who are more affluent, highly educated, politically conservative, whites and Latinos seem to like the charter more than their counterparts. More than half of the voters with household incomes of \$60K or more would vote for charter reform, as would 48% of white, 47% of Latinos voters and 48% of those with a college degree or more. Blacks are divided 34%—35% on a new city charter. Fifty-five percent of self-described conservatives would vote for the charter, compared to 46% of self-described liberals and 38% of self-described moderates.

In addition to the proposed new city charter, there will be two amendments on the June ballot that involve the expansion of the City Council seats. One amendment is to expand the City Council to twenty-one members and the other amendment is to expand the City Council to twenty-five members. As the poll has shown there is little knowledge among voters about the proposed new city charter, there is also high unawareness for these proposals to expand the City Council. Nineteen percent of the voters would vote to expand the Council members to twenty-one, while 16% would vote for expansion to twenty-five members, 12% say they would vote for both amendments. Combining the vote for either amendment and both—31% of the electorate would vote for expansion to twenty-one seats and 28% would vote for expansion to twenty-five seats. However, nearly two in five (38%) of city voters would vote for neither amendment and 15% are undecided.

Of those who say they would vote to expand the City Council, 49% would still vote for expansion even if they thought their taxes would increase. Forty-two percent would vote no and 9% are undecided at this time. Of those voters who live on the Westside and voted yes to expand the City Council seats, 52% of this group would still support expansion even if their taxes were raised, as would 61% of those voters who live in the southern part of the city. Voters living in the Valley who support increasing the Council seats are split whether they would still support the change in Council seats if their taxes were increased, while voters living in the central part of the city would not support expansion if their taxes are raised. Also, those affluent voters (income more than \$60K) who want expansion, would still support the measure even if it meant their taxes would be raised (64% support, 30%

oppose) as would white voters (55%—36%) and voters with a college degree or more (54%—37%).

The poll asked in separate questions about a few of the changes that are being proposed in the new city charter. Respondents who are registered to vote were asked if that would make them more likely to vote for the new charter, less likely to vote for it, or if the changes would not have much effect on how they would vote.

The first change asked about is the strengthening of the mayor's power. Respondents were told that the new charter would give the mayor increased power to fire city department heads and commissioners, as well as have formal authority to issue executive orders. After reading arguments for and against this change, the electorate was pretty divided over this issue. Thirty percent would be more likely to vote for the charter because of this change, 33% would be more likely to vote against it and 27% say it would not effect how they would vote. Forty percent of voters who are college graduates or more say they are more likely to vote for the charter because of the strengthening of the mayor's power, 36% say less likely, 19% say it would have no effect. White voters were split, 37% more likely, 36% less likely and 20% say it would have no effect. On the other hand, 41% of black

voters say they would be less likely to vote for the charter because of this change, 15% say more likely and 36% say it would have no effect. Those earning more than \$60K also would be slightly more likely, 39%, than less likely, 32% to vote for the charter because of this change, while 19% say it would have no effect on how they would vote.

The next proposal mentioned is the creation of a citywide system of

advisory neighborhood councils that would be established community by community. After reading arguments for and against this proposed change, thirty-six percent of city voters say they would be more likely to vote for the new charter because of this, 21% would be less likely and 32% say it would not effect how they would vote. Majority (52%) of voters on the Westside are in the only area of the city saying they would be more likely to vote for the new charter because of creation of these neighborhood councils. A plurality of white voters (46%) and voters with a college degree or more (44%) also say they would be more likely to vote for the charter because of this change.

Another change in the city charter that was asked about in the poll is the limiting of Civil Service protection for some top city officials, including the top deputies to the city's police chief. Again, after reading arguments by supporters and opponents for this change, about a third (32%) of voters say they would be more likely to vote for the new city charter because of this change, 20% say less likely and 35% say it would have no effect. Two out of five highly educated voters would be more likely to vote for the charter because of this proposed change.

The poll then revisited the question of whether city voters would vote for the proposed new city charter after giving them some more information. When asked again if the election were being held today would they vote for the new city charter or not, there was a slight movement in the vote with more undecideds voting against city charter than for it. The undecideds shifted by 8 points from 32% before arguments were read to 24% ➡

“If the electorate in the city of Los Angeles had to vote on the new city charter today, it would be a difficult decision for them to make.”

after arguments were read. After arguments were read, 48% say they would vote for the new city charter, compared to 45% before arguments. After arguments were read, 28% say they would vote no, while 23% said no before arguments.

Impressions of Possible Mayoral Candidates

Citywide residents, as well as registered voters, have little sense of the leading possible contenders vying to be mayor of the city of Los Angeles. Despite his five citywide elections and long family history in Los Angeles government, City Attorney James K. Hahn is still unknown to 58% of the city. Of those who do know him, 31% have a favorable opinion of him, 7% unfavorable and 4% are not sure. He fared slightly better among registered voters, 49% are not aware of who he is, 39% have a favorable opinion, 7% unfavorable and 5% are not sure whether they have a favorable or unfavorable impression of him.

