

Proposition 18

Voting Rights for 17-year-olds

Research Assistant: Robin Peterson '22

Purpose

Proposition 18 would allow 17-year-olds to vote in primary and special elections if they will turn 18 years old by the time of the general election.

Background

In 1971, the United States ratified the Twenty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution, guaranteeing the right of 18-year-olds to vote.

In the years since, eighteen states and the District of Columbia have allowed 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they will turn 18 by the date of the general election.¹ Local jurisdictions in California also have considered lowering the voting age. For example, in 2016, voters in the City of Berkeley approved an amendment allowing for 16-year-olds to vote in school board elections.

The idea of extending voting rights to 17-year-olds in California has been around for a long time, with the legislature first considering the proposal sixteen years ago. The legislature finally placed it on the ballot in 2020 by approving ACA 4, authored by Kevin Mullin (D-Daly City). The California Assembly approved the measure by a 56-13 vote, and the California Senate by a 31-7 vote. The vote in both chambers was largely along party lines, with most Democrats supporting the amendment and most Republicans opposing it.² ACA 4 now needs simple majority approval of the voters to become part of the California Constitution.

Proposal

Proposition 18 would amend Section 2 of Article II of the California Constitution to allow 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections and special elections if they will turn 18 years old before the general election.

¹ National Conference of State Legislatures, "Voting Age for Primary Elections: 17-Year-Olds and Primary Elections," March 2, 2020, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/primaries-voting-age.aspx>.

² California Legislative Information (LegInfo), "ACA 4: Elections: Voting Age (2019-2020)" https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billAnalysisClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200ACA4.

Fiscal Impact

If approved Proposition 18 would incur one-time state General Fund costs of less than \$1 million for the Secretary of State (SOS) to implement the new policy.³ The measure also would increase costs for counties across California between hundreds of thousands of dollars and \$1 million every two years to send and process voting materials to eligible registered 17-year-olds.⁴

Supporters

Supporters include:

- Secretary of State Alex Padilla (D)
- California Association of Student Councils
- League of Women Voters of California
- California Democratic Party⁵

Arguments of Supporters

Supporters argue that allowing 17-year-olds to vote would

- Empower young people who are assuming adult responsibilities.
- Develop the habit of voting at an early age.
- Promote civic engagement.⁶

Opponents

Opponents include:

- Election Integrity Project, California
- Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association
- California Republican Party⁷

Arguments of Opponents

Opponents argue that 17-year-olds should not be able to vote because they:

- Are still minors and lack real-world experience.
- Would be voting on taxes that only adults have to pay.

³ Legislative Analyst's Office, "Proposition 18: Analysis of Measure," <https://lao.ca.gov/ballot/2020/Prop18-110320.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid., Reina Miller, "General Election: Final Ballot Labels and Titles and Summaries" (July 10, 2020): 11, <https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/ccrov/pdf/2020/august/20172rm.pdf>.

⁵ Yes-on-18: Vote for Our Future: "Endorsements," n.d., <https://www.yeson18.vote/endorsements>.

⁶ California Secretary of State, Official Voter Information Guide, November 3, 2020, General Election: Proposition 18," <https://vig.cdn.sos.ca.gov/2020/general/pdf/complete-vig.pdf>.

⁷ Ibid., CAGOP: "Meet the CAGOP Endorsed Candidates: Propositions," n.d., <https://www.cagop.org/s/endorsements>.

- Are vulnerable to one-sided influence in school or at home.⁸

As of September no significant campaign contributions or expenditures had been reported either for or against this measure.

Conclusion

A YES vote on Proposition 18 would allow eligible 17-year-olds to vote in primary and special elections if they will be 18 years old by the time of the next general election

A NO vote would mean no one younger than 18 years of age may vote in any election.

⁸ California Secretary of State, "Official Voter Information Guide"; Evan Symon, "Critics Of Proposition to Allow 17-Year-Old Voters In Primaries Ramp Up Opposition," *California Globe*, July 31, 2020, <https://californiaglobe.com/section-2/critics-of-proposition-to-allow-17-year-old-voters-in-primaries-ramp-up-opposition/>.