Orange County Progressive Voter Guide

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Introduction/Priorities

This voter guide assumes that the reader has their mind made up for Democratic vs Republican federal and state races but may be unaware of the issues and candidates for more local races. In addition to providing recommendations for many races, I have attempted to provide context around many contentious local issues so that the reader can continue to follow these conflicts and become involved in county and city politics even after the election ends.

Before getting into my commentary and recommendations, I'd like to very briefly outline some of my priorities when evaluating local, especially city council, candidates and propositions.

Environment

Climate change is the most important issue facing California, and I am looking for candidates who will work to reduce emissions and increase the production of housing, especially dense, multi-family housing, in the parts of the state that enjoy a coastal climate and are not located in flammable canyons. In addition, I am highly supportive of candidates that will encourage bicycling and walking infrastructure instead of more auto-oriented sprawl. Any candidate also looking to take action on building codes, using their level of government's purchasing decisions to contribute to a market for Passive House technology, and providing subsidies for e-bikes would earn an enthusiastic endorsement. (For more on what a truly inclusive, climate-friendly housing policy could be, read this.)

Policing

Police budgets take up many of our local resources with questionable returns. I support candidates who will resist the pressure of the police associations to provide unsustainable raises, benefits, and pensions, and who will bring reform and consequences to corrupt and criminal officers.

Rentiers

Thanks to Proposition 13, among other reasons, California has developed a class of landowners, both corporate and private, who are able to exercise a financial stranglehold on the state, newcomers, and young people without inheritances by a mere accident of chronology. Established businesses are given tax advantages over startups, owners of long-vacant lots are not penalized for withholding land during a housing crisis, and long-time homeowners are given disproportionate power to block any new apartments, public transit, or public amenities they think might even slightly inconvenience them.

Many of these same forces then vociferously oppose any attempts to introduce policies to institute fair taxes, pay workers a living wage, make new business formation easier, and create dense, walkable, climate resilient communities. Breaking the power of legacy businesses and NIMBY homeowners is essential to building a better state.

Homelessness

As the cost of housing has increased, so has homelessness. We need to build more housing, more supportive housing, and elect county supervisors and city officials who will invest in shelters with wraparound resources. I support candidates who espouse a "housing first" model rather than those who yammer on about enforcement or how it's someone else's problem.

Statewide Propositions

Propositions 15 and 22 are the most important. I provided commentary for those and in cases I felt the vote wasn't entirely clear. We provided arguments both for and against 19 and 25.

Prop 14

Neutral, leaning yes. I'm usually in favor of more funding for scientific research. I don't have much of an ability to judge whether this specific money will be put to good use. This is really the sort of issue that should be decided by a legislature, which has the resources to better investigate the specific programs.

Prop 15

Yes. This one will tax all commercial property worth more than $3,000,000 at the same rate. This is an extremely important step in fixing California's broken and inequitable taxation and real estate market. It's dumb that the money from this wouldn't go into the state's general fund, but it's still better than the status quo.

Prop 16

Yes

Prop 17

Yes

Prop 18

Yes

Prop 19: We held differing opinions on this proposition. Read below:

- **Argument from JG:** Yes. I really don't like that this expands some tax breaks for wealthy older Californians BUT narrowing the loopholes on the tax benefits of inherited properties is a really, really good thing, as is incentivizing small households to downsize. As with Prop 15, it's also unfortunate that this money will not go to the general fund. If you need another reason to support it, the proposition is opposed by the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.
- **Argument from CS: NO on Prop 19**. While there are some "sweeteners" in this ballot proposition (like closing the tax break on inherited properties mentioned by Josh), it does seem to be a classic tax break for wealthy, older Californians. It allows people age 55 and older to carry property tax rates to a new home anywhere in the state, up to three times. And though Prop 19 raises tax rates on inherited property if it is not the primary home of the heir, it is difficult to explain why tax breaks should be passed through to younger generations even if the heir resides in the house – something that has the potential to exacerbate racial and economic inequality. Most importantly, Prop 19 does nothing to address the shortage of affordable housing in California. Prop 19 is opposed by DSA LA, the ACLU, and also, yes, some unsavory actors (albeit for very different reasons). Though there's definitely some good here, it seems to be outweighed by the bad.

Prop 20

No

Prop 21

Yes

Prop 22

No. This one would provide a subsidy to the automobile and tech industries, make it more difficult for many Californians to access health insurance, and destroy the ability of the California government to pass future labor laws.

