Politics, Players, and Legislation in the California Housing Crisis

Andy Daly
awdaly@clemson.edu

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POLITICS, PLAYERS, AND LEGISLATION IN THE CALIFORNIA HOUSING CRISIS

Committee: Chair- Eric A. Morris, PhD., John Gaber Ph.D. and Caitlin Dyckman, J.D., Ph.D.

A newspaper content analysis with expert interviews that evaluated the politics involved with passing state-led housing legislation to help close the CA housing gap.

Andy William Daly Jr.
Terminal Thesis
POLITICS, PLAYERS, AND LEGISLATION IN THE CALIFORNIA HOUSING CRISIS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master in City and Regional Planning
City and Regional Planning

by
Andrew W. Daly Jr.
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Accepted by:
Dr. Eric A. Morris, Committee Chair
Dr. John Gaber
Dr. Caitlin Dyckman
ABSTRACT

California has faced a statewide housing shortage for three decades, particularly in exclusive job-rich cities that are becoming increasingly unaffordable. In response, the state has passed pro-housing legislation that bypasses local zoning regulations, focusing on increasing the construction of affordable housing units. I conducted a convergent content analysis of over 80 articles and eight expert interviews. I found that state-led housing legislation is most effective when politicians align their messaging with other pressing issues, such as climate change, transit, and homelessness. Even if bills are rejected, progress is made by opening conversations about the importance of density and housing affordability. Planners can promote a return to traditional housing and use language that counters the prevalence of localism, which often prevents housing production.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my family. This project is dedicated to my parents, Andrew Daly and Rebecca Daly, who always believe in me and support me even when I doubt myself. To my sisters, Hannah Daly and Tara Daly, they help me find purpose and are my biggest cheerleaders. My family’s support gave me the push to follow my passion.

This project was sparked because I grew up in Los Angeles, a city that will always be my hometown. I feel lucky to have grown up amongst diversity, variety, and an urban environment that has shaped my worldview, and I hope to give back to whatever community I live in the future.

Thank you to my committee chair, Dr. Eric A. Morris, who put up with the growing pains of learning about research and whose guidance enhanced this project. Thank you to my professors, Dr. Enrique Ramos, Dr. Caitlin Dyckman, and Dr. John Gaber, who all have a contiguous passion for teaching and planning.
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Section 1: Introduction

The history of land use in the United States has been characterized by a deference to home rule. Cities, suburbs, and towns have the right, often enshrined in state constitutions, to control their local zoning and other land use regulations; this gives them a high level of autonomy and the authority to regulate land use as a municipal affair free from state intrusions. This approach has worked well in less populated areas, but in more densely populated states like California, it has led to “localism.” This has created a significant deficit in housing supply, which in turn has caused larger public policy problems such as homelessness, displacement, and increased commuting times. Home rule has led California to be battling a housing shortage for three decades. These supply and demand challenges have resulted, unsurprisingly, in an affordability crisis.

“Localism” – “a perspective that grants moral authority to incumbent residents” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021), dominates California’s municipal politics and land use regulation. Although local self-rule may have many advantages, localism has helped to halt housing production. Organizations like neighborhood associations, city planning commissions, and city councils have outsized influence on the use of land, and overwhelmingly they oppose new construction. They are armed with an arsenal of objections against development projects, for example arguing for the preservation of neighborhood “character” and charging that new developments will cause chronic traffic congestion, overwhelm schools, block views, cast shadows, generate noise, create crime, etc.

In addition to fears, justified or not, about neighborhood change, there are economic reasons why voters oppose development in their communities. By limiting housing supply, existing homeowners, especially those in areas with significant job growth, have benefitted dramatically. With supply limited, housing prices in the Golden State have skyrocketed. Further, the 1979 Proposition 13 capped property taxes for incumbent residents, prompting people to stay put and age in place in homes they bought 30 years ago.
All of this has limited the number of starter homes on the market and dramatically eroded the younger generation’s ability to live in the state. Ultimately, all this is helping to lead to an exodus out of California: between 2020 and July 2022 it lost nearly 700,000 residents.

Los Angeles shows the depth of California’s housing crisis. As far as new housing construction, “Los Angeles has among the worst performances of any MSA in the United States” (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). Over the past five years Los Angeles County permitted just one housing unit per 3.2 jobs created, meaning that relative to job growth the city is “building 44 percent more slowly than the nation” (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). As a result of decades of housing underproduction, the city is now “566,000 units short of low-to middle income housing” (Zhu, et al., 2022). With supply so limited, unsurprisingly the ‘city ranks ninth worst across US metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in housing affordability’ (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). The city has the “2nd lowest vacancy rate across the nation and is the highest in the nation for the doubling up of families among renters” (The 2nd highest rate is the Inland Empire, just outside the greater Los Angeles area) (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). Given the scarcity and unaffordability of housing, it should be seen as no coincidence that Los Angeles has the largest per capita unsheltered homeless population in the United States.

The lack of market-rate housing in Los Angeles is a microcosm of the entire state, which is not building enough middle-income housing compared to jobs created. The high cost of housing in California is a well-known issue, and the example of San Jose’s median home price of $1.29 million (Tucker, 2023) illustrates just how extreme the situation has become in some parts of the state. This high cost of living is not limited to coastal cities, as even inland cities like Fresno and Bakersfield have median home prices that are higher than the national average. According to the Zillow Home Values Index, the median home price in Fresno is $370,100, while the median home price in Bakersfield is $357,900 (Tucker, 2023). Both figures are significantly higher than the national median home price of $334,270.
The problems have grown severe enough that policymakers have been forced to acknowledge and begin to address them. State senators and assemblymembers are feeling the effects of policy problems like homelessness and housing unaffordability and are acknowledging that their own constituencies are contributing to the housing crisis. Thus, the legislature has begun to debate and pass pro-housing legislation that overrides local control to ensure California meets its housing goals. California has had to claw back housing regulations from localities by writing laws in the state legislature to stimulate housing production and ensure that every town/county/city contributes their fair share of housing production.

How are these measures crafted? Who supports them? What leads to their passage? What reforms are politically feasible and what are not? To address these issues, it is essential to understand the various neighborhood groups, housing advocates, media organizations, public officials, and scholars who have shaped public perception of California's housing crisis. By understanding the political calculus behind housing reform, we can help develop more effective strategies for increasing housing production and ensuring that housing is accessible and affordable to all Californians. There is no silver bullet solution to California's housing crisis. Instead, we need a multifaceted approach that includes technical legislative fixes, broad building of coalitions, and raising political awareness and consensus on housing as a solution for solving multiple societal issues. This approach must be inclusive and equitable, ensuring that all Californians have access to safe and affordable housing, regardless of their income level, race, or background. Further, lessons from California's fight against excessive localism is important for other states experiencing housing shortages.

Section 2: Research Questions

What is the political process surrounding efforts to increase the housing supply in Los Angeles and California?
What political challenges do stakeholders like city councilmembers, housing advocates, state legislators, union officials, developers, and planners face when trying to promote housing construction? What organizations and individuals form the strongest coalition to lobby for and pass “yes in my backyard” legislation? What are the strongest techniques for mobilizing support, e.g., public lobbying via newspapers,
Twitter, or putting measures on voting ballots? Who opposes building more housing, and can they be brought along with the political process? What measures must be taken to be sure that pro-housing measures are implemented, including ensuring local government compliance with new legislation or regulations? In short, what lessons from California’s successful and sometimes-unsuccessful measures to close the housing gap can be used in other cities facing housing shortages?

Section 3: Literature Review

Introduction

In Los Angeles and California, there has been a housing shortage for three decades, in large part because of municipalities and neighborhoods which control zoning and other land use regulations. Localism, “a perspective that grants moral authority to incumbent residents” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021), lets neighborhood associations, municipalities, and politicians gamify Euclidian zoning in the name of tradition, not changing neighborhood “character,” reducing traffic congestion, etc. Deference to local land-use regulations heavily favors current residents. In response, progressive states are passing legislation that intervenes at the state level, written to streamline development and bypass local municipality restrictions. The politics and understanding of the passing the pro-housing legislation that counteracts localism is important for housing shortages across the nation.

How bad is the housing shortage in Los Angeles? The Metropolitan Statistical Areas has the largest per capita unsheltered homeless population in the United States. Los Angeles ranks the ninth worst across MSAs in housing affordability (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). The state is currently 566,000 low-to middle income housing units short. Los Angeles has the 2nd lowest vacancy rate across the nation. The LA MSA is the highest in the nation for renting families “doubling up”. The 2nd highest rate is the Inland Empire, just outside the greater Los Angeles area.

As far as building new construction, “Los Angeles has among the worst performances of any MSA in the United States” (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). Los Angeles County permitted just
one unit per 3.2 jobs created, meaning relative to job growth the city is” building 44 percent more slowly than the nation” (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). The housing shortage problem is dire.

**Housing Gap in California & Across the Country**

Local land use regulation is “unique in comparison to other nations” (Infranca, 2019). America’s history of zoning, dating back to New York and Berkeley, CA in 1916, deferred land use to local government control. Zoning thus catered to the nature of local concerns, “the needs and preferences of the elites of a particular time and place” (Gray, 2022). That legacy has shaped today’s zoning regulations, which have helped to maintain historical inequity through exclusionary zoning practices in favor of those in power. Recently, housing shortages accompanied by rising rents and mortgages, as well as skyrocketing homelessness, has spurred activism challenging entrenched zoning laws.

Scholars have recognized that the “balance of power between state and local government in the realms of housing and land use regulation” (Infranca, 2019) is preventing construction of all type of housing. Urban land has significant value, particularly where jobs outnumber housing units, and these areas need new development the most. Yet new housing in each neighborhood is considered a “burden for which existing residents deserve compensation and developers must make amends” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021).

The concerns used by local municipalities to oppose development are congestion, undermining affordability, erasing community character, eroding public space and many more. Planners are responsive to existing residents and “regulate local impacts for the benefit of local residents alone” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021). The process that favors localism, the parochial protection of resident resources. Localism works primarily for existing residents, requiring the state to intervene on behalf of potential future residents to curb or override local power.

California has ten municipalities in the LA region with the combination of the lowest housing production and the highest home values. Four of the five largest proportions of income spent on rent are
California cities (SF, LA, San Jose, San Diego). Cities like Manhattan Beach, Laguna Beach, La Canada Flintridge, and Beverly Hills are all under-reporting and under-producing housing.

Every California locality has housing targets in their general plan based on population growth. These are mandated by California’s housing development authority, but there few or no repercussions for missing housing-built targets. Since 1969, California has required that all local governments (cities and counties) plan to meet the housing needs of everyone in their community and report to the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

The local governments must produce a housing plan, called Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), that calculates the amount of housing needed and determines the number of units to build. In most areas RHNA had no enforcement mechanisms. California failed to enforce the targets or sanction jurisdictions that missed them until 2019. That year the state legislature passed an amendment stipulating that transportation funds be withheld for jurisdictions that miss targets. If the cities failed to comply with RHNA’s target allocation, localities were referred to the Office of the California Attorney General.

The millennial generation and planners in California are simultaneously dealing with issues such as the impacts of climate change (wildfires, urban heat island), a homelessness pandemic, and a wealth gap between them and their parents’ generation. These problems may even be dwarfed by the state’s severe housing shortage which is calling into question whether young people in the state will ever be able to buy a home.

