



EXPANDING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING ON THE BALLOT

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA

In 2018, voters in Oakland, California were presented with a city ballot measure to improve affordable housing policies for renters. Measure Y was “designed to amend eviction limitations law.” The measure, which was referred to the ballot by city council members, would remove the exemption from Oakland’s Just Cause Eviction law, which requires landlords to provide a reason for evicting a tenant, for owner-occupied two- and three-unit buildings. Additionally, this measure would allow Oakland’s City Council to impose further limitations to landlords’ ability to evict without being required to return the decision to voters. Oakland voters passed Measure Y with 58.37% of the vote, ending the just cause eviction exemption for two- and three-unit buildings in the city.

Oakland is a Northern California city that has faced high rates of gentrification and displacement, particularly among low-income and BIPOC residents. PolicyLink has documented declining income levels for residents of color and a shrinking Black population [41]. According to the U.S. Census, in 1980, Oakland’s Black residents comprised 47.0% of the city’s total population. By the year 2000, that number had dropped to 35.7%. The most recent population estimates from 2019 have Black residents accounting for only 23.8% of the city’s overall population. In less than 40 years, Oakland’s Black population has been cut in half. This displacement can be traced to dramatic shifts in the Bay Area economy, prompting rapidly rising costs and values of Oakland’s housing market.

Nonprofit Professionalization and Partnering with Elected Officials on Ballot Measures

Oakland is also a city within a metropolitan region that is densely populated with nonprofit service and advocacy organizations. Stanford University's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society numbers the total number of nonprofit organizations in the Bay Area at approximately 15,000, or one nonprofit per 573 residents [42]. Service-based and advocacy organizations played a prominent role in getting Measure Y on the ballot. Leah Simon-Weisberg, an attorney who was with Centro Legal de la Raza during the 2018 campaign, explained how she discovered the need to end this exemption:

The Oakland case study demonstrates how a well-resourced, densely populated nonprofit ecosystem can move important pieces of legislation to improve affordable housing by bringing the issue to voters. However, it also shows how a professionalized advocacy and service sector can successfully win a ballot measure campaign in the context of a progressive city without building significant community power.

When I first came to Oakland, I started working at an organization called Centro Legal de la Raza, which is a legal service agency. I was directing the tenant program. I started doing direct services. After about two weeks, I identified immediately that everybody was receiving a 60-day notice claiming that the owner was going to move in. Well, that's exceptional. I worked in Los Angeles for about a decade and in that entire time, I represented 8 tenants in owner move-in cases. And I was the only person who did those cases [at the agency in Los Angeles]. So to see on a daily basis up to 10 notices like that amongst tenants is just... it doesn't make any sense.

Simon-Weisberg's professional experience in another city allowed her to detect how owner-occupied evictions were being abused in Oakland [43].



California is considered a “ballot initiative state,” 1 of the 21 states in which citizens can refer statutes to appear on the ballot through initiative petitions.

On average, California voters weigh in on 116 state propositions and 39 ballot initiatives or referenda each decade [43]. On top of these, voters are presented with ballot measures at the city and county levels. It can be incredibly expensive and time-consuming to collect the required signatures and mount a campaign for a citizen-initiated statute. **As a result, there is a professionalization of the process by which these direct-democracy approaches to governance are undertaken.** Measure Y illustrates this phenomenon.

Simon-Weisberg described the process by which laws can be changed to better protect Oakland tenants: “To [change the law], the rent control side can be done through [City] Council. But in Oakland, if you want to make a change to the just cause ordinance, you have to go through the ballot.” She detailed the comparably high hurdle of signature collection to get an initiative on the ballot in Oakland—10% to 15% of registered voters, depending on the nature of the initiative. To avoid this process, she worked with Oakland City Councilmember Dan Kalb’s office to have the measure referred to the ballot. She explained, “I drafted language, gave it to Dan Kalb’s office, and then the city attorney drafted it.” In an interview with Councilmember Kalb, he confirmed this chain of events. **The detailed knowledge of the process to change a city ordinance, the technical expertise needed to draft the initial language of the ballot measure, and the direct connection to the councilmember’s office all point to the ways in which service and advocacy nonprofit actors use professional acumen and connections to bring issues to voters.**

LEAH SIMON-WEISBERG

In addition to knowing the process, Simon-Weisberg was attuned to the political commitments of Oakland City Councilmembers. Similarly, Councilmember Kalb noted that he had attempted to address the same issue in 2016, but did not have enough votes on the City Council to refer a ballot measure then. Simon-Weisberg knew of Kalb's support of tenants' rights and explained, "We mapped where the issues were happening, and it was District 1 and District 3. The District 3 [Councilmember] at the time was really terrible on tenant issues, so she was not going to be an ally. But District 1 was more progressive, and it was happening in his district, so he really took the leadership of [the ballot measure]."

To be sure, while the ballot measure was conceived of by an advocate, and referred to the ballot by City Council, grassroots organizations were also involved in the process. The Close the Loophole Coalition united service organizations like Centro Legal de la Raza, with grassroots organizations such as the Oakland Tenants Union. James E. Vann, a longtime organizer with the Oakland Tenants Union, discussed his organization's involvement:

The principal sponsor was Councilmember Dan Kalb, the Councilmember for District 1, North Oakland. However, when it was developed and brought to the City Council, we made strong presentations, and brought out a lot of members and the tenant community to come to City Council and speak for the needs of people who had actually gone through some of the kinds of abuses that had happened [because] of this exemption. [We] pointed out that Oakland was one of the only cities that had this exemption. [The ballot measure] got the full support of [the] City Council, so it did go to the ballot with a unanimous vote.

