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Wal-Mart 'Supercenter' Measure Trailing In Early Returns

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INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP)--A ballot measure supported by Wal-Mart so it can build a giant Supercenter store in this Los Angeles suburb was trailing late Tuesday night with more than half the ballots counted.

With 15 of 29 precincts reporting, Inglewood voters were opposing the initiative, with 67.8% and 32.1% supporting it, said Gabby Contreras of the city clerk's office.

Residents of the working-class community went to the polls after days of debate over the measure, which opponents said would clear the way for Wal-Mart Stores Inc. to build its planned Supercenter store while skirting zoning, traffic and environmental reviews.

The ballot initiative would circumvent a City Council decision against building the large store, a battle that has pitted religious leaders, community activists and unions against the world's largest retailer.

Opponents vowed legal action if the measure passed.


Inglewood last year blocked the proposed shopping center, which would include both a traditional Wal-Mart and other stores, prompting the Bentonville, Ark.-based company to collect more than 10,000 signatures to force the vote.

Wal-Mart has argued in Inglewood and elsewhere in California that its stores create jobs and that residents should be able to decide for themselves if they want the stores in their community.

But opponents say the Supercenters amount to low-wage, low-benefit job mills that displace better-paying jobs as independent retailers are driven out of business. They also fear the stores will contribute to suburban sprawl and jammed roadways.

Objections to Wal-Mart Stores Inc. have surfaced elsewhere around the country, including Chicago,

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where the City Council recently stalled a measure to approve the first Wal-Mart inside city limits because of concerns about the company's labor practices.

Wal-Mart succeeded in lobbying residents in Contra Costa County, in suburban San Francisco. Residents there voted last month to allow a Supercenter. But Wal-Mart also lost a vote that day to allow it to open another store near San Diego.

Wal-Mart officials have not said what they plan to do if the Inglewood initiative fails. The company spent more than \$1 million in its campaign, according to campaign finance records, while opponents have spent a fraction of that amount.

The opposition, however, enlisted public figures, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson to rally voters to its side. On Monday, Jackson and Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., urged residents to vote against the Supercenter.

But their message was lost to Inez Scott, who voted in favor of the ballot measure Tuesday in hopes that the Supercenter will bring jobs for the city's youth.

"They don't live here," said Scott, 72. "I voted 'yes' so the young adults and youth will have some place to work, to keep them off the street corners and out of gangs."

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