**NIMBYism**

The NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) syndrome has been acknowledged by planners since the 1990’s. The movement arose from neighborhoods and political leaders fighting unpopular projects being sited in or near their communities. It has been formally defined as “protectionist attitudes of and oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing unwanted developments in their neighborhoods” (Dear, 1992).
Sixty-three percent of Americans live in owner-occupied housing and their housing equity is usually between 32% and 39% of total wealth. These investments incentivize the adoption of the NIMBY attitude, and “people are significantly more likely to participate in local elections once they purchase a home” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021). Urban land is under-used because people hold property rights and have a vested interest in regulating the local impacts of new developments. Homeowners have a right to preserving neighborhood character, but it can become problematic when regulations are abused.

Increased property values typically result in communities with housing shortages in desirable areas with job growth. This further incentivizes NIMBY attitudes among homeowners. Today NIMBYism manifests itself in the political power of neighborhood association groups that produce newsletters, engage in grassroots voting efforts, lobby elected officials, and support politicians who to maintain the status quo of their neighborhood.

One aspect of localism is that “the needs and desires of established members of the local community... take priority over those of newcomers and outsiders” (Wong, 2018). Neighbors often argue “that new housing will exacerbate congestion, undermine affordability, erase community character, and erode open public space” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021) as their reasoning to limit development. Locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) like landfills or homeless shelters, will often be moved to undesirable areas. But housing ‘has a greater likelihood of not being built’ (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021).

Historically, zoning has been a tool to restrict development. Despite ample land in the US, “local land use policies impose restrictions on residential development that limit the size and type of housing that can be built on a given amount of land.” (Gyourko & Molloy, 2014). In reality, the “supply of housing can be restricted by various regulations such as minimum lot sizes, height restrictions, setback requirements, and open space designations” (Gyourko & Molloy, 2014). These regulations have been adopted inconsistently across the United States but more precipitously in higher cost of living areas.
Exclusionary zoning thrives not only because of fear of change but because property value increases are directly linked to middle-class homeowner’s net worth. Today, “around 75% of land zoned for housing in major U.S. cities is zoned for single-family housing” (Planopedia, 2023), and there may not be an appetite to change these neighborhoods if property values are going up. Zoning has historically racist connotations masked by the “segregating of undesirable land-uses” (Raitt, 2022). Zoning has evolved to require unnecessary and strict regulations, like FAR (Floor to Area Ratio) limits, height restrictions, parking requirements, and environmental regulations; these are subtle ways to subvert unwanted development.

The federal housing authority helps Americans achieve the dream of homeownership by subsidizing loans and allowing taxpayers to deduct the interest paid on first mortgages up to $750,000 in mortgage debt. In California, Prop 13 passed in 1978, strictly limited the growth of residential property taxes, though these reset when the property is sold. This has led to families being incentivized to remain in desirable cities like Los Angeles due to the combination of building equity and limited supply. Consequently, neighborhoods form coalitions that resist change, including the construction of large housing developments and up-zoning.

City council members who use discretionary review to evaluate large development projects are intimately connected at a local level with their constituents. Approving developments is politically under the microscope of grass-roots homeowners. Local politicians face a lack of property tax revenue from homeowners but changing the status quo and “taxing land is political difficult. It imposes high costs on the incumbent property owners most likely to vote in local elections.” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021). Residents have no appetite for zoning reform because by blocking development “existing homes will sell for more in the absence of new supply” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021).

Local Jurisdictions Toolbox

In California local cities with significant resources use the California Environment Quality Act (CEQA), legislation from 1970, to styme growth. Anyone can sue to block projects for noncompliance with CEQA. Although CEQA is meant to protect the environment, “a recent survey of CEQA lawsuits...found the feature has... been most frequently deployed to sink projects that further affordable housing and environmental
objectives” (Bertrand, 2020). The act's ambiguous language, that any potential to physically change the environment in ways that are “reasonably foreseeable,” encourages frivolous lawsuits. The ambiguity has enabled citizens, labor unions, in some cases business rivals to halt larger developments by claiming the impact environmental review was done incorrectly. CEQA “has evolved into a legal tool most often used against the higher density urban housing, transit, and renewable energy projects” (Infranca, 2019).

Higher density developments face both regulatory and non-regulatory barriers and far more steps then less than 5-unit projects. Bigger developments face multiple public hearings, potential CEQA lawsuits, impact fees and an extensive permit application process. The state has passed legislation that circumvents local land-use regulations within a ½ mile of public transit hubs, but cities have fought back by implementing arbitrary requirements, such as “minimum allowable lot sizes, minimum parking requirements, and the presence of adopted overlay zones” (Gabbe, 2018).

State legislators are facing challenges from cities that are resistant to allowing density. Larger developers have garnered political support to navigate “regulatory deviations,” but smaller multi-family developments are subject to the same constraints. When Measure JJJ was passed in Los Angeles County, a Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC) bill incentivizing developers to include affordable units and local construction workers in exchange for increased density near transit, the City Council in Pasadena sent a memo to the planning department to investigate adopting historic preservation overlay. They did not want to be bypassed by by-right development projects.

Los Angeles has neighborhood councils, “quasi-government entities that give neighborhoods more say in planning decisions” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021). These neighborhood associations typically have 100 members, even though they represent an area with perhaps 10,000 adults. Neighborhood associations rally around the “developer profit frame,” a fear “rooted in resentment of other’s gains” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021). Neighborhood associations wield considerable power at the local level and can make it
difficult to build new housing. These “development restrictions mechanically favor the wealthy” (Monkkonen & Manville, 2019).

Researchers recognize that “planning’s pendulum has swung far in localism’s direction, that results in a system demanding too much of new development and too little of existing residents” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021). Manville and Monkkonen reach the conclusion that “Localism’s remedy is preemption”, and that “state officials in expensive housing markets should use their power to expand the range of people and places that local planning practice considers when it examines new housing” (Manville & Monkkonen, 2021). Wealthy areas may be resistant to change and that is why state-led housing intervention has been popular to encourage housing production.

**Boston Smart Growth, Minneapolis Single-Family Zoning, Oregon State-Wide ADU**

In July 2019 in the state of Oregon, a bipartisan group of legislators passed a statewide ban on single-family zoning in cities with populations of at least 10,000 residents. House Bill 2001, was the first state-level broad legalization of a housing type of its kind in the state. The measure allows duplexes in areas zoned for single-family homes. House Speaker Tina Kotek, a Democrat who advocates for additional construction to combat the housing crisis, was the sponsor. At the time of the passing of the bill, Portland had legalized duplexes on corner lots, but “fewer than 5% of those residences had been converted to duplexes” (Wamsley, 2019). Kotek estimated it would take about 20 years to fully implement, but the gradual changes of housing options in communities should be seen year after year.

Minneapolis up-zoned their entire city by allowing all single-family homeowners to build duplexes and triplexes. Minneapolis leveraged a coalition of like-minded leaders like racial justice advocates, labor unions, and environmentalists under the umbrella “Neighbors for More Neighbors”. They had three major arguments: that “reform would make the city more affordable, by expanding the supply of housing; it would make the city fairer, by reducing racial and economic segregation; and it would combat climate change, by reducing commutes and making housing more environmentally friendly” (Kahlenberg, 2019). With support
throughout the city, a broad coalition of interested parties, and an engaged young electorate, Minneapolis took a step to produce affordable housing.

Oregon and Minneapolis both cited the importance of changing zoning state-wide, or city-wide in Minneapolis’s case, because otherwise some communities would work to build more homes and others wouldn’t. More affluent communities are less liberal have local officials that are hamstrung by both a lack of political will and constituents that fight re-zoning. Overcoming this generally requires state-level intervention.

Another example of effective housing legislation is Massachusetts’s smart growth measure 40R. To put the problem into perspective, of 351 Massachusetts cities and towns, 207 “have permitted no multi-family housing with more than 5 units in over a decade” and “over a third of...communities have permitted only single-family housing” (Infranca, 2019). This required state action to bypass highly restrictive local zoning.

In 2004 Massachusetts created the Smart Growth Zoning Overlay District Act, which “encourages communities to create dense residential or mixed-use districts, with a high percentage of affordable housing units that are located near transit stations, in areas of concentrated development such as existing city and town centers” (Reyelt & Wijnja, 2023), in 2004. The act used carrots for municipalities to adopt the proposed zoning by offering two “40R payments from the Commonwealth, between $10,000 and $600,000 in state funding, plus an additional $3,000 for every new home” (Reyelt & Wijnja, 2023). The state’s website has three 40R profiles, in Haverhill, Northampton, and Reading. In Haverhill, the act led to 362 units built and a repurposed mixed-use project of 305 units. All three of these legislative examples used state laws to bypass local zoning regulations.

**The California Bills**

Measure JJJ, is a measure requiring cities in Los Angeles County to write and implement a “by-right inclusionary zoning (IZ) program, the TOC program” (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). The measure was written by the Alliance for Community-Transit Los Angeles, an affordable housing advocacy
organization, and was financially supported by the AFL-CIO, the umbrella group for the largest construction labor union. The goal of the program is to boost affordable housing within one-half mile of transit stops. Its effectiveness lies in providing developers by-right development rights and density bonuses, However, the Transit Oriented Communities program “in 2019...produced 500 units of affordable housing and 4,100 units of all housing (or less than 10 percent of what is necessary to prevent market rents from rising” (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). This was a miniscule production rate compared to the housing deficit; however, the program is ramping up production. TOC “help[s] in reducing land-cost per unit, and second it has successfully sped up the process of getting projects permitted by 6 months” (Zhu, Burinskiy, De la Roca, Green, & Boarnet, 2021). Speed reduces costs and lowers the total amount of debt lenders must take on large development projects. JJJ is a proof of concept that can be used in future state-wide TOD legislation.

Senate Bill 9 is dubbed the “Duplex bill.” According to the LA Times, it was the “most conservative effort in string of so-far unsuccessful measures by Sacramento lawmakers to permit housing density in single-family neighborhoods” (Plachta, 2021). The bill was written and backed by Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins (D-San Diego). SB 9 had two predecessors, SB 50 and SB 827, bills intended to incentivize building housing near high-quality transit and exempting developments from certain restrictive and low-density zoning standards. Both bills were killed because of opposition from affordable housing advocates worried about gentrification from up-zoning in lower-income areas. SB 827 was thwarted by “neighborhood associations and activists for low-income residents and communities of color who felt blindsided that no efforts were made to protect against displacement and gentrification” (Dillon, 2018).

SB 9 was passed in 2021 and at the time it was “praised as a major victory for zoning reform that could enable small-scale homebuilding in previously exclusionary places” (Garcia & Alameldin, 2023). According to Senator Scott Wiener, "these zoning bills are planting the seeds for the future. That means gradual change in neighborhoods" (Plachta, 2021). However, a Terner Center study analyzed 13 cities and
found that only 53 applications had been approved by November 2022 (Garcia & Alameldin, 2023). This shows that passing laws is only one step; uptake is the second part of the battle.

SB 35, passed in 2018, applies to California cities and counties where production of new housing has not met the state mandated RHNA targets. The law requires that affordable housing developments be permitted and approved through a ministerial process. Developments that dedicate between 10% and 20% of units to be “affordable” are not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), applicants can request their entitlement be streamlined, and developments have significant reductions in the mandated minimum amount of parking.

