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November 2020 Voter Guide

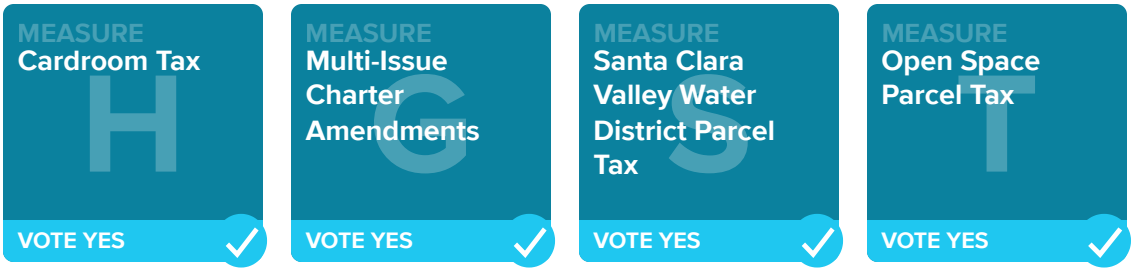
Ballot analysis and recommendations

SPUR analyzed all local and state measures on the San Francisco, San José and Oakland ballots for the November 2020 election. Our analysis includes the background behind the measures, pros and cons, and a recommendation on how to vote.

San Francisco (SF)



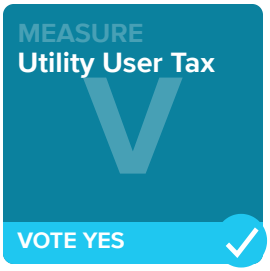
San José (SJ)



Oakland (OAK)













Bay Area (BA)



California (CA)



SF Prop A

Health, Parks and Streets Bond

BOND

Health and Homelessness, Parks, and Streets Bond

Issues $487.5 million in general obligation bonds for capital projects for: mental health, substance abuse and homelessness programs; parks and recreation facilities; and street improvement, maintenance and repair.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Although this measure includes a wide range of seemingly unrelated projects, they are beneficial to the city and would particularly benefit vulnerable populations and communities impacted by systemic racism. The investments funded by Prop. A support SPUR's vision for an equitable "15-minute city," where neighborhoods — including public spaces — are designed for safety and belonging and where residents can easily take care of their regular activities without the use of a car.

Overall, this measure is a fiscally responsible use of the city's bonding authority and is likely to provide meaningful economic stimulus, job creation and social support during a time of prolonged economic and public health crisis.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop B

New Department of Sanitation and Streets

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Department of Sanitation and Streets, Sanitation and Streets Commission and Public Works Commission

Establishes a new Department of Sanitation and Streets by splitting up the Department of Public Works and creates oversight commissions for both departments.

Vote NO

SPUR's Recommendation

Recent corruption and ongoing problems with dirty streets both highlight the need for reform at DPW. Rooting out corruption and improving efficiency in city departments are goals we share with Prop. B's proponents, and the idea of establishing a commission to provide oversight (as most other city agencies have) is worth considering. But reform — even reform focused on something as pressing as cleaning up San Francisco's streets — doesn't require cleaving a new city department out of an existing one and divvying up accountability for this pressing problem among the mayor, 11 supervisors and the controller. The broader goals of this measure would be better achieved by the mayor and the Board of Supervisors placing a greater focus on management, performance and accountability than by creating a costly new city agency.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop C

City Commission Membership Requirements

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Removing Citizenship Requirements for Members of City Bodies

Allows non-citizens to serve on commissions and other city advisory boards.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

In the midst of a pandemic and a national reckoning with racial injustice, San Francisco needs government to be reflective of the communities it serves. Increasing representation in civic decision-making leads to better and more legitimate policy, while building trust and reducing stigma. And participating in city commissions and boards is a powerful way for undocumented immigrants to directly impact their communities.

