

California Initiative Editorial Scorecard

September 2020 (2020-1)

[California Strategies](#) and [Forward Observer](#) are pleased to present the fourth edition of 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:

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 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	11
Prop 15 (Removes commercial, industrial and some agricultural property from Prop 13’s tax protections)	2	11
Prop 16 (Removes voter-approved prohibition on race-conscious university admissions, public hiring and contracting)	0	11
Prop 17 (Allows felony parolees to vote)	10	1
Prop 18 (Allows 17-year-olds to vote in primaries and special elections if they’ll be 18 for general elections)	1	10
Prop 19 (Allows elderly, disabled and wildfire victims to retain lower property tax rates when they change properties)	0	11
Prop 20 (Rolls back sentencing and parole reforms enacted in Props 47 and 57)	0	11
Prop 21 (Removes statewide constraints on local governments enacting rent control)	1	16
Prop 22 (Allows gig tech companies to remain as independent contractors)	11	0
Prop 23 (New regulation of kidney dialysis clinics)	0	11
Prop 24 (Expands online consumer privacy)	0	11
Prop 25 (Overturn cash bail prohibition)	11	0

Endorsements from the Top 22 California Papers

	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Los Angeles Times								YES				
Mercury News	NO	NO		YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Sacramento Bee								NO				
Orange County Register	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
East Bay Times	NO	NO		YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
San Francisco Chronicle		YES						NO				
Fresno Bee								NO				
San Diego Union-Tribune												
La Opinion		YES										
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 Press Democrat								NO				
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												
Chico Enterprise-Record												
Bakersfield Californian	NO	NO		NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES

Noteworthy Editorial Quotes

Proposition 14

Bakersfield Californian – No

“As California continues to struggle under the catastrophic burden of the coronavirus pandemic, increasing state budget deficits loom, public service cuts are likely and economic recovery is likely to take more than a decade... Adding \$5.5 billion to the state debt for just stem cell research would be unwise in these economically dire times.” [Link](#)

Proposition 15

San Francisco Chronicle – Yes

“For more than 40 years, California has endured a contorted property tax system that punishes home buyers, chills housing construction and rewards businesses who skate by when assessments are set. Proposition 15 would ease the worst of these abuses while protecting homeowners and small businesses. It sets a path that should continue in overhauling an out-of-whack tax code.” [Link](#)

San Gabriel Valley Tribune – No

“Passing Proposition 15 would pummel California’s economy at the very worst time. The commercial market is struggling now, as Californians increasingly work from home and as many brick-and-mortar retailers and restaurants remain closed.” [Link](#)

Proposition 16

Los Angeles Daily News – No

“Underprivileged and underrepresented Californians would be far better served by a more robust focus on improving K-12 education and ensuring more students graduate college-eligible, which in the long-run would greatly improve access to the CSU and UC system. Such an approach would deliver much better outcomes, without requiring government or public institutions to engage in preferential treatment.” [Link](#)

Proposition 17

Bakersfield Californian – No

“While parole is considered a mechanism to transition felons “back into society,” it also is a time – commonly three years – for a convicted criminal to earn their place in society. That should include earning their right to vote.” [Link](#)

Orange County Register – Yes

“Parolees are living among us and working to reintegrate into society. As part of that process of reintegration and reflecting the fact that they are no longer segregated from society behind bars, it is sensible to afford them the right to vote. American citizens who are no longer imprisoned should have their voting rights restored.” [Link](#)

Proposition 18

Los Angeles Daily News – No

“Considering the litany of complex issues on primary election ballots in California, including tax and bond measures, we’d recommend that politically interested 17-year-olds who will be able to vote in the next general election invest their time learning about the process and the issues. But they can wait until they’ve reached adulthood to cast their vote.” [Link](#)

Bakersfield Californian – Yes

“The rationale is that these young soon-to-be voters should be allowed to participate in a primary election to select the candidates competing for their votes in a final general election showdown. Now they have no say and are stuck with picking between candidates that others selected in an earlier primary election.” [Link](#)

Proposition 19

Mercury News – No

“Prop. 19 would eliminate the tax break for inherited homes that aren’t used as the owners’ primary residences. That makes sense. Had Prop. 19 stopped there, it would deserve voter support. Sadly, it doesn’t.” [Link](#)

Proposition 20

Long Beach Press-Telegram – No

“Prop. 20 itself is the wrong vehicle for raising and implementing the policy changes it promotes. At a time when Californians continue to be supportive of scaling back mass incarceration, Prop. 20 offers only the preferences of police and prison guard unions. Complex issues such as the matters at hand demand a more deliberative and thoughtful approach than Prop. 20 provides.” [Link](#)

Proposition 21

Los Angeles Times – Yes

“Cities are on the front lines of managing the upheaval and suffering caused by the state’s housing crisis, and now the COVID-19 pandemic. They need the flexibility to adopt policies in response, such as limits on rent increases or temporary rent freezes. Proposition 21 would help.” [Link](#)

Inland Valley Daily Bulletin – No

“Rent control is a government intervention that distorts, and damages, the housing market and nearly everyone in it. It doesn’t spur homebuilding. It does lower land values. It forces properties off the rental market. And above all, it doesn’t help people at the low end of the economic scale — a key goal of the backers of the ill-advised Proposition 21.” [Link](#)

Proposition 22

The Daily Breeze – Yes

“Not only would Proposition 22 allow independent drivers to keep working, but it provides a suite of tangible benefits including wage guarantees and health-care contributions. The measure offers a portable benefit model that other industries can emulate. Those truly concerned about worker benefits should applaud these provisions.” [Link](#)

Proposition 23

East Bay Times – No

“Requiring on-site physicians sounds good on the surface. But we already have a shortage of kidney doctors in California and throughout the United States. The vast majority of the dialysis clinics in the state would be forced to hire doctors with no expertise in the specialty field, adding hundreds of millions of dollars of cost for little or no medical gain.” [Link](#)

Proposition 24

The Press-Enterprise – No

“That won’t bother the tech giants or other large companies, such as banks and insurers. But for small and midsize companies, the legal bills associated with regulatory compliance for every technological upgrade would be strangling. Invention could turn into stagnation. The creative energy that has rushed new products and services into the hands of consumers would be chilled. Never again will tech giants be threatened by a start-up company in somebody’s garage.” [Link](#)

Proposition 25

San Bernardino Sun – Yes

“Poverty is not a crime, but for people who are arrested and can’t afford bail, it is punished as if it were.” [Link](#)

Mercury News – Yes

“Under the current system, wealthy defendants can post bail directly to the court and get the money back at the completion of their cases. But low-income people charged with crimes don’t have the means to post the full bail. They have two options: Stay in jail, losing their income and possibly their job, or use a private bail-bond company to gain freedom while awaiting trial. Those defendants must pay a non-refundable portion of the total bail to the bond companies — roughly 10% of the bail amount.” [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