The LA Times reported that the SB 35 ‘had a potential loophole that could be problematic if abused by NIMBY cities to block projects’ (Board, 2022). Under the bill, cities can impose parking requirements if they can show that the project would adversely affect parking or make it more difficult for the locality to achieve its affordable housing targets. However, developers can counter this by allocating 20% of the units to affordable housing. The bill and California leaders have shown that they are ready to break the old paradigm of car-centric development. SB 35 shifts the burden of proof onto cities ‘to demonstrate, within 30 days of receiving a complete development application, that imposing parking requirements would have a significantly negative impact’ (Board, 2022).

Gaps in Research
To conclude, researchers have identified localism, CEQA abuse, and arbitrary zoning regulations as barriers to housing production. In particular, Dr. Manville’s and Dr. Monkonnen’s work highlights the complexity and challenges local councilmembers face from NIMBY homeowners throughout the state. California has made progress in passing state-led housing legislation, but the process, coalitions, and reasons state politicians are able to pass meaningful legislation has yet to be explored. My research will investigate how newspapers, elected officials, planners, housing advocates, developers, and academics contribute to the housing debate in order to draw lessons for California and other states that are attempting to allow more housing construction.
Section 4: Newspaper Content Analysis

In order to gauge the media’s role in evaluating the housing crisis and its proposed remedies, the first data slice I explored was newspaper content analysis. I evaluated and interpreted newspapers like the Los Angeles Times, the SF Chronicle, the San Bernardino Sun, the Fresno Bee, The Sacramento Bee, The East Bay Times, The San Diego Union Tribune, The Orange County Register, etc. These publications “can be thought of as physical traces of social settings” (Denicolo & Becker, 2012). The analysis evaluated and linked texts to the socio-political context of political structures and housing policy. I read the documents through the lens of content analysis, gathering data and evidence that is for and against housing legislation.

I selected newspapers with the aim of identifying patterns and trends in reporting that may exhibit biases or perspectives that could influence public opinion and policy decisions. Given that newspapers are often seen as influential in shaping public opinion, it is important to understand the impact of their reporting, particularly given that 70% of Californians are concerned about housing security. As an example, “during the June 2022 primary election, only 16% of potential votes were cast’ (Hoeven, 2022) to decide important positions such as city council members and district attorneys, as well as to determine the fate of ballot measures that directly influence housing production. Newspapers can sway this electorate. The LA Times, for instance, publishes a voting guide for every election to help inform the public. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the role of newspapers in shaping public opinion and policy decisions.

Ultimately, it is important to study newspaper articles because they can help explain the cognitive dissonance demonstrated by Californians’ when discussing housing. In planning practice, housing policy directly influences hot-button issues like homelessness, mental illness, affordable housing, and gentrification. Yet voting turnout does not reflect the importance of local control on housing production; it seems the layman does not understand the link between zoning, housing plans, and the current California housing crisis.

I was able to gather a variety of viewpoints on housing production expectations and the effectiveness of state-level policies. My approach to selecting newspaper articles was deliberate and
intended to capture a range of perspectives on the California housing crisis. I included cities that both met and fell short of RHNA obligations, focusing on cities that have shown reluctance to meet RHNA obligations. I also focused on highlighting challenges and obstacles that state-level policymakers face in implementing housing policies.

For example, I read about extreme examples of cities fighting the state, such as Huntington Beach’s recent RHNA housing element lawsuit, and had to include the obstructive cities newspapers. By choosing newspapers in resistant and embracing areas it provided a more nuanced understanding of the political dynamics at play in the California housing crisis. These examples help to illustrate the complex interplay between local and state-level policies by including both supportive and critical voices. On the positive side, Oakland was one of the few cities to win the state’s pro-housing designation, making the East Bay Times an essential source.

The method I used to read the newspaper articles was latent content analysis. Latent analysis establishes “events, knowledge or perceptions [that] evolve over time; or assess[es] the patterns in the text to see what people say (Gaber, 2020). I used the data I gathered from the articles to build a longitudinal manifest content analysis. This included reading and transcribing specific words/themes and counting appearances of concepts to turn qualitative data into quantitative data. For example, I counted key words like homelessness, housing crisis, labor unions and single-family homes.

I differentiated and counted editorials/opinion articles as well as strict reporting. I then divided editorial/opinion articles between those written by the editorial board versus an individual contributor. I then counted editorials supporting pro-housing legislation and those opposing housing development. The percentage of contributors was heavily slanted to pro-housing editorials; counter arguments were raised by less than 20% of editorial articles.

For transparency and repeatability, I only read newspaper articles between 2019 to 2023, a five-year period. Each year, I counted the total number of articles related to housing legislation and created
quantifiable data illustrate trend analysis. There was a rise in articles covering the housing crisis in 2022 following the COVID pandemic.

When I evaluated articles, I counted examples of positive evidence—support of housing/density—and negative evidence—articles that lean towards localism. I tracked and identified the types of quotes in articles. Quotes included opinions from housing advocates, local or state politicians, labor organizations, and others. I identified and categorized the sources of information used in the articles. Included were government reports, academic studies, and advocacy group publications. I analyzed the creditability and reliability of the sources to determine how they may have influenced the reporting.

Further evaluation techniques used included coding the types of adjectives used in the articles, both positive and negative. I identified and categorized the proposed solutions to the housing crisis that appeared in articles. These included, for example, policy recommendations like zoning changes close to transit and job rich areas, the need for affordable housing because of the homelessness crisis, and the impact of RHNA’s housing element. Lastly, I looked for and identified any biases or perspectives that appeared in articles. Biases included localism, pro-development biases, or biases against certain groups like developers.

The latent content approach identified and allowed me to code specific interest groups by recording who is quoted in articles. This process helped me narrow down themes/phrases spoken by pro and anti-housing advocates. I acknowledge that newspaper article analysis is “explored as metonymic cultural artefacts of broader societal processes that involve powerful groups pushing particular meanings” (Denicolo & Becker, 2012). The trends of organizational sources shaped the issues covered and “the angles” taken on the housing crisis. Stakeholder groups, media advocacy groups, researchers, and government representatives influence the scope and shape of coverage. An analysis of these articles, “provides a means for revealing which perspective are promoted and which are neglected in the news” (Denicolo & Becker, 2012). I saw patterns of editorial outlook that favored pro-housing arguments seeking to shape public opinion.
biases. Another challenge was the diversity and number of documents, it required multiple newspapers to ensure a comprehensive analysis. I faced issues maintaining neutrality because of the charged language used in articles like crisis, homelessness, gentrification, and local control, displacement. Despite these challenges, the use of multiple research methods resulted in convergent themes, as will be discussed below.

The Search

I choose a five-year publishing period, from 2019 to 2023, because RHNA reform bills culminated in 2019. RHNA is mandated by law administered by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. This window shows newspapers’ coverage and characterization of the housing crisis, and of pending and/or passed legislation after the state moving legislatively to enforce housing production.

As was noted above, in previous RHNA cycles nearly every city and county missed RHNA housing production expectations. Hence, new legislation was introduced in the state legislature that added teeth and consequences for cities that fail to meet their targets for new housing, including both affordable and market-rate units. The purpose of reform was to ensure equity and close the gap on rent/housing costs. Before I elaborate on why I chose specific newspapers, here is a brief additional explanation of the RHNA housing cycle process in California.

Regional Needs Housing Allocation (RHNA) from California Department of Housing and Community Development

California state politicians reevaluated the effectiveness of the regional housing needs allocation (RHNA) process when localities, across the board, failed to build enough housing to meet demand state-wide (see Figure 2). Between 2017-2019, the California state legislature passed a series of housing bills that “aimed at strengthening...
housing element law” (State of California Legislature Report, 2019), the 1969 Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) law. RHNA requires cities and counties to plan and zone for a specific number of new housing units to be built in their communities over an eight-year period. The most recent cycle, the sixth, is set to begin in 2023 and run until 2031. The projections are based on the California Department of Finance population forecasts for each region, with adjustments for vacancy rate, rate of overcrowding, and the share of cost burdened households (State of California Legislature Report, 2019).

Legislation passed in California requires all cities, counties, and municipalities to create a housing element plan that meets RHNA standards by the end of 2022 for Southern California and by January 2023 for Northern California communities. These plans must be approved by the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). At the end of my newspaper analysis, I saw an increase of articles that covered potential consequences for cities failing to have a submitted HCD approved housing element plan. During my research this is the first indication of actual consequences for cities that for decades ignored changing zoning to account for population growth.

Newspapers Selection
I read and analyzed 17 different newspapers in total. My first step to select newspapers was focused on California’s largest populated cities; Los Angeles, San Jose, San Francisco (Bay Area), San Diego, Fresno, and Sacramento. I included the most well-known and most-circulated newspapers of the largest metropolitan areas. Publications included the Los Angeles Times, the San Diego Union Tribune, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Orange County Register, the Mercury News, and the Sacramento Bee.

Some papers tend to be more locally focused while others have a more regional scope. For instance, some MSAs have a dominant newspaper covering the entire area, such as the Los Angeles Times, while also having several smaller papers that cover specific regions within the larger area, like Long Beach, the Inland Empire (which includes Riverside County and San Bernardino County), and so on. Subscribers to these smaller papers are also likely to subscribe to the Los Angeles Times.
In my newspaper selection process, I paid special attention to choosing newspapers from areas that historically have carried a higher housing burden by permitting and building more than their “fair share” of housing, such as Fresno, Bakersfield, and San Bernardino. These areas frequently allow greenfield development instead of the infill that is common in urbanized areas. Additionally, I aimed to balance my selection of newspapers politically. While liberal-leaning papers like the LA Times and SF Chronicle cover very liberal cities, I also chose papers from conservative-leaning cities like Fresno and Bakersfield to provide a contrast in perspectives.

To have a comprehensive understanding of the housing crisis in California, it’s crucial to consider the housing struggles of smaller areas in addition to larger metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, San Diego, and Riverside. Although these larger areas have a higher demand for housing due to their larger populations and abundance of jobs, many smaller areas also face significant challenges in meeting housing demands. The newspaper coverage of the housing crisis tends to be biased towards areas with higher demand for housing, but it’s essential to also include the struggles of smaller areas in any analysis. I included a table to demonstrate areas with the largest population and available land.

The housing crisis was covered in 80 newspaper articles I examined. The journalists Hannah Wiley and Ethan Varian each wrote six articles, and Dan Walters wrote the most at seven. Walters writes for CalMatters, a non-profit, nonpartisan newsroom focused on California politics and policy, and his articles lean pro-housing. One of his articles, "California allows affordable housing on some commercial properties," was used by multiple newspapers including the LA Times, the Mercury News, and the Registry SoCal. Syndicating state-wide housing articles to smaller publications was a trend among newspapers owned by the same company. With newspaper consolidation, there are fewer dedicated reporters for smaller circulation newspapers.

I classified the articles into two primary categories: news articles reporting information, which accounted for 50 articles, or 63%, and opinion-editorials authored by either editorial boards or guest writers,
which accounted for 30 articles or 37%. To gain a better understanding of the scope of coverage, I conducted a count of articles that covered state issues versus those that focused on local impacts. Of the total 80 articles analyzed, 43 articles (53%) pertained to state-level issues, while 25 articles (38%) focused primarily on local-level impacts and consequences of state-led housing legislation (see Figure 3).

