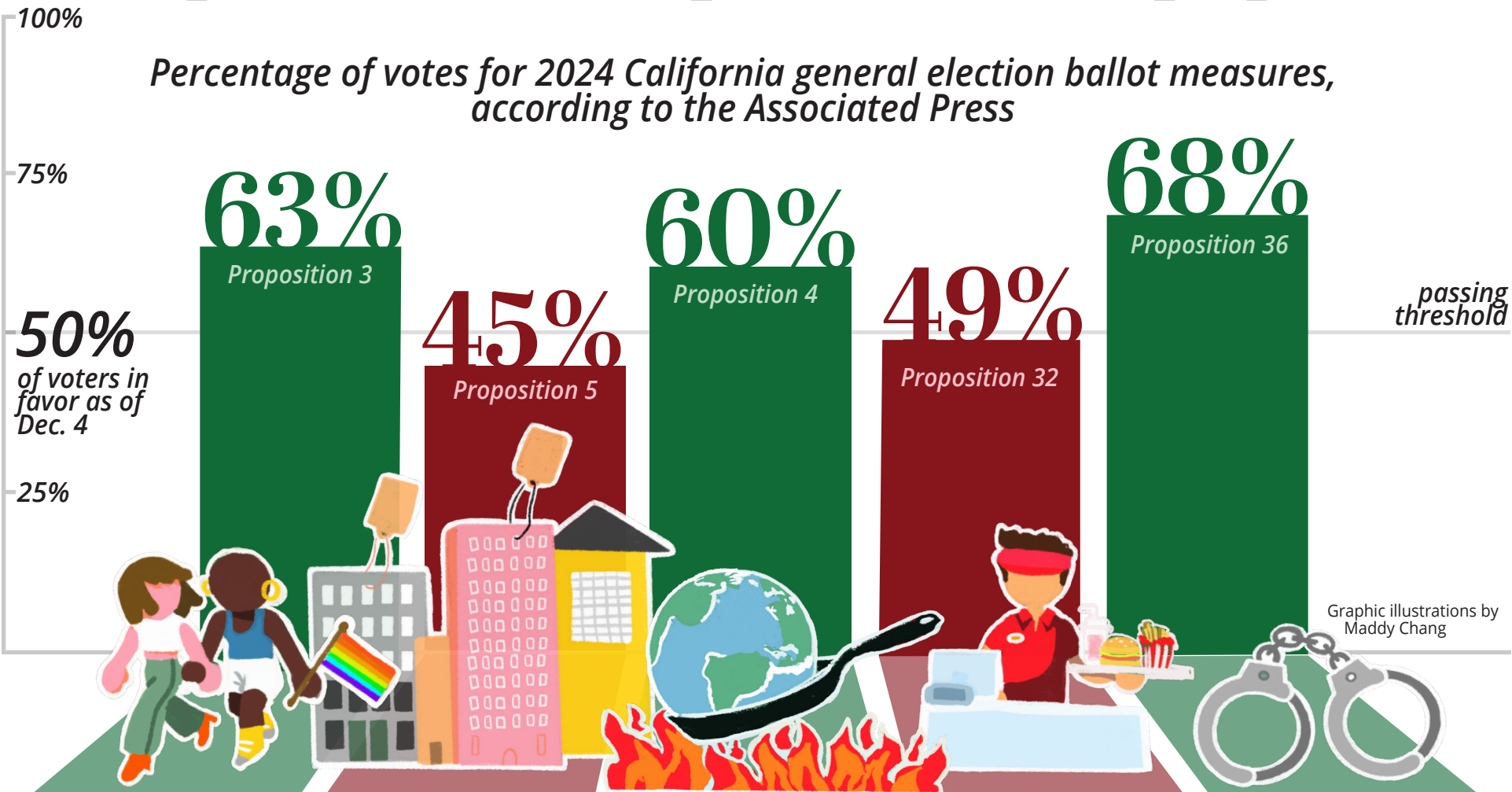


# The impact of California’s passed and failed propositions



BY STUTI JAIN

California — the state with the largest LGBTQ+ population — began to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples in 2004, defying a federal ban on gay marriage, but were quickly shut down by the U.S. Supreme Court. Thus, California passed Proposition 8, which defined marriage as only between a man and a woman. However, in 2013, the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage nationwide, nullifying Proposition 8.

After the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, reversing 50 years of federal abortion protection precedent, State Sen. Scott Wiener and Assemblymember Evan Low — both Democrats in the Legislative LGBTQ+ Caucus — introduced Proposition 3 to preemptively protect other constitutional rights. The proposition passed with support from 62.6% of voters. As California Amendment 3, it will enshrine same-sex marriage in the state constitution while formally repealing Proposition 8. In practice, it will not lead to any new change.