The same holds true for Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky. He also has been in city government for 20 years—on the City Council and as a Supervisor—and 59% of city residents haven't heard enough about him to say whether their opinion is favorable or not. Of those who do know him, 30% of all residents have a favorable impression of him, 8% unfavorable and 3% are not sure. He does much better among registered voters. Forty-two percent of city voters have a favorable opinion of the supervisor, while 10% have an unfavorable impression and 4% are not sure. Forty-four percent are not aware of who he is.

Antonio Villaraigosa, speaker of the state assembly, does even worse than the other two elected officials. He is the second most important elected official in California, yet more than three-quarters of city residents, including 73% of Latinos, have no opinion about him. Of those who know him, 16% have a favorable opinion, 3% an unfavorable opinion and 3% are not sure. Among registered voters, 74% are not aware of who he is, 17% favorable, 5% unfavorable and 4% not sure. Among Latino voters, 66% are not aware of who the assembly speaker is.

Analysis by SUSAN PINKUS

SELECTED RESULTS FROM THE TIMES POLL CITY OF LOS ANGELES SURVEY

March 20-27, 1999

(A full summary of results will be available at a later date through the Los Angeles Times Poll)

GUIDE TO COLUMN HEADINGS

ALL	All adult residents of the city of Los Angeles
RV	Registered voters
DEM	Registered Democrats
IND	Registered independents ("declined-to-state")
REP	Registered Republicans
WST	Westside residents
SFV	San Fernando Valley residents
CNT	Central city residents
SOU	South city residents

What is your impression of City Attorney James K. Hahn?

	ALL	RV	DEM	IND	REP	WST	SFV	CNT	SOU
Favorable	31	39	40	34	39	33	29	25	38
Unfavorable	7	7	5	8	11	7	9	9	3
Haven't heard enough	58	49	52	56	38	58	60	64	49
Don't know	4	5	3	2	12	2	2	2	10

What is your impression of Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky?

	ALL	RV	DEM	IND	REP	WST	SFV	CNT	SOU
Favorable	30	42	42	32	46	34	32	26	31
Unfavorable	8	10	8	10	13	9	10	6	6
Haven't heard enough	59	44	47	54	31	53	54	66	59
Don't know	3	4	3	4	10	4	4	2	4

What is your impression of State Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa?

	ALL	RV	DEM	IND	REP	WST	SFV	CNT	SOU
Favorable	16	17	18	16	14	10	15	19	15
Unfavorable	3	5	4	4	7	6	4	2	2
Haven't heard enough	78	74	75	77	73	81	78	77	79
Don't know	3	4	3	3	6	3	3	2	4

CITY CHARTER REVISIONS

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WERE ASKED OF REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY)

As you may know, residents of the city of Los Angeles will vote in June as to whether to adopt a new city charter or not. Have you heard, read, or seen anything about the proposed new city charter? (IF YES) From what you know, if the election were being held today, would you be inclined to vote for or against the proposed new city charter or don't you know enough about it yet to say? (INCLUDES LEANERS)

	RV	DEM	IND	REP	WST	SFV	CNT	SOU
Vote for	7	7	6	10	10	9	7	3
Vote against	3	2	3	4	2	3	4	1
Haven't heard/								
Don't know	90	91	91	86	88	88	89	96

The proposed new city charter will make considerable changes in the way the city of Los Angeles is governed. Some of the changes are: strengthening the mayor's power, creating a citywide system of advisory neighborhood councils and limiting Civil Service protection for some top city officials. Having heard more, if the election were being held today, would you vote for or against the proposed new city charter? (INCLUDES LEANERS)

	RV	DEM	IND	REP	WST	SFV	CNT	SOU
Vote for	45	47	35	46	37	50	40	35
Vote against	23	24	30	17	16	21	28	24
Haven't heard/								
Don't know	32	29	35	37	27	29	32	41

In addition to the proposed new city charter, there will be two amendments on the June ballot that involve the expansion of the City Council seats. One amendment is to expand the City Council to twenty-one seats and the other amendment is to expand the City Council to twenty-five seats. Supporters say expanding the City Council would provide better constituent services because of smaller districts and it would also better reflect ethnic diversity. Opponents say that expanding the City Council might cost the city more money because of potential additional salaries and staff, and also that it would change the working dynamics of the Council. If the election were being held today, would you vote for expanding the City Council to twenty-one seats, or twenty-five seats, or would you vote for both amendments or would you vote for neither amendment? (INCLUDES LEANERS)

	RV	DEM	IND	REP	WST	SFV	CNT	SOU
Vote for 21 seats	19	20	14	19	27	17	16	17
Vote for 25 seats	16	18	22	7	22	14	17	16
Vote for both	12	10	11	19	5	13	12	16
Vote for neither	38	36	35	45	40	39	37	35
Haven't heard/								
Don't know	15	16	18	10	6	17	18	16

(ASKED OF REGISTERED VOTERS WHO WOULD VOTE TO EXPAND THE CITY COUNCIL TO 21 AND/OR 25 SEATS)

Would you support expanding the City Council if you thought your taxes would be increased, or would you be opposed to it?