The Los Angeles Times is the most widely read newspaper with 4.4 million print and digital readers, giving it a significant impact. The next most widely circulated newspapers that were read for this study include The San Diego Union-Tribune with 782,500 readers, the Orange County Register with 250,724 readers, and the Press-Enterprise (Inland Empire), the Sacramento Bee, and the Mercury News with just under 100,000 readers each. Of the 44 articles analyzed from the aforementioned publications, 27 were focused on state-wide housing politics while 17 were focused on local implications. I found that conservative areas tended to cover more local content.

The fact that opinion-editorials that seek to influence readers’ opinions constituted 1/3 of the analyzed articles highlight the topical and contentious nature of housing policy. It should be noted the number of editorials could also be a function of limited time and resources involved as I gathered articles. Moreover, the relatively even distribution between articles covering local housing policy and those covering legislation proposed in Sacramento suggests that the power dynamic between home rule and state laws is currently being debated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
<th>Publication Type</th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>State</th>
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<td>Daily</td>
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<td>Lee Enterprises, Napa Valley Publishing</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Daily</td>
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<td>Costa Mesa, Sante</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Patrick Soon-Shing, Times Mirror Company</td>
</tr>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Daily</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Times Mirror Company, Pacific Mirror, Thompson</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>69</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>McClatchy Company, McClatchy Markets</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Press-Enterprise</td>
<td>Inland Empire</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>Times Mirror Company, E.W. Scripps Company, Over 10 Newspapers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sacramento Bee</td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
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**Figure 3 - Table of Analysis of Newspaper Content**
**Pro-Housing Content**

In conducting my latent content analysis, I found that many articles (48 articles or 74%) had a positive tilt towards housing politics. Twelve articles (18%) were neutral, and only five articles (8%) had a negative tilt. I calculated the lean of articles by using descriptive coding to designate paragraphs/themes that used pro-housing terms/phrases like housing crisis, homelessness crisis, and prohibitive costs. I then counted pro vs anti themes in each article, and designated articles lean positive with 2 to 1 ratio of pro-housing coding. This suggest that in general, newspapers in California are pro-housing and contribute to pro-housing themes and language.

This positive tilt may be due to various reasons, such as the severity of the state’s housing crisis and the urgency of addressing it. Newspapers may also recognize the social and economic benefits of affordable and accessible housing on diversity. Terms used for halted development are parking requirements, “weaponizing” CEQA, and the “years-long planning and permitting process” (Varian, 2022). Emotive phrases often used to sway neutral readers. The climate crisis and increased traffic were also mentioned as reasons for increased housing production. The rental market and real-estate market are mentioned sparingly. The positive tilt towards housing can contribute to constructive dialogue on policymaking for the housing crisis.

**Unions**

Labor unions, including the Conference of Carpenters (representing 82,000 workers), the California Labor Federation (with more than one million members), and the Building and Construction Trades Council were found to have significant influence on the California housing crisis according to analyzed articles. The Trades, the most powerful union in the housing space, lobbies aggressively for prevailing wages, unionized contractors, and regulations that require a certain percentage of the workforce to be union members. The Trades are a force because they “contribute tens of millions of dollars in campaigns” and “will cause the most pain during a major election year” (Tobias, 2021). Their significant campaign contributions and potential impact on elections make it difficult to bypass their interests, as they are a force in California politics.
The Carpenter's Union support was crucial for the survival of AB 2011, one of the most significant housing legislation bills of 2022, sponsored by Buffy Wicks, the California State Assembly Housing and Community Development Chair. This was a bill that illustrates the significant impact that unions have on shaping housing legislation in California. It was one of the mostly hotly contested bills in 2022; several previous versions of the bill had died “as a result of squabbling between developers and labor unions” (Tobias, 2021). This bill was significant because it revealed a split within the labor unions; while the Carpenters saw conversion building as an opportunity, the Trades insisted on labor standards, healthcare requirements, and stricter apprenticeship standards.

The bill includes language that allows unions to pursue developers for wage violations without waiting for state regulators. The Trades opposed the bill, claiming that the required apprenticeship standards would lengthen the local approval process, which typically “gives unions leverage for pay and work rules” (Tobias, 2021). Unions are actively against streamlined discretionary permits because they use that time to negotiate for favorable benefits with developers. However, a 2019 study commissioned by the Trades found that less than one-fifth of construction workers across California were unionized. Developers argue that “the standard of having 30% or 60% of workers in each trade is difficult to meet” (Tobias, 2021). The Trades during AB 2011 debate showed a willingness to kill productive housing legislation in favor of labor interests; however, Carpenters indicated that they would rather work right away by supporting the legislation.

Labor unions typically support candidates who ease construction barriers, reduce development costs and curb tenants’ rights. However, a big obstacle facing bills for removing barriers to constructing housing is that unions will not support them without union labor requirements. These include the requirement to use only unionized construction workers. Lobbying arms that have killed housing bills without these labor requirements in the past are the CA Building and Construction Trade Council, the California Conference of Carpenters, and the California Housing Consortium and Service Employees International Union (SEIU).
Labor unions play a significant role in every state-led housing bill, not only because of political contributions but because every bill has “labor requirements” for affordable housing. Bills with “by-right” entitlements allows developers to “skip many city council meetings that tack on costly delays as well as the state’s premier environmental law” (Tobias, 2021) resulting in cost savings they covet. However, 4/5ths of construction workers in California are currently non-unionized, may be paid under-the-table wages, and may have their work experience uncounted. With the California housing crisis becoming more visible, there is a political opportunity for the Trades in terms of how they plan to close that gap and enroll workers state-wide in their “apprenticeship” programs. Thus, there is tension between developers seeking to build more housing quickly and efficiently and unions advocating for labor protections and fair wages for their workers.

Pro-housing politicians are leveraging the homelessness crisis to counterbalance the political influence of labor unions. They are taking a chance that by increasing housing production, it will result in reduced housing costs for their constituents and help to alleviate homelessness. This change in strategy is evident in the statement made by Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo, a Democrat from Los Angeles, who emphasized that “people want solutions, they don’t want to see homeless encampments continue to grow” (Tobias, 2021). (See below in terms of how the homelessness crisis is used to influences public opinion to support pro-housing state politicians.)

Obstacles to Construction
Outside of CEQA, lawsuits, and labor wage requirements, the three most referenced reasons for lack of housing production are construction costs, restrictive zoning, and development costs. Developers are often faced with funding concerns and when projects are delayed, and the lack of a quick pace only increases construction costs. An article that reported on the Bay Area’s push to add 441,000 new homes following RHNA Housing Element requirements cites experts and advocates who claim that true barrier from cities is the need to reform “the often years-long planning and approval process for new housing that add crushing costs to affordable and market-rate homes” (Varian, What's behind the Bay Area's push to add 441,000 new homes by 2031?, 2023)
It is important to note that articles frequently cite there is a 1.6M to 2.4M housing unit shortfall statewide in meeting the estimated need. This is a figure constantly quoted by Governor Gavin Newsom, given his campaign promise for 3.5 million homes by 2025, yet solutions for market-rate developers to streamline the building of housing are rarely discussed. Instead, articles cite barriers like the long permitting process and parking mandates. Despite the state's mandate to increase new housing production, there is little discussion in newspapers about policy solutions to reduce construction and development costs; instead, newspapers focus on zoning for enough housing. In my opinion newspapers support reductions in housing barriers as evident by pro-housing advocates getting the last word in articles.

Assembly Bill 2011, legislation that streamlined development of affordable housing on empty commercial, office, and mall sites, opened discussion about the untouched resource of land available for infill development. The reason abandoned developments were left untouched for residential is that cities frequently argue property taxes are higher for commercial/office buildings. Impactful revenue for localities will be gone if properties are converted to housing. The counterargument is that land already designated for commercial development should be fair game for dense housing development.

Developers
Developers are portrayed negatively in the news content. They are portrayed as taking advantage of zoning loopholes, and only being interested in profits. In an article framing the Huntington Beach’s City Council’s opposition to state overreach in mandating overbuilding in single-family neighborhoods, the builder’s remedy is described as a gift for developers to “sidestep zoning restrictions” (Schallhorn, 2023). That may be true, developers are interested in the bottom-line; however, California is unique, as experts assert the builder’s remedy “most likely to come into play in wealthier areas that have long made it difficult to build denser housing” (Varian, What's behind the Bay Area's push to add 441,000 new homes by 2031?, 2023). Depending on your allegiance, cities failing to meet a RHNA plan that is approved and complies with the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) housing expectations either are experiencing the ramifications of past housing decisions or are victims of state overreach. I believe editors
and reporters are engaging in historical anti-developer bias because this allows them to be portrayed as the bad guys when helping to enforce “builders remedy.” This perspective likely confirms readers preexisting concerns.

Developers are portrayed as destroying communities because they are the protagonist pursuing the builder’s remedy for cities out of compliance with their “housing element” (Varian, What's behind the Bay Area's push to add 441,000 new homes by 2031?, 2023). For example, in an article covering the fact most Bay Area cities missed the deadline to submit housing plans and over a hundred SoCal cities missed their RHNA deadlines as well, “developers have blitzed a handful of affluent enclaves with proposals for massive apartment complexes with thousands of units” (Varian, What's behind the Bay Area's push to add 441,000 new homes by 2031?, 2023). Cities are looking into adopting their housing plans into law without state certification because of the consequences. Proponents of using builder’s remedy to attack housing shortages might argue that sticks for cities missing their housing plan have thus been effective. The builder’s remedy law passed because a provision required that 20% of units be affordable.

In Southern California, Redondo Beach and Santa Monica have experienced the repercussions of being behind on their housing plans. San Francisco real estate attorney Daniel Golub summarized the carrot experience as: “If you’re not going to tell developers where they can build multifamily housing, the state is saying they don’t have to follow your rules” (Varian, What's behind the Bay Area's push to add 441,000 new homes by 2031?, 2023). These failures to meet the plan have led to “more than a dozen high rise projects in Santa Monica and a 2,300-unit oceanside complex in Redondo Beach” (Varian, What's behind the Bay Area's push to add 441,000 new homes by 2031?, 2023). The change in laws may be unfair, “as homebuilding targets set by the state have doubled or even tripled in some cities” (Varian, What's behind the Bay Area's push to add 441,000 new homes by 2031?, 2023). Yet all these laws are meant to hold jurisdictions accountable for meeting their goals and the most desirable cities are feeling the effects.
Homelessness Crisis

Newspapers are using the term "housing crisis" (25% of articles) along with the term "homelessness crisis" to shape public perception and reinforce the idea that the two issues are inherently linked. The frequent use of the term "crisis," which appeared in 70% of articles, suggests that newspapers are attempting to convey a sense of urgency and encourage readers to act on housing issues. It is possible that this messaging is influenced by political rhetoric, as politicians may be using the term "housing crisis" to frame the issue as a pressing concern that requires immediate action.

