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NOVEMBER ELECTION

Bay Area voters face full ballot of tax measures

Closer look reveals fewer state,
local initiatives than in 2010

By Steven Harmon

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SACRAMENTO — Brace yourself when you head to the ballot box this November. California Gov. Jerry Brown wants more of your money. So do more than 30 city halls and local school districts in the Bay Area. Not to mention counties, like Santa Clara, or institutions like the Oakland Zoo.

Friday was the deadline to qualify measures for the November ballot. And while it may seem like governments across the state are digging deeper than ever into Californians' pockets this year, an analysis by this newspaper shows there are fewer tax and bond initiatives across the state and in the Bay Area than there were just two years ago.

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Taxes

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But with a pair of statewide sales tax measures near the top of your November ballot, everybody in California is being asked to share the burden this year.

Voters like Henry Riggs of Menlo Park are guarding their wallets. Even though the local measure on his ballot will be aimed at hotel guests — not residents — he's feeling a bit fed up by all the tax demands.

"There's always the good things that people don't want to lose," he said, "but in every case ... there's one communal pot of money."

Anti-tax groups say the fall ballot will surely give voters a heavy dose of tax fatigue, but an analysis of recent elections shows hearty support for taxes — at least at the local ballot box. Over the last three years, including votes on taxes earlier this year, Californians have approved nearly two-thirds of all local taxes, many of them requiring super majority votes.

Bay Area residents are even more inclined to support local taxes than the rest of the state. They've approved 73 percent of the 190 tax hikes that have gone before them since 2010.

"Those numbers show the opposite of tax fatigue," said Lenny Goldberg, president of the California Tax Reform Association. "They're not anti-government, they're not anti-tax. If people know where the money is going and trust it will be spent well, they're for it."

Even tax foes admit voters often support local taxes because there are very few local anti-tax groups to lead campaigns against them, said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

"Because there's no viable local taxpayer groups, and city councils phrase the questions in a one-sided manner, they almost always go unchallenged," Coupal said.

But having three statewide tax measures on the ballot could build on the cynicism and confusion of even Bay Area voters.

"The tendency is, I'm

How well do tax and bond measures do?

Local tax and bond measures that appeared on ballots in California since 2010:

2010			
Measure	Win	Loss	% won
Marijuana	12	0	100%
Special tax	1	0	100%
School bond	63	21	75%
Business license	3	1	75%
Vehicle	5	2	71%
Sales	19	8	70%
Miscellaneous	6	3	67%
Utility	17	10	63%
General bond	3	3	50%
Parcel	39	43	48%
Hotel	10	12	45%
Business gross receipts	0	1	0%
Total: 282	178	104	63%

Source: caltax.org

confused, so I'll vote no," said Larry Gerston, a San Jose State political science professor. "That's why Brown was working so hard to get these other statewide tax proposals off the ballot. But there doesn't seem to be much of a correlation between how people vote on state issues and how they vote on local ones."

Brown's tax, Proposition 30, would fall largely on the wealthy, raising income taxes for couples making \$500,000 or more, while also asking for a quarter cent hike in the sales tax. The \$6 billion to \$9 billion would prevent massive cuts to schools, community colleges and law enforcement, a threat seen as Brown's best bet to win.

A rival tax, Proposition 38, bankrolled by attorney Molly Munger, would boost school funding with higher taxes on all but the very poor.

Another tax, Proposition 39, would close a loophole for out-of-state companies, requiring them to pay taxes based on sales in the state rather than allowing them to choose how they are taxed.

Voters have been less forgiving on statewide taxes, rejecting the last eight, including one — by a paper-thin margin — in June that would have raised tobacco taxes.

Even though it's tough to compete on such a crowded ballot, local officials say that with the state's drastic budget cuts, the need is so great they couldn't wait.

"We have schools that are getting so overcrowded

2011			
Measure	Win	Loss	% won
General bond	1	0	100%
Hotel	5	0	100%
Marijuana	2	0	100%
Property	2	0	100%
Business license	5	1	83%
School bond	7	2	78%
Sales	8	4	67%
Parcel	31	17	65%
Utility	4	3	57%
Oil	0	2	0%
Miscellaneous	0	1	0%
Total: 95	65	30	68%

that waiting for another election cycle would be unacceptable," said Craig Baker, superintendent of the San Carlos School District, which is seeking higher property taxes to finance a \$72 million bond to pay for equipment and facility upgrades for the city's elementary and middle schools.

Even Orinda Mayor Steve Glazer, who also serves as Brown's political adviser, forged ahead with a local sales tax hike for road improvements.

"My view is that it wouldn't hurt the governor's important tax measure or ours," Glazer said.

Don Horsley, the vice president of the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, said his county had already done what it could to tighten its budget belt, by eliminating county positions, reducing employee benefits and cutting services.