Non-citizen immigrants send their children to San Francisco schools, pay taxes and contribute to their communities. Those who are eager to serve their city should have that opportunity.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop D

Sheriff Oversight

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Sheriff Department Oversight Board and Inspector General

Establishes a Sheriff's Department Oversight Board and an Office of Inspector General to investigate misconduct and make recommendations regarding complaints against the San Francisco Sheriff's Department.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

It would be ideal to have one existing oversight body with the resources and processes in place to carry out consistent, high-functioning oversight for both the Police Department and the Sheriff's Department. It is our assessment that DPA is not currently resourced or positioned to provide the investigatory power and oversight that the Sheriff's Department needs. SPUR believes the compelling need for transparency and oversight overrides concerns about cost and efficiency.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop E

Police Staffing

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Police Staffing

Removes San Francisco's minimum police staffing requirements from the City Charter and establishes a framework for the Police Department and Police Commission to use in determining the city's police staffing needs.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

A minimum staffing requirement is not a best practice for determining police staffing levels, and police staffing levels should not be mandated by the City Charter. Prop. E is a good governance proposal in that it would remove a decision from the charter that should not be there and empower the Police Commission to determine staffing levels based upon relevant staffing considerations, such as department workload, crime data and community needs.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop F

Business Tax Changes

CHARTER AMENDMENT AND ORDINANCE

Business Tax Overhaul

Makes changes to the city's business tax system and authorizes the release of funding from two prior voter-approved tax measures.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

It is a significant achievement to produce compromise tax reform in the midst of an economic recession, especially when the reform measure would provide targeted relief and manage to raise revenue. Prop. F would also unlock over a billion dollars to fund critically urgent needs around homelessness and child care. While the measure does raise rates on many technology companies, it would provide relief to struggling industries and delay rate increases in a way that's responsive to the health of the economy. While the circumstances are extraordinarily challenging and Prop. F is imperfect, it represents a number of wins for San Francisco at a critical moment.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop G

Youth Voting in Local Elections

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Youth Voting in Local Elections

Amends the City Charter's definition of "voter" for the purpose of municipal elections to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

SPUR has advocated for decades to increase participation in the civic decision-making process. We believe responsive, effective government requires a high level of involvement by the city's residents. This measure would open participation in public decisions to more citizens who we believe could make conscientious voting decisions. Additionally, engaging youth in municipal elections could improve the health of our democracy overall by heightening interest in local civic issues and contributing to better youth turnout and lifetime voter engagement.

Young people are deeply aware of the political, social and civic problems in San Francisco and around the Bay Area, and are passionate about being part of the solution. We should allow them to have an impact at the ballot box.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop H

Small Business Initiative

ORDINANCE

Neighborhood Commercial Districts and City Permitting

Streamlines the permitting and inspection process for new businesses and relaxes zoning requirements in certain districts in San Francisco.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Restaurants and retail are vital contributors to the life of San Francisco neighborhoods, providing jobs, economic activity, goods and services, and community spaces. Prop. H is a critical step to supporting the small business community during this exceptionally challenging time. Retail and other ground-floor uses have been under continuous pressure over the last decade as e-commerce has expanded, consumer behavior has changed and rent has skyrocketed. These trends, coupled with the recent pandemic and shelter-in-place orders, have crippled many of our small businesses.

While we believe the changes put forth in this measure could be enacted by the Board of Supervisors rather than going to the ballot, many of the proposed changes are long overdue. They also support SPUR's vision for an equitable "15-minute city," where neighborhoods and public spaces are designed for safety and belonging, and where residents can easily take care of their regular activities without the use of a car.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop I

Transfer Tax Increase

ORDINANCE

Real Estate Transfer Tax

Increases the city's transfer tax rate on the sale of properties valued at $10 million or more.

Vote NO

SPUR's Recommendation

Transfer taxes can be an effective way to offset some of the inequitable effects of California's property tax system, which has excluded many from the benefits of homeownership. In San Francisco, transfer taxes can extract public value from the city's high-value properties without directly impacting economic activity. However, a healthy housing system also relies on the provision of new homes — and high tax rates can delay or prevent new construction in the midst of a regional housing crisis.

SPUR believes that the intended uses of Prop. I revenue are critically urgent ones. Yet in the midst of historic budget deficits, there is no guarantee that Prop. I would fund what its supporters intend. San Francisco has some of the highest transfer tax rates in the state, and SPUR is concerned that doubling the rates for high-value properties could lead to unintended consequences for needed housing construction and affordability.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop J

Schools Parcel Tax

ORDINANCE

Parcel Tax for San Francisco Unified School District

Repeals the 2018 voter-approved $320 parcel tax for San Francisco Unified School District educator salaries and replaces it with a $288 parcel tax for the same purpose.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Before the pandemic, teacher salaries in San Francisco were far below those of other cities in the region and untenable for a growing number of educators. In 2018, SPUR supported Prop. G, recognizing the importance of competitive pay in securing and retaining great teachers, reducing turnover and thereby improving student success.