Other terms frequently used in articles that focus on the homelessness crisis is low-income households, affordable housing, and student homelessness. For example, in an article by Hannah Wiley, the Los Angeles Times housing beat writer, reporting on the state’s housing agenda, she states, “rents continue to increase, squeezing out middle- and low-income Californians from their neighborhoods and the state altogether” (Wiley, 2021). Assemblymember Buffy Wicks is also quoted, asserting her agenda is to work on solutions for “our homelessness epidemic, renter protections, and pathways to home ownership” (Wiley, 2021). Language in the article is linked to working on California’s ability to solve affordability and homelessness crisis.

Two articles reported on student homelessness. Senator Scott Wiener was quoted about the importance of streamlining affordable housing for public universities because of students experiencing homelessness. His language and the newspapers coverage stressed the obstacles students are facing because of the state’s housing crisis. A problem his legislation, AB 1630 would help alleviate student housing insecurity.

RHNA

Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) 8-year plans need to be filed by municipalities and counties and approved by the state’s Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to ensure they are contributing to meeting the state’s housing needs. Cities need to allocate zoning for their
determined housing needs including moderate and low-income housing; otherwise, they face the repercussions of builder’s remedy.

The RHNA requirements are frequently cited in articles. Some quote city managers in affluent areas like Orinda and Atherton who are frantically trying to designate zoned land for new housing production. The articles give the last word to Kevin Burke, a member of East Bay for Everyone, who views HCD requirements as a step in the right direction, but comments they give room for Orinda to “promise on paper to build housing for hundreds of low-income families there, but effectively avoid commitment” (Lauer, 2023).

**Climate Crisis**

Housing’s connection to the climate crisis is mentioned in 9% of analyzed articles. Proponents of apartment developments argue for mixed-use developments and density near transit hubs, aligning with long-term environmental goals. Climate concerns rank third behind the homelessness and housing crises as key themes. For example, San Jose's adoption of SB 35 and SB 9 is attributed to the city's move towards densification, 'as sprawl is not only harmful to the environment but also costly' (Eckholm, 2023). Terms such as "dense" and "sustainable housing" are commonly used to support high-rise buildings. There were multiple opinion articles that appealed to ‘building housing’ to combat the climate crisis. Articles authors used ‘emotive’ language to tie issues Californians recognize as dire, like the climate crisis, pushing housing as a potential solution.

**Discrimination**

There is considerable evidence of articles grappling with the housing crisis role in discrimination. One of these terms is "redlining," which refers to the discriminatory practice of denying access to housing and other services to people based on their race or ethnicity. "Housing discrimination" is used to describe the unequal treatment of people in the housing market, based on factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status. "Inter-generational wealth" refers to the unequal distribution of wealth across different generations, which can make it difficult for some people to afford housing. The Los Angeles Times published a series of articles about Bruce Beach in Manhattan Beach, as an example of racisms effects on
inter-generational wealth. The city used eminent dominion, that the area was needed to build a public park, to strip a black family of beach-front property to keep the area white.

Many articles also highlight the issue of racial segregation in housing, which is often perpetuated by zoning requirements that are maintained by homeowner groups. These requirements can make it difficult to build affordable housing units in certain neighborhoods, which can lead to the exclusion of low-income and minority populations. Implicit bias is another factor that is often cited as contributing to housing discrimination and segregation. Overall, the use of these terms in newspaper articles reflects a growing awareness of the structural issues that underlie the housing crisis in California.

Anti-Housing Content

NIMBY

One theme that stood out in the articles was the characterization of NIMBYs. One article described them as "homeowners in affluent neighborhoods who dominate the not-in-my-backyard conversation." (Phillips, Reid, & Cuff, 2022). Overall, 16 out of the 80 articles (or 20%) specifically mentioned NIMBY, NIMBYism, or related terms. Articles that discussed the effectiveness of state-mandated housing laws often featured quotes from leaders of foundations and neighborhood associations who opposed the legislation. Figure 3 has examples of NIMBY organizations mentioned in the articles.

Articles often describe generic neighborhood associations instead of listing specific organizations either because the organizations wish to remain anonymous or there is proliferation of neighborhood associations indicating author biases. In articles that cover higher-income areas, NIMBY is frequently mentioned. In these articles NIMBY quotes use language to oppose developments/developers, negative connotation terms like “greedy”, “fast-tracked”, “overcrowding” the surrounding neighborhood and “losing local zoning control”. NIMBY’s use other charged language to indicate opposition to developments like “gentrification”, “displacement”, and the loss of neighborhood character. Coincidentally, these terms are also used by non-profit housing advocates who oppose state-led legislation.
NIMBY organizations often use phrases that appeal to preserving the character of neighborhoods and argue that state-mandated housing laws will lead to the eradication of single-family housing, corporate takeover of development interests, and changes in the character of the neighborhood, as well as negative impacts on local interests and pollution. While these arguments are typically covered in reporting articles, they tend to receive only 2 to 3 paragraphs of coverage. Advocates opposing housing legislation receive far less coverage than pro-housing advocates. Therefore, it can be concluded that pro-housing receives more attention and emphasis in newspaper coverage of the housing crisis.

Some articles focused on loopholes that California municipalities, especially wealthy ones, use to stymie housing development. These include alleged wildfire risk and the preservation mountain lion habitat. An example of this is Senate Bill 182, which was vetoed by Governor Gavin Newsom in 2020. The bill aimed to increase fire evacuation routes, implement stricter building codes, and manage vegetation for new developments in high-risk fire areas. However, Newsom believed that “the bill creates loophole for regions to not comply with their housing requirements” (Rogers, 2022). This demonstrates the high level of political capital that the housing crisis holds in California.

Articles frequently used terms like "affluent enclaves," "significant developer fees," "regulatory hurdles," and "socio-economic crisis" when reporting on housing developments and legislation in high cost of living areas. The emotive and evocative nature of these terms adds additional weight to the “problems” created by NIMBYs. It is clear that newspapers are appealing to emotive reactions of their readers and are actively supporting the state’s housing legislation goals.

The following table provides a list of NIMBY organizations that were specifically mentioned in newspaper articles during my analysis. These organizations, particularly the four Berkeley-based groups, were often associated with CEQA lawsuits and were accused of causing delays, like People’s Park in Berkeley. Despite attempts by reporters to contact their presidents or representatives, many of these organizations declined to comment in articles. Their stated concerns often revolve around issues such as parking,
preserving historical areas, protecting open space, and avoiding gentrification. However, it is important to note the lack of specific identification of NIMBY groups in news articles (see Table 1), as this can contribute to the use of negative portrayal and scapegoating of these organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Focus/Area of Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better Cupertino</td>
<td>Cupertino</td>
<td>Balanced Growth, Quality of Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Mesa First</td>
<td>Costa Mesa</td>
<td>PAC, Smart Growth, Vote on Land Use Changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make UC a Good Neighbor</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Non-profit 501c(3), CEQA lawsuit for student noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People’s Park Historic District Advocacy Group</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>CEQA lawsuit for student noise, 501c(3), Historic Preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elmhurst Neighborhood Association</td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>Neighborhood Association, Oppose SB 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Sacramento Improvement Association</td>
<td>Sacramento</td>
<td>Neighborhood Association, Preserving and Protecting unique qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Neighborhood Voices</td>
<td>Statewide</td>
<td>Gentrification, Blank Check and Giveaway for Developers, Traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save Livermore Downtown</td>
<td>Livermore</td>
<td>Open Space, Parking, Gentrification, Traffic, Preserving Historic downtown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berkeley Property Owners</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>Homeowners Association, Nonprofit for rental housing providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Save Berkeley Neighborhoods</td>
<td>Berkeley</td>
<td>501c(3) public charity, Residents, Unique Character and Quality of Life, Diversity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 4- NIMBY GROUPS MENTIONED BY NAME IN READ ARTICLES

CEQA

CEQA is described in articles a tool used by pro-localism organizations, environmental groups, anti-housing NIMBY groups, and even in certain circumstance by developers to oppose competitors. CEQA’s environmental review process, described as a “heavy lift” by a Jim Ries, a non-profit developer, is frequently
present in articles about stalled development projects. Expensive and time-consuming environmental impact reviews (EIR) and the threat of lawsuits are held by housing advocates to be common tools for wealthy cities. Articles support the argument that “the law is too often and too easily abused by individuals or organizations opposed to new housing developments for reasons that go beyond its probable environmental impact” (Klearman, 2022).

For example, in “California’s public universities face a student housing crisis. Could this bill help?”, Owen Tucker-Smith reported on SB 886, legislation that would streamline student housing construction. It would grant exemptions for UC, CSU, and community college campuses from regulations under CEQA. The legislation was debated because of a major lawsuit: “spearheaded by NIMBY group Save Berkeley’s Neighborhoods, [it] alleged that the University of California, Berkeley was admitting too many students for its available space” (Tucker-Smith, 2022). The article features a quote from California YIMBY, that CEQA is often used for “reasons that are not truly environmentally motivated” (Tucker-Smith, 2022) exhibiting bad faith leverage of the law. This article is one example of reporters/newspapers that contributed to pro-housing discourse.

In high-cost cities with expensive land and labor, just the threat of triggering an environmental impact review can cause developers to drop projects. The potential “threat of a lawsuit” (a frequently used term in articles), particularly if there is financial backing from neighborhood associations, deters developers. Builders face potential spending of upwards of $150,000 to $200,000 and losing six months due to the funding, preparation and writing of an EIR per CEQA.

Environmental groups like the Sierra Club and Center for Biological Diversity are key players who utilize CEQA to halt larger developments. They contend they are not necessarily against housing in general, but they do use CEQA to block specific development projects they believe will have negative environmental impacts. To take one example, the Sierra Club of San Diego blocked proposed luxury developments in Lake County and Chula Vista in the San Diego region. The developments proposed 1,400 luxury homes and a
1,100-home gated community. Sierra Club San Diego Chairman Peter Anderson described the organization as “completely in favor of housing where you should build housing” but “we’re not in favor of building housing that requires long commutes, more greenhouse gases, more traffic and more fire risk” (Rogers, 2022). As a result, there may be opportunities for compromise and collaboration between these groups, but finding common ground can be difficult. Newspapers’ coverage of CEQA frequently cite it as a ‘strong’ barrier, a clear effort at emotionally appealing to support for more housing.

Community Grassroots Activism/ Slow Growth Movement
There were a few articles that covered localities which managed to maintain exclusivity through strict land-use regulations, despite being situated in or near job-rich areas. For example, an article in the Los Angeles Times, reported on Redondo Beach’s successful blocking of a proposed $400 million mixed-use residential and commercial project for the city’s waterfront. The article framed the city’s residents as electing leaders that subscribe to a “slow-growth movement” philosophy. Redondo Beach’s current Mayor Bill Brand is credited as “one of the masterminds of the slow-growth movement” who succeeds by arguing that “overdevelopment and traffic threaten the way of life in Redondo Beach” (Dillon & Campa, Crude emails reveal nasty side of a California beach city's crusade to halt growth, 2022). Brand also “spearheaded a successful ballot initiative that requires voter-approval for any major zoning change” and is co-authoring a “proposed ballot initiative that would amend the California’s constitution to block the state from overriding local land-use laws” (Dillon & Campa, Crude emails reveal nasty side of a California beach city's crusade to halt growth, 2022) in reaction to forthcoming RHNA housing element mandates from the state. In 2017, Redondo Beach imposed a temporary ban on approving mixed-use projects, citing concerns of “overdevelopment and change in the neighborhood’s character” (Dillon & Campa, Crude emails reveal nasty side of a California beach city’s crusade to halt growth, 2022). This move exemplifies how cities use grassroots movements to thwart housing requirements. The article presents an unfavorable profile of Bill Brand, likely due to his involvement in the moratorium.
After analyzing the articles, I categorized wealthy cities into two groups: inland wealth enclaves that make consistently fail to make “good-faith efforts” to address housing demand and small beach towns that use the justification of "neighborhood character" to maintain their exclusivity. The first category comprises cities like Atherton, Burlingame, Los Gatos, Palo Alto, and Pasadena, which have extremely high housing prices and low rates of housing production. The second category encompasses exclusive communities such as small, single-family beach towns. For instance, Huntington Beach, Laguna Beach, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach, and Santa Monica have embraced slow-growth movements and elected city council members who endorse this approach. As a result, these communities have been able to limit the availability of housing and preserve their exclusive character.