Prop 23

Yes

Prop 24

No. I was initially usure about this, but after talking with a friend of mine who is a privacy expert, I'm confident that this would not be good. The principal issue is that much of privacy law is very new and regulatory agencies are still trying to determine which laws work best. When laws are set by the legislature, they can be changed every year as circumstances dictate. However, this proposition would take that power away from the legislature, which means that changes would only take place every 2-4 years and with much more effort. My friend also recommended this article for those of you who want to read more about it

Prop 25: We held differing opinions on this proposition. Read below:

- **Argument from JG:** Neutral, leaning yes. There's some uncertainty about how much this would limit discrimination. Certainly, ending cash bail would be a positive step. It is possible that the criteria introduced in lieu of bail could be discriminatory, but I don't think we know enough to say for sure either way. The factor pushing me towards yes, then, is that this is merely a referendum on an existing law, not an initiative. This makes it easier for the California legislature to change the law should it turn out to have more negative than positive consequences. (Also, if you think that the general public will be more decarceral than the legislature on issues of crime and punishment in this state, we have a very different memory of recent events, especially Propositions 62 & 66.)
- **Argument from CS: NO on Prop 25.** This ballot proposition is a voter referendum on SB10—a measure to end the cash bail system—and is notably opposed by Human Rights Watch. The ACLU also withdrew support for SB10. Yes, that makes HRW and other progressive and abolitionist groups strange bedfellows with reactionary bail bondsmen, who want to maintain cash bail. Though we certainly need to end the money bail system, prop 25 might best be described as what prison abolitions have called "reformist reforms"—or measures that in fact funnel more money and power into the criminal justice system rather than *taking away* resources. The cash bail system would be replaced with racist algorithmic risk assessment tools and the nearly unlimited discretionary power of judges while expanding funding for probation departments. This does not deliver substantive change to the criminal justice system, nor does it guarantee that fewer people would avoid pretrial detention—in fact, quite the opposite could be the case.

Countywide Races

County Supervisor: Sergio Contreras

Local Measures

P – City of Cypress, Amend City Charter to Update Noticing, Election Procedures, and Process for Filling a Council Vacancy

- Yes

Q – City of Costa Mesa Retail Cannabis Tax and Regulation Measure

- Yes

S - City of Fullerton Community Services, Street Repair, and Emergency Response Measure

- Yes

U - City of Fullerton Fireworks Ballot Measure

- No recommendation. Personally, I'd prefer it, but I realize there are problems with the enforcement.

V - City of Laguna Woods Advisory Measure on Marijuana Dispensaries

- Yes

W - City of La Habra Cannabis Business Tax/Regulation Ordinance of 2020

- Yes

X - City of La Habra Citizens Initiative for Preservation of Open Space in La Habra

- No

Y - City of Los Alamitos Quality of Life, 911 Police Response, Business/Job Protection Measure

- No recommendation. Functioning government is good, but much of this money would likely go to police.

Z - City of Newport Beach Addition of Harbor Commission to the Newport Beach City Charter

- No recommendation

AA - City of Orange, The Trails of Santiago Creek Open Space and Residential Project

- Boy, it's the ever-present Orange County conundrum between keeping an area a sand pit and building single family housing. I'm leaning toward Yes while recognizing this isn't the best example of development.

BB - City of San Clemente, City Council Term Limits

- No. Term limits are anti-democratic.

CC - City of Tustin Limited Council Compensation

- Yes

DD - City of Westminster Term Limits

- No. Term limits are anti-democratic.

School & Water Boards

There are a lot of school board races, and it would take the patience of Job to sort through all of them. Apologies if your city is not represented. Many of these recommendations are fairly weak, but I've underlined anyone I'm confident is pretty good.

Community Colleges

North Orange County Community College District

Trustee Area 4: <u>Miguel Alvarez</u>

Trustee Area 5: Jacqueline Rodarte

Trustee Area 7: Keri Kropke

Coast Community College District

Trustee Area 2: Jerry Patterson

Trustee Area 4: No recommendation. I can't find much on Collier, so there's less downside with Hornbuckle.

Rancho Santiago Community College District

Trustee Area 3: Sal Tinajero

Trustee Area 5: David Crockett.

Trustee Area 7: No recommendation

South Orange County Community College District

Trustee Area 1: Carolyn Inmon

Trustee Area 6: Ryan Dack

Trustee Area 7: Tim Jemal

School Districts

In these races, I go with the teachers' candidates, unless there's a really good reason not to.

Anaheim

Elementary School District, Trustee Area 3: Jose Paolo Magcalas

Garden Grove

Trustee Area 1: Terri Rocco

Trustee Area 5: Patrick Cahill

Huntington Beach
High School District, At-Large: Christine Hernandez, Spencer Hagaman

Irvine
Trustee Area 3: Cyril Yu

Trustee Area 5: Paul Bokota

Orange
Trustee Area 2: Tiger Cosmos

Trustee Area 3: Ana Page

Trustee Area 6: Carrie Lundell

Santa Ana
Trustee At-Large: Alfonso Alvarez, Carolyn Torres, Rigo Rodriguez

Tustin
Trustee Area 1: Allyson Damikolas

Trustee Area 2: Susan Stocks

Westminster
Trustee Area 1: David Johnson

Water Boards
Orange County Water Board
Division 4: Kris Beard

Division 6: Michael Elliott

Municipal Water District of OC
Division 3: No recommendation. Just don't vote for Diep.