Beyond expressing their support for the measure, local grassroots organizations like the Asian Pacific Environmental Network and Oakland Rising sent out voter guides and knocked on doors to get out the vote. They did not, however, engage in base building or transformational organizing efforts around this particular ballot measure.

The expert comes in, identifies the problem, works behind the scenes to fix it, and fixes the law. But I would not say that that is a particularly empowering method.

LEAH SIMON-WEISBERG

Simon-Weisberg reflected back on the process:

The expert comes in, identifies the problem, works behind the scenes to fix it, and fixes the law. But I would not say that that is a particularly empowering method." While ultimately successful at protecting tenants from landlords abusing the exemption, the Measure Y campaign was not used as a way to educate, mobilize, or organize poor, working-class, or BIPOC voters, all of whom are overrepresented in Oakland's tenant population.

KEY MESSAGING & FRAMING: Equal Rights and Protections

When asked to reflect back on the messaging for Measure Y, there was not a particular slogan or message the interviewees pointed to. In a progressive city like Oakland, it is possible that the need for creative or targeted messaging was not as pronounced. Camilo Sol Zamora, Co-Director of Housing, Land and Development at Causa Justa::Just Cause, described the messaging around equal protections:

One of the things that stands out was this narrative around everyone deserving the same rights, that it was not right nor just to have one neighbor that didn't have eviction protections or rent protections live across the street from another. We were actually seeing those stories play out in the conversations that the members that were engaged in this fight would have with their neighbors, speaking to neighbors who had those rights and just feeling horrible that their other neighbors did not.

In addition to framing the issue as one about equal protections for tenants, as suggested by the name of the coalition supporting the measure, the ballot measure was also framed as closing a loophole that was being abused by landlords to evict long-term tenants in order to be able to raise the rent. Under the campaign section of the Oakland Tenants Union website is proclaimed **“Close the Loophole: Protect Oakland Renters from Eviction!”**



CAMILO SOL ZAMORA

What proved to be impactful was the lived experience and life story of the Webb family, three generations of whom were living in a three-unit building, and who were evicted and ultimately displaced from Oakland. Simon-Weisberg described how their story prompted her to take action:

This happened to the Webb family. My experience [has been that] you are representing tenants, you are enforcing the law as it is, and then suddenly, you realize there's this huge loophole that is preventing you from protecting people who really need to be protected. And this family is one of those. This is a family that had lived in their triplex since the '70s. The children had all been born in the building. Eventually, when they became adults, they moved into the other units as they became open. When I met this family, the son lived in one unit, the daughter lived in another, and the grandmother lived in the third.

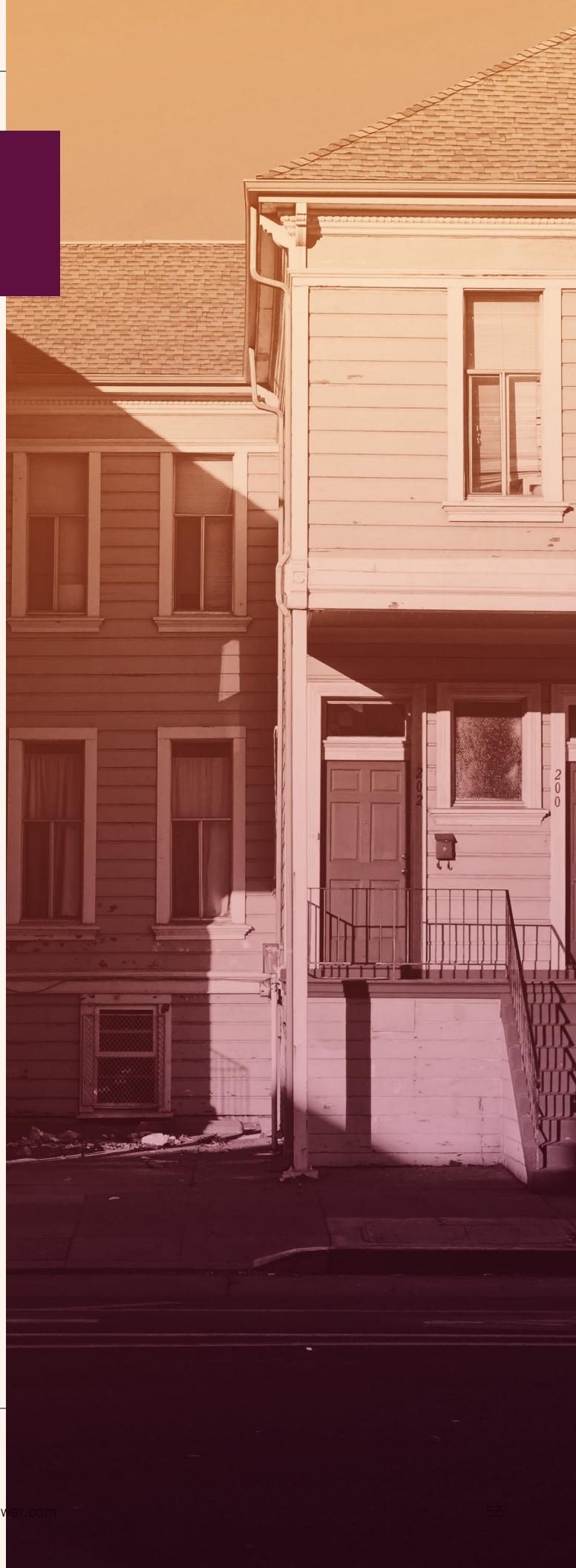
And the landlord was in the process, first of trying to raise their rent. This landlord was a young kid, I don't think he was even 25. Initially, we fought the illegal rent increase. So that failed. His next strategy was, "Well, I'm going to pretend to move in." So he served [an eviction notice to] the grandmother who was paying the least amount of rent, which was illegal. You can't do that. You can't serve owner move-ins on people over 65 or people who are disabled. So that protected the grandmother. But then all he did was find the person in the family that didn't qualify. So they tried evicting the son, which was successful. [The landlord] didn't have to provide relocation because we hadn't changed the law yet. And so suddenly, the landlord moves into the son's apartment. Never lives there, starts doing construction, and while doing construction claims he's living there. And he serves both the daughter and the grandmother a 60-day notice. No cause. What was frustrating the whole time is what he was doing was legal.