In all, this sort of anti-growth activism gets unfavorable newspaper coverage.

Prop 13
The issue of high property taxes and their impact on the California housing market is a pressing concern, as they are cited as a reason for fewer starter homes and limited mobility among homeowners in two opinion editorial articles. Prop 13, which locks in property tax rates at the purchase price—the “base year value” —has been blamed for exacerbating housing problems by disincentivizing older homeowners from moving. This has led to a lack of turnover in the real estate market and a shortage of affordable housing for younger homebuyers. The limitations imposed by Prop 13 have also prompted municipalities to prioritize retail businesses over housing development, further compounding the housing crisis. The issue is unlikely to be addressed anytime soon because of homeowners’ leverage; “pro-housing” authors reporting on housing legislation are afraid to address the obvious imbalance. This may explain why Prop 13 is rarely mentioned in discussions of housing policy besides two op-ed articles.
Section 5: Interview Content Analysis

Interview Subjects

I employed eight expert interviews as a data collection method to investigate the political process of the California housing crisis. Key personas were identified, including those quoted in newspaper articles on California housing legislation, and were recruited for in-depth interviews and coding analysis.

I contacted the California YIMBY organization for a “yes-in-my-backyard” perspective. California YIMBY is a non-profit lobbying organization with over 80,000 Californian members that has actively contributed to California housing legislative initiatives since the organization was founded in 2019. The organization produces research, endorses politicians, and promotes bills by implementing legislative strategy to accelerate housing production. The Policy Director at California YIMBY, Ned Resnikoff, was interviewed as part of this research.

To gain insights into the legislative process surrounding California's housing crisis, I contacted the offices of two prominent California legislators, one from the Senate and one from the Assembly. Both legislators are members of the chambers’ Committee on Housing and Community Development and have played important roles in shaping housing legislation. Specifically, I reached out to California State Senator Scott Wiener, who is widely recognized as a leader in writing and introducing housing legislation. His office referred me to two contacts: Mehgie Tabar, a principal consultant for the California Senate Housing Committee, who previously worked as the data and research manager for the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD), and Tate Hanna, a policy analyst helping to advance Senator Wiener's legislative agenda. Both participants work directly with Senator Wiener’s office.

The other political representative I reached out to was California Assemblymember Tina McKinnor, who represents my hometown district of Westchester, California. I submitted a meeting request form and was subsequently contacted by Sean Porter, her legislative director, who agreed to be interviewed.
I consulted two scholarly experts: David Garcia, the Policy Director for the Terner Center for Housing Innovation at UC Berkeley, and Paavo Monkkonen, Professor of Urban Planning and Public Policy at UCLA. The Terner Center for Housing Innovation publishes studies on housing regulations and land use in California, while Dr. Monkkonen’s research focuses on diversity, gentrification, and how urban and housing policy shape urban development and social segregation in cities. Both experts are frequently cited as authorities in news coverage of these issues and have been sought out by political figures for their expertise on housing legislation. The subjects consented to sit for interviews with me.

In order to capture perspectives on the daily operations of zoning, future growth planning, and housing production, I conducted interviews with a Los Angeles city planner and a senior vice president at a land-use development company. The planner, who asked to be masked due to political reasons, has worked to prepare a housing element plans to comply with state-wide RHNA requirements. He is an expert in communicating with the public about legislation such as AB 1401, a bill that prohibits parking requirements for parcels within a ½ mile of public transit; Senate Bill 9, which allows the splitting of single-family lots and legalization of duplexes; and AB 69, which legalized ADUs statewide. Jim Ries is a Senior Vice President at Craig Lawson & Co. and for the last five years he has consulted with non-profits to streamline obtaining entitlements for affordable housing projects. The subjects consented to participate in interviews.

The significance of incorporating the labor unions’ viewpoints became apparent upon discovering that key housing bills required labor’s backing for their passage. Consequently, I reached out to the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor and the AFL-CIO. I contacted Rob Northoff, the Policy Director at AFL-CIO, and Devin Osiri, the Political Director, via email, following up with two phone calls each. Unfortunately, both were unresponsive, and as a result, I was unable to include the perspectives of labor unions in my expert interviews.

To obtain a non-profit housing organization’s perspective, I attempted to contact the legislative director of the Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles (ACT LA). I selected this organization because it
co-authored ballot measure JJJ in Los Angeles, which aimed to promote affordable housing by providing density bonuses in transit-oriented developments, including increasing floor-to-area ratio (FAR) limits and relaxing parking requirements in exchange for a percentage of affordable housing. However, this organization withdrew its support for the state-wide Senate Bill 50 in 2018, which would have permitted more density on sites within ½ mile of high-quality public transportation, due to gentrification concerns. I focused on targeting Director Laura Raymond as ACT-LA’s expert persona. However, she did not respond to my five emails and two phone calls. I also tried to contact the organization’s Advocacy Manager, Alfonso Directo Jr., via email, but he declined to be interviewed due to time constraints.

Despite attempts to gather perspectives from the NIMBY contingent, including contacting two neighborhood association leaders, no responses were received. One of the experts was the President of the powerful Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association (SOHA), an organization that opposes key housing bills, including SB 9 and SB 10, and is lobbying against the construction of a Metro light rail station in Sherman Oaks. Although he initially responded to an email, he declined to participate in the interview process. Another potential interviewee was Julie Ross, Chair of the Planning, Land Use & Development Committee at the Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa Del Ray (NWCP), a quasi-governmental agency representing the interests of residents, workers, and property owners in the area. Despite follow-up emails, no response was received from NWCP representatives, resulting in a lack of NIMBY perspectives in the study.

I was unable to obtain a NIMBY perspective of four interview candidates because they may have felt that media coverage and academic studies continually mis-represent their intentions. Each of the potential alternative perspective experts would likely have argued that they are not necessarily opposed to all development, they just have good reasons to oppose certain developments, whether it be due to gentrification, long-term vibrancy of neighborhood character, or an underlying desire for the status quo.

The Process
I used a fly transcription technique to transcribe and analyze the interviews using descriptive coding that identified recurring themes. The analysis highlighted key themes, including barriers to housing
production, avoidance of state policy, and the impact of housing legislation. The findings from the descriptive coding analysis underscored the advocacy of my newspaper content analysis surrounding housing legislation and policy.

**Supply and Demand**

Experts confirmed that the California housing crisis is caused by an imbalance between the supply of and demand for housing. Due to a growing population, a thriving economy, and many people seeking job opportunities, there is high demand for housing in the state. However, as this paper has demonstrated, there are constraints on the supply of housing. As a result, more and more people are being priced out of coastal cities and are moving to inland areas, where prices are also increasing. According to Meghie Tabar, “California hasn’t met the housing supply since the 1980s, and now the terrible housing shortage has just made the issue worse.”

Land in California is very expensive, especially in cities with abundant job opportunities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, where the median cost of a house is $901,291 according to Zillow’s Home Value index in 2023 (Tucker, 2023). The lack of affordability for middle-class and lower-income residents is made worse by the amount of land that is zoned for single-family homes. David Garcia estimates that, in most places, 85% to 95% of zoned land is reserved for single-family homes. Legalizing densification would increase the number of homes available. Mr. Garcia believes that “by slightly adjusting the percentage of land reserved for single-family homes, without having to pave over specific neighborhoods, we could make a significant difference in the availability of land" (David Garcia). This could include small-scale development, such as two or three-story multi-family units, which could be described as "gentle density."

**The Homeless Crisis**

The lack of affordable housing in California has led to a rise in homelessness and displacement, but the issue is rooted in the lack of funds. According to a recent report, it would cost "$60 billion dollars to eradicate homelessness in California" (Meghie Tabar) and an estimated $8.1 billion annually until 2035. One proposed solution is to introduce social housing statewide, but this would require subsidizing more people to
live in housing that low-income people can afford. Unlike other states, California does not have a permanent source of funding for affordable housing construction, so the state relies on passing bond issues, contributing general funds, or using federal funds from COVID for housing.

Contrary to what I found in my newspaper analysis, housing and homelessness were not necessarily linked issues at the local level of politics. The Los Angeles city planner explained that “sometimes decision-makers don’t make that connection; when homelessness is debated, housing isn’t even brought up” (LA City Planner). The conversation around homelessness often dominates due to its visibility in communities, and this leads to a focus on issues like encampments and drug use, causing the broader conversation about housing to get lost. However, my research suggests that state politicians try to connect the housing crisis and the issue of homelessness by using emotional language, yet people at the local level are still failing to see the connection. Solutions to homelessness typically have a more short-term time horizon.

NIMBYism

The proliferation of neighborhood groups, local activists, and grassroots organizations such as Livable California is frequently cited as a major obstacle to housing production legislation. Livable California, a nonprofit that advocates for equitable, livable communities and truly affordable housing, has proven to be more organized and efficient than its YIMBY counterparts. Livable California holds bi-weekly Zoom meetings and maintain a website that tracks housing legislation, including the Assembly and Senate member roster and contact information. According to a Los Angeles city planner, before housing issues were a priority for state legislation, their office only received criticism from groups like California Neighborhood Preservation, homeowner associations, and land use committees. Now, these “traditional neighborhood activists are organized through Facebook groups and webpages dedicated to anti-housing activism” (LA City Planner), making it even more challenging to enact housing legislation.

Cities often use CEQA to stop large developments that are not entirely affordable housing. According to Senator Wiener’s office, “the people who oppose such developments are typically wealthy, white homeowners who have significant influence” (Meghie Tabar).
There is a cognitive dissonance in citizens in California; residents vote for state-wide candidates who support housing, “yet they oppose any housing built in the parcel next door” (Tate Hanna). If you poll people, “it is something like 80% of Californians are worried about what their housing future looks like and definitely for their children” (Tate Hanna). In a 2023 poll from the Policy Institute of California, “70% of Californians say housing affordability is a big problem and 60% are very concerned that housing costs will prevent their family’s younger generations from buying a home in California” (Baldassare, Bonner, Lawler, & Thomas, 2023) (See Figure 3.) If you pull back from the local level, “people are voting for elected officials that support housing. That is the difference” (Tate Hanna). There is a bi-polar understanding that there is a lack of affordable housing in California; communities’ members often oppose construction of new housing in their own neighborhoods, citing concerns such as neighborhood character, preserving open spaces, and avoiding gentrification. Nonetheless, when voting on state-wide issues citizens tend to support housing initiatives—presumably because they support new housing in other people’s neighborhoods.