Today, SFUSD faces a host of old and new challenges, including unfunded retiree benefits, the prospect of prolonged distance learning and worsening outcomes for students affected by systemic racism. Teacher salaries may not sound like the best use of public dollars at this moment, but Prop. J allows San Francisco voters to affirm their commitment from 2018 and create a revenue stream for a need that has not gone away.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop K

City-Owned Affordable Housing

ORDINANCE

Affordable Housing Authorization

Authorizes the City and County of San Francisco to construct up to 10,000 units of municipally owned affordable housing.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Given the affordability crisis in the city's residential housing market, SPUR recommends that San Francisco voters approve this measure to increase the city's capacity to develop additional affordable units. SPUR also recognizes, however, that San Francisco currently has an abundance of authorization to build subsidized affordable housing units and some of the most sophisticated and high-capacity nonprofit housing developers in the United States. Authorizing public entities to build affordable housing does not solve the challenges of actually building it, and SPUR urges the Board of Supervisors to pair its enthusiasm for more affordable housing with the needed reforms to deliver this housing more quickly and at less cost.

Prop. K raises the possibility of a social housing program at some point in San Francisco's future. This is a worthy goal; SPUR has called for housing to be treated as necessity of life, as it is in a number of social housing models around the world. However, SPUR encourages the city to carefully consider the capacities, authorities and resources needed for this program to succeed over the long term.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SF Prop L

Disproportionate CEO Pay Tax

ORDINANCE

Business Tax Based on Comparison of Top Executive's Pay to Employees' Pay

Establishes an additional gross receipts tax on companies whose highest-paid executive make more than 100 times as much as their median San Francisco employee.

No Recommendation

SPUR's Recommendation

Income inequality is a threat to San Francisco and California's future. Wage stagnation, the loss of middle-wage jobs and other factors make economic prosperity and security a fundamentally different prospect for today's workers than it was 50 years ago. Executive compensation has risen to stunning heights seen nowhere else in the world at a time of extreme economic insecurity for many Californians.

San Francisco has established groundbreaking policies on issues ranging from domestic partnership protections to carbon emission reductions, inspiring similar efforts around the country and, in aggregate, achieving broad impact. Prop. L could present such an opportunity — and lay the groundwork for future efforts — at a time when the inequities of our society are starkly evident. However, the proposed tax rates may be too low to change corporate behavior, and if they do, it's unclear if the tax would reduce disproportionate pay. SPUR's board was divided on these points and was not able to reach enough votes to support either a "yes" vote or a "no" vote on this measure.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SJ Measure H

Cardroom Tax

ORDINANCE

Cardroom Tax

Raises the monthly gross receipts tax rate on legal gambling establishments, increases the number of allowed card tables and adds a new tax on gross revenues for businesses that provide banking services to cardrooms.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

SPUR acknowledges the concerns around cardrooms and gambling and the potential for addiction and financial hardship that can result, particularly for lower-income households. However, those interested in gambling could engage in online or other unsanctioned options or travel elsewhere in the region. SPUR believes it is better for these activities to be well-regulated and contribute to the fiscal health of the city.

Measure H would increase the volume of an existing legal business activity that the city and voters have authorized, regulated and allowed to expand incrementally for nearly three decades. The revenues generated from this measure will help to shore up the city's General Fund in a very challenging budget climate without creating a strain on public safety resources.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SJ Measure G

Multi-Issue Charter Amendments

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Multi-Issue Charter Amendments

Amends the City Charter to expand the independent police auditor's oversight, increase the Planning Commission to 11 members, and allow the City Council to establish timelines for redistricting when census results are late.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

While SPUR has concerns about placing multiple unrelated provisions in a single ballot measure, we think this was fiscally wise and that the descriptions of the various provisions are sufficiently clear to avoid voter confusion. SPUR believes these charter amendments would achieve greater transparency, oversight, accountability, democratic participation and equitable representation in city government and that they are worthy of support.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SJ Measure S