	<u>RV</u>
Support	49
Oppose	42
Don't know	9

COMBINED RESULTS OF THE TWO PRECEDING QUESTIONS:

	<u>RV</u>
If taxes raised...	
...would <i>still</i> support:	
Expansion to 21 seats	8
Expansion to 25 seats	8
Both amendments	6
If taxes raised...	
...would <i>no longer</i> support:	
Expansion to 21 seats	8
Expansion to 25 seats	6
Both amendments	4
Never supported either	35
Other responses	25

(ASKED OF ALL REGISTERED VOTERS)

One of the changes in the proposed new city charter is the strengthening of the mayor's power in the city. The mayor would have increased power to fire city department heads and commissioners, as well as have formal authority to issue executive orders. The mayor would also have more power to oversee city departments. Supporters say expanding the mayor's power will make the city run more efficiently and also will limit meddling by the City Council. Opponents say this will lead to an autocratic government and weaken the role of the City Council. Does this change in the new city charter make you more likely to vote for it, less likely to vote for it or does it not have much effect on how you might vote?

	<u>RV</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>IND</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>WST</u>	<u>SFV</u>	<u>CNT</u>	<u>SOU</u>
More likely	30	27	33	41	36	36	31	16
Less likely	33	34	27	32	32	29	34	39
Not much effect	27	27	32	21	21	26	23	37
Don't know	10	12	8	6	11	9	12	8

Another change is creating a citywide system of advisory neighborhood councils that would be created community by community. Some supporters say that these neighborhood councils would empower each community to address problems on issues that relate to their own neighborhoods. Others say that these councils would improve local representation throughout the city. Some opponents say that these neighborhood councils should be more than advisory and they should also have authority over land use in their neighborhoods. Others say that these councils could complicate development and slow decision making. Does this change in the new city charter make you more likely to vote for it, less likely to vote for it or does it not have much effect on how you might vote?

	<u>RV</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>IND</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>WST</u>	<u>SFV</u>	<u>CNT</u>	<u>SOU</u>
More likely	36	37	30	34	52	39	30	26
Less likely	21	18	20	34	18	19	20	29
Not much effect	32	36	40	19	23	29	41	33
Don't know	11	9	10	13	7	13	9	12

Another change is to limit Civil Service protection for some top city officials, including the top deputies to the city's police chief. Supporters say this is necessary to weed out those top city officials performing their jobs poorly which cannot be done under the current Civil Service system. Opponents say this could lead to the firing of some top city officials for political reasons and not because of poor job performance. Does this change in the new city charter make you more likely to vote for it, less likely to vote for it or does it not have much effect on how you might vote?

	<u>RV</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>IND</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>WST</u>	<u>SFV</u>	<u>CNT</u>	<u>SOU</u>
More likely	32	30	32	40	32	36	33	26
Less likely	20	19	19	19	15	19	22	21
Not much effect	35	37	40	29	39	31	31	45
Don't know	13	14	9	12	14	14	14	8

Of course, many people are still thinking about the proposed new city charter and have not made a definite decision to vote for or against it. Now that you have heard some arguments for and against it, regardless of how you felt before, if the election were being held today, would you vote for or against the new city charter? (INCLUDES LEANERS)

	<u>RV</u>	<u>DEM</u>	<u>IND</u>	<u>REP</u>	<u>WST</u>	<u>SFV</u>	<u>CNT</u>	<u>SOU</u>
Vote for	48	46	50	52	58	51	42	41
Vote against	28	29	29	24	21	26	32	31
Haven't heard/ Don't know	24	25	21	24	21	23	26	28

Tables compiled by RAY ENSLOW

NOTES

All answer frequencies are given in percentages.
The wording of some questions has been abridged.

HOW THE POLL WAS CONDUCTED

The Times Poll contacted 1,221 citywide residents in Los Angeles, including 854 registered voters, by telephone March 20 through 27. The margin of sampling error for the entire sample and for registered voters is plus or minus three percentage points. Telephone numbers were chosen from a list of all exchanges in the city. Random-digit dialing techniques were used so that listed and non-listed numbers could be contacted. The entire sample was weighted slightly to conform with census figures for sex, race, age, education and region. For certain subgroups the error margin may be somewhat higher. Poll results can also be affected by other factors such as question wording and the order in which questions are presented. Surveys were conducted in English and Spanish. Asians were interviewed as part of the overall sample, but there were not enough to break out as a separate subgroup.

Times Poll results are also on the World Wide Web at:
<http://www.latimes.com/timespoll>

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