Division 4: Karl Seckel

Division 7: Megan Yoo Schneider

Irvine Ranch Water District
Division 4: Karen McLaughlin

Mesa Water District
Division 2: Adam Ereth

Midway City Sanitary District
At-Large: Jamison Power

City Council Races

Anaheim

Issues

New to Anaheim politics? Start [here](). I'll wait.

To summarize as quickly as possible, the most contentious division in [Anaheim city politics]() is between a populist faction (**Jose Moreno**-D, **Denise Barnes**, R-turned-D) that wants to end subsidies to Disney and the [Angels]() and a corporate-friendly faction (Mayor **Harry Sidhu**-R, **Lucille Kring**-R, **Steve Faessel**-R, **Trevor O'Neil**-R, **Jordan Brandman**-D) that has consistently voted in favor of subsidies to the city's major entertainment properties. Recently, this division was made apparent through votes on the [firing of the city manager](), the city's [2020 budget](), and the sale of the land for [Angel Stadium]().

Another major issue was the fate of [rent increases at a mobile home park]() inhabited primarily by lower-income seniors. This came down to a party line vote, with the Democrats (**Moreno**, **Barnes**, **Brandman**) attempting to block the increases and the Republican majority refusing to institute any rent control.

Finally, there are NIMBY issues surrounding the building of [new apartments]() and the [legalization of cannabis shops](). The populist faction has generally trended NIMBY, as have conservatives **O'Neil** and (sometimes) **Sidhu** and **Faessel**. **Brandman** and **Kring** have generally seemed to be the most pro-development councilmembers. In a similar vote regarding a new complex in a poor neighborhood, however, **Moreno** and **Barnes** were the only councilmembers who voted [against development](). That being said, it's worth noting that none of the pro-development councilmembers are exactly [Anne Hidalgo]() or [Ada Colau]() – they don't seem interested in dense, walkable infill that would create a climate-resilient city. Of course, in California, very few politicians are interested in that.

District 1

Denise Barnes (D) won a seven-way race with 27% of the vote as a Republican in 2016. She has switched parties and is running for re-election against Republican **Ryan Balius** and Independent **Jose Diaz**. **Diaz** is a Municipal Water Administrator who touts his escape from Cuba and has filled his issues page with platitudes about investment, public/private partnerships, fighting drugs, and stopping human trafficking. As of October 2nd, his campaign's Facebook page has 64 likes, suggesting he's not representing some sort of organic groundswell. **Balius** (83 FB likes) is even less specific about what he'd do in office besides keeping homeless people out of parks. Interestingly, he has not been endorsed by the county GOP despite being the only Republican in the race, suggesting that vote could be split by **Diaz**. Neither candidate appears to be attracting online engagement or high-profile endorsements yet, suggesting that **Barnes** has a good chance of re-election.

I'm leaning: Denise Barnes. I dislike her inveterate NIMBYism, but in Anaheim, I think removing the control of Disney, the Angels, and their allies over the city council is essential. I also have a similar calculus for the other Anaheim races.

District 4

Incumbent councilmember Lucille Kring is not running for re-election, sparking a four-way race between three Democrats and a ???, **Julie Brunette**, who has no ballot statement and almost no online presence (only a private FB page with "Blue Lives Matter" as its most recent post) and might just be in the race to pick up the vote of everyone who doesn't want to vote for a Democrat. Of the other candidates, school

board member **Annemarie Randle-Trejo** (441 FB likes) and activist **Jeanine Robbins** (161 FB likes) can be expected to vote with the populist Moreno-Barnes faction on most issues, while **Avelino Valencia** (553 FB likes) gained the Democratic Party's endorsement. Unlike Randle-Trejo and Robbins, Valencia says nothing about Disney, corporate subsidies, or renters in his candidate statement or on his campaign website, signaling that he would probably vote with the pro-Disney/Angels faction on questions of taxes and subsidies. With the populists split, he should be considered the favorite.

I'm leaning: Annemarie Randle-Trejo. Similar rationale to Barnes, and I think she has a bigger base of support than Robbins.

District 5

Incumbent **Steve Faessel** (R) is running for re-election against Democrats **Kenneth Batiste** (237 FB likes) and grad student **Sabrina Quezada** (195 FB likes). **Batiste** has been endorsed by Jose Moreno, former populist mayor Tom Tait, and state assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva and is running for more city government transparency, fewer corporate subsidies, and rent control. **Quezada** makes vague mention of environmental justice and income support without any explanation of what she would do as a city councilmember. Batiste has been in the race, locking up important local endorsements, since March, and it appears that Quezada entered the fray just before the deadline, so it's difficult to see what her plan for victory could be. She has received an endorsement from Congressman Lou Correa, who has rarely met a [corporate giveaway](#) [he didn't like](#) and [often](#) [endorses](#) [Republicans](#), which does make me think that she's mainly in the race to ratfuck (to use the [technical term](#)) the anti-Disney Batiste. **Faessel** received 43% of a four-way vote in 2016, so he is favored against a split field.

