

California Initiative Editorial Scorecard

October 2020 (2020-3)

[California Strategies](#) and [Forward Observer](#) are pleased to present the California Initiative Editorial Scorecard.

For this 2020 edition of the scorecard, we track editorials on the 12 ballot measures that California voters will decide on Tuesday, November 3.

This year's editorial scorecard is based on circulation data from the Alliance for Audited Media for 22 newspaper outlets. **To date, nearly 80% of possible editorials have run (206 of 264).**

2020 California Initiative Editorial Endorsement Scorecard		
Rank	Paper	Circulation
1	Los Angeles Times	653,868
2	San Jose Mercury News	527,568
3	Sacramento Bee	279,032
4	Orange County Register	250,724
5	East Bay Times	168,362
6	San Francisco Chronicle	164,820
7	Fresno Bee	157,546
8	San Diego Union-Tribune	121,321
9	La Opinion	116,256
10	The Press-Enterprise	92,697
11	The Record - Stockton	58,888
12	San Gabriel Valley Tribune	57,558
13	The Daily Breeze	57,185
14	Modesto Bee	56,723
15	Los Angeles Daily News	56,493
16	The Santa Rosa Press Democrat	54,000
17	Long Beach Press-Telegram	41,038
18	Inland Valley Daily Bulletin	38,286
19	San Bernardino Sun	36,076
20	The Desert Sun	30,555
21	Chico Enterprise-Record	29,000
22	Bakersfield Californian	22,000

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In both 2016 and 2018, we observed that editorial endorsements (pro or con) were a leading indicator of success at the ballot.

- Of the 10 measures on the 2016 ballot with a majority of editorials in favor, only one failed to pass (Prop 62, repeal death penalty); out of the seven measures with a majority of editorials against, only three passed.
- Of the 11 initiatives on the 2018 ballot, each of the four measures endorsed by a majority of leading newspapers was approved by voters (Prop 1 – Housing Bond; Prop 2 – Tax Revenue for Homeless Prevention; Prop 4 – Children’s Hospital Bond; Prop 11 – Ambulance Employee Regulations). Of the seven initiatives opposed by a majority of leading newspapers, only two (Prop 7 – Repeals Daylight Savings Time and Prop 12 – Animal Space Requirements) were approved by California voters. The remaining five were defeated.

For many measures, endorsements have been lopsided – as indicated below.

2020 California Initiative Editorial Endorsement Scorecard		
Proposition	Yes	No
Prop 14 (Authorizes stem cell bonds)	0	15
Prop 15 (Removes commercial, industrial and some agricultural property from Prop 13’s tax protections)	3	15
Prop 16 (Removes voter-approved prohibition on race-conscious university admissions, public hiring and contracting)	7	9
Prop 17 (Allows felony parolees to vote)	16	3
Prop 18 (Allows 17-year-olds to vote in primaries and special elections if they’ll be 18 for general elections)	5	12
Prop 19 (Allows elderly, disabled and wildfire victims to retain lower property tax rates when they change properties)	1	16
Prop 20 (Rolls back sentencing and parole reforms enacted in Props 47 and 57)	2	15
Prop 21 (Removes statewide constraints on local governments enacting rent control)	1	20
Prop 22 (Allows gig tech companies to remain as independent contractors)	15	1
Prop 23 (New regulation of kidney dialysis clinics)	0	18
Prop 24 (Expands online consumer privacy)	1	14
Prop 25 (Repeals a state law replacing money bail with a system based on public safety and flight risk)	17	1

Endorsements from the Top 22 California Papers

	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Los Angeles Times	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES
Mercury News	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Sacramento Bee				YES			NO	NO				YES
Orange County Register	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
East Bay Times	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
San Francisco Chronicle	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Fresno Bee		NO		YES				NO		NO		YES
San Diego Union-Tribune		NO		YES	YES	YES	YES	NO		NO		YES
La Opinion		YES						NO	YES	NO		
The Press-Enterprise	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
The Record - Stockton												
San Gabriel Valley Tribune	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
The Daily Breeze	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Modesto Bee								NO				
Los Angeles Daily News	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
The Santa Rosa Press Democrat	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Long Beach Press-Telegram	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Inland Valley Daily Bulletin	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
San Bernardino Sun	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
The Desert Sun		NO	YES	NO	NO	NO		NO				
Chico Enterprise-Record	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Bakersfield Californian	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES

Noteworthy Editorial Quotes

Proposition 14

Chico Enterprise-Record – No

“This is a \$5.5 billion bond measure, with the funds going to stem-cell research. While a promising field of medical research, we don’t like the idea of the state taking on additional debt in the uncertain COVID-19 economy. The Legislative Analyst’s Office says servicing the bond would take \$260 million out of the state general fund each year for about 30 years. This is not the time for this” [Link](#)

Proposition 15

Fresno Bee – No

“This is not the right time for the overhaul proposed by backers of Proposition 15; not when so many businesses already face financial ruin on account of the coronavirus pandemic. Prop. 15, the split-roll initiative on the November ballot, would impose one more economic burden, especially on small businesses.” [Link](#)

Proposition 16

The Desert Sun – Yes

“Allowing our public institutions greater latitude to creatively include race and gender into admissions considerations could help boost numbers of underrepresented students in these types of fields and disciplines.” [Link](#)

