

California Initiative Editorial Scorecard

Campaign professionals often bemoan the fact that fewer voters read newspapers. While paid circulation numbers decline and “other” information sources – most notably digital news outlets – proliferate, some observers have questioned the impact of newspaper editorials on political campaigns, particularly on statewide initiatives.

Editorial board visits are a time-consuming endeavor. Editors are tough, seasoned and critical. Successfully navigating this process requires campaigns to argue their position coherently and persuasively.

The impact of a newspaper editorial isn’t felt only when the editorial runs in the newspaper or on-line. Its true impact on the voter is often determined by how campaigns leverage editorials in paid media (direct mail, digital, radio and television advertising) to validate campaign messages.

We developed this 2016 California Initiative Editorial Scorecard to keep track of editorials for and against the 17 statewide initiatives on this November’s ballot. Each week we will update the scorecard with ballot measure endorsements (pro and con) from the top 20 California newspapers by circulation. We give each initiative a score for the number of endorsements received, as well as a weighted score based on the size of the paper’s circulation.

The first edition of the California Initiative Editorial Scorecard is based on 42 editorials:

California Initiative Editorial Endorsement Scorecard				
Proposition	Yes	No	Score	Weighted Score
Proposition 51 (Education bonds)	1	2	5	7
Proposition 52 (Changes to hospital fee program)	2	0	10	26
Proposition 53 (Voter approval of revenue bonds)	0	4	0	0
Proposition 54 (Bills published 72 hrs. before vote)	4	0	20	38
Proposition 55 (Extend income taxes on wealthy)	2	1	10	19
Proposition 56 (Cigarette tax to \$2 per pack)	3	0	15	30
Proposition 57 (Parole for non-violent crimes felons)	1	0	5	7
Proposition 58 (Bilingual education)	2	1	10	24
Proposition 59 (State position on <i>Citizens United</i>)	4	2	20	24
Proposition 60 (Condoms in pornographic films)	0	3	0	0
Proposition 61 (Prescription drug price regulations)	0	2	0	0
Proposition 62 (Repeal death penalty)	2	0	10	23
Proposition 63 (Background checks for ammunition)	0	0	-	-
Proposition 64 (Legalization of marijuana)	2	0	10	23
Proposition 65 (Grocery and retail carry-out bags)	0	2	0	0
Proposition 66 (Death penalty procedures)	0	3	0	0
Proposition 67 (Prohibits single-use plastic bags)	3	0	15	32

Methodology: Our scorecard gives both scores for the number of positive endorsements (each is worth 5 points, for a total of 100 possible points) and a weighted score based on the circulation size of the Top 20 papers in California. For instance, an endorsement from the Los Angeles Times would give a paper 20 points, since it represents 20 percent of the total circulation of the top 20 papers in California.

Endorsements from the Top 20 California Papers

	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67
Los Angeles Times		Yes						Yes	No			Yes			No	No	Yes
San Jose Mercury News	No		No	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	No		Yes		Yes		No	
OC Register											No						
San Diego Union Tribune				Yes					No								
San Francisco Chronicle	Yes		No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes		Yes						No		Yes
East Bay Times	No		No	Yes		Yes				No		Yes		Yes	No	No	Yes
Sacramento Bee		Yes	No						Yes	No							
La Opinión								Yes									
Riverside Press-Enterprise																	
San Francisco Examiner																	
San Gabriel Valley Tribune																	
Torrance Daily Breeze																	
Modesto Bee																	
Los Angeles Daily News																	
Santa Rosa Press-Democrat																	
Long Beach Press-Telegram																	
Bakersfield Californian					Yes			No	Yes		No						
Inland Valley Daily Bulletin																	
San Luis Obispo Tribune																	
Chico Enterprise-Record																	

Proposition 51

San Jose Mercury News – No

“Bankrolled by \$7 million mostly from the construction industry, Prop. 51 is an end-run around calls from Gov. Jerry Brown and the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst’s Office to reform school bond provisions.” [Link](#)

East Bay Times – No

**Note: East Bay Times carries the Mercury News’ editorial content*

San Francisco Chronicle – Yes

“The measure amounts to a statewide commitment to the success of local schools. The general obligation bonds, which need a 55 percent vote, would supply the money to make that social ideal work.” [Link](#)

Proposition 52

The Sacramento Bee – Yes

“In an election dominated by Donald Trump, the fight for control of Congress, gun control and marijuana legalization, Proposition 52 is an outlier. It doesn’t generate fierce debate. But Proposition 52 does make fiscal sense, and it is worthy of voters’ support.” [Link](#)

