

THE CALIFORNIA POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND IMPARTIAL STATEWIDE SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION
ESTABLISHED AND OPERATED BY FIELD RESEARCH CORPORATION SINCE 1946

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BERKELEY 4, CALIFORNIA**

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Release #514

For release THURSDAY, MARCH 3, 1966

LITTLE PUBLIC SUPPORT TODAY FOR LIBERALIZATION OF DIVORCE LAWS

by Mervin D. Field

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vocation if publication or broadcast takes place before
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Discussions have been heard recently about liberalizing California divorce laws, but the California Poll finds that the majority of the public feels today that the present law is already too lenient or about right. Only one California adult in seven thinks today's divorce law is too tough.

As a test of sentiment on this subject, the California Poll recently completed a statewide survey of adults and asked each one this question:

"Do you feel the divorce laws in California are too lenient, too tough, or about right?"

Answers show that one third of the public thinks the laws are "about right" and 37 per cent think they are "too lenient" now. Just 15 per cent say divorce laws are "too tough."

California divorce laws are --

Too lenient	37%
About right	32
Too tough	15
No opinion	16

It might be expected that people who have experienced a divorce would be more critical of the law, and this is the case. However, although more of them say the present laws are "too tough" (21%), a majority of divorced persons of both sexes still endorse the idea that the laws are "about right" or even "too lenient." Divorced persons make up approximately 18 per cent of the sample of 1,037 adults interviewed.

(MORE)

The California Poll was founded in 1946 as a medium for promoting public opinion research. The California Poll is completely independent of all political parties and candidates. Its sole purpose is to report public opinion accurately and objectively. Most of the financial support for the Poll comes from newspapers and television stations that have exclusive rights within the city of publication. The Poll utilizes accepted scientific sampling and questioning procedures in obtaining the data reported in its releases. Representative samples of adults are interviewed at periodic intervals on election issues and other socially important questions of the day. Proportionate numbers of people of both sexes, from all parts of the state, from different sized communities, and of all age, economic, political, and occupation groups are included in the samples. Major surveys are made with samples of 1,200 or more respondents. Interim surveys sometimes are made with smaller samples but not less than 600 interviews.

California divorce laws are -	<u>Have had divorce</u>	<u>Have not had divorce</u>
Too lenient	27%	39%
About right	41	30
Too tough	21	14
No opinion	11	17

Significant differences in opinions about the severity of our divorce laws are found between the sexes: three times as many men as women think the present divorce laws are "too tough."

California divorce laws are -	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
Too lenient	34%	41%
About right	28	36
Too tough	23	7
Don't know	15	16

Divorce laws vary from state to state in the severity or leniency of the grounds on which divorces will be granted and the waiting period. For example, in New York the only grounds for divorce is adultery. In California many grounds for divorce are allowed, but there is a year's waiting period before a divorce becomes final. In neighboring Nevada and Idaho, divorces become final when granted and can be obtained after just six weeks of residency.

Californians are not alone in their feelings about their divorce laws. A recent Gallup Poll shows that a majority of people in the United States as a whole feel that divorce laws are not strict enough or about right. There has apparently not been any reversal in feeling about this issue over the years, since a Gallup Poll thirty years ago found that four out of five people were against any relaxation in divorce laws then. One exception was New York, where a bare majority was recorded in favor of easier divorce.

There are signs that sentiment for status quo, or for even stricter divorce laws is not as great as it has been in the past, but the proponents of liberalization are still in the minority in California and in most other states.