Players

The interviews confirmed the power of labor unions, who are “probably the most influential stakeholders in California” (David Garcia) for housing legislation. Specifically, “the Trades” are a “major player” (Ned Resnikoff) that have an outsized role “on streamlining legislation” (LA Planner). The California Carpenter’s union has “not [been] part of a coalition of major players” (Ned Resnikoff) but has also been important. These two labor unions focus on securing healthcare, benefits, and “prevailing wages” for new
housing developments, and lobby for language ensuring this in all housing legislation at the state level. Thus housing legislation typically includes language requiring developers to hire “skilled and trained” workers.

However, California has a labor shortage in the construction industry. According to Tate Hanna, Senator Scott Wiener’s legislative aide, “labor in housing spaces is geographically dependent”; there is a split between major metro areas and places like Fresno or Merced that do not have the workers that are “considered skilled and trained to do the work” (Tate Hanna). Particularly in rural areas, legislation that streamlines CEQA and distortionary exemptions is difficult to take advantage of because there is a lack of union workers available.

In Sacramento politics, there exists a well-established network of non-profit organizations dedicated to addressing housing issues, according to Ned Resnikoff. These organizations include Housing California, as well as regional groups such as the Northern California Association of Non-Profit Housing (NPH) and the Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing (SCANPH). According to David Garcia of the Terner Center, “they collaborate to lobby for affordable housing funding and land use policy changes through budget allocations” (David Garcia). They represent affordable housing developers but are singularly focused on 100% affordable housing. Over time they have become less important in Sacramento because “legislators recognize now, you do need to build more market-rate housing” (Ned Resnikoff).

Developers were identified as the second most influential advocacy group, with representation from both for-profit and non-profit sectors. For-profit developers have a “greater number [of], and more influential, lobbyists and advocates” (Meggie Tabar). They focus on ensuring cost certainty for construction and navigating the entitlement and discretionary processes. Meanwhile, non-profit developers benefit from favorable legislation that requires a percentage of affordable housing in streamlined housing bills due to the high value of land. This legislation is often the result of non-profit developers facing lawsuits when building housing in wealthy areas.
A consequential advocacy organization is the California Building Industry Association (CBIA), which is focused on “greenfield, single-family homes, and more development” according to Meghie Tabar, the principal housing consultant for Senator Scott Wiener. Unsurprisingly, CBIA’s goals are to loosen regulations on building and bolster the construction industry. Its objectives align with for-profit developers, companies who employ homebuilders, trade contractors, architects, engineers, designers, and suppliers of homebuilding supplies.

Equity-focused stakeholders that are less consequential but still have a hand in legislation are tenant advocacy organizations, like the Western Center on Law and Poverty, Tenants Together, and the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). They view safe, decent, affordable housing as a right and support affordable housing legislation, tenants’ rights, and housing bills that focus on low-income residents. On the other side of the coin, the California Apartment Association (CAA), a coalition of persons and organizations in the rental property industry, and the California Association of Realtors (CAR) seek to protect property and owners’ interests. I expected these organizations to be in favor of housing production, but my experts indicated that their goals are protecting property owners’ rights. Often that means lobbying to kill progressive housing legislation.

According to multiple interviewees, the California League of Cities (Cal Cities) is the most powerful NIMBY organization at the state level. Cal Cities is an advocacy organization that aims to expand and protect local control for cities. However, David Garcia from the Terner Center at UC Berkeley notes that a subset of cities opposes specific housing legislation and will hire their own lobbyists if their interests do not align with Cal Cities. This often creates divisions between cities that support housing legislation and those that are against it. Wealthy cities that desire more local control tend to lobby outside of advocacy organizations like Cal Cities.

Lastly, an important player that is less consequential but will be emerging if CEQA is to be evaluated for abuse is environmental organizations. David Garcia described environmental groups as “fractured”
between older legacy groups that “loathe change in the environmental regulations for the purpose of creating more housing” and progressive environmental organizations. The progressive organizations understand the housing-environmental nexus that are eager “to work with groups like affordable housing and YIMBY to push housing forward”. Their motivation is preserving open space, upholding the intention of CEQA, and managing growth in a productive way.

To summarize, there are various advocacy organizations at the state level with different motivations and missions. Some organizations share similar goals, while others have more singular objectives. For instance, CBIA and YIMBY organizations have overlapping interests in pushing for housing development, while labor unions have a more specific focus. All these organizations are engaged in lobbying efforts and holding politicians accountable at the state level.

**Zoning at the Local Level**

Local planners face challenges in selling changes to the community, as many people are resistant to uncertainty and prefer to maintain the status quo. However, there are techniques that can help gain consensus. For instance, in lower-density neighborhoods, changes to zoning can be presented using terms like "form" and "scale" to support updates to housing ordinances. The Los Angeles planner emphasized it is best to avoid using the word "density" and instead emphasize that the reforms won't increase building heights significantly. Advocates can also highlight that new buildings will be in line with the neighborhood's scale and design, while the underlying goal is to “loosen density rules, setbacks, and building placement regulations” (LA City Planner). This approach allows planners to evoke a return to traditional housing options while also emphasizing the importance of change.

A takeaway for planners that can be used in other states is to chip away at resident opposition to change by appealing to historical density. By emphasizing “traditional housing, historical houses, bungalows, duplexes, triplex [designs] from the 1930’s” (LA City Planner), localities can appeal to sentimental values. By suggesting “get[ting] rid of the zoning that prevents them from getting built” (LA Planner) people are open to
changes to the law. As planner or politician hoping to upzone for change, “it is important to soothe folks that it doesn’t mean the big scary designs, they have seen in other places” (LA Planner).

Some interviewees, including Jim Ries, the consultant for non-profit developers, are doubtful about the potential for change at the local level and prefer state-led housing legislation. Ries pointed to successful bills like SB 35, which streamlines the development of affordable housing in cities that fail to meet state-mandated housing goals, and Project HomeKey, which converts hotels into permanent housing. He plans to use the Project HomeKey legislation to construct an entirely new affordable housing project, saying it's "a big step up" that avoids local zoning barriers that have historically hindered affordable housing projects.

**Local Political Strategies to Promote Housing**

This debate highlights a division between state-led legislation and local authority. On one hand, interviewees acknowledged concerns about the loss of local control. However, there was a consensus that localities have not kept up with housing production demand for the past thirty years. Therefore, intervention by state-led legislation that bypasses local zoning regulations was seen as necessary.

The California state constitution grants local governments the power of land-use planning, but there is currently an "inter-governmental conflict" (Paavo Monkkonen). Zoning regulations are partly to blame for the high cost of building housing in California, which has resulted in only high-income housing being constructed. Dr. Monkkonen asserts that this issue could be resolved by city councils, but they are hesitant to do so due to political unpopularity with homeowners, who are the primary voting demographic. To solve this problem, Dr. Monkkonen suggests re-assessing the mechanics of local elections. The outsized influence of homeowners on elected officials is another factor exacerbating the problem, as they wield considerable power in shaping land-use policies. The interview with CA YIMBY’s legislative director, Ned Resnikoff, also recognized the prevalence of NIMBYs in local meetings and the need to have a counterbalance.

In my interview with the Los Angeles city planner, it was noted that local planners in Los Angeles actively engage with key stakeholders and the public when introducing new legislation and zoning changes.
However, a recurring issue in this engagement is that older, wealthier, and mostly white homeowners are the most engaged in housing politics. As a result, the city planners in Los Angeles put significant effort into explaining any housing ordinance, housing plan, or housing element to this group.

Planners must engage other stakeholders, including having one-on-one meetings with key players such as non-profits, the business community, and politicians in the district. The planner noted that the state enabling legislation like reforms to the RHNA housing element has provided cover to elected officials from the sub-set of constituents who are not in favor of housing changes. This legislation ensures that housing capacity must be zoned and that local planners cannot push back against state mandates.

State-led housing laws have encouraged localities to cooperate and implement housing policies, a good example being San Diego County’s implementation of state-led ADU laws. Mister Resnikoff asserted “San Diego saw an opportunity, it is a great way to relive the housing crisis and increase production of affordable housing” (Ned Renikoff). To address the housing crisis, local governments can adopt a simplified application process like San Diego did in writing pre-approved county standard ADU building plans.

**Regional Planning- Fair Share Housing Burden**

RHNA reform is seen as a significant piece of legislation because it requires cities to develop a "housing element" that forces them to re-examine their zoning codes and increase their housing stock. There is a belief that state-mandated housing requirements have opened the possibility of accountability for cities. David Garcia with the Terner Housing Center believes that RHNA offers a solution by creating ministerial approval by-right. This means that if a housing plan is approved by the city, builders can bypass discretionary action and CEQA reviews, leading to the immediate construction of housing.

Without RHNA repercussions, individual city councils historically have avoided up-zoning and changing their housing plan. The LA City Planner said amongst planning organizations, there is an understanding that housing plans are “where the opposition are going to be hot” (LA City Planner). Therefore, the state is in a better position ‘to do something bold, like require wealthier areas near transit to
up-zone” (LA City Planner). A caveat is that RHNA requirements more than doubled from previous cycles statewide and may be unreasonable. The fifth cycle expectation was 1.15 million new housing units, but the re-calculation for the sixth cycle requires the state to produce 2.5 million new housing units. That said, if the repercussions for failing to meet housing production work, “in theory that is a tool that looks at cities equally and makes sure they are pulling their weight and rowing the same boat” (LA Planner).

In the past, cities could get away with claiming they had enough zoned capacity for housing without anyone verifying it. They could even count future developments that were unlikely to happen. However, the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) has changed that. As the LA City Planner explains, cities must now show that they have areas that can realistically be developed into housing within eight years. Cities that cannot do so, like South Pasadena, have to keep revising their housing element plans. The builder’s remedy provision of RHNA has made it clear that cities cannot play games anymore. They are now held accountable for producing real housing capacity.

According to CA YIMBY, added provisions to the RHNA cycle through the California Housing Accountability Act “focused on making small changes to existing laws that can have a big impact” (Ned Resnikoff). These changes, when combined, are powerful tools for holding NIMBY cities accountable. As a result, cities can no longer ignore the HCD housing element plan without consequences. The effects of this accountability are already being seen, as Huntington Beach is suing the state, arguing that they do not have to follow state housing requirements as a chartered city. The RHNA housing element is the largest test yet of whether state-led legislation can ensure that all places contribute equally to housing provision.

**CEQA**

CEQA was the most frequently mentioned obstacle and tool used by NIMBYs in both the newspaper articles and interviews. In every interview conducted, CEQA was mentioned. However, most of the interviewees were pro-housing and shared the view that CEQA is being abused by bad actors such as bounty-hunting lawyers, NIMBYs, and economic competitors who use it to file frivolous lawsuits. For example, the
Los Angeles planner said it is “very easy for a group that opposes housing, particularly a well-funded group that uses CEQA to kill a housing plan or housing project” (LA Planner).

To illustrate the complexity of CEQA, my planner interview told me about trying to pass a housing plan for Hollywood. A judge threw out the entire plan this year because 2020 Census data was released. The plan was written based on ACS Community Survey data that showed the area was growing. After the 2020 Census showed the population shrinking, the judge argued that all assumptions were incorrect. The “problem with CEQA is that it is too broad, and it is easy for NIMBYs to use lawyers to exploit its many loopholes” (LA City Planner). While state-led legislation can bypass CEQA reviews, market-rate housing is still vulnerable to attacks.