The campaign uplifted the Webb family's experience, among others, and the local news picked it up as well. **Bringing real stories to voters humanized the loophole in the city law.** At the same time, community members who shared their stories were not activated through the campaign. Interviewees did not report any of these families becoming actively involved in the fight to end displacement, gentrification, or the housing crisis in Oakland or elsewhere.

Bringing real stories to voters humanized the loophole in the city law.

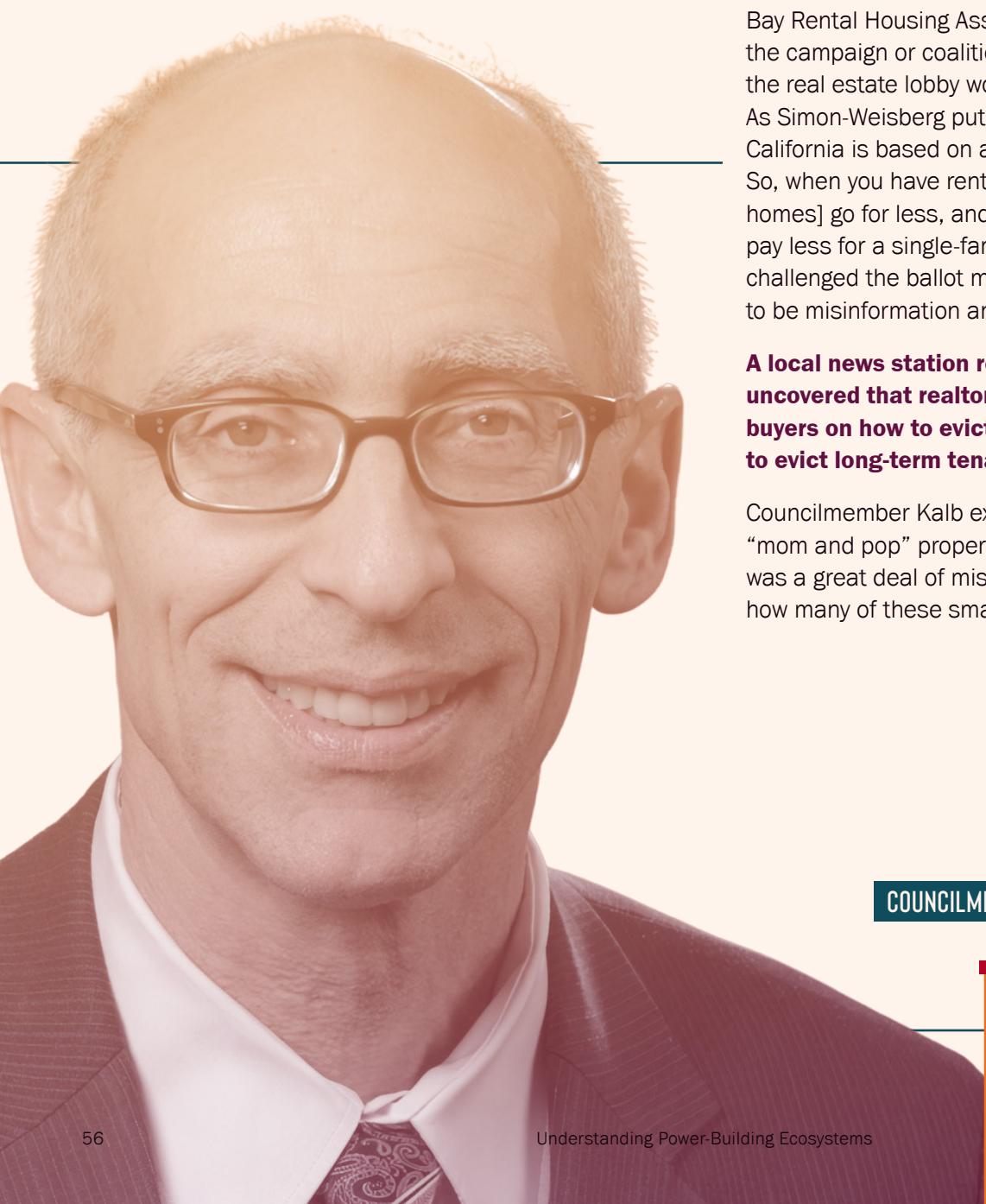
Pairing Local Measures with Statewide Initiatives

