



State Ballot Measures

In addition to voting on candidates, California voters are often asked to vote on new laws called “ballot measures.” The ballot measures that propose new laws can be for the whole state (“propositions”) or just for a local community.

There are two ways that state propositions can be put on the ballot:



The initiative process was created one hundred years ago so California citizens would not have to rely only on lawmakers to make new laws. Propositions can:

- Create new laws
- Change or repeal existing laws
- Change the State Constitution
- Approve a bond measure

What are state ballot measures about?

In California, state ballot measures have covered many topics, including schools, crime, health care, transportation, taxes, and how our government operates. A proposition can only cover one subject. People who choose to put a proposition on the ballot may have a specific goal for something they want to have funded.

You need to know:

- State ballot measures are proposed laws that require voter approval.
- They need over 50 percent “yes” votes to pass.
- They can be put before voters by:
 - the state legislature
 - citizens using the “initiative” process



California’s initiative process

To initiate means “to start.” People who get an idea to start a new state law can draft an initiative. They need to follow state rules about how to put the proposed law into a petition. Then they need to collect voter signatures equaling at least five percent of the total number of votes in the last election for Governor (or eight percent if the proposition would change the State Constitution) to qualify the proposition to go before voters in a statewide election. Following the Nov 2010 election, this was over 500,000 signatures for an initiative and over 800,000 signatures for a constitutional amendment.

How do I know to vote “yes” or “no”?

Some propositions can be complicated. Voters often feel overwhelmed by paid advertisements about ballot measures on television and radio. These short messages usually try to persuade you to vote yes or no and do not provide unbiased information.

You can get a clear description of each statewide proposition at:

- www.easyvoter.org – short summaries with pros and cons
- www.smartvoter.org – additional information
- www.sos.ca.gov – the state sends each registered voter household an official “Voter Information Guide” with detailed analyses and more information about supporters and opponents

To help you decide, you can also look to see which groups are supporting or opposing a measure.

Remember: You do not have to vote on every proposition. Choose the ones you want to learn about. If you only vote on some of the measures, your vote still counts.

A Closer Look

The number of propositions continues to grow. Understanding how propositions make it onto a ballot is important because they will continue to be a common part of California’s election process.

With the initiative process, voters can change the State Constitution if just over 50 percent agree. The legislature, on the other hand, must get voter approval in order to amend the State Constitution, and it takes 2/3rds of state lawmakers to agree to put a constitutional amendment before the voters. It also is more difficult to “undo” an initiative than to change a law passed by the legislature. Only voters can change an initiative (unless the initiative allows the legislature to amend its provisions). This is why interest groups often prefer to work through the initiative process.

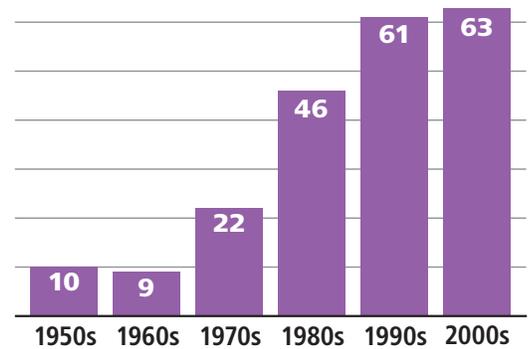
The amount of money raised to support or oppose a proposition can have a major influence on whether it passes or not. In 2006 for example, interest groups spent more than \$330 million supporting or opposing initiative campaigns. Some people are concerned that there are too many powerful interest groups in the initiative process. Others like that citizens can play a larger role in making state laws. There are many proposals about ways to improve the initiative process.

What Your Vote Means

- A YES vote on a proposition means you want it to become a new law.
- A NO vote means you do not agree with what is being proposed. You would rather keep the law on that subject the way it is now.



Number of Statewide Initiatives Qualified for the California Ballot



Source: Center for Governmental Studies and smartvoter.org