I'm leaning: Kenneth Batiste despite some truly horrendous graphic design, campaign statements filled with randomly capitalized letters and words, and social media posts that clank off the ear like an intoxicated raccoon ricocheting off a metal garbage can. Please, Batiste campaign, do better. (Also, see the justifications for Barnes and Randle-Trejo.)

Santa Ana

Issues

The politics of [Santa Ana](#) have primarily focused on issues of [policing](#), [homelessness](#), and personal acrimony among the council. Most members of the council are [supported by the police union](#), which instituted recalls against councilmembers who voted against [police raises](#). For many on the left, breaking the power of that union over the council is a top priority, but it's unclear that's possible given the candidates in this year's elections, the first in which each council race will not be voted on by the entire city.

There has also been a backlash against the homeless residents of the city, with many candidates declaring that the city has been too accommodating and other cities in the county need to spend more resources and house more shelters. Nearly every candidate has declared the need to "hold other cities accountable" and none of them have explained what that means.

Finally, there are also disputes over [gentrification](#) and the construction of [new housing complexes](#), though the NIMBYism is often an alliance between left wing activists who think new housing will lead to more displacement of poor people from the city and right wing homeowners who think new housing will lead to more poor people in their neighborhoods, as many people struggle to pay rent in the poorest

city in the county. Also, many candidates complain about parking, because Californians have the enviable ability to be party to a near endless litany of natural disasters exacerbated by climate change and think that the lack of parking spaces is the most important problem facing the city.

Here is a good overview of the races from [Voice of OC](#).

Mayor

[Corrupt as hell](#) Miguel Pulido is finally termed out, leading to a wide-open mayoral race. The Democratic Party and most local progressives have coalesced around **Vicente Sarmiento** (1,101 FB likes), who has never been exactly supported by the police union but who did vote in favor of the raises. He is running on a dual platform police reform and the status of the only responsible adult in the room, which, fair enough. The police union's preferred candidate is councilmember **Jose Solorio**, whose campaign is essentially "give the police more money." Former councilmember and career prosecutor **Claudia Alvarez** (373 FB likes) is also running with quite a few endorsements from the over-70 set of the city's establishment as her anti-homeless shelter, anti-housing, pro-parking policies would suggest.

If those three split the vote evenly enough, that could leave the door open for Republican **Cecilia Iglesias** (836 likes), who was successfully recalled from her seat on the council for opposing the police raises. She would also like everyone to know that she is extremely opposed to any new taxes or bonds for any reason and appears to believe that cutting taxes solves all ills. She is also opposed to all public unions, as she has adopted conservative ideology without understanding the cynical power politics necessary to the maintenance of that ideology that has led many "fiscal conservatives" to give unlimited money and support to police unions. Finally, vicious, reactionary crank **Mark Lopez** and friendlier reactionary crank **George Collins**, who wants to end gentrification by increasing the supply of parking and decreasing the supply of housing and whose police reform policy is emergency response drones everywhere, will probably pick up a few percent each.

I'm leaning: Most progressives have lined up behind Sarmiento, who is probably the least-worst candidate, but I am extremely unimpressed by everyone in this race. Iglesias would be an entertaining train wreck, but I can't in good conscience recommend a candidate that seems so hostile to actual governance.

Ward 1

Thai Viet Phan (590 FB likes), endorsed by the County Democratic Party, is probably a slight favorite here. She is generally in favor of moderate police reforms, advocating "community policing" and hiring officers who speak Vietnamese, but is the rare municipal candidate to come out in favor of both zoning reform, permitting more multi-family units, and some form of renter protections. **Tony Adame** (602 FB likes) is a young entrepreneur whose platform is focused on increasing the quantity and quality of city programs for youth. Which is good! His campaign materials give the impression that machine learning software was fed a steady dose of motivational quotes from on Instagram. To which I have a finely tuned instinctual aversion! Both Phan and Adame have broadly progressive positions, but both came out against needle exchanges, which is one of my personal litmus tests for politicians who have courage and pay attention to scientific evidence. So, I can't muster any enthusiasm for either.

Cynthia Contreras (188 FB likes) is running for that sweet, sweet Police Officers Association money, holding other cities accountable on homelessness (How? Who knows?), and a host of reactionary

policies, including cooperation with ICE. Republican **Thomas Gordon** (5 FB likes) is also running on an anti-homeless, pro-police platform.

I'm leaning: Thai Viet Phan. She at least supports some up-zoning and Adame seems a bit too likely to try to sell me some Cutco knives.

Ward 3

I would like to take a moment to thank **Jeffrey Katz** (4 FB likes). Not because I agree with him on everything. (He's an anti-density NIMBY.) Not because I think he has a chance to win. (See the number of Facebook likes.) But because he has the most detailed "Issues" page I have ever seen from a city council candidate. He goes so far as to say for which street he would favor façade improvement subsidies! Other candidates let loose platitudes about "community policing"; Katz enumerates the specific reforms he'd like to see in the police department. That is the type of specificity that I would like to see from other candidates, and I wish was better rewarded.