In 2018 when Measure Y was on the ballot in Oakland, a statewide proposition to strengthen tenant protections was also proposed to voters across the state of California. Proposition 10 aimed to repeal the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act, which limits the use of rent control in California. Because Measure Y and Prop 10 were both intended to strengthen protections for tenants, organizers decided to pair the campaigns. Zamora explained Causa Justa::Just Cause's position on the measures; **"We were for Prop 10 from the very beginning, so it was a no brainer. For us, [pairing Measure Y and Prop 10] was like the local iteration of tenant protections and the statewide iteration of tenant protections teaming up."** When tenants' rights organizers encouraged Oakland voters to support Measure Y, they also asked them to repeal Costa-Hawkins at the state level by voting for Prop 10. Simon-Weisberg explained, "it was the unions that assisted in a lot of the infrastructure in terms of the financial support. They also were working really hard to try and get rid of Costa Hawkins at the time. So they were willing to help combine the campaigns. So that made a huge difference." **Combining campaigns was an effective strategy for consolidating resources and expertise. However, it only proved successful for one campaign; while Prop 10 did not pass, Measure Y did.**



CHALLENGE

Misinformation from the Real Estate Lobby

A portrait photograph of Councilmember Dan Kalb. He is a middle-aged man with short, light-colored hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is smiling at the camera.

Many respondents noted that the primary opposition was the real estate lobby, and specifically the East Bay Rental Housing Association. It was no surprise to the campaign or coalition supporting Measure Y that the real estate lobby would oppose the city measure. As Simon-Weisberg put it, “[Realtors’] commission in California is based on a percentage of the sale price. So, when you have rent control, then [multi-family homes] go for less, and if you’re paying less rent, you’ll pay less for a single-family home.” The real estate lobby challenged the ballot measure with what some deemed to be misinformation and suspect tactics.

A local news station reporting on Measure Y uncovered that realtors were coaching potential buyers on how to evict tenants and using the ability to evict long-term tenants as a selling point [44].

Councilmember Kalb expressed empathy for small, “mom and pop” property owners, but noted that there was a great deal of misinformation being spread about how many of these small landlords would be affected:

COUNCILMEMBER DAN KALB

I bet almost all the landlords who showed up to testify [before City Council] were indeed good people who would not [exploit the exemption]. But there are a lot of landlords who do that. They have no hesitation. Whether they are speculators or they come in or buy a place and live in it for a little bit in order to be able to kick people out. People just take advantage of any loophole that exists.

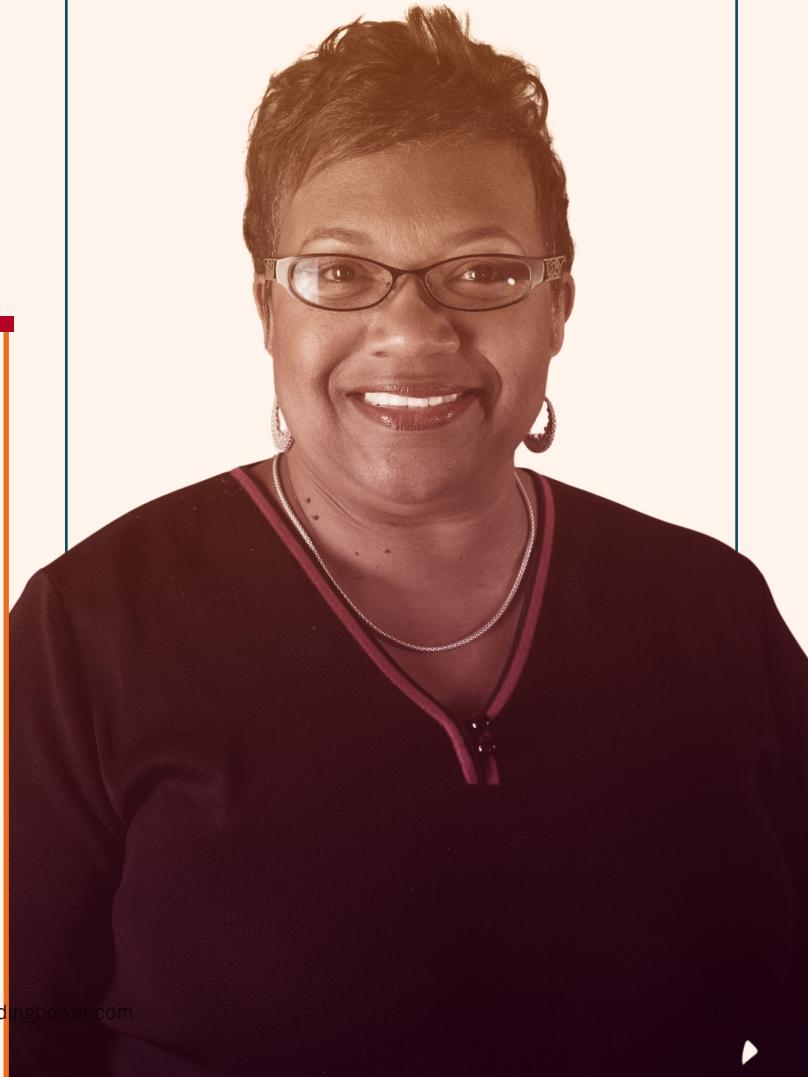
The reality on the ground was more complex than owners versus renters. Zamora expounded upon some of the considerations when pitting small landlords against tenants:

