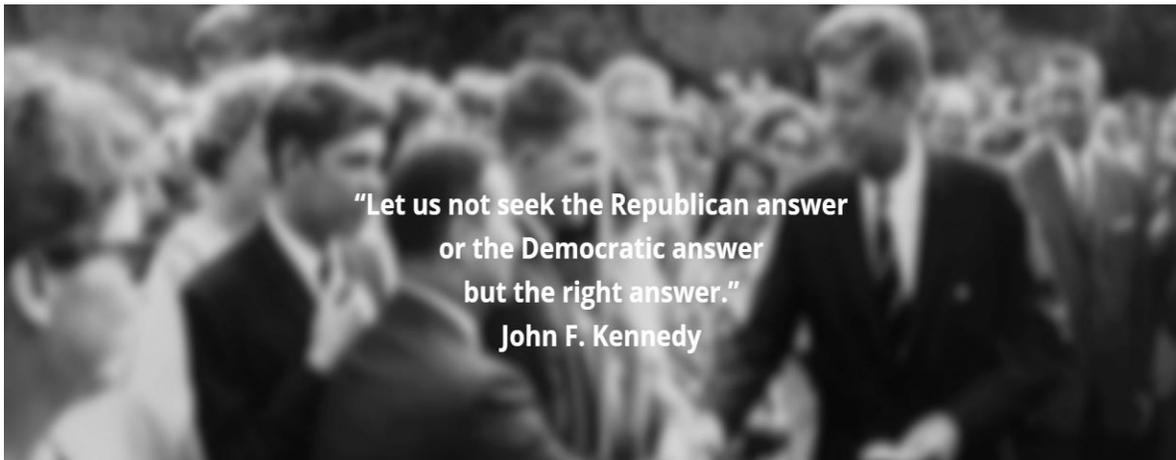




# **A Brief Guide to California's Ballot Initiatives**

**October 28, 2016**



**[www.reasoningovernment.org](http://www.reasoningovernment.org)**

## Foreword

“A pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. . . . Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.”

Federalist 10

## Introduction

Reason in Government (“Reason”) is a social welfare organization headquartered in Santa Barbara, California. We educate citizens and encourage civic engagement to encourage more effective, efficient, and *reasoned* public policies in accordance with a set of core principles – principles that make us centrists with a point of view, rather than centrists who necessarily seek to occupy the middle ground. Briefly, we believe in less intrusive and more effective government driven by a thorough and empirical policy formulation process. In today’s political parlance, we are reformers who are generally socially liberal, fiscally conservative, and environmentally conscious. We are, therefore, neither consistently “left” nor “right” on public policy issues, nor are we always in the “middle.” Instead, because our positions are guided by reason rather than political orthodoxy, and because we advocate for those positions, we are the voice of the radical center.

We have prepared this guide to assist voters in determining which, if any, ballot initiatives to support this November. It is important to note at the outset that we generally disfavor ballot initiatives for several reasons. First, they subvert the legislative process. As imperfect as it may be, the legislative process is the process by which facts are gathered, opposing views are heard and weighed, compromises are achieved, and the truly “public” interest is best served. Second, ballot initiatives eliminate elected official accountability. Elected officials can refuse to take action knowing that a ballot initiative is under development and can hide behind requirements imposed upon them by previously enacted initiatives. Third, it is this latter feature of many initiatives that makes them particularly unattractive – they can create a crazy quilt of requirements that must be reconciled with other legal provisions and that can tie the hands of future legislators (even when circumstances have changed). Lastly, they impose enormous burdens on voters to do the work that the legislature should be doing. How many of California’s voters took the time to read some or all of the more than 220 page official voter information guide?

For all these reasons, our default position on initiatives is to recommend a “no” vote unless they carefully designed to: (1) address a critical and pressing public policy challenge; or (2) remedy a defect in the legislative process. In cases where a ballot initiative is used to put forth a policy change that is consistent with Reason’s core principles, but we believe should have been adopted through the legislative process, we take “no position” because a voter could reasonably choose to favor the legislative process (and thus vote “no”) or the reasoned policy outcome (and thus vote “yes”).

The Board of Directors  
Reason in Government  
October 28, 2016

## Our Recommended Position on the Ballot Initiatives

Initiative	Vote
51: School Bonds	No
52: Medi-Cal Fee	No
53: Voter approval of revenue bonds	No
54: Legislative process improvements	Yes
55: Income tax increases extension	No
56: Cigarette tax increase	No
57: Early release for felons	No
58: Reinstate bilingual education	No
59: Express displeasure with <i>Citizens United</i>	No
60: Adult film additional health requirements	No
61: Regulating drug prices	No
62: Repeal the death penalty	No Position
63: Firearm and ammunition sales	No
64: Legalize marijuana for adults	No Position
65: Carryout bag fees – special fund	No
66: Death penalty reform	No Position
67: Repeal ban on plastic bags	No

## **Explanatory Notes on Various Initiatives**

Virtually all of our recommended positions are explained by our general disfavor of ballot initiatives. However, we believe additional explanations are warranted in a few instances.

### **54**

This initiative would, critically, prevent the legislature from passing bills that have not been printed and available for review for 72 hours. This would curtail the terrible practice of ramming poorly drafted and conceived bills through the legislature at the end of each session.

### **55**

The Los Angeles Times has clearly and succinctly explained why extending these income tax increases on wealthier Californians is a bad idea that will negatively impact *all* Californians:

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-end-proposition-55-20160930-snap-story.html>

### **59**

Regardless of your particular views on *Citizens United* and campaign finance reform, this type of advisory ballot initiative is precisely the type of pointless political exercise that we disfavor.

### **62 and 66**

Reasonable people can disagree about whether the state should impose the death penalty for certain criminal offenses. But reform – whether through repeal altogether or revised appeal procedures – is warranted given the challenges associated with the current system.

We take “no position” on either initiative, but a “yes” on 62 should be accompanied by a “no” on 66; conversely, a “no” on 62 could be accompanied by either a “yes” or “no” on 66.