Santa Clara Valley Water District Parcel Tax

PARCEL TAX

Replaces a Santa Clara Valley Water District parcel tax with a similar parcel tax that has no sunset provision

Replaces a Santa Clara Valley Water District parcel tax approved by voters in 2012 that was scheduled to sunset in 2028 with a similar parcel tax that has no sunset provision.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

The projects funded by the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program are critical to safeguard built and natural infrastructure in Santa Clara County. Climate change is stressing the county's aging flood control infrastructure, drinking water supplies and natural habitats. Building a resilient water infrastructure for the county will require greater local investment in the agencies that clean and restore waterways and protect communities from floods. From a good government perspective, SPUR would have preferred for Valley Water to seek a long extension rather than an indefinite one. But this preference is outweighed by the benefits of the Safe, Clean Water and Natural Flood Protection Program.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

SJ Measure T

Open Space Parcel Tax

PARCEL TAX

Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority Parcel Tax Renewal

Renews a $24-per-parcel tax, originally passed by voters as Measure Q in 2014, which provides funding for the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority to protect and preserve natural open spaces and agricultural land.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

The Open Space Authority has made strong strides using the funding that voters authorized in 2014. In just five years, it has strengthened the greenbelt south of San José, encouraging infill development in urbanized areas rather than continued outward sprawl. And it has protected agricultural land and open space that support the local food economy and provide numerous environmental benefits. The Authority has also spent more than $2 million on environmental education and improving access to parks inside cities.

From a good government perspective, SPUR would have preferred for the Authority to seek a long extension rather than an indefinite one. A parcel tax with tiered rates that better reflected the value of the property would be a more equitable way to raise revenue than the flat tax. But, on balance, the Authority has demonstrated it is a good steward of its parcel tax funding and with this measure can continue to provide benefits for Santa Clara County residents for decades into the future.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

OAK Measure W
County Sales Tax

ORDINANCE

Alameda County Sales Tax Intended for Homelessness Programs

Establishes an additional 0.50% sales tax in Alameda County for 10 years to fund programs for people without housing.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Serving Alameda County's residents who don't have homes requires significant collective investment. Particularly in the midst of a public health crisis and at a time of heightened economic insecurity, the county should mobilize resources to prevent homelessness and better serve those living through it. SPUR acknowledges that impacts of Measure W would be disproportionately felt by the lowest-income households in the county, many of whom are already impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout. We wish Measure W included a provision to create a sales tax rebate for low-income households, and should the measure pass, we urge the county to create such a program. However, the people who would benefit from Measure W's intended expenditures are also the lowest-income residents of the county, including those without homes and those at risk of homelessness. On balance, the cost of doing nothing to support the county's efforts on reducing homelessness would be severe, and Measure W is worth supporting.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

OAK Measure Y
School Repairs Bond

GENERAL OBLIGATION BOND

Oakland Unified School District Classroom Repair/Safety Improvement Measure

Authorizes the Oakland Unified School District to issue $735 million in general obligation bonds for capital improvements and building acquisition.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

OUSD buildings are in serious need of repair and renovation. While SPUR is concerned with OUSD's history of poor financial management, we are encouraged by recent steps the district has taken to improve transparency and accountability. Measure Y funds would benefit schools in some of the Oakland communities with the greatest need, within a school district that serves primarily low-income students and students of color. Without this measure, OUSD's students will return to failing and unsafe facilities at a time when the disparities in education are at risk of widening further. On balance, SPUR believes this measure is worthy of support.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

OAK Measure V

Utility User Tax

ORDINANCE

Extension of Alameda County Utility User Tax for Unincorporated Areas

Extends to 2033 the county's current 6.5% utility user tax levied on residents of unincorporated areas.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Measure V would raise needed funds for county services in unincorporated areas. While SPUR would have liked to see the county adjust its utility tax to target the energy usage that's most harmful to the environment, this measure does support climate goals by taxing the use of utilities that raise emissions. Furthermore, it would maintain important exemptions for low-income households, blunting the regressive impacts of this tax. We believe Measure V is worthy of support.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

OAK Measure S1
Police Commission

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Expands the powers of the Oakland Police Commission and the Community Police Review Agency, and creates an Office of Inspector General.