I think what has been hard is the whole story of the mom and pop landlord. There are things that we are going to continue to struggle with under capitalism and landowning. There are a lot of fears and misinformation spread by realtor associations that it's not in [landlords'] interest to give up rights, what they see as their right to control who they rent to and [for] how much. And oftentimes [the landlords are] folks of color and they are immigrants too. So that is where class really plays a bigger storyline than race.

Grassroots organizations working to secure tenants' rights offered a nuanced analysis of the dynamics of race, class, and immigration status in thinking about the communities they serve and organize.

Despite the challenges of misinformation and morally questionable tactics, the real estate lobby did not throw as much money behind opposing the ballot measure as they could have. As Simon-Weisberg noted, "We have generally not had a lot of opposition for pro-tenant initiatives. [The real estate lobby] could outspend us. But they have never been able to win by initiative. They have always had to win by going to Council."

SHERYL WALTON



EXPANDING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING ON THE BALLOT

PORTLAND, OREGON

In 2018, two interrelated ballot measures—intended to allow nonprofits and other private developers in Portland to build affordable housing—were brought to Oregon voters, one in the tri-county Portland metropolitan area, and the second at the state level. The first measure was to amend the state constitution to remove a “restriction that affordable housing projects funded by municipal bonds be government owned.” This became Measure 102, which was run at the state level and passed with 56.90% of the vote. This amendment at the state level supported the Portland bond measure, Measure 26-199, which provided \$652.8 million towards affordable housing in the Portland Metro area: Washington, Clackamas, and Multnomah Counties. Voters approved this bond measure as well with 65.76% of the vote. The simultaneous change to the state constitution meant that the new affordable housing built through the bond measure could be owned or operated by city partners rather than government agencies alone. Both measures were put on the ballot by the Oregon Metro Council (known colloquially as Metro), the tri-county Portland metropolitan area’s regional government.

Like Oakland, the ballot measures in Oregon were lucky to face a liberal electorate. With Oregon also being a ballot initiative state, we observed a professionalization of the process for Measure 26–199 and 102 alike. While in Oakland, the lack of power built seemed to be at least partially due to the process, in which a self-proclaimed policy expert led the charge for getting the issue on the ballot, in Oregon a more pernicious process prohibited power-

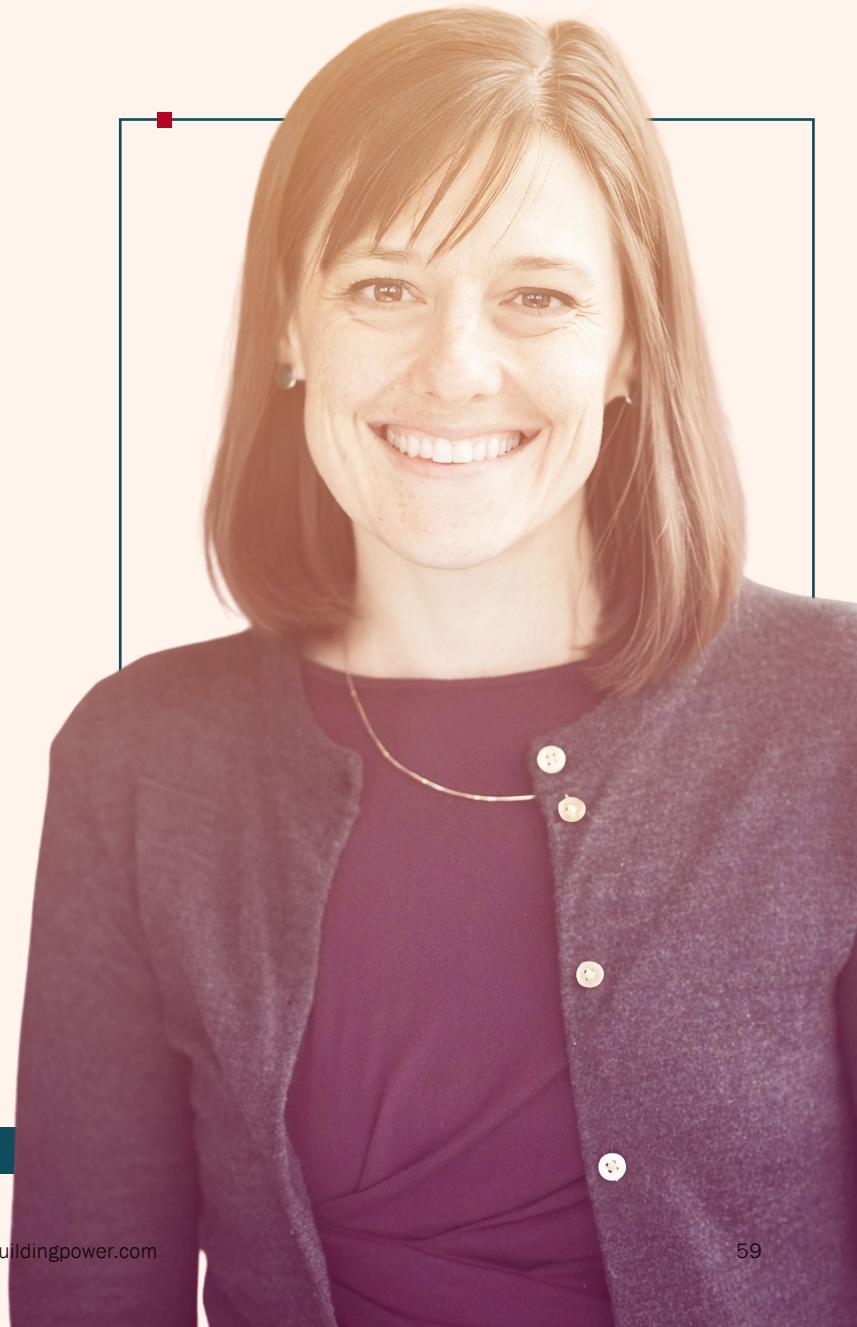
building, particularly in BIPOC communities. Despite bringing BIPOC-led organizations to the table to help shape the measure, they felt tokenized when the campaign moved forward with framings that did not align with their values. This turned off grassroots organizations representing BIPOC communities and many ultimately decided not to put much of their time or resources behind the campaign.

