

## What to Know About California's Ballot Propositions; California Today

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### Body

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Wednesday: The presidential election isn't the only thing on the ballot.

Good morning.

With everything else going on, you may not have spent much time thinking about your ballot — or if you have, you may have been focused on the presidential election at the top of the ticket.

But in California, election time also means it's time to wade through what might feel like a soup of sometimes confusingly numbered ballot propositions.

This time, there are a dozen, which may sound like a lot, but, as Mark Baldassare told me recently, it's actually "pretty average."

Mr. Baldassare, president and chief executive of the Public Policy Institute of California, has been following the state's ballot-initiative process for a long time, including through the nonprofit's statewide surveys.

While roughly three-quarters of Californians said that the wording for initiatives was too complicated, and more than half said special interests controlled the process, he said that "an overwhelming majority" supported the state's ballot-initiative process — that ability to directly change public policies.

"I come back to that every time we've asked in our surveys," Mr. Baldassare said.

So which initiatives is he watching most closely on this year's ballot?

There's the big one, Proposition 13, which would change the way some commercial property taxes are assessed — basing them on current market value rather than purchase price.

Proponents say the move to create a "split roll" will boost desperately needed revenue for local government services and school districts by amending the landmark Proposition 13 — the 1978 initiative that has long been called a "third rail" of California politics — without raising homeowners' property taxes.

Businesses and other opponents say it would amount to a big tax increase, which would be especially poorly timed in a recession caused by the pandemic.

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The institute's most recent survey showed that Proposition 15 is supported by a slim majority of likely voters, 51 percent, with Democrats, renters and younger people much more likely to support it.

Mr. Baldassare noted in an email that because Gov. Gavin Newsom continues to "receive high marks for his overall job performance," as well as his handling of the coronavirus crisis, his endorsements of ballot measures are likely to carry more water. And he endorses Prop. 15.

There is also Proposition 16, which would reverse California's ban on using race, gender or ethnicity as factors in admissions to the state's public universities and in government hiring.

That ban was also enacted by a ballot measure, Proposition 209 in 1996. Then, as now, affirmative action was an explosive debate.

But now, proponents say, there is more information showing how supposedly race-blind admissions processes perpetuate inequality for Black and Latino students in particular. Opponents say affirmative action is its own kind of prejudice.

[Here's a deep dive into what the data shows about the downsides of California's ban on affirmative action.]

Of course, discussion about whether to reverse the ban predated the uprisings against racism that have profoundly changed the country over the last several months. But Mr. Baldassare said the outcome would give some indication of how Californians are really thinking about the ways race is woven into their lives.

The most recent survey shows that just 31 percent of likely voters would say yes on Proposition 16 and 47 percent would vote no.

Another complex and divisive measure is Proposition 22, the ballot measure bankrolled largely by Lyft and Uber that would exempt gig-work companies, including Lyft and Uber, from a new law requiring that they treat their workers as employees.

The fight over that law, passed last year, has been bitter between businesses and labor — and the pandemic has only complicated matters.

Mr. Baldassare said that although what's on the ballot was in many ways a reflection of debates a year ago, the votes would be informed by a pervasive "gloomy economic mood."

And these three propositions in particular, he said, are likely to reflect voters' opinions on broad questions as much as the policy changes themselves.

"Fifteen tells us something about how people are feeling about government spending and taxes," he said. "Sixteen tells us something about how people are feeling about racial justice issues that have surfaced in the pandemic, and 22 tells us something about the economy and jobs."

Read more about the propositions and the election:

- Find information about all the propositions, including who's putting money behind which side. [CalMatters | The Los Angeles Times | SFGate | Official voter information guide]
- Here are key election dates for each state. (Like when in-person early voting starts in California: Oct. 5) [The New York Times]
- "Birtherism" lies about Senator Kamala Harris have spread more widely than those about President Barack Obama at their peak in 2017. [The New York Times]

An update on the pandemic

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Tuesday was another mixed day for California and the pandemic. The virus death toll across the country surpassed 200,000 — an unfathomable loss that came less than seven months after learning about the country's first known coronavirus death.

[Track coronavirus cases by California county.]

But the signs of progress continued in the Golden State, where several more counties, including San Mateo, Alameda and Riverside, were cleared to move from the state's most restrictive purple tier to the less restrictive red tier — although Riverside County officials will still again weigh their own plan, which would defy state rules, according to The Press-Enterprise.

Nail salons across the state were also allowed to reopen indoors with modifications. The move came after many in the industry said it was being unfairly singled out, while hair salons and barber shops were allowed to reopen.

Read more:

- Catch up on California's new tiered reopening plan — and how it differs from the state's first major attempt to reopen. [The New York Times]
- An analysis of "excess" deaths suggests that thousands more Black, Asian and Latino Californians may have died of Covid-19 than has been previously known. [Kaiser Health News]
- As schools start a new school year remotely, finding "lost" students has gotten difficult. [The New York Times]
- Indoor dining in San Francisco could resume soon. Here's how diners feel about it. [Eater San Francisco]

Here's what else to know today

- Miles Hall, a young Black man in Walnut Creek, was killed by police officers last year after they received calls from his family saying he was having a mental health episode. The city reached a \$4 million settlement with his family. [The New York Times]
- Vanessa Bryant has sued the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, alleging that at least eight deputies took and shared graphic photos of the victims of the helicopter crash that killed her husband, Kobe Bryant; their daughter; and seven others. [The New York Times]
- The state auditor released a stinging report slamming the University of California system for admitting students unfairly based on personal or family connections to donors. The audit found 64 such cases from the 2013-14 school year through 2018-19. [CalMatters]
- Researchers in California helped measure the biggest wave surfed this year: a 73.5 footer ridden by a 33-year-old Brazilian woman, Maya Gabeira. [The New York Times]
- The Dodgers beat the A's to clinch their eighth consecutive National League West title. A typical alcohol-soaked celebration was, alas, prohibited. [The Los Angeles Times]

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Jill Cowan grew up in Orange County, graduated from U.C. Berkeley and has reported all over the state, including the Bay Area, Bakersfield and Los Angeles — but she always wants to see more. Follow along here or on Twitter.

California Today is edited by Julie Bloom, who grew up in Los Angeles and graduated from U.C. Berkeley.

PHOTO: A volunteer helped people register to vote at the Gen-Z Drive Up Voter Registration Event organized by BeWoke Vote on Saturday in Compton. (PHOTOGRAPH BY Valerie Macon/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

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