



Information from the Lutheran Office of Public Policy—California
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Voter Guide to Evaluating Propositions: Questions to Consider

**From the Policy Council
Lutheran Office of Public Policy—California**

1. Was this proposition placed on the ballot by the Legislature or through the initiative petition process?
2. Does this measure amend the California Constitution, or state law (statutes) only? Does it include both?
3. What are the requirements for amending this proposition in the future?
4. What would this measure do? Is this change needed? Is the remedy proposed appropriate and proportional to the identified need or problem? Are there other ways to make this change or enact this policy? Will the measure create unintended consequences? Has this proposal received a full public review so that all of the changes are understood clearly by voters?
5. What is the financial impact of this proposed change? Who will pay? Where will the funds come from? Are there alternative sources? Will there be enough money to pay for the changes in this measure both now and in the future? Will the money for this proposal come from a source of funds already used for other purposes? Will paying for this measure create future state budget problems?
6. Has the Legislature debated the change proposed by this proposition? If so, what happened? Why? What is the history of this issue?
7. Who supports this ballot measure? Why? Who opposes this measure? Why? Who is funding the support and opposition campaigns? If an initiative, what organization or individual provided funds for petitions to place this measure on the ballot?
8. Is this measure being used to “harvest” public opinion, based on simplistic polls, responding to emotion and strongly held symbols and values? To what extent does the content of the measure align symbols and values with effective public policies and adequate resources to implement those policies?
9. To what degree, if any, is this proposition being used for partisan political purposes, to support or oppose candidates for elected office? Is it being used to distract or divert voter attention or the campaign resources of parties, candidates, and interest groups?

Our shared faith calls on us to “promote sound, critical and creative citizenship...” and to “work to further democratic processes throughout the territory of the church.” * Voting is an important part of that process and the most effective voters have access to good information. However, in recent years, California voters have struggled with many complex and often confusing ballot initiatives, and have been saturated with expensive and often deceptive media campaigns. How can voters make well-informed decisions on these proposals? Here are three good ways: 1) Ask questions, 2) Demand clear answers, and 3) Understand ballot propositions, their purposes, and their benefits and pitfalls.

Changes in state law are usually made when a state senator or assemblymember introduces a bill proposing specific changes. The bill is reviewed by legislators, with opportunities for public input. If both houses of the Legislature and the governor approve, the bill then becomes law. This process is imperfect but it is designed to allow an in-depth review of proposed changes in state law. In this way, the impact of the change on both people and programs can be evaluated and, hopefully, flaws may be identified and corrected before a change is made. The legislative process also provides a way of estimating the cost of changes before they are made.

Some propositions are placed on the ballot by the Legislature. All constitutional amendments and general obligation bond proposals must be put up for a vote of the electorate, whether placed on the ballot by a two-thirds vote of the Legislature (which implies at least some bipartisan cooperation), or via initiative petitions.

Initiatives were designed to offer voters a way to make changes by circumventing the process outlined above. In this way, voters can change laws when elected officials fail to act according to their desires. Initiatives are designed to give voters a direct and positive voice in state government.

However, initiatives also carry serious risks and they can be misused by special interests. Some of the problems with initiatives are outlined in the *LOPP Perspective and Recommendations on Initiative Reform*. While solutions to these problems are debated, the only real option for voters is to hold ballot initiatives to a high standard by asking hard questions and seeking clear answers. This Voters’ Guide is designed to help voters find out what they need to know.

To read the *LOPP Perspective and Recommendations on Initiative Reform*, please go to www.loppca.org.

*from “Church in Society—A Lutheran Perspective”