Metro-led Measure

The decision to bring affordable housing measures came from Metro. Like Oakland, this measure was not resident-led or initiated. Alison McIntosh, who serves as the Deputy Director of the nonprofit Neighborhood Alliance and convenes the Oregon Housing Alliance coalition, described the rationale behind the local and state-level measures:

In 2016, there was a bond measure for affordable housing in the city of Portland alone. I worked on that campaign as a volunteer and my organization endorsed the measure. At the time the measure was referred [to voters by the City of Portland], they knew that because it was a general obligation bond, there was this weird provision in the Oregon constitution that meant the City of Portland would have to own and operate any housing that was built with those dollars. That is not a role that we see city governments or county governments typically playing, particularly now. We have public housing authorities, and we have nonprofit and for profit affordable housing providers who comply with a lot of rules and restrictions about that housing. But a city owning and operating housing wasn't traditional or typical. And from an affordable housing wonk perspective, which is always what I bring to these conversations, it also limited the tools that we could use.

ALISON MCINTOSH



McIntosh continued the explanation of how Measure 102 was brought before voters:

In the fall of 2017, we put together some resources and some smart people to put together a poll to ask voters what they thought of this question. And we actually polled on what became Measure 102 as well as another kind of wonky bonding issue. The state bond question polled really terribly. The polling on what became Measure 102 wasn't fabulous either, but it wasn't nearly as bad as the state [bond] measure. So we decided to go forward with the polling with a question on 102. [We] spent a lot of time with the folks at Metro and the City of Portland and the Speaker's office to craft a measure that the legislature would pass and refer to voters. We had an existing coalition that was able to push that in the legislative process. It passed unanimously in the House and had strong bipartisan support in the Senate. After the titling process in May, it joined forces with the Metro measure to fund affordable housing bonds. So the campaign was unified.

McIntosh delineates how policy “woks” like herself, and advocacy organizations participated in shaping what would become Measures 102 and 26-199. She does not mention input or involvement of community members or directly impacted people.

Community input did, however, help shape Measure 102. Becca Uherbelau—who is the Executive Director of Our Oregon, and worked on the affordable housing measures in her capacity there, but also worked at Metro when the affordable housing measures were in their initial phases of conception—recalled that approximately six to eight months prior to the referral date, Metro had engaged in learning opportunities from BIPOC communities to support their racial equity strategy. She recounted

We were partnering with the Coalition for Communities of Color and Momentum Alliance to do these culturally specific community conversations that were to inform the racial equity strategy. And in every single one—we were talking about issues facing the community—and housing affordability was number one.

Uherbelau noted that Metro had initially intended to refer a transportation measure in 2018, but shifted course because the need for housing was so acute and BIPOC-led organizations were calling for solutions.

Because both measures were referred through Metro, this bought the campaign time they would not have had if they had been required to collect signatures to get these issues before voters. Megan Wever, who managed the statewide coalition and ran communications for the campaign, clarified, “Both the statewide [measure] and the Metro bond were referrals, so while all of our fellow colleagues working on measures were still in the signature gathering phase, we were launching our full coalition.”

Pairing City Measures with Statewide Initiative & Candidates

The local and state measures were run together as a combined effort through the “Yes for Affordable Housing” campaign. Wever noted that she had not previously seen a local and statewide measure run together. She reflected that in this pairing, the two worked well because in most of the state, housing bonds for affordable housing had never been raised. Pairing the local bond with the constitutional amendment provided a clear example of how the abstract rule would apply for voters outside of Portland. Even still, Wever explained, “Yes for Affordable Housing’s messaging was promoting both measures, but it was really focused on the Portland Metro area.”