Modifies and expands the powers of the Oakland Police Commission and the Community Police Review Agency, and creates an Office of Inspector General.

No Recommendation

SPUR's Recommendation

Effective oversight is sorely needed to build trust in the Oakland Police Department. This measure would allow the CPRA to conduct better investigations and would establish a truly independent Office of Inspector General to move the city beyond a troubled chapter of federal oversight. On the other hand, Measure S1 doesn't address some of the larger structural challenges that could prevent the Police Commission from effectively serving in its role. In its first two years, the Police Commission has experienced challenges in defining the scope of its work and in building effective internal structures and working relationships with city partners. Despite the improvements that Measure S1 would bring, SPUR is concerned that the Police Commission's role is overly scoped and inadequately supported. It is unclear that the additional authority and independence provided by Measure S1 will solve these challenges. SPUR has been supportive of increased oversight in public safety and of efforts that build transparency and trust. However, the Board of Directors was divided and could not reach a 60% majority to either support or oppose this measure.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

OAK Measure QQ
Youth Vote in School Board Elections

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Lowers the voting age to 16 for Oakland Unified School District Board of Education elections.

Amends the Oakland City Charter to allow the City Council to adopt an ordinance lowering the voting age to 16 for Oakland Unified School District Board of Education elections.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

SPUR has advocated for decades to increase participation in the civic decision-making process and believes responsive, effective government requires a high level of involvement by a city's residents. This measure would open participation in public decisions to up to 8,000 more citizens, ultimately leading to better outcomes for current and future Oakland Unified School District students.

Sixteen- and 17-year old students in Oakland should have political influence when voicing their concerns and solutions and should be able to hold their elected school board members accountable.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

OAK Measure RR
Limits on Fines

CHARTER AMENDMENT

Ends $1,000 limit on fines for violating city ordinances

Removes from the charter the $1,000 limit on fines for violating city ordinances.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

The city's decades-old cap on fines has hamstrung efforts to fight persistent code enforcement challenges. SPUR supports removing an outdated limit from the City Charter and replacing it with a deliberative approach that can be adjusted legislatively with public input. What's more, replacing the charter-defined limit with a more public process could spark a conversation about the impact of fines on low-income communities and lead to more equitable outcomes. As the fine limit is adjusted, we encourage Oakland to implement policies that enforce the law but do not disproportionately burden low-income residents, such as lowering fines for low-income people committing minor violations and increasing fines for wealthier individuals and organizations committing major violations.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

BA Measure RR

Caltrain Sales Tax

ORDINANCE

Creates a 0.125% sales tax dedicated to Caltrain operations and capital improvements

Creates a one-eighth percent sales tax in San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties to fund Caltrain operations and capital improvements.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Without this additional funding, Caltrain faces significant risk of shutting down or reducing operations to such a limited service that it will be difficult to return to the agency's promising pre-pandemic trajectory. Caltrain is a key part of the region's rapid transit network and one of its best-performing agencies — and major investments such as the downtown rail extension in San Francisco, high-speed rail and the potential new transbay transit crossing are all linked to Caltrain's ongoing success. SPUR has supported the agency's visionary but realistic planning over the past several years, and Measure RR would make the implementation of this work possible. It would also free up local revenue for the three contributing counties at a time when funding is badly needed.

Sales taxes are regressive funding tools that SPUR typically does not support. However, Caltrain's recent equity initiatives and its work toward a more regional governance structure create a promise for increasingly vital service that better serves all riders in the future – reasons enough to justify a small increase in the tax burden.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 14

Stem Cell Bond

BOND

Authorizes Bonds Continuing Stem Cell Research

Authorizes the sale of $5.5 billion in general obligation bonds to fund research on stem cells.