The Los Angeles Times – Yes

“Medi-Cal is just the sort of program that could use some constitutional protection. The state already beggars it, paying some of the lowest rates in the country for medical services. As a result, poor Californians have struggled to find doctors who’ll take Medi-Cal, so they’ve continued going to hospital emergency rooms — a costly and inefficient way to deliver healthcare.” [Link](#)

Proposition 53

San Francisco Chronicle – No

“The problems with initiatives like this one are almost too many to list. Instead of a real seasoning before legislators and state officials, there’s only one author. Clearer language and attempts at compromise are ignored. If it proves disastrous, it can’t be amended or repealed without another public vote.” [Link](#)

Sacramento Bee – No

“Proposition 53 could increase construction costs and add unnecessary layers of complexity and uncertainty to an already unwieldy state government. And voters have a

solution if they conclude that legislators abuse revenue bonds: They can vote them out of office.” [Link](#)

San Jose Mercury News – No

“The question is whether, for example, a new set of buildings at a medical center would require statewide approval. Why should statewide voters have to approve a major project being undertaken and funded exclusively by an individual county or a specific region of the state, such as the Bay Area?” [Link](#)

East Bay Times – No

**Note: East Bay Times carries the Mercury News’ editorial content*

Proposition 54

San Jose Mercury News – Yes

“It’s long-overdue transparency. It’s hard to imagine why anyone would oppose it. Indeed, this should have been fixed eons ago.” [Link](#)

East Bay Times – Yes

**Note: East Bay Times carries the Mercury News’ editorial content*

San Diego Union Tribune – Yes

“The Legislature made this measure necessary because of its leaders’ long, ugly history of gutting and amending bills in the final days of its annual session — radically changing their content — and then ramming them through to passage with minimal or no public input or debate.” [Link](#)

San Francisco Chronicle – Yes

“It’s important to know that several earnest legislators, Democrats and Republicans alike, have been trying to push a 72-hour rule for years — and those ideas went nowhere. The politicians had their chance.” [Link](#)

Proposition 55

Bakersfield Californian – Yes

“Gov. Brown has lived up to his part of the 2012 bargain made with voters when they passed Prop. 30. He has used the money as promised and has been tight-fisted in fighting excessive spending proposals. But he was also correct to note that a looming recession could devastate California schools and other critical programs.” [Link](#)

San Jose Mercury News – Yes

"Another economic downturn now is overdue, and the Prop. 55 Band-aid will not prevent spending cuts when it hits. It will just make them less harmful. But that's a worthwhile goal." [Link](#)

San Francisco Chronicle – No

"The state cannot continue to just keep putting patches on a tax structure destined to periods of undue destitution. Prop. 55 represents another big patch for a precarious tax structure, and one big excuse for elected officials to continue avoiding a comprehensive tax reform that actually could allow sustainable investments in our schools and other priorities." [Link](#)

Proposition 56

San Francisco Chronicle – Yes

"The drafters of Prop. 56 have done a responsible job of apportioning the up to \$1.4 billion in new revenue from the tax to efforts to either prevent or offset the public burden caused by smoking." [Link](#)

San Jose Mercury News – Yes

"The need is urgent: E-cigarettes have increased teen smoking at an alarming rate. The Centers for Disease Control reported last year that vaping by middle- and high-school students tripled from 4.5 percent in 2013 to 13.4 percent in 2014." [Link](#)

East Bay Times – Yes

**Note: East Bay Times carries the Mercury News' editorial content*

Proposition 57

San Francisco Chronicle – Yes

"Prop. 57 would also take some power from prosecutors — namely the power to decide whether to charge juveniles as adults — and put it in the hands of judges. We would argue this crucial decision should have remained with judges in the first place." [Link](#)

Proposition 58

Bakersfield Californian – No

"In addition to returning to the prior bilingual education system, Prop. 58 will give legislators the ability to make further changes, without consulting voters." [Link](#)

Los Angeles Times – Yes

“Parents would still have to be offered intensive English-immersion classes for their children; nothing in the initiative would mandate a switch to bilingual education. Instead the matter would be left to local school districts, responding to parents’ preferences for their children.” [Link](#)

Proposition 59

San Jose Mercury News – Yes

“Voters who believe that money is not speech and corporations are not individual people, and who want California to fight for campaign finance reform, should vote yes on Proposition 59. Unlike Citizens United, it can't do any harm.” [Link](#)

Sacramento Bee – Yes

“But California carries much more weight and the momentum from a victory here would be significant. The path to constitutional change and to fix our broken campaign finance system will be long and difficult. Passing Prop. 59 is only one step, but possibly an important one.” [Link](#)

