A Guide to the 7 Propositions on California’s November Ballot

The ballot measures cover sports betting, reproductive rights, school arts funding and more.

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The midterm congressional battles will dominate attention in November, but in California, no general election is complete without a bonus round of direct democracy. Today we offer a handy cheat sheet.

Voters will consider seven measures this year, fewer than in the past two general elections. The pandemic made signature-gathering difficult and pricey, and many proposals, including bans on fracking and vaccination mandates, failed to draw the necessary number of signatures. And the Legislature cut last-minute deals to avert potentially costly ballot measures on medical malpractice awards and on how quickly California should phase out the use of nonrecyclable plastic.

The remaining proposals include a subsidy for zero-emission vehicles and a constitutional amendment on abortion. Campaign spending has already broken records, with a high-dollar fight over legalized sports betting leading the way.

**Proposition 1 — Reproductive Freedom**

The Supreme Court’s reversal of federal abortion rights this year prompted California Democrats to introduce bills aimed at safeguarding the right to the procedure. Key among them was a ballot measure asking voters to explicitly ban the state from denying or interfering with a person’s right to abortion and contraceptives, if they so choose. Legal scholars see flaws in the measure’s language, but legislative leaders view Proposition 1 as extra protection should abortion opponents pursue a national
Abortion rights have long been viewed by the courts as covered under a right to privacy in California's Constitution, but a constitutional guarantee to abortion and contraception could make it even harder for those rights to be eroded by politicians in the future. In a recent poll, 71 percent of California voters said they would vote yes on Proposition 1.

**Proposition 26 — Casino Sports Betting**

Two sports-betting initiatives are competing on the ballot. If both receive more than 50 percent approval, the one with the most votes wins. They arise from a sweeping 2018 Supreme Court decision that overturned a 1992 federal ban on sports gambling outside Nevada. Wagering on sports is now legal in more than half of states, but it is still outlawed in California, a market potentially worth many billions of dollars. Proposition 26 was bankrolled by Native American tribes who, since 1998, have had the exclusive right in the state to operate casinos. It would allow sports gambling at tribal casinos and large horse racing tracks — but only in person — and let tribes offer new games such as roulette. It includes a 10 percent sports-wagering tax at racetracks and regulatory reimbursements from tribes that the state's legislative analyst estimates would net tens of millions of dollars for the public coffers. Fighting the measure are private card clubs, whose owners compete for business with tribal casinos. They would be more vulnerable to lawsuits from tribes under another provision of the initiative.

**Proposition 27 — Online Sports Betting**

Major gambling interests also see California's potential. Proposition 27 was put on the ballot by Las Vegas casinos and the online operators FanDuel and DraftKings. It would allow sports betting not just in person but also through computers and mobile apps, in partnership with tribes. It generally favors large, established operators; companies would have to pay a $100 million fee just to get into the market. Proponents say that 85 percent of that fee will go to programs fighting homelessness and that the remaining 15 percent will go to smaller tribes — only a few of which are supporting the initiative. The state's legislative analyst estimates that up to $500 million would be generated for homelessness programs. But most of California's tribes view the measure as an encroachment on their gambling monopoly, and the fees are a drop in the bucket compared with the money that online operators would stand to make and the billions of dollars California annually spends to address homelessness.

**Proposition 28 — School Arts**

The 2008 recession forced deep cuts in public school funding. Art and music programs were among the hardest hit and still haven't recovered, particularly in large urban school districts. In his final days as superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District last year, Austin Beutner made this initiative his signature project. Proposition 28, along with a series of star-studded joint efforts between the Los Angeles schools and the city's show-business community that he wrote, aims to forge more durable ties between California's largest school system and Los Angeles's signature economic sector. This ballot measure would create a dedicated funding stream for art and music education not by raising taxes, but by requiring the state to match 1 percent of California's prekindergarten-through-12th-grade school dollars from the general fund. California's legislative analyst estimates the set-aside would generate up to $1 billion that would be prioritized for districts that serve low-income families with the greatest number of Black and Latino students. Supporters include the state teachers' union, the state P.T.A. and the Los Angeles County Business Federation. Although the initiative would remove some revenue from the Legislature's purview, no opposition has materialized, which is rare.

**Proposition 29 — Dialysis Clinics**

California's initiative process is not always just direct democracy in action. Sometimes it is also a handy political tool. Since 2018, the Service Employees International Union-United Healthcare Workers West — which is seeking to organize workers and raise wages at private, for-profit dialysis clinics — has twice asked California voters to approve costly regulations. The initiative campaigns, relatively cheap to deploy from the union perspective, are costly for the dialysis companies, which have so far spent hundreds of millions of dollars to defeat them. This third attempt again calls for several new restrictions on clinics, including a requirement that a doctor, nurse practitioner or physician assistant be on site during all patient treatment. This would enhance labor leverage in a tough workplace, but the state legislative analyst estimates this rule alone will add hundreds of thousands of dollars to the average cost of running a clinic, which will then be passed on to Medi-Cal and other health insurers. That, in turn, would add tens of millions of dollars in costs to state and local government.

**Proposition 30 — E.V. Subsidies**
This initiative arises from global warming — and from a California law that requires ride-sharing companies to electrify their fleets. It would raise the top tier of the state income tax to help subsidize electric vehicles and charging infrastructure and, to a lesser extent, prevent and respond to wildfires. Personal income over $2 million would be taxed by an extra 1.75 percent, raising up to $5 billion for zero-emission incentives and wildfire prevention programs, according to estimates by the state legislative analyst. A coalition of business and environmental interests, including the ride-sharing company Lyft and the state’s electrical workers, have put this proposal on the ballot. Proponents say it will put more electric vehicles on the road; opponents say it will simply help ride-sharing companies, which are under pressure to accelerate the electric transition. Gov. Gavin Newsom has urged voters to defeat it, calling it “a cynical scheme devised by a single corporation to funnel state income tax revenue to their company.”

**Proposition 31 — Flavored Tobacco**

In 2020, the pandemic accomplished what years of health lobbying had failed to do in California — it persuaded the Legislature to ban the flavored tobacco products that the industry has long marketed to new smokers, including bubble gum vape pens and menthol cigarettes. Newsom almost immediately signed the law, and within days, the industry qualified this referendum, preventing the ban from going into effect. Since then, the statewide ban has remained on pause, even as many California cities have passed municipal bans on flavored tobacco products. A yes vote will enact the ban, and a no vote will overturn the law.

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