Vote NO

SPUR's Recommendation

In 2004, California created a first-of-its-kind medical research agency and in the years since, CIRM has funded important clinical research and solidified the state's place in a global field. This work is still important. However, CIRM was created at a time when no federal funding existed and now the landscape has changed. The federal government awarded $2.1 billion in funding for stem cell research in 2019. At the same time, California faces significant fiscal challenges and potential cuts to essential services like education and health care, as well as persistent challenges like homelessness and housing affordability. In our current circumstances, the state should prioritize the security and well-being of its residents today, and CIRM should pursue other sources of revenue for this important work.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 15
Commercial Property Tax Changes

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Increases Funding for Public Schools, Community Colleges and Local Government Services by Changing Tax Assessment of Commercial and Industrial Property

Taxes most commercial property worth more than $3 million dollars at market value and uses the funds raised from this change to support schools and local government.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

SPUR opposed Prop. 13 in 1978 due to concerns about its impact on state and local funding, and we have written many times about the numerous problems created by its passage. Prop. 13 causes local governments to turn to more regressive taxes and fees, and taxes on new housing development to fund local public infrastructure and services. Prop. 13 places a disproportionate tax burden on new would-be homeowners and businesses, benefitting the well-established. Prop. 13 incentivizes cities to develop new retail and commercial space that can generate sales taxes, at the expense of developing new housing. Prop 13 negatively impacts almost every issue that SPUR has worked on over the past several decades. There's much more work to be done, but this measure would be an important step toward fixing California's troubled property tax system.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 16
Affirmative Action

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Allows diversity as a factor in public employment, education and contracting decisions

Allows public institutions to consider race, gender or ethnicity in decisions around education, employment and contracting.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

California cannot dismantle racism without considering race. Allowing public institutions to consider race in hiring and other decisions is both a common-sense change and a symbolic gesture worthy of this historical moment. It acknowledges that a society that produced slavery, Jim Crow, racial covenants, sundown towns and other less visible but equally pernicious inequities can also produce policies to advance racial justice. Though this measure alone won't solve the many structural inequities that people of color and women face today, it makes an important step forward in increasing opportunities in education, employment and contracting.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 17
Voting Rights for People on Parole

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Restores voting rights upon completion of prison terms

Grants people on parole in California the right to vote.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

There is no more basic right in a democracy than the right to vote. Voter disenfranchisement is antithetical to the political structures of our nation and to the values of equality and justice we espouse. Barring people on parole from the right to vote is a clear example of the disconnect between our declared values and our actions, especially since people of color are disproportionately disenfranchised.

Additionally, we believe that a responsive and effective government requires a high level of citizen involvement and that involvement in civic life helps reduce recidivism. Prop. 17 would open participation in public decisions to approximately 50,000 citizens who have every right to participate in their democracy.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 18

Primary Voting for 17-Year-Olds

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Expand Voting to 17-Year-Olds

Allows 17-year-olds who will be 18 at the time of the next general election and are United States citizens and residents of California to vote in any primary or special elections.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

SPUR has advocated for decades to increase participation in the civic decision-making process. We believe responsive, effective government requires a high level of involvement by a state's residents. This measure would open participation in public decisions to more citizens who we believe could make conscientious voting decisions. Additionally, engaging youth in the democratic process could improve the health of our democracy overall by heightening interest in local civic issues and contributing to better youth turnout and lifetime voter engagement.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 19

Property Tax Transfers

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The Home Protection for Seniors, Severely Disabled, Families, and Victims of Wildfire or Natural Disaster Act

Allows seniors, disabled people and disaster victims to transfer existing property tax assessments to a new home.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

While Prop. 19 does feel like a grab bag of policies designed to support different interest groups (real estate agents who want to increase the number of real estate transactions, firefighters who want more funding to combat wildfires), on balance it would achieve important policy goals. The elimination of the property tax loophole for heirs would increase the fairness of California's tax system and generate funding for combatting wildfires, an important public service. SPUR supports this measure.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 20

Rollback of Crime Leniency Laws

INITIATIVE STATUTE

Restricts Parole for Non-Violent Offenders, Authorizes Felony Sentences for Certain Offenses Treated as Misdemeanors

Makes a number of changes to the state's criminal justice laws on sentencing, punishments and parole.

Vote NO 

SPUR's Recommendation

Proposition 20 would reverse years of criminal justice reform that has reduced California's prison population while not increasing crime. Rolling back these reforms when California's prisons are still overcrowded, people of color remain over-represented in those prisons and crime is at historic lows would be an unjust and indefensible policy decision. Additionally, this measure would put a significant and disproportionate economic burden onto people involved in the legal system and their communities.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 21

Rent Control

INITIATIVE STATUTE

Expands local governments' authority to enact rent control on residential property

Removes certain state restrictions on what buildings can be rent controlled and whether cities can control the rents charged to new tenants.