San Francisco Chronicle – Yes

“The one clear path to restoring control of money in politics would be a constitutional amendment that would assert Americans’ right to regulate donations and spending. It’s a tall order and would require a formidable citizen uprising to demand it.” [Link](#)

Bakersfield Californian – Yes

“It was a lousy U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Just watch the advertisements and other political stunts to see why it was a lousy ruling. But that is no excuse for clogging an already clogged ballot with a worthless proposition. That said, if you plan to cast a vote in the Prop. 59 contest, you are urged to vote YES.” [Link](#)

San Diego Union Tribune – No

“But we think having advisory measures such as this clutters and complicates the ballot, and that anyone who doesn’t want a future in which every election has similar nonbinding, time-consuming measures should vote no.” [Link](#)

Los Angeles Times – No

“Even if it weren’t overturned, many of the evils for which it has become a metaphor — undisclosed “dark money” in political campaigns, for example — can be addressed by simple legislation. We don’t rule out supporting an appropriately crafted constitutional amendment in the future, but we see no reason to rush.” [Link](#)

Proposition 60

San Jose Mercury News – No

"Prop. 60 is the brainchild of Michael Weinstein, CEO of the Los Angeles-based AIDS Healthcare Foundation. He's often described as uncompromising and dictatorial, and let's just say he brought both those qualities to Prop. 60." [Link](#)

East Bay Times – No

**Note: East Bay Times carries the Mercury News' editorial content*

Sacramento Bee – No

"In such a case, Weinstein would be sworn in as a state employee with standing to defend the initiative himself, and he couldn't be fired without a majority vote of both legislative houses. Oh, and the taxpayers would be on the hook for his legal expenses." [Link](#)

Proposition 61

Orange County Register – No

"Everyone likes the sound of cheaper drug prices, and many would not shed a tear for cutting the profits of the 'big, bad' pharmaceutical companies, but setting below-market-rate prices for drugs would work out no better than rent control has in making housing affordable to the masses in San Francisco, creating similar shortages and other unintended consequences." [Link](#)

Bakersfield Californian – No

"The state Legislative Analyst noted that manufacturers could respond in two ways. They could raise the price charged for drugs sold to the VA; or they could decline to sell critically needed drugs to state agencies. Either way, Californians could and likely would suffer if Prop. 61 passes." [Link](#)

Proposition 62

San Jose Mercury News – Position: Yes

"In the United States, for every 10 prisoners who have been executed since the death penalty was reinstated in 1976, one person on death row has been set free. One in 10." [Link](#)

East Bay Times – Yes

**Note: East Bay Times carries the Mercury News' editorial content*

Los Angeles Times – Yes

"The chief reason to abolish the death penalty in California is that it is cruel and unusual punishment, both immoral and inhumane and out of step with "evolving standards of decency" in the United States." [Link](#)

Proposition 64

San Jose Mercury News – Yes

“We would have preferred uniform federal rules legalizing marijuana, but there's no sign of that. So once again, the states must lead.” [Link](#)

East Bay Times – Yes

**Note: East Bay Times carries the Mercury News’ editorial content*

Proposition 65

East Bay Times – No

“Proposition 65 deserves consideration as one the most disingenuous ballot measures in state history.” [Link](#)

San Francisco Chronicle – No

“The measure plays on phony fears to discredit the overall plastic ban.” [Link](#)

Proposition 66

San Jose Mercury News – No

“It should shed this dehumanizing and costly practice — and not speed it up, as Proposition 66 aims to do. That would actually magnify the inequity and sometimes outright injustice in the death penalty’s application. [Link](#)

Los Angeles Times – No

“Proponents of Proposition 66 say they can speed up the process and make the death penalty work, but there are serious doubts that their proposal would achieve the kind of fast-tracking they promise... And if it does succeed, it would likely require unacceptable compromises of basic constitutional rights, increasing the chance that innocent people might be put to death.” [Link](#)

Proposition 67

East Bay Times – Yes

“Bag bans work. San Jose conducted a study before and after it enacted a citywide plastic bag ban, and it showed that trash had been reduced by an eye-popping 59 percent on city streets, 89 percent in storm drains and 60 percent in creeks.” [Link](#)

San Francisco Chronicle – Yes

"In a world doused with everlasting plastic, grocery store bags play a harmful role, winding up on beaches, parks and trees, choking fish and wildlife and even clogging recycling machines. Cutting down usage, especially when cloth or paper bags can be swapped in, makes sense." [Link](#)

Los Angeles Times – Yes

"A ban on single-use bags won't stop the scourge of plastic waste, but it's a practicable place to start. And a necessary one." [Link](#)