"I'm unwilling to make those cuts without going to the voters to make the case that these are vital public services," Horsley said.

Santa Clara County Supervisor Dave Cortese, among four supervisors who voted this week to place a sales tax on the November ballot, said the county's health and hospital system needed the support after a decade of cuts.

Cortese supports Brown's tax measure as well, and thinks local voters "are well-informed and will realize that our measure is money that is staying right here in Santa Clara County."

2012				On Nov. ballot	% won
Measure	Win	Loss			
General bond	1	0	2	100%	
Business gross receipts	2	0	0	100%	
Sales	11	1	7	92%	
School bond	26	9	12	74%	
Hotel	4	2	3	67%	
Parcel	25	17	17	60%	
Business license	1	1	0	50%	
Utility	1	5	6	17%	
Miscellaneous	0	1	3	0%	
Marijuana	0	0	1	NA	
Total: 158	71	36	51	66%	

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In San Leandro, school officials view a new five-year \$39 residential parcel tax as a form of self-reliance, a chance to fund things that enrich students' lives such as music and the arts.

"I'm tired of Sacramento making the decision of what gets funded on the local level," said Mike Katz-Lacabe, a San Leandro school board member.

One of the closest-watched tax measures in Alameda County will be the permanent doubling of the transportation sales tax from a half cent to 1 cent to fix potholes, improve roads and freeways, as well as operate and expand public transit.

Alameda County residents will also be asked by the Oakland Zoo to approve a parcel tax worth as much as \$5 million a year if the measure passes.

Oakland resident Margo Robinson, 38, said she was "iffy" about the transportation tax but would support the zoo tax.

Voters in the Contra Costa Fire Protection District will decide whether to pay a \$75 annual parcel tax to preserve fire protection services. District officials recently told county supervisors that if voters reject the parcel tax, six district fire stations will have to close within two years.

Neighboring East Contra Costa Fire District closed three of its six stations and laid off 15 firefighters after voters in June rejected a \$197 parcel tax.

Concord Mayor Bill Shinn calls the fire tax a "yin and yang type of deal"

TAX MEASURES THAT WILL CRAM THE BALLOTS

Statewide

Proposition 30

Couples making \$500,000 or more would see their income taxes rise, while the state's sales tax would go up by a quarter cent. The \$6 billion to \$9 billion it is expected to raise would prevent nearly \$6 billion in cuts to schools, community colleges and law enforcement.

Proposition 38

Would boost school funding with higher income taxes on all but the very poor, though the biggest burden would fall on the wealthy. Annual revenues would be \$10 billion for 10 years.

Proposition 39

It would close a loophole for out-of-state companies, requiring them to pay taxes based on sales in the state rather than allowing them to choose how they are taxed. Annual revenues would be \$1 billion.

Contra Costa County

Chabot Las Positas Community College District:

\$28 parcel tax for six years to provide Chabot and Las Positas community colleges funds spent on local colleges.

Contra Costa Community College District:

\$11 per parcel for six years to provide Diablo Valley College, Contra Costa College, Los Medanos College, and the Brentwood and San Ramon Centers with funds.

Contra Costa County Fire Protection District:

Annual parcel tax of \$75 per single family home to provide local fire protection and emergency medical services.

Martinez Unified School District:

\$50 per parcel annually for five years, with an exemption for seniors, age 65 or over, to continue funding academic programs.

West Contra Costa Unified School District:

Renews its existing parcel

that will only help in the short term.

"On the one hand, we in the government have clearly been hit real hard with the different mandates from the state and spiraling employee costs," Shinn said. "On the (other) hand, if it's voted down, you have immediate consequences."

tax for five years, keeping the current rate.

Antioch School Facilities Improvement District No. 1:

Issues \$56.5 million in construction bonds to modernize Antioch High School by renovating classrooms.

Knightsen Elementary School District:

Issues \$3,000,000 of bonds payable from property taxes to refinance a lease entered into in 2007.

San Ramon Valley Unified School District:

Issues \$260 million in bonds.

West Contra Costa Unified School District:

Issues \$360,000,000 in bonds.

Moraga: A one-cent sales tax for 20 years.

Orinda: A one-half cent sales tax for 10 years.

Pinole: Continues the existing Utility Users Tax of eight percent until December 31, 2020.

Richmond: Imposes a business license fee of one cent per ounce of sugar-sweetened beverage.

Alameda County

City of Berkeley: Expenditures of voter-approved taxes for parks maintenance, library relief, emergency medical services, emergency services for severely physically disabled persons and fire protection and emergency response and preparedness.

Special tax to fund operation and maintenance of the warm water and Willard pools.

San Leandro Unified School District:

A \$39 per residential parcel tax to fund schools, possibly including music and arts education.

Albany: A half-cent sales tax measure, which would expire in eight years, to maintain city services, including public safety, recreation programs for youth and seniors, parks, playgrounds and open space.

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