Vote NO 

SPUR's Recommendation

California continues to deal with a housing affordability crisis that has plagued the state for many years. A shortage of housing has led to increased homelessness, displacement of low- and moderate-income people and a reduced quality of life for people who commute long distances or live in overcrowded living situations.

Rent control provides significant benefits to residents who live in rent-controlled units. Many current tenants in California would not be able to remain in their homes — or even in their cities — if their rents went up to market-rate levels. In addition, by allowing households in rent-controlled units to remain in place, rent control provides greater community stability. We have seen firsthand how rent control has provided protections for many in San Francisco's overheated housing market.

But the details of rent control policy matter. There is great risk in under-regulating rent control and depressing California's already-inadequate production of rental housing. In a report issued this year, SPUR estimated that the Bay Area should have built 700,000 new homes over the past decade and needs to build over 2.3 million housing units over the coming 50 years to bend the curve on housing affordability. Local rent control laws could inadvertently (or intentionally) result in less housing production than the state needs to house the people who want to live here.

There are aspects of this measure that we appreciate. We support the idea of making single-family homes subject to local rent control laws when they are owned by corporate entities or owners with multiple units. Single-family homes are a large portion of the state's housing stock and a growing portion of the rental housing stock, so there is a significant opportunity to expand protections by making some single-family homes subject to rent control.

While we are on record supporting the idea of a "rolling" date for housing to become subject to rent control (in localities that have rent control ordinances), we remain concerned about the 15-year term included in this measure. Such a short term would significantly reduce the profitability of rental housing, and thus likely significantly reduce the building of new rental homes. In 2018, the Terner Center released a policy brief suggesting that a term of 40 years would not significantly harm the market for investment in new housing development. A compromise effort could aim for 25 years, the age of housing currently affected by Costa-Hawkins, so as not to lose existing rent-controlled units.

Ultimately, our concerns about the details of this measure and their impacts on the new production of housing outweigh the potential benefits that we see. The state plays a key role in setting guardrails for local rent control policy, and these details are important. We urge the California State Legislature to work toward compromise legislation that can be negotiated through the legislative process.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 22

App-Based Driver Classification

INITIATIVE STATUTE

Changes Employment Classification Rules for App-Based Transportation and Delivery Drivers

Defines some ride-hailing and delivery drivers as independent contractors rather than employees and establishes minimum benefits and labor protections for those drivers.

Vote NO

SPUR's Recommendation

Worker protections and benefits are critical to household financial security and are the cornerstone of a fair and functioning economy in California. On one hand, this measure doesn't go far enough for some drivers, offering fewer benefits and protections than they would receive as traditional employees. And Prop. 22 would exempt major companies from the responsibility of investment in unemployment benefits, Social Security and other social safety net programs. On the other hand, Prop. 22 would allow drivers to retain the workplace flexibility that has attracted many to these platforms in the first place. And it reduces the risk of companies eliminating or reducing hundreds of thousands of ride-hailing and delivery driver jobs in the middle of an economic crisis.

In reality, neither current law nor this measure fully serves the totality of the ride-hailing and delivery workforce: some of whom are supplementing other work, some of whom are seeking income in between employment and some of whom are wholly reliant on full-time driving. We appreciate that this measure attempts to chart a middle path. SPUR believes that employment classification poses a legitimate threat to the viability of flexible ride-hailing and delivery models, and that the fallout could be devastating at this moment to the hundreds of thousands of drivers who rely on this work. However, it is a measure that codifies industry-written rules that are difficult to change. The legislature should be the venue to make necessary changes to California labor law, as it has been for other industries.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 23

Private Dialysis Clinics

INITIATIVE STATUTE

Protect the Lives of Dialysis Patients Act

Establishes staffing and other requirements for chronic dialysis clinics.

