No, Californians aren’t being asked to repeal Prop. 13’s residential property tax limits

Supporters of a California ballot measure that would remove some of Proposition 13’s tax protections say claims shared thousands of times on Facebook and other social media platforms have distorted their initiative.

The campaign for the California Schools and Local Communities Funding Act of 2020, also known as the "split-roll" measure, is still gathering signatures to qualify for the November ballot. It is backed by a group of union and social justice organizations.

If approved by voters, the measure would hike taxes on factories, stores and other commercial and industrial real estate by requiring they pay property tax based on current market value rather than the value of the property when it was purchased.

It would raise an estimated $7.5 billion to $12 billion annually, according to an analysis by the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst’s Office. The money would be distributed to schools and local governments.

The proposed ballot measure, however, would not touch tax protections for homeowners.

Yet many claims on social media suggest the initiative would repeal all parts of Prop. 13, stoking concerns that residential property taxes could spike.
Here’s one example posted on Facebook Dec. 31, 2019:

**IMPORTANT**

Major property tax increases are on the launch pad as California politicians try to repeal prop 13 by slipping it under the radar. California’s Attorney General, Xavier Becerra is putting together plans to raise property tax revenue by eliminating the only thing keeping some people's property tax from sky rocketing, Prop 13. Because they know it will be unpopular if presented as "Repeal Prop 13," Xavier Becerra has strategically relabeled it "Education and Local Government Funding." It’s already on the 2020 ballot and much like the gasoline tax, it will be worded in a way that misleads California voters. People renting may see it as a way to get something for nothing, but the long term result will be higher rents to pay due to the increase in property taxes. People are leaving the state in record numbers, and many here are barely hanging on, this could be something that changes the face of California forever.

All my California friends and family, please copy and repost as this must be defeated.

A similar Facebook post by Bakersfield Tuff, a media company focused on racing and rodeo, was shared more than 2,200 times. Others have appeared on the platforms Next Door and We Chat, according to the campaign for the initiative.

Do these claims distort the truth? We set out on a fact check to find out.

**Background on Prop. 13**
In 1978, voters approved Prop. 13, which slashed property taxes and limited how much they could go up. It also tied tax rates to a property’s purchase price, rather than to the fluctuations of California’s real estate market, ensuring homeowners greater financial stability.

The law remains popular among homeowners and business groups, who argue it allows neighborhoods to stay intact and older residents on fixed-incomes to remain in their homes rather than being forced out by high tax bills.

Groups such as Californians to Stop Higher Property Taxes have warned that removing Prop. 13’s commercial tax protections will lead companies to pass along any increased tax burden to consumers.

Critics of Prop. 13, on the other hand, say the law has cut too deeply into the foundation of tax revenue for local governments.

**Social Media Claims ‘Completely False’**

The campaign spearheading the November ballot measure contacted PolitiFact about the social media claims.

"They are completely false," said Alex Stack, spokesperson for the initiative. "It would completely protect and exempt all residential property, that means homeowners, renters and seniors."

That’s backed up by the initiative’s official title and summary prepared by the Attorney General’s office. That document says the measure exempts "residential properties; agricultural properties; and owners of commercial and industrial properties with combined value of $3 million or less."
Becerra’s Role

FEATURED FACT-CHECK

Bernie Sanders stated on January 13, 2020 in a Sun Sentinel op ed

"In Florida children are required to take their first standardized test within 30 days of beginning kindergarten and Gov. DeSantis wants to extend that requirement to preschoolers."
By Amy Sherman • January 15, 2020

The social media posts claimed Becerra "was putting together plans" to "eliminate" Prop. 13. There’s no evidence to substantiate that.

Becerra and others attorneys general, however, have been criticized for drafting misleading ballot measure titles and summaries. For example, Becerra was accused of giving an earlier version of this measure a friendly write-up. But attorneys general do not initiate ballot measures. A spokesperson for Becerra declined to directly address the social media posts.

Wesley Hussey, a political science professor at Sacramento State University, said the claim about Becerra planning to repeal Prop. 13 is clearly wrong and described the rest of the information as "cleverly fuzzy."

"It's very intelligently written," he said of the posts, suggesting they may have originated with a political operative. "Only one or two spots are wrong. A lot is political opinion."

There's no doubting the ballot measure's significance, Hussey added.

It would be "a dramatic revision" to Prop. 13. "If passed, it would be by far the biggest change we've seen" since voters approved the law, he said.
Keith Smith is a political science professor at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, where he studies elections and voting behavior.

He agreed the claim about Becerra was technically wrong. But given that the initiative represents a big change to Prop. 13, some voters may see it as "a gateway" to repealing the measure altogether.

Asked if social media posts were accurate, he replied: "It depends on your perspective. Is [Prop. 13] going away? No, it’s not going away. Is [the ballot measure] proposing to do away with some aspect of Prop. 13 that currently exists? Yes."

The claims published on Facebook and other sites, Smith explained, could be more convincing to voters than any details in the ballot measure.

Earlier this month, ABC 10 Sacramento examined similar claims and found there’s no effort to eliminate Prop. 13.

Adding to the confusion about the proposed November ballot measure, there’s a voter initiative on California’s March primary ballot called Proposition 13, the School and College Facilities Bond. But it has nothing to do with the landmark measure of the same name passed four decades ago. A spokesman for the California Secretary of State’s Office said that the numbers assigned to propositions are reused through the years, sometimes leading to duplicates.

Our Ruling

Social media posts claimed a November ballot measure would repeal California’s Prop. 13, and that Attorney General Becerra "is putting together plans" to eliminate the historic law.
The proposed measure would undo Prop. 13’s tax protections for commercial and industrial properties with a value over $3 million.

It would be a major change to the law.

But homeowners, small businesses and agricultural properties would not lose their Prop. 13 tax safeguards. That’s spelled out in the measure’s official state title and summary document.

While Becerra’s office writes the legal titles and summaries for voter initiatives, the attorney general does not put forward ballot measures. There’s no evidence Becerra is trying to eliminate Prop. 13.

In the end, the social media posts capture the real concern about potential changes to Prop. 13, but they also greatly misrepresent the specific changes the November ballot measure would make to it.

We rate their claims about repealing Prop. 13 as False.

FALSE – The statement is not accurate.

Click here for more on the six PolitiFact ratings and how we select facts to check.

Read more about Prop. 13, its history and efforts to change it in 'The Block That Prop. 13 Built,' a collaboration between CapRadio, CALmatters and public radio stations across California.

Email us at politifactca@capradio.org with feedback or contact us on Twitter or Facebook.