

THE INITIATIVE PROCESS IN CALIFORNIA

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► Californians are increasingly turning to the initiative process to make public policy.

In 1911, California became the tenth state to enact the citizens' initiative process. Today, 26 other states have an initiative or referendum process. No other state, apart from Oregon, has used the process as much as California has: since 1912, 354 citizens' initiatives have appeared on the state ballot, and the last 20 years have seen a sharp rise in the number of initiatives put to the voters.

► How influential are citizens' initiatives?

Many initiatives have brought about major policy changes—for example, Proposition 13 in 1978 limits property taxes; Proposition 98 in 1988 mandates a minimum percentage of the budget to be spent on K–14 education; and Proposition 140 in 1990 limits the number of terms state senators and representatives can serve. More recently, voters approved measures to establish a top-two primary system (Proposition 14 in 2010) and an independent redistricting commission (Proposition 11 in 2008 and Proposition 20 in 2010).

► As the frequency of initiatives has increased, so has the money spent on campaigns.

The initiative process is an expensive way to make public policy changes. Since 2000, about \$2 billion has been spent on initiatives, more than half of it in just the last three election cycles. More than \$100 million was spent on three individual initiatives alone: \$154 million on Proposition 87 in 2006 (oil extraction tax to fund alternative energy projects; rejected), \$151 million on Proposition 32 in 2012 (prohibiting political contributions by payroll deduction; rejected), and \$136 million on Proposition 30 in 2012 (temporary taxes to fund education; approved).

► Californians think voters make better public policy decisions than elected officials do.

Distrust of the legislature is a theme in support for initiatives. In recent PPIC Statewide Surveys, a strong majority of likely voters (72%) said it is a good thing that voters can make laws and change public policies by passing initiatives. Sixty percent of likely voters—including pluralities across parties—say that public policy decisions made through the initiative process are probably better than those made by the governor and state legislature.

► Many believe changes are needed, but reform has proven to be difficult.

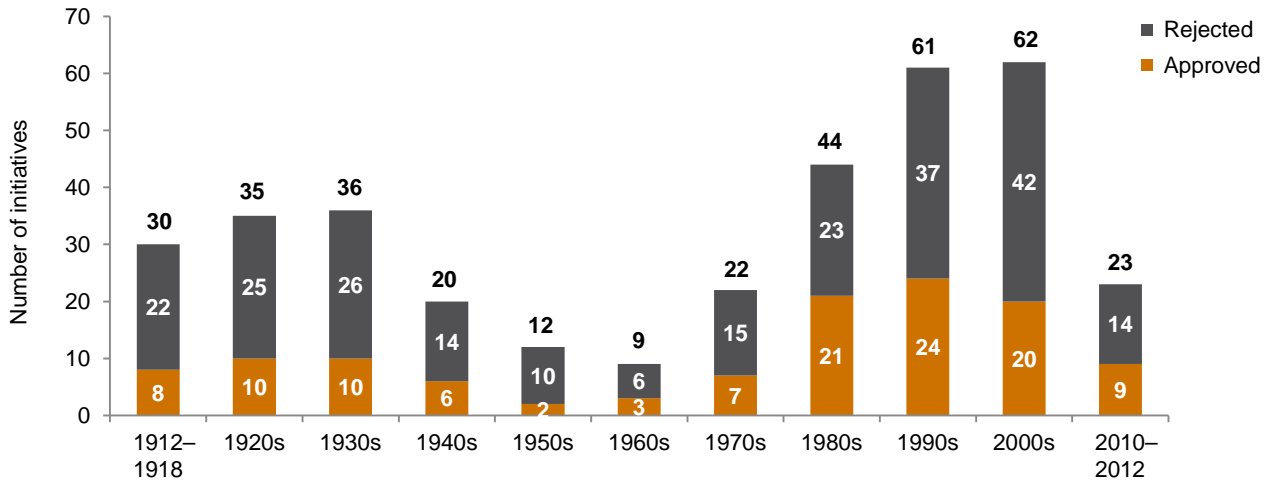
In PPIC surveys dating back to 2000, majorities of likely voters have said they are satisfied with the way the initiative process is working, but fewer than one in six have said they are “very satisfied.” And solid majorities have said that changes to the process are needed, with 36% recently calling for “major changes” (March 2013: 36% major, 38% minor changes). Historically, voters have been ambivalent about changing the process. For instance, they rejected three significant reforms: changes to the signature requirements in Propositions 4 (1920) and 27 (1922) and a ban on legislative changes to the initiative process without voter approval in Proposition 137 (1990). However, voters have passed significant initiative reforms: Proposition 1a, which lowered the number of signatures required for initiative statutes and eliminated the indirect initiative (1966) and Proposition 9, which changed the initiative information required in the ballot pamphlet (1974).