Vote NO

SPUR's Recommendation

This measure attempts to regulate a highly profitable industry. However, SPUR has long objected to special interests legislating at the ballot. Parts of Prop. 23 are duplicative, and it's not clear that the added regulations are necessary; instead, they would likely increase cost of care to the detriment of patients. The Legislature has shown a willingness to take up private dialysis industry regulation and is the appropriate place to do so.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 24

Consumer Data Privacy

INITIATIVE STATUTE

Amends consumer privacy laws

Establishes new consumer data privacy rights, amends current data privacy law and creates a new state enforcement agency.

No Recommendation

SPUR's Recommendation

SPUR objects to the use of ballot measures to circumvent the legislature's deliberative and collaborative policy-making process, particularly when current law has only been in effect since January of this year and we don't yet have a full sense of its impacts. Prop. 24 is a complex policy that should be negotiated among legislators, advocates and businesses. On the other hand, Prop. 24 proposes a number of changes that would further consumer data privacy for vulnerable groups and break further ground for Californians' data privacy. SPUR's board was divided on these points and has no recommendation on this measure.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

CA Prop 25
End Cash Bail

REFERENDUM

Referendum on a 2018 law that replaced money bail system with a system based on public safety risk

Upholds Senate Bill 10 to transform the state's pretrial system, including ending the use of cash bail. A yes vote upholds SB 10; a no vote repeals SB 10.

Vote YES

SPUR's Recommendation

Prop. 25 does not provide a straightforward choice for voters. On the one hand, if it passes and SB 10 is upheld, California risks creating a new system that produces even higher pretrial incarceration rates and greater racial disparities than under the current cash bail system. On the other hand, if SB 10 is overturned and cash bail remains in place, it may be extremely difficult to achieve bail reform in the future.

Ultimately, SPUR believes that upholding SB 10, and amending it in the legislature as needed, is the more pragmatic approach to creating an equitable pretrial system. If SB 10 is repealed, the cash bail system would remain in place, and there is no guarantee that meaningful legislative reform would be achieved in the near future. Instead of repealing SB 10, we should build upon and improve the changes it makes.

Read our complete analysis at spurvoterguide.org

Acknowledgments

The goal of the SPUR Voter Guide is to offer objective analysis and advise voters on which measures will deliver real solutions.

For San Francisco measures, our Ballot Analysis Committee heard arguments from both sides of the issues, debated the measures' merits and provided recommendations to our San Francisco Board of Directors. The board then voted, with a 60 percent vote required for SPUR to make a recommendation.

SPUR's San Francisco Board of Directors debated and voted on SPUR's local San Francisco ballot recommendations on August 26, 2020.

For San Jose local measures, SPUR's San Jose Board of Directors reviewed and debated the merits of select local measures and voted, with a 60 percent vote required for SPUR to make a recommendation.

For Oakland local propositions, SPUR's Policy Advisory Board heard arguments from different sides of the issues, debated the measures' merits and provided recommendations to our Oakland Board of Directors. The board then voted, with a 60 percent vote required for SPUR to make a recommendation.

For California state propositions, a sub-committee of the SPUR Executive Board heard arguments from different sides of the issues, debated the merits of state measures and provided recommendations to the SPUR Executive Board. The Executive Board then voted, with a 60 percent vote required for SPUR to make a recommendation.

San Francisco Ballot Analysis Committee: Bob Gamble (Co-Chair), Molly Turner (Co-Chair), Nadia Anderson, Peter Back, Chris Brown, Michaela Cassidy, Jim Chappell, Kim-Mai Cutler, Tamsen Drew, Stephen Engblom, Don Falk, Diane Filippi, Ed Harrington, Vince Hoenigman, Traci Lee, Aaron Johnson, Greg Johnson, Hao Ko, Jim Lazarus, Terry Micheau, Rebecca Prozan, Joe Speicher, Doug Shoemaker and Fran Weld.

Oakland Policy Advisory Board: Dahlia Chazan, Deborah Boyer, Elisse Douglass, Lynette Dias, Alexis Pelosi, Gloria Bruce

SPUR Staff: Susannah Parsons, Hannah Schwartz, Katie Ettman, Eli Zigas, Ben Grant, Michelle Huttenhoff, Kristy Wang, Michael Lane, Laura Feinstein, Eli Zigas, Helen Woodbury

Editors: Valerie Sinzdak, Karen Steen, Colleen Valles