Jessie Lopez (850 FB likes) is running to "protect neighborhoods from overdevelopment" and allocate more funding to youth programs. She seems to be friendliest of the candidates to police reform but refused to answer a question on whether she would vote to raise or lower their budget. She has the endorsements of a number of left-leaning local politicians, but many of her statements smack of left-wing NIMBYism, such as a proposal for community review for every new housing project. **Jannelle Welker** (429 FB likes), interestingly, has been endorsed by a number of North County politicians but not many Santa Ana ones. Unlike Lopez, she is in favor of broad up-zoning to allow the city to incentivize more housing but contradicting herself on rent control and other tenant protections. She also wants to eliminate Santa Ana's SWAT unit and move the money to community policing, whatever that means.

Danny Vega (454 FB likes) seems to be running a right-wing anti-establishment campaign: anti-housing, anti-homeless shelters, anti-corruption & anti-"career politicians." In contrast, **Mark McLoughlin** (219 FB likes) seems to be the establishment favorite, racking up an impressive number of endorsements from current and former city councilmembers and city commissioners, which is probably why his campaign website doesn't even have an issues page and instead is festooned with endless photos of the candidate posing awkwardly with the same group of small children. Are they his? Are they props? Who knows? He doesn't clarify! He's also almost certainly the police union candidate.

I'm leaning: I don't feel good about it, but Jannelle Welker, I guess. She's a bit of a cipher, but the other center-left candidates are anti-development which is climate arson in a coastal California city with the density for functioning transit and walkable neighborhoods.

Ward 5

Incumbent **Juan Villegas**, who received 55% of the vote in a citywide two-way election in 2016, is running for re-election. Villegas, a sheriff, was seen as one of the chief allies of the police union until he voted against a controversial $23 million raise. The police union then targeted him with a recall campaign, which failed. He did vote for a budget which included police raises this year, so maybe they've patched things up. He is opposed by **Johnathan Hernandez** (333 FB likes), **Laura Perez** (251 FB likes), and **Vic Mendez** (no online presence). Both **Hernandez**, who cannot answer a question without the preface "as a father," and **Perez** have generic platforms calling for affordable housing and investment in youth programs, though Perez is noticeably more hostile to homeless people than Hernandez.

As another point in his favor, Hernandez does promote citywide free WiFi, which is a step in the right direction, if not the gold standard of municipal broadband. (It's the difference between likely low-quality wi-fi in public spaces and a city corporation providing better WiFi at lower prices than the private telecommunication companies.) Either way, they will likely split the anti-Villegas vote. **Mendez** seems to be a bored retiree running for office without putting in the effort. I did have the opportunity to see Hernandez and Mendez talk about housing policy and their answers ranged from the horrific (Mendez advocating less density) to the vacuous (every extremely vague, platitudinous statement made by Hernandez).

I'm leaning: Hernandez is not good on environmental, urbanist issues (he said something along the lines of "nobody chooses to move next to a transit station" during a debate), but at least he is the only one to support needle exchanges, pushing him over the top for me. He's probably the least bad option here.

Irvine

Issues

The recurring issue in Irvine politics that just won't die is the placement of the very long-delayed Veterans Cemetery. One faction, largely Democratic, wants to start the project at the location of an old hangar base. The other faction, largely Republican, wants to continue delaying the project while the state decides what to do with the land. If you are looking for a detailed, thoughtful analysis of this problem, you have come to the wrong place, but many Irvine residents appear to possess very passionate feelings about it. It does seem to have additional salience because this election marks the return of former mayor Larry Agran to the political sphere. Agran left office in 2012 having spent much of his time in office attempting to develop the nearby Great Park with what can charitably be called mixed results. The result of his candidacy will likely be a referendum on the perceptions of his competence in doing so. Again, unfortunately, such a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this writeup, but the above links provide a start.

Besides the issues surrounding the management of city land, Irvine candidates also spend quite a lot of time talking about environmental issues. I would like to break these issues into four categories: cars, housing, the climate action plan, and community choice energy.

As the California power grid continues to electrify, becoming more reliant on solar and wind, an increasing amount of the state's carbon emissions are coming from cars. In addition, auto-focused infrastructure, such as parking lots, are themselves the source of negative climate impacts. Finally, even as cars begin to electrify, the particles from their tires and brakes have their own extremely negative health impacts. In short, in order for Irvine to become an environmentally sustainable city, the number of miles driven per person needs to decrease and the number of trips taken via walking and biking (or e-biking) needs to dramatically increase.

However, most Irvine city council candidates are campaigning on policies that would make driving easier and more convenient. When they do complain about traffic, it's in the context of opposing new development. What happens when new development does not come to Irvine? More people are forced to live in California's fire zones, or even move to even more car dependent states like Arizona and Texas. This is a complete disaster for sustainability and leads to greater global emissions – often in the name of "keeping Irvine green."

Irvine has commissioned a climate action plan in the last year, and several city council members are running on a promise to implement it. However, the report is not yet finished, so it's difficult to know the seriousness of these promises.

