

CALIFORNIA *Fair* ELECTIONS ACT

Allow Public Funding of Campaigns So Elections Are Won, Not Bought

On the November 3, 2026 Ballot!

The California Fair Elections Act will provide voters the opportunity to remove the current prohibition on public financing of campaigns in California while establishing basic requirements that public financing systems and candidates using public funding must follow to protect taxpayers and maximize the benefit to voters.

Why California Needs the California Fair Elections Act

- **The amount of money in politics is outrageous and is corrupting the system. Since 2020, over \$1 billion dollars has been spent on California state candidates alone.** This massive fundraising buys access for special interests but shuts out the rest of us. We need to change the way we finance election campaigns so politicians can focus on the job we sent them to accomplish.
- **81% of California voters** believe Big Money campaign contributors have too much influence over elected officials.*
- **Five California charter cities have public funding of campaigns** to amplify the voices of everyday voters so they can compete with Big Money: Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and Long Beach.
- **Yet public funding of campaigns is banned everywhere in California but charter cities.** General law cities, counties, districts, and the state currently don't have the same right to pass public funding that charter cities have.

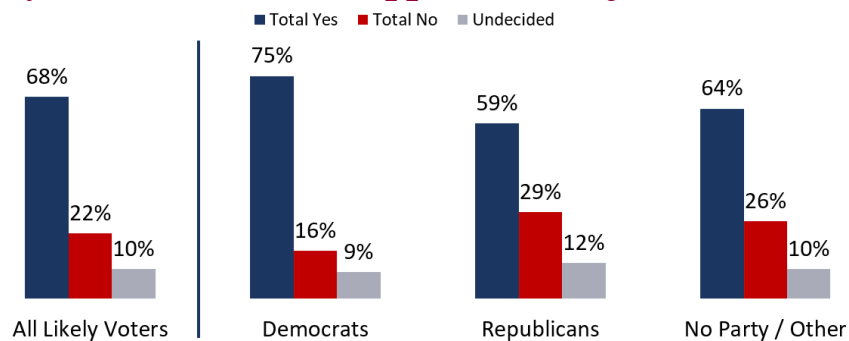
The California Fair Elections Act will:

- **Repeal the current ban on public funding of campaigns** so any city, county, district, and the state itself can pass public funding systems as long as the systems meet specific requirements, including that they:
- Require that **public funding candidates must abide by expenditure limits and meet strict criteria to qualify.**
- **Prohibit the use of public funds to pay for legal defense or fines.**
- **Prohibit candidates that receive public funds from repaying personal loans** with public funds, or repaying personal loans with private donations after the campaign ends.
- **Prohibit public funding from discriminating** based on party or against challengers in favor of incumbents.

California Fair Elections Act Sponsors and Supporters

- Put on the ballot by SB 42 (Umberg-Allen-Cervantes-Lee) which was sponsored by **California Clean Money Campaign, California Common Cause, and League of Women Voters of California.** It is supported by **ACLU, AFSCME, Asian Law Caucus, Bay Rising Action, California Environmental Voters, California Nurses Association, California Labor Federation, Courage California, Dolores Huerta Foundation, Indivisible, La Defensa,** and many more state, local, and national organizations.

68% of Likely California Voters Support the California Fair Elections Act!



*California Clean Money Campaign poll of 837 likely November 2024 voters from May 23-June 10 based on possible title, summary, supporters, and opponents that would appear on the ballot label.



“If the public doesn’t finance political candidates, special interests will happily step in.”

George Skelton story on original *California Fair Elections Act*, Los Angeles Times, 4/3/2023

Different Types of Public Funding Systems Allowed by *California Fair Elections Act*

The *California Fair Elections Act* will not institute public funding anywhere. But it allows any jurisdiction to pass a public funding system as long as it follows basic requirements. Here are example public funding systems allowed:

- **Matching Funds Systems:** Donations from small donors are magnified by matching them with public funds. Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Berkeley all provide 6-to-1 matching funds on small donations. New York City provides 8-to-1 matching funds on donations up to \$175. This empowers small donors to compete with larger ones.
- **Democracy Voucher Systems:** Residents receive vouchers they can give to candidates who agree to abide by specified contribution and spending limits. Seattle provides (and Oakland will soon provide) four \$25 vouchers to every adult resident, allowing everyone to help fund the candidate of their choice even if they can’t afford to donate.
- **Full Public Funding Clean Elections Systems:** Candidates qualify by raising enough small contributions and then receive a public grant to fully fund their campaign provided they raise no additional private funds. Used in Connecticut, Maine, Arizona, and Albuquerque. Ensures candidates aren’t influenced by private donations.
- **Full Public Funding Democracy Vouchers:** California Clean Money Campaign has proposed a hybrid system that allows candidates to qualify for public grants to fully fund campaigns without private donations by collecting enough vouchers instead of contributions. Candidates may submit additional vouchers for extra funding if needed.

Proven Benefits of Public Funding of Campaigns

- **Amplifies the voices of everyday voters** and candidates with a viable alternative to fundraising that relies on wealthy donors and special interests.
- **Allows qualified candidates from all walks of life to compete and win.** Public funding systems help qualified candidates run competitive campaigns even if they aren’t wealthy and lack wealthy donors. Los Angeles now has the most diverse city council ever with 14 of 15 councilmembers elected using matching funds.
- **Increases the diversity of campaign contributors.** A study by Maplight found that during the first cycle of the matching funds program in Berkeley (in 2018), donors to participating campaigns were spread across more of the city.¹ A 2020 study from Georgetown University found that since Seattle began Democracy Vouchers in 2017 the donor pool has become increasingly large and diverse.²

Publicly Funded Candidates Can Beat Big Money

- **Matching Funds helped New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass win despite massive financial opposition.** Billionaires spent over \$40 million against Mamdani and Bass faced over \$108 million from her opponent. Public financing ensured they had the resources to reach voters and win anyway.
- **Democracy Voucher candidates in Seattle beat millions spent against them.** In 2019, Amazon and other corporations spent \$2.6 million in independent expenditures opposing six voucher-using candidates but 4 out of the 6 candidates they opposed prevailed anyway.
- **85% of Connecticut candidates** for the General Assembly used public funds to seek office in 2018. As a result, 99% of their campaign funds came from real people—up from 49% before the Clean Elections program. Connecticut also ranked among the top states for monetarily competitive legislative races.

Vote for the *California Fair Elections Act* so every jurisdiction in California can make elections about ideas not money!

¹ “2018 Fair Elections in Berkeley”, Maplight, 2019, <https://maplightarchive.org/story/2018-fair-elections-in-berkeley/>

² “Building a More Diverse Donor Coalition — An analysis of the Seattle Democracy Voucher Program in the 2019 Election Cycle”. Jennifer Heerwig, Stony Brook University and Brian McCabe, Georgetown University, 2020. <https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/r2skqxfnc230ukkb3dfqgm4576phzabd>