► Likely voters support reforms to increase transparency, involve the legislature, and engage the public.

Public support is especially high for proposals that would increase transparency in the initiative process. In recent surveys, 84% said they favor increasing public disclosure of initiative funding sources. They also favor certain proposals that would increase legislative involvement, including having a period of time for the legislature and initiative sponsor to seek a compromise before the measure reaches the ballot (78% favor). Finally, strong majorities favor increased public engagement in the process, such as having a citizens' initiative commission that would hold public hearings and make ballot recommendations (69% favor), similar to a program Oregon established in 2011.



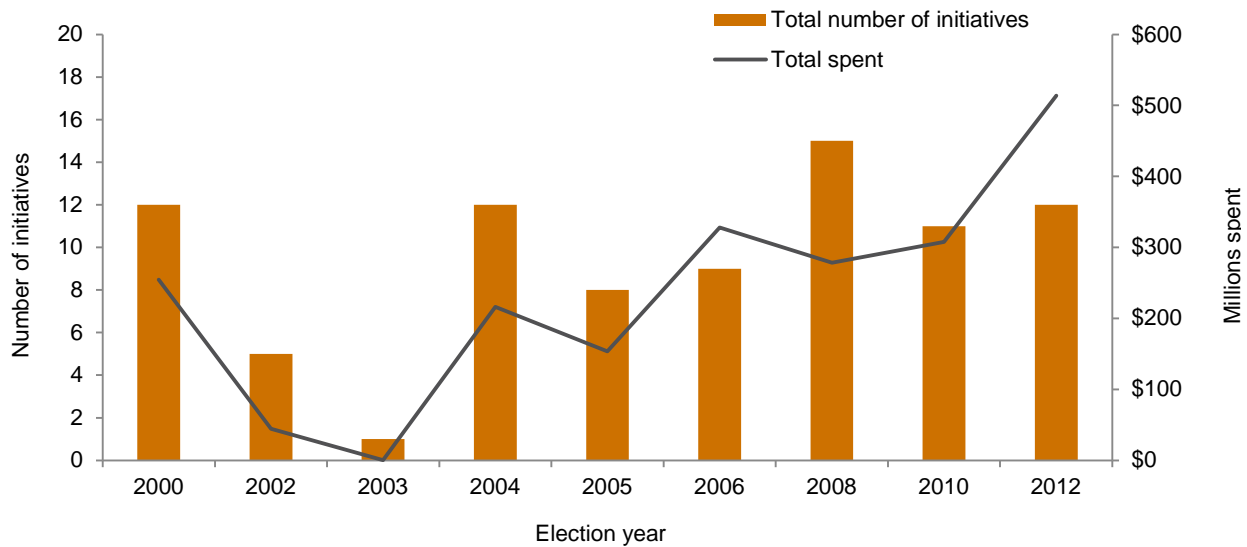
Use of the citizens' initiative has increased sharply



Source: California Secretary of State, History of California Initiatives, Initiatives by Year.

Notes: This figure includes only citizens' initiatives, not referenda or initiatives placed on the ballot by the state legislature.

Initiative campaign spending has increased in recent years



Sources: California Secretary of State, History of California Initiatives, Initiatives by Year; California Secretary of State, Cal-Access, Campaign Finance Activity, Propositions & Ballot Measures.

Note: Elections in 2006 (Prop. 87, \$155 million, 47% of total 2006 spending) and 2012 (Prop. 30, \$130 million and Prop. 32, \$151 million, together 55% of total 2012 spending) included the only three initiatives on which more than \$100 million was spent.

Sources: PPIC Statewide Surveys, 2000-2013; California Secretary of State, History of California Initiatives, Initiatives by Year; California Secretary of State, Cal-Access, Campaign Finance Activity, Propositions & Ballot Measures.

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