Several of the left-leaning candidates also support Community Choice Energy as the centerpiece of their climate plan. While I do support this idea, it's unclear what the actual carbon impact will be as the larger California grid becomes cleaner every year. Whatever the energy savings, it seems likely that they will be dwarfed by the impact of the tens of thousands of Chevrolet Climate Deniers or Ford Glacier Melters, or whatever SUVS are called these days, that the city encourages its residents to buy with its land use and transportation policies.

Mayor

This is a fairly standard Republican vs Democratic race, with a spoiler on each side. Current city councilmember **Farrah Khan** (31.0% of the vote for city council in 2018; 28.4% needed to win) is the Democratic candidate, while **Christine Shea** (40.4% of the vote for city council in 2016; 34.4% needed to win) is the Republican candidate. On the municipal level, there is perhaps less difference between the candidates than one might think. Both have a NIMBY attitude toward new housing, both decided to punish college students for the housing crisis, and both even supported a Republican appointment to the city council seat vacated by Don Wagner after his election to the Board of Supervisors. That said, Sunrise at UCI is endorsing Khan, so they do see some promise in her rhetoric on the Climate Action Plan and Community Choice Energy. (It is worth noting that Shea voted in favor of commissioning the Climate Action Plan.)

The other two candidates are **Luis Huang**, a democratic socialist running an anti-landlord campaign who doesn't appear to have an organized base of support and **Katherine Daigle**, a Republican who won 16.6% in a four-way mayoral race in 2018. One of the interesting aspects of this race is that both GOP candidates present themselves as environmentalists (while falling short of my understanding of the term). Daigle is running to the right of Shea on taxation issues. Like Huang, she's essentially running a spoiler campaign, and she may have the most poorly designed website of any of the candidates in this guide.

I'm leaning: Khan, but I feel significantly worse about it than I did two years ago.

City Council (At-Large)

Irvine has at-large council seats, and so 14 candidates are running for two spots (if Khan loses) or three spots (if Khan wins). Each major party has endorsed three candidates, leaving eight more candidates looking to break through. It is unlikely that any of them will win, but we will cover them anyway.

The Democratic Party has endorsed **Lauren Johnson-Norris** (also endorsed by Sunrise at UCI and OC YIMBY), **Tammy Kim** (endorsed by Sunrise at UCI), and former mayor **Larry Agran**. **Johnson-Norris** (23.0% of the vote when running for city council in 2018; 28.4% needed to win) is the friendliest of the Democratic candidates to new housing and immediate, mandatory electrification of vehicles and buildings, which makes her the strongest candidate on environmental issues in my estimation.

She also is the only candidate insisting that the aforementioned Climate Action Plan exist as a standalone document, so it can be updated more frequently than the city's general plan. This seems like

a reasonable position, as the costs of climate inaction will become even more obvious and pressing before the city is scheduled to update its general plan again.

Tammy Kim is also running on an environmental platform, but has certain phrases in her policy statements that worry me: "protect our open spaces," "growth has allowed to go unchecked," "over-crowding." Those phrases have all of the hallmarks of a candidate that would "support sustainable development in theory, but…" She also frequently calls for "100% energy independence" because she's apparently running for President in 2004. Unlike Johnson-Norris, she has also proposed fewer ideas for reducing car trips or changing building codes in the campaign materials and statements of hers that I've seen. In the interests of fairness, she does claim to support workforce housing, which is a positive, if it happens.

Larry Agran, meanwhile, seems to be a very nice old man with very progressive views on issues of national policy who seems to be trapped in the anti-growth, anti-density mentality of 1970s environmentalism.

Republican **Carrie O'Malley** (26.0% of the vote in 2018; 28.4% needed to win) narrowly lost in 2018 and appears to be fairly pro-environment according to the questions she answered to OC Clean Power. Of course, much of this is theoretical until the Climate Action Plan is actually released. Most of her policy positions also seem pretty centrist by OC standards, which led me to wonder if the presence of a majority Democratic electorate in Irvine is actually having an effect on the opposition's political rhetoric, or if she's a Republican because of national issues and this is an anomaly. During a candidate forum hosted by Irvine Watchdog, she was one of the only candidates to oppose a "housing program with wraparound services" as a way of addressing homelessness, which may provide a partial explanation.

Michael Carroll was recently appointed to the council and brags on his website about stopping the construction of 130 high density homes, mitigating his support of Community Choice Energy. **John Park** (9.2% of the vote in 2018; 28.4% needed to win) is the 3rd candidate endorsed by the Republican Party and seems mostly focused on how to balance the city's budget.

Of the other eight candidates, one appears to be running a right-wing campaign, three appear to be left-wing, and four appear to be running centrist or incoherent campaigns. The right-winger is **Mark Newgent** (10.8% of the vote in 2018; 28.4% needed to win), who is the kind of veteran that will immediately tell you that he's a veteran. He seems to have an extremely authoritarian personality, distinguishing himself as the candidate most emphatically supportive of the police, and spending a bizarre amount of time in a candidate forum justifying his love for his "mixed-race son." The fact that he felt that piece of information needed any justification at all honestly raised more questions for me than it settled.

