

Projected Cost to Defeat a California Ballot Measure Soars to \$55.7 Million

After each election cycle, Forward Observer analyzes spending by successful California ballot initiative campaigns to identify best practices and emerging trends, and to assist clients as they plan for the next election cycle.

According to the California Secretary of State, seven successful ballot initiatives were supported by committees spending at least \$5 million in 2018:

Prop. #	Committee
68	Yes on Proposition 68: Californians for Clean Water and Safe Parks, Sponsored by Conservation Groups
4	Yes on Children's Hospitals, Sponsored by CA Children's Hospital Assoc.
6	No on Prop 6: Stop the Attack on Bridge & Road Safety, Sponsored by Business, Labor, Local Governments and Transportation Advocates
8	No on 8: Patients and Caregivers to Protect Dialysis Patients, Sponsored by the California Dialysis Council
10 ¹	No on Prop 10: Californians for Responsible Housing, Sponsored by the California Apartment Association
	No on Prop 10: A Flawed Initiative That Will Make The Housing Crisis Worse; a Coalition Of Housing Advocates, Renters, Large and Small Businesses, Taxpayer Groups, and Veterans
11	Californians for Emergency Preparedness and Safety
12	Prevent Cruelty California, a Humane Society Committee

Estimating 2020 Initiative Budgets

In prior studies of ballot initiative spending, we have suggested that campaigns could set budgets in part based on the level of spending by successful campaigns in previous election cycles.

Projected committee spending for the upcoming election is derived by averaging expenditures for the nine successful “No” campaigns and 13 successful “Yes” campaigns in competitive contests in the 2014, 2016, and 2018 cycles.

¹ In this analysis, spending by the two major committees opposing Proposition 10 is combined.

Accordingly, we project that “No” committees will need to spend \$55.7 million to defeat an initiative in 2020 – more than twice the amount necessary to win a “Yes” campaign.

Projected 2020 Winning Campaign Budgets

Campaign	Budget
“No”	\$55.7 million
“Yes”	\$26.2 million

“With respect to spending by successful ‘Yes’ campaigns, the 2018 figure seems to be an anomaly,” said Forward Observer CEO Joseph Rodota. “Campaigns are already sending signals they will spend record amounts to pass ballot initiatives in 2020. We may be looking again at record budgets for ‘Yes’ campaigns.”

Successful “No” campaigns spent 5x as much as successful “Yes” campaigns

In 2018, the three competitive, successful “No” campaigns² spent an average of \$76.3 million, compared to an average of \$15 million for the four successful “Yes” campaigns.

Initiative Spending and Outcomes, 2018

Prop. #	Committee Expenditures		Outcome
	Yes	No	
Prop. 68	\$5,948,889	n/a	Passed
Prop. 4	\$11,522,806	n/a	Passed
Prop. 6	\$4,456,594	\$45,868,782	Failed
Prop. 8	\$18,533,035	\$111,081,321	Failed
Prop. 10	\$24,996,329	\$72,039,806	Failed
Prop. 11	\$29,498,580	n/a	Passed
Prop. 12	\$13,127,724	n/a	Passed

Source: CA Secretary of State, [Campaign Finance database](#)

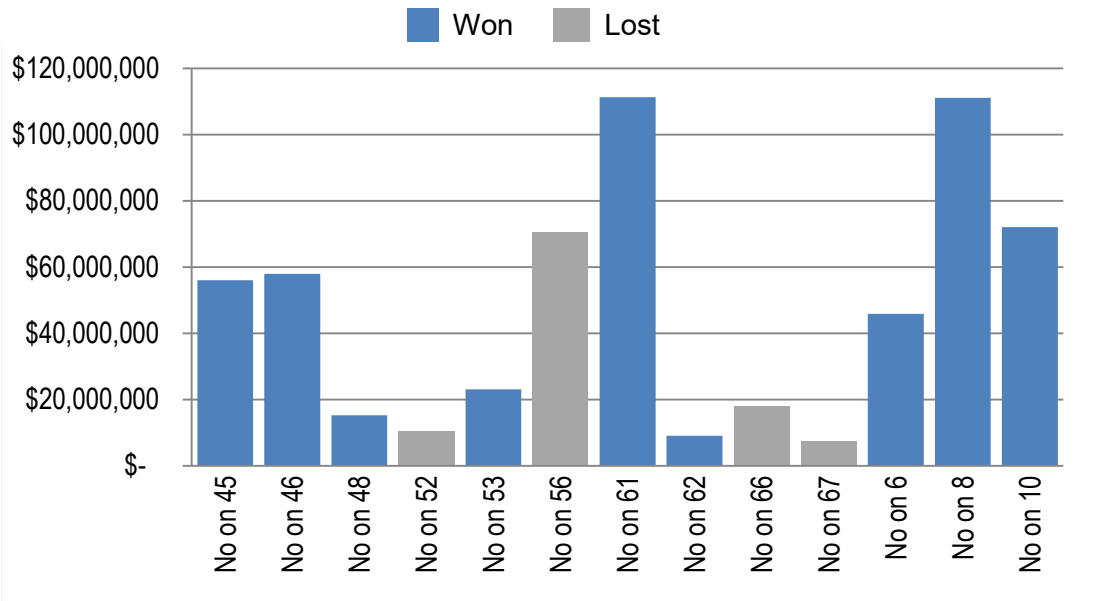
Overall, campaign spending by successful “No” campaigns increased by nearly 60 percent from 2016 to 2018, while spending by successful “Yes” campaigns *decreased* by 55 percent.

Avg. Spending by Successful “Yes” and “No” Campaigns, 2016 & 2018

Campaign	Average Spending	
	2016	2018
“Yes”	\$33.6M	\$15.0M
“No”	\$47.8M	\$76.3M

² We include only campaigns in which the main committee of the winning side spent at least \$5M.

Expenditures by “No” Campaigns, 2014 – 2018



Expenditures by “Yes” Campaigns, 2014 – 2018