KEY MESSAGING & FRAMING: Racist Nostalgia

The campaign struggled around its messaging, which coalition members representing and serving BIPOC communities found offensive. Angela Martin, Senior Director of Wheelhouse Northwest, the consulting agency that spearheaded the campaign logistics, described the framing: “We constructed a message that said, ‘It used to be, if you worked hard, you could afford a place to live.’ [We] tapped into nostalgia, ‘we used to be able to afford,’ and merit ‘work hard and you should be able to afford a roof over your head.’” Duncan Hwang, the Associate Director at the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), described how the nostalgia frame landed for him:

“Basically, they came up with a message that was like, ‘Make America Great Again.’” The proposal to use a similar framing to the Trump administration for a progressive measure was problematic for organizations speaking to BIPOC voters. Beyond that, the message did not resonate for BIPOC since the reality this framing evoked only existed for white people.

The values-based frames of nostalgia and merit were chosen because they polled best with older white, Republican women. Martin recalled, “I walked in with these findings that showed if I use this message, I could get that 60-year-old Republican woman in Washington County to say yes on raising taxes for affordable housing.” She acknowledged that this approach lacked a racial equity lens. Martin now takes responsibility and calls the experience “a place of learning.” She elaborated:

There's a tension point that I fully expect to run into every time I run a campaign around the messaging, because there are ways that you talk about systems change, social change. There are long-term messaging goals and there are short-term messaging goals. And there's a difference of opinion among those who want to see a campaign's message be in service of the long-term, social change goals. And I get that. I don't think a campaign message should ever be in conflict with those long-term social messaging goals, but I am a practitioner of public opinion research and understand the timeline. So I'm of the opinion that I need to speak to the audience that's showing up on election day and get them to “Yes.” So there's a real tension there that has always caused a moment of conflict. It certainly did in 2018.

This focus on the “yes” votes over the experiences and messaging that would speak to communities most directly impacted by the issue alienated some members of the coalition. Multiple interviewees expressed their frustration with this approach. Jenny Lee, Deputy Director of Coalition of Communities of Color, recounted a heated discussion about the messaging with the consultant team in which she declared, “Even if that's what your testing says, it's still racist.” Robin Ye, who was the Political Director for APANO in 2018, described his organization's position:

At the heart of the work we do is to try our best always to center the folks most impacted. And this campaign was actively trying to obfuscate who would be the beneficiaries of affordable housing, because they did not want to tip off their Clackamas and Washington County voters that people of color were going to receive [the benefits].

Eventually, the campaign dropped the nostalgia frame and kept the merit-based frame. Wever noted that while dropping the nostalgia frame may have assuaged some organizations working with BIPOC communities, organizations serving unhoused populations still found the merit-based frame problematic because it implied that people must have a job to deserve housing.

Ultimately, BIPOC-led organizations found the campaign to be harmful, both to communities of color and to efforts to expand affordable housing. As a result they chose to be minimally engaged in the campaign—endorsing the measure and weighing in on coalition decisions and having their involvement end there.



DUNCAN HWANG

Organizations working in BIPOC communities responded by rejecting the framing altogether. When asked how the message was tailored for the communities in which APANO worked, Ye simply responded, “Oh, we just didn’t use any of their framing.” He asserted that Measure 102 and Measure 26–199 were lower on APANO’s priority list when engaging with voters because it was already likely to win and there were other, more pressing measures on the ballot that would have consequences for immigrant communities and reproductive health. **He concluded that they put their energy elsewhere in the 2018 elections because “[The other measures] were frankly just more important and less racist.”** Hwang shared what he would have liked to see as the framing:

It should actually be a frame about community resilience, or community strengthening... We thought [the messaging for the campaign] was an opportunity to reframe the conversation and talk about how mixed income neighborhoods are generally more successful and happy. And the anti-displacement angle: we want to be able to stay in place and not get pushed out.

Ultimately, BIPOC-led organizations found the campaign to be harmful, both to communities of color and to efforts to expand affordable housing. As a result they chose to be minimally engaged in the campaign—endorsing the measure and weighing in on coalition decisions and having their involvement end there.

CHALLENGES

Consultants

Many respondents described the consultants on the campaign as lacking humility, empathy, and curiosity. Some BIPOC organizers said they wished consultants had acknowledged their expertise and leadership earlier on and done more to prioritize the communities most impacted by Measure 102.

A Missed Opportunity for Power-Building

Measures 102 and 26–199 failed to build power. As Hwang noted, “A lot of POC-led organizations were involved in the formulation of 102, but not in the campaign.” The campaign effectively alienated organizations serving BIPOC communities, discouraging them from building power around affordable housing through the ballot measure campaign. Instead, these organizations focused their attention and efforts on candidates and ballot measures that resonated more with their communities.

POWER-BUILDING ASSESSMENT: AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The following table offers a breakdown of how the affordable housing campaigns scored on our power-building assessment. It offers some insight into why these campaigns did not build as much power as some of the other campaigns and highlights opportunities to prioritize community involvement in the future.