The left-wing candidates are **Christina Dillard** (380 FB likes), **Abigail Pole** (173 FB likes), and **Dylan Green** (68 FB likes). Dillard and Pole appear to be running on an unofficial slate together. They both have some decent policies, Dillard more than Pole, but I've seen them default to "ask the community" on difficult questions, and boy howdy, do I not want a city councilmember who listens to the subsection of the community that shows up to an Irvine city council meeting. Remember what happened last time the council had the option to listen to the community? Listening to the loudest voices in your email (assuming text to speak) is how frightened city councilmembers turn full NIMBY, and that is something I

cannot endorse. Meanwhile, Dylan Green has already gone full NIMBY, proposing a moratorium on new construction. If I wanted to vote for Larry Agran, I'd vote for Larry, Dylan.

Diana Jiang (29 FB likes) talks a lot about her resume and making government more efficient. **Laura Bratton** (533 FB likes – which I've been informed are probably fake) talks about bipartisanship and how things used to be better. She also wants to "start a dialogue" with the community about homelessness, most likely in lieu of actually doing anything. She also repeats the phrase "we the people" talismanically, which is never a good sign. I'm not quite sure why **Anshul Garg** (38 FB likes) is running, as everything he says is the most generic platitude repeated by every other candidate, and I'm not sure **Hai Yang Liang** knows why he is running.

I'm leaning: Johnson-Norris for the first spot, then take your pick for the second spot based on the commentary.

Garden Grove

Issues

Many of the races this year seem to be motivated more by personal animus than actual policy differences. Far-right councilmembers **Phat Bui** and **George Brietigam** have attacked liberal councilmember **Kim Nguyen** for posting on Facebook about the idea of a "model minority" following the murder of George Floyd. Nguyen then fired back on the dais and social media. Bui allegedly responded by recruiting an ally (Huan Nguyen) to move to (Kim) Nguyen's district at the last minute to challenge her in this year's election. Kim Nguyen then led the council in removing Bui ally (Man Jordan) Nguyen from the planning commission after the latter was arrested for grand theft. Well, maybe that last example was merely responsible governance carried out with a certain *joie de vivre*.

Other recent issues have included the development of the Willowick Golf Course, which I believe is currently tied up in court, the city's relationship with the police department, and compliance with state-mandated housing targets. The entire council has voted for police raises in the past and the public comments of the past several meetings have been filled with students and other young residents arguing to defund the police. The reaction of the council has ranged from bemused tolerance (Nguyen) to outright rage (Bui) at the suggestions. The majority of the council also attended a "defend the police" rally intended to oppose defunding the police.

The increasingly fractious atmosphere led to a pointless rebellion against a pre-emption of the city zoning code by a state law permitting more housing, with councilmembers Bui, Brietigam, **John O'Neill**, and **Stephanie Klopfenstein** abstaining or voting against the change to indicate their displeasure with the changes in neighborhood character the state laws would promote.

Mayor

Incumbent **Steve Jones** (R) won with 84% in 2018 against **Donald Taylor**, an Independent with fairly conservative rhetoric about small government and veterans. This year, he is being challenged from the right by businessmen **Phat Bui** (R) and **Duy Nguyen** (R). Taylor is also running again. Shockingly, with the Republican vote split so many ways, there does not appear to be a Democrat to benefit. I'd expect most of the Democratic vote to go to Jones here, who, for all of his faults, is focused more on local issues than national culture war politics and at least understands the basic functions of government.

I'm leaning: Steve Jones. I don't feel great about it, until I look at the alternatives.

District 2

Independent **John O'Neill** was unopposed in 2016, but faces a challenge from **Julie Diep** (D), who has picked up the Democratic Party endorsement. Her campaign literature says nothing of significance, instead featuring pablum like "our residents and our small businesses are our priorities." Meanwhile, O'Neill's political philosophy appears to be to avoid controversy, with the exception of the recent zoning changes.

I'm leaning: Meh. I'm not a fan of O'Neill but he's not as reactionary as Bui and Brietigam, and I have no idea what Diep stands for besides the liberal use of strawberries in her campaign signs and mailers.

District 5

This is a fairly standard 1 vs 1 Republican vs Democratic race between incumbent **Stephanie Klopfenstein** (R), who narrowly won a similar race in 2016, and challenger **Robert Tucker** (D), a retired teacher's union representative. Tucker seems fairly liberal from his personal Facebook, spoke positively about building housing near transit, and promotes addressing crime and policing by increasing funding for community support services. This will be a close race.

I'm leaning: Robert Tucker.

District 6

Aforementioned councilmember **Kim Nguyen** is running against mystery man **Huan Nguyen**, who Kim accuses of parachuting into the district at the last moment. It is difficult to write much about him because he does not appear to have any sort of online political presence. Kim is a pretty mainstream pro-development progressive and should be considered the overwhelming favorite here.