“It’s unlikely that the Supreme Court will overrule its previous ruling on same-sex marriage,” senior and Gender and Sexuality Alliance Club president David Merriam said. “I think it’s a good symbolic step, but I don’t think it’s incredibly significant. Safeguarding LGBTQ+ medical care would be a great next step forward.”

A typical home in California costs twice the national average, and rent is 50% higher than the national average. To make housing more affordable and build public infrastructure, local governments use bonds paid for by taxpayer money.

However, California presents obstacles for governments to borrow this money, as approvals need at least a two-thirds majority from local voters. Proposition 5 aimed to change California’s constitution by lowering the vote needed to approve certain local government bonds to 55%.

Proposed by California State Assembly Majority Leader and Democrat Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, the proposition failed with 55.1% of voters against it. If passed, supporters say it would make affordable supportive housing, and public infrastructure projects such as parks and water management easier for local governments to finance. The amount borrowed would be repaid through increased property taxes.

Critics argued it was not democratic to allow a third of voters to overrule the wishes of the other two-thirds. They also emphasized the ease that local officials would have in funding priorities, rather than relying on statewide or federal bonds. However, as the proposition failed, the minimum vote required to borrow money to cover public amenities will remain at a two-thirds majority.

Environmental groups and renewable energy supporters have been pushing for more funding to tackle climate change in recent years. This intensified after Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the \$54.3 billion California Climate Commitment initiative in 2022, which was later reduced to \$44.6 billion due to budget challenges.

Proposition 4 passed with 59.7% voting “yes,” and will authorize the state to issue a \$10 billion bond toward natural resources and climate initiatives. The principal benefactors will be communities impacted by droughts and floods, with \$3.8 billion going toward improving water supply and quality. A significant portion of the funds will also be allotted to state projects, local governments, Native American tribes, nonprofit organizations and businesses.

“I think people were a little scared, especially since the proposition relates to state debt and authorizing \$10 billion,” senior and Conservation Action Association Club co-president Medha Nalakonda said. “But you can’t really decrease the amount of energy and money that you put into such large-scale efforts.”

Although repaying the bond is expected to take 40 years, with annual installments of \$400 million from taxpayer money, the proposition is estimated to provide long-term savings by preventing disasters and reducing costs for climate activities.

Ranging between \$16 to \$19.36 per hour based on city and business size, California’s minimum wages are some of the highest in the United States. This directly reflects the high cost of living in the state: a single adult in the cheapest California county would need to make an estimated minimum of \$20.23 per hour to comfortably afford the basics.

Rejected by 50.7% of voters, Proposition 32 failed narrowly. If passed, California would have different minimum wages of either \$17 or \$18 per hour based on employer size, starting in January 2025. In 2026, employees would all earn at least \$18 per hour, the highest nationwide.

“Proposition 32 not passing may not seem like a big deal, but in reality, it makes those that live paycheck to paycheck even tighter on cash as prices rise disproportionately to their salaries,” sophomore and Mathnasium employee Maria Yakovenko said. “Low-income families will also likely be unable to afford things like housing soon due to inflation, and it’ll be hard to get raises because career growth opportunities at minimum wage jobs are often limited.”

Proponents emphasized the aid it would provide struggling families, but business groups opposing the proposition argued that inflation has already strained them, citing past layoffs caused by unaffordable wage increases.

In an attempt to reduce overcrowding in state prisons by classifying some theft and drug crimes as misdemeanors rather than felonies, California passed Proposition 47 in 2014. However, the proposition has been blamed in recent years for the sharp rise in crime statewide: shoplifting of merchandise worth up to \$950 soared 28% over the past five years, and the total reported thefts were 18% higher during the pandemic than in 2019.

A successful overturning of Proposition 47, Proposition 36 passed with 68.4% voting “yes.” Once implemented, it will issue harsher penalties and change court procedures. Individuals with multiple prior theft convictions will face up to three years in prison for stealing items worth over \$950, or causing property damage during crimes involving three or more people. Also, courts will be required to warn drug traffickers that they could be charged with murder if they provide illegal drugs that lead to a fatality.

Proposition 36 is estimated to increase state spending on jail management and court-related workloads by hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Many doubted the proposition’s actual effectiveness will be in reducing crime. However, its supporters have highlighted the importance of safer neighborhoods and its ability to lower homelessness caused by drug dependence.