Table 3. Affordable Housing Campaigns Power-Building Assessment

OUTCOMES		
METRIC	Yes/No	DETAILS
Newly activated individuals	No	Activating new people was not part of the strategy for these specific campaigns.
New voters or communities participating in electoral politics	No	Oakland's campaign targeted organizations' existing voting blocks, while Portland's campaign targeted white middle-class women, which is standard practice for moving swing voters.
New organizations/programs	No	Respondents did not describe creating new organizations or programs.
New networks, coalitions or organizing relationships	Somewhat	In Oakland, the Close the Loopholes Coalition emerged, which repositioned which organizations held leadership positions. ACCE and Causa Justa::Just Cause collaboratively led the field work and Centro Legal led the policy work. In Oregon, the Welcome Home Coalition, which was coordinating the Yes for Affordable Housing Campaign, fractured over tensions around the messaging. One organizing relationship that was deepened as a result of this campaign was with the Oregon Food Bank. The Food Bank formally dedicated some of an employee's time to the campaign and leveraged its statewide network.
New funders	No	Respondents did not describe new funding streams nor relationships with funders.
New audience or increased attention	No	Interviewees openly stated that these were not the most exciting or noteworthy issues on the ballot in 2018 and thus did not receive much attention.
New access to decision making	No	These campaigns leveraged the decision-making power they already had rather than improving access for new groups or individuals.
New positional power for communities that have been traditionally marginalized	No	Respondents did not describe shifts in positional power that occurred during the campaign, however, communities that have been traditionally marginalized may have gained more power after the fact because of the policy changes.

Table 3. Affordable Housing Campaigns Power-Building Assessment, *continued*

PROCESS		
METRIC	Yes/No	DETAILS
New frameworks or narratives in explaining an issue	No	Neither Oregon's nostalgia frame nor Oakland's gentrification frame were new.
New organizing models, strategies or tactics	Somewhat	The strategy of linking local measures with statewide ballot initiatives is not necessarily new, however, it is noteworthy.
Expanding know-how to new groups around ballot initiative or other civic engagement processes	No	Respondents did not mention this in our conversations.
Community has autonomy and agency throughout the campaign	No	In both Oakland and Portland, nonprofits carried out much of the organizing, which did not create many opportunities for community participation or control.
Community knowledge is respected in the process	Somewhat	In Oakland, many of the organizations in the Close the Loopholes Coalition have grassroots bases that they are responsive to and this respect for community expertise and knowledge is carried into their organizing. In Portland, respondents said they wished consultants had acknowledged their expertise and leadership earlier on and done more to prioritize the communities most impacted by the housing crisis. However, the consultants ultimately moved away from the racist nostalgia messaging because of how community partners responded, which shows some baseline respect for their perspective.
Campaigns are accountable to community members	No	While organizations in both cities serve community members, respondents did not mention agreements or processes that would ensure that campaigns were held accountable to community interests and needs.

TAKEAWAYS FOR LOCAL POWER-BUILDING IN LIBERAL CITIES

Professionalization, Technicality, and Progressive Contexts as Barriers to Power-Building

The affordable housing campaigns built the least power of all the case studies. This seems to be at least partially due to the professionalization of the ecosystems and how systematized processes have become. The measures themselves were also more administrative and technical issues and did not resonate in the same way as the fights to restore the right to vote or require unanimous jury verdicts in the South, for example. Another interesting potential barrier to power-building was the fact that these measures originated in liberal, progressive-leaning cities that already had some support from elected officials. Organizers described how they expected the measures to pass from the start since they were led by experienced advocates and the legislatures were receptive, whereas other fights in 2018 required more to win. With electoral results as the goal these characteristics may be seen as positive, however, our findings show that they also may hinder power-building.

Skipping Signature Collection Has Its Tradeoffs

While foregoing the signature collection phase of the campaigns saved time on the front end and gave organizers more time for actual campaigning, fundraising, and getting out the vote, it also detracted from building power in communities and raising awareness about or long-term commitment to the issue.

Pairing Local and Statewide Measures Can Be Beneficial

Both local ballot measure campaigns benefited from aligning themselves with related statewide campaigns. The partnerships granted them access to powerful coalition partners and resources that helped bring them electoral success. In Oregon's case, having the Portland measure as an example of what cities would be able to do under the new law helped to clarify how the otherwise abstract policy applied, which was then helpful at the state level.

Messages that Prioritize Short-term Wins Can Be Harmful

Targeting swing voters with messages that are more focused on winning campaigns than changing distorted narratives can harm communities who stand to benefit from the policies. In Oregon's Yes for Affordable Housing campaign, we saw how the decisions to use messaging that centered white voters and moderate Republicans turned off coalition partners who may have otherwise seen the campaign as a tool for building power. Ultimately, this shows how narrowly focusing on winning specific campaigns and letting this inform the messaging may alienate important populations.



Campaigns Raise Awareness

While power-building was minimal in Oakland and Portland, the ballot measures helped to educate voters and raise awareness about local housing rights organizations. Eddie Ytuarte, a longtime organizer with the Oakland Tenants Union, unpacked this, saying, “I think it’s because of Measures like JJ and Y that inform people. It gets renters aware that there’s something else happening out there. It gets our name out there, it gets the name of ACCE out there. I think the elections themselves set the stage for a more aware public and more aware group of renters.” This greater recognition and awareness could lay the foundation for future campaigns and power-building efforts.

Leveraging Direct Democracy

In a liberal city like Portland, we learned that it can be easier to pass progressive legislation through direct democracy than through city council or other legislative bodies. Martin explained this: “Ballot measures really were a way to leverage the quintessential 80/20 issue, where 80% of the public supports something, but yet our lawmakers, whether they’re at the state level or the local level, are out of sync with the public.”