I'm leaning: Kim Nguyen. She's a bit too friendly with the police union, but she's one of the better elected officials in the county on most other issues.

Fullerton

Issues

As in many other Orange County cities, the biggest issues facing Fullerton have to do with homelessness and housing. Local nonprofits and advocacy groups have battled to [force the city](#) to construct homeless shelters and permanent supportive housing. Electing city councilmembers who will do so without the presence of several hundred supporters in the audience should be a priority. In addition, continuing to help the seniors of [Rancho La Paz](#) should be important for the next council.

On a more systemic level, Fullerton is one of the cities in Orange County best poised to create a large, dense, walkable downtown to keep California residents out of the fire zone and decrease vehicle emissions and particulates with its traditional grid, small block size, and large student population. As far as I'm aware, there has been little to no recognition of this by the current council, and so electing councilmembers who understand the importance of building more housing at the expense of parking lots and single-family zoning is essential.

Finally, the city is embroiled in a [lawsuit](#) against a pair of local bloggers who published secret city hall documents pertaining to an incident in which the former city manager was not charged with a DUI after allegedly drinking and driving in 2016. Any politician who voted [in favor of the lawsuit](#) – **Jesus Silva** (D),

Ahmad Zahra (D), **Jan Flory** (D), and **Jennifer Fitzgerald** (R) – should be viewed as, at the very least, enablers of municipal corruption.

District 1

This is a traditional, 1 vs 1, Republican vs Democrat race to represent this largely Asian-American section of West Fullerton between **Fred Jung** (D) and **Andrew Cho** (R). At a recent Q&A on the topic of housing, Jung clearly had a much better understanding of the scope of the housing crisis and the need for policies to fix it, while Cho claimed that Fullerton is "built out" – a particular bugbear of mine – and argued that development needs to be "balanced," which I have found to be a code word for "only in poor neighborhoods."

I'm leaning: Jung. This one is easy.

District 2

This is a chaotic four-way race for an open seat to replace Jan Flory in the wealthiest of Fullerton's five districts. There seem to be two serious candidates and two fringe candidates. **Faisal Qazi** (914 FB likes) has received the Democratic Party endorsement and is saying the positive sounding things about reducing homelessness and police transparency, but without any specifics it's difficult to get too excited. Republican **Nick Dunlap** (783 FB likes) is running for lower taxes, "business-friendly policies," and "reduc[ing] homelessness with…enforcement," which sounds extremely ominous. As seems to be *de rigueur* among North County Republicans (see also Ryan Balius), his social media is mostly pictures of him smiling goofily.

Meanwhile, on the edges of the ballot, **Mackenzie Chang** (52 FB likes) is touting their work for a NGO in Ukraine and is bringing the tax cuts and free market ideals that worked so well over the past three decades to transform that country's economy (currently 40/41 among European countries in GDP per capita) to the Fullerton city council. **Charles Sargeant** (R) is running on a platform of street repairs and more parking, presumable with the intention of displacing more families into California's wildfire zones. He has no social media presence that I could find.

I'm leaning: Faisal Qazi. In this district, a boilerplate Dem is a win.

District 4

Eccentric Republican **Bruce Whitaker** is running for re-election after getting votes on 44% of the ballots cast citywide in the 2016 at-large election. He was the only member of the city council to vote against the proposed homeless shelter in January, though he was also the only to vote against pursuing the city's lawsuit against the aforementioned bloggers. He is running against **Aaruni Thakur**, who has been endorsed by the OC Democratic Party. Thakur was very unimpressive when I saw him speak on housing and zoning issues, continually straying off-topic, but he has taken a stronger stance on demilitarization and civilian oversight of the police than most local Dems.

I'm leaning: Thakur because of Whitaker's stance on the homeless shelter, but less firmly than I'd ordinarily be in a race like this, given Whitaker's status as the only member of the council to vote in favor of more governmental transparency last fall.

Other Races

Other Orange County City Council Races

Costa Mesa Mayor: Katrina Foley, reluctantly.

Costa Mesa District 1: John Stephens

Costa Mesa District 2: Loren Gameros

Costa Mesa District 6: Jeff Harlan

Huntington Beach At-Large: Oscar Rodriguez, Dan Kalmick, Natalie Moser

Westminster District 2: Carlos Manzo

Neighboring Cities

These are some candidates who aren't running in Orange County but are right over the border and could use your help!

State Assembly, District 64: Fatima Iqbal-Zubair. This is a D vs D race in South Los Angeles. The incumbent is one of the more conservative Democrats in the Assembly who voted against requiring clean energy (SB 100), and abstained on net neutrality (SB 460), tenant protections (AB 2364), and protections against predatory lending (AB 2500).

Downey City Council: Alexandria Contreras. This is a city council race just north of the county border with a candidate who understands and supports many of the housing, transportation, and environmental policies I prioritized in my introduction. Take a look at her platform and support one of the only local candidates with a coherent, holistic vision for what can be done at the municipal level to create a better Southern California.