Proposition 17

Sacramento Bee – Yes

“Under current California law, people convicted of felonies are stripped of the right to vote until they finish their parole... Sadly, but not surprisingly, this disproportionately disenfranchises Black and Latino voters. It’s yet another ugly vestige of the deep-rooted, systemic racism that continues to haunt our nation — and our state — today. Proposition 17 would restore the right of parolees to vote, thus increasing voter turnout and encouraging the convicted to embrace the highest ideals of citizenship.” [Link](#)

Chico Enterprise-Record – No

“This would allow felons the right to vote after they’ve been released from prison but are still on parole. Sorry, but parole is part of the sentence. It’s a test to see whether the criminal got the message.” [Link](#)

Proposition 18

Chico Enterprise-Record – Yes

“This would allow people who would be 18 years old at the time of a general election to vote in that year’s primary if they’re just 17. It seems reasonable that if someone is going to be able to vote in November, they should have a say on who will be on the ballot then.” [Link](#)

The Desert Sun – No

“A 17-year-old enthusiastic about the political process already can pre-register to vote. Yes, California allows a person as young as 16 to pre-register in order to be able to cast a ballot upon turning 18. The proponents’ argument that giving some 17-year-old residents a jump on others due to birthdate vagaries will increase awareness and participation rings hollow.” [Link](#)

Proposition 19

Chico Enterprise-Record – No

“This expands the existing rules certain classes of homeowners can use to transfer the property tax base of a home destroyed by wildfire or disaster to a new residence. Sounds good, but Proposition 19 would also likely destroy family farms. That’s because any farm with a property tax base over \$1 million (that’s most of them) could not be passed on from parent to child without being re-assessed and re-taxed at the value it would have if it were sold. This would

result in a significant jump in tax bill, probably one that in many cases couldn't be met without selling all or part of the land." [Link](#)

Proposition 20

Chico Enterprise-Record – Yes

"This is a measure that tries to correct some of what we see are problems in Proposition 57, passed in 2016. It would change penalties for some thefts, change the way inmates are released into the community, and require DNA collection from adults convicted of some crimes. We like it primarily because it expands the list of just 23 violent crimes that make inmates ineligible for the early release granted by Proposition 57." [Link](#)

Sacramento Bee – No

"California voters should reject this cynical and shameful spending scam. California embraced criminal justice reform because the state's prisons had become humanitarian disaster zones that cost billions of dollars a year to maintain." [Link](#)

Proposition 21

The Desert Sun – No

"As was true in 2018, this measure would only make California's real housing problem — the dearth of affordable housing development — more difficult. It will only add the uncertainty of local rent control boards to California's already Byzantine and costly housing development process." [Link](#)

Proposition 22

La Opinion – Yes

"Implementar la obligación de las empresas a convertir a los contratistas independientes en asalariados parece lógico a primera vista y que ha hecho difícil la decisión para quienes apoyamos los sindicatos en general y a los trabajadores hispanos organizados en particular. Porque para las empresas no existe la opción de trabajar con empleados asalariados, al punto que podrían abandonar California si eso les es impuesto. Lo que sucede es que al menos la mitad de los conductores de transporte con base en aplicaciones no quieren o no pueden ser empleados. Para ellos es un trabajo de tiempo parcial, que efectúan ocasionalmente. Son centenares de miles que se quedarían sin esta fuente de ingresos si no pasa la Prop. 22." [Link](#)

"Implementing the obligation of companies to convert independent contractors into wage earners seems logical at first glance and has made the decision difficult for those of us who support unions in general and organized Hispanic workers in particular. Because for companies there is no option to work with salaried employees, to the point that they could leave California if that is imposed on them. What happens is that at least half of app-based trucking drivers are unwilling or unable to be employed. For them it is a part-time job, which they do occasionally. Hundreds of thousands would be left without this source of income if Prop 22 does not pass." [Link](#)

Proposition 23

Chico Enterprise-Record – No

“Sets new requirements on dialysis clinics. And like Proposition 21, this should sound familiar, because an almost identical measure, Proposition 8 was on the November 2018 ballot. It lost 60 percent to 40 percent. It should lose again.” [Link](#)

Proposition 24

Santa Rosa Press Democrat – No

“Our conclusion: It’s too soon to put this complicated issue on the ballot. That’s based in part on a lack of experience with which to assess the new law. Not only is it less than a year old, the implementing regulations weren’t released until mid-August. Moreover, leading advocates of consumer privacy are sharply divided on whether Proposition 24 would make California’s law stronger or weaker.” [Link](#)

Proposition 25

Fresno Bee – Yes

“California’s old bail system, which kept people behind bars if they could not pay thousands of dollars to remain free while awaiting trial, was outdated, unfair and racist. A study of the bail system in San Francisco revealed that it disproportionately harmed African Americans and Latinos... Prop. 25 would replace cash bail with risk assessments to determine whether an arrested individual should be released.” [Link](#)

Chico Enterprise-Record – No

“A no vote would reinstitute the money bail option for people arrested on criminal charges. It’s a referendum on the law that eliminated bail and replaced it with a judgement whether or not the arrestee was a threat if released. That sounds like a pretty subjective way to determine who’s released and who isn’t.” [Link](#)

We will continue to update the 2020 California Initiative Editorial Scorecard in the coming weeks. Please feel free to share on social media and circulate to your colleagues, clients and friends.

Thanks,

Matt Klink & Joe Rodota