Ned Resnikoff of CA YIMBY also shared an example to illustrate how CEQA can be misused: “In Berkeley, there has been a year-long fight to put a bike lane on a street near where I live. Arguing that a bike lane has an environmental impact makes no sense” (Ned Resnikoff). Another example of abuse is the ongoing situation with the People’s Park Project in Berkeley, which aims to provide housing for students, unhoused individuals, and those with very low incomes. The Save Berkeley Neighborhoods organization used a CEQA lawsuit to block the project in court, claiming that the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was incomplete because it failed to consider the fact that college students tend to be louder than other types of residents. According to Mr. Resnikoff, “this seems un-American” because it discriminates against a specific group, but the court accepted the argument. This demonstrates the power of CEQA to halt all kinds of housing development.

From a developer perspective, Jim Ries called CEQA "the soft underbelly of development" because of numerous and specific regulations that are easy to miss. Additionally, he claimed there is no standing required to sue under CEQA, which means it can be used not only by environmentalists and neighbors but by anybody else, such as labor unions. Jim claimed that state-led bills like SB 35 have been successful in streamlining affordable housing projects by providing a CEQA exemption for projects that provide union labor
and affordable housing. The bills also contain a requirement for cities to approve or deny a permit within 90 days of application submittal. In fact, Senator Wiener intends to introduce an extension of SB 35 this year because it has been so successful in producing affordable housing. Lawmakers have passed some housing laws that limit CEQA abuse, but market-rate developments—which are essential for addressing the housing crisis—are often left out of these pathways for CEQA relief.

**Energy Regulations Requirements & Housing**

A barrier that was only addressed in one interview was state requirements for developers that are not part of land use and housing policy. California has strict building regulations related to environmental conditions, such as earthquake codes, and the lengthy and complex process for obtaining administrative permits in such areas. The California Air Resources Board (CARB), which regulates greenhouse gas emissions, creates necessary but difficult-to-obey energy requirements. While their regulations are meant to promote energy efficiency, they also increase costs for builders and, ultimately, for the end-users. Moreover, the entitlement process for complying with CARB regulations is complicated and includes CEQA reviews. To address this issue, David Garcia suggests aligning CARB regulations, energy efficiency requirements, and building codes with housing policy: Strike a balance where housing can be built without incurring unnecessary costs.

**Regional Planning Alignment**

To ensure effective planning in California, my political interviewees stressed that moving beyond local planning to regional planning is critical. For instance, in the Bay Area, Mehgie Tabar and Tate Hanna claimed that “planning for San Francisco cannot be done in isolation but rather in the context of the broader region” (Mehgie Tabar), with varying housing policies for rural and urban areas. They claimed that regional-level intervention, including by metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), is necessary to bring about change. Give regional organizations like MPOs authority to plan for housing and the production gap will lessen. This is a salient observation, considering MPOs are a step removed from NIMBY blowback.
Ultimately it is politically infeasible to strip localities of land use police power. Still, if regional planning could take the lead, housing construction could proceed more efficiently, as opposed to today’s reality. There is an argument to be made for aligning climate change, transit, and housing policy at the regional level.

**Messaging with Sustainability**

Long-term stability means pushing uncomfortable conversations at the local level, and mandating housing in wealthy areas. The Los Angeles housing element plan targets “areas that are high opportunity, high resources, wealthy communities with good transit, good jobs, good everything” (LA City Planner). These areas are not interested in changing zoning. Planners face resistance, and they must be strategic, “find alignment, equity, stability, they may not be pro housing, but they are pro those things” (LA City Planner). The office of planning in Los Angeles has proposed a housing element plan for 1.4 million units of up-zoning in mostly wealthy communities, “so the equity and sustainability minded folks become important” (LA City Planner).

Multiple interviewees asserted that, in front of the correct audience, a persuasive argument is that housing and climate policy are intertwined. If you make clearer the connection, “the relationship between climate policy and land-use policy and the need to build denser to reduce carbon emissions” (Ned Resnikoff), then you make it hard for the opposition to have an argument. Likewise, when advocating housing and speaking to the tech industry, emphasize that housing constraints limit economic growth and will long-term effects on the amount of hiring a company can do in California. Lastly, the most persuasive argument when engaging NIMBY’s may be to “just ask residents if they want to live by their kids? Do you want to see your grandkids on a regular basis?” (Ned Resnikoff). This is why you see in polls there is 80% support for housing production California-wide and state politicians elected are starting to reflect these policy goals.

**Lessons Learned from Failed Bills**

I asked my experts what they have learned after five years of successfully passing housing legislation, but the answer is complicated because every bill is different. For example, Senator Scott Wiener had a
climate bill that was killed by one vote last year. Tate Hanna, his legislative aide, suggested there were two options for Senator Wiener: to try and minimize problems to pass the bill, or to introduce the same bill next year with more details. If the bill wasn't aggressive enough, then a revised version with more specifics is needed. Tata Hanna said, "it comes down to votes, and which players oppose your bill".

Senate Bill 50 is an example. The bill aimed to allow mid-rise apartment complexes near transit stops and job centers, essentially permitting fourplexes in most single-family neighborhoods across the state. However, the bill failed due to opposition from "groups representing low-income communities" (Dillon, 2020). After receiving feedback that the bill needed to be more specific, Senator Wiener introduced SB 827, which would allow apartment buildings up to five stories tall near high-frequency mass transit stops. However, this bill also failed due to its "one-size-fits-all" approach. This experience taught that engaging with non-profit housing advocates is crucial for passing state-led legislation that intends to bypass local low-density zoning standards.

Organizations such as the Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles and the Western Center on Law and Poverty surprisingly opposed the density bills, arguing that dense housing near transit could worsen housing affordability for low-income people and people of color, leading to potential displacement. However, the ACT-LA had previously supported the passage of Los Angeles Measure JJJ in 2016, which required developers to include affordable units and hire local construction workers in exchange for density and fewer parking requirements for developments of 10 units or more. The organization felt that the state-led bills would interfere with the progress made for affordable housing, as Measure JJJ is the largest source of affordable housing in LA. They wanted language in the bill to include "enforceable provisions that prevent direct displacement" (ACT-LA’s Medium Blog, 2020). It is important to be aware of coalition dynamics, and to take stock of "what your coalition looks like versus the opposition" (Tate Hanna) when bills do not pass.

One strategy that seems to be working is introducing bills that don't pass, but still advance the cause of promoting density. An example of this is Senate Bill 50, which failed because it was too broad in its
approach. According to the LA planner, the bill proposed up-zoning areas near transit regardless of their current zoning classification, which would have overlooked the sensitivity of lower income communities and increased the risk of displacement. However, even though SB 50 failed, it helped to educate the public about the idea that areas near transit should be utilized for housing.

Lawmakers are learning from previous bills to better understand how localities enforce state-wide mandates. SB 478, for example, eliminated minimum Floor-to-Area Ratio (FAR) requirements for 3-unit to 10-unit projects proposed in multi-family zoning districts. However, some localities responded by setting infeasibly small FAR requirements for any development of 11 units or more. For instance, the city of Del Mar set a FAR of .35, which meant that the building’s total floor space could take up only 35% of the total lot size. To address this issue, “lawmakers are introducing a follow-up bill that would halve the FAR requirement” (Tate Hanna). This is an example of how lawmakers are working to ensure that state-wide mandates are enforced properly and effectively.

When it comes to getting support from labor unions, “there are always certain players involved” (Tate Hanna). When new bills are introduced, these players want to get involved in the details and may say things like "we'll support this if you amend these provisions" or "we don't like how the labor language plays into this." For larger bills, it's harder to get a big coalition to align. However, having housing experts like Scott Wiener, Buffy Wicks, and David Chui (when he was in office) who pay attention to the details and are passionate about solving the problem has made a difference.

Successful bills include Assembly Bill 2011 (AB 2011), which allows affordable housing projects to be approved through a streamlined process if they meet certain criteria for affordability, labor, and the environment. Another successful bill is SB 35, which has helped to bring a “significant number of housing units, and the senator is currently working on an extension for the bill’ (Tate Hanna). Other successful bills are those that have little opposition, such as SB 4, which authorizes 100% affordable housing on faith
organization and non-profit college land. The bill reduces the environmental review process and exempts multi-family housing projects from local zoning.

ADUs have also been successful. In 2016, ADU construction was legalized across the state, but local governments blocked many applications they did not want. As a result, subsequent legislation eliminated parking requirements, made permits subject to ministerial review (as opposed to discretionary review), and prohibited minimum lot size regulations. Ultimately, state legislation now allows for the construction of 800 sq. ft. ADUs without the need for compliance with zoning, resulting in an increase in permits across the state. Pushback on ADUs from the public has been minimal due to their widespread popularity.

Big Swings

In 2019, Senate Bill 50 didn’t pass, but it still had important implications for housing affordability and climate change. Senator Wiener's office and California YIMBY considered it a "qualified failure" because it drew a lot of criticism. However, its legislation “drew a lot of fire” (Ned Resnikoff) and was why ADU laws were passed “under the radar.” Furthermore, the ideas behind SB 50 gained traction, and even though the bill itself didn’t pass, “there is momentum to break it down into smaller parts and pass them in separate bills” (Ned Resnikoff). Failed bills are used as learning experiences, and the lessons are applied to future legislation.

Based on my interviews, it is evident that certain concepts such as up-zoning near transit are not completely abandoned. Instead, they are modified and adjusted in subsequent rounds of legislation. For instance, a proposal for 6-8 story buildings may be scaled down to 4-6 stories in the next iteration.

Legislation can be improved even if it doesn't work as intended. Senate Bill 9 is an example of this, as it didn’t produce the expected units, but it “can be modified to be more family-friendly instead of starting from scratch” (Ned Resnikoff). Rather than viewing laws as successes or failures, there is a trend of continuously refining legislation.
Section 6: Findings

California’s recent success in passing state-led housing legislation is the result of a seven-year journey of raising awareness about the need for affordable housing and the associated problems of housing insecurity. Housing policy experts and the emergence of YIMBY advocacy organizations have challenged perceptions of over 100 years of home rule and the expectation of the American dream of a single-family neighborhood. This challenge has emerged as a direct result of the realization that people cannot afford to live and work where they want in California. Younger generations like millennials and generation Z are leading the charge.

The steps that are transforming the housing landscape are supported by a growing public understanding of the housing crisis and related political matters. Media coverage has linked housing policy with problems like homelessness, climate change, and the high cost of living. As a result, housing has become a top priority across the state. In the past, “only a few lawmakers were concerned about housing issues in their district but now it is one of the top two or three issues,” according to David Garcia. Elected officials have recognized that their constituents are being impacted, and they are responding with their votes.

The majority of newspaper articles described California’s housing situation as a crisis, using terms such as housing affordability, cost of housing, underutilized land, rent increases, and severe housing shortage. Homelessness, affordable housing, and low-income housing crises were frequently linked to the shortage of housing. The articles often cited CEQA, Environmental Impact Reviews (EIR), NIMBY organizations, and environmental groups as reasons for the lack of housing production. Pro-housing legislation is widely supported by residents across the state, because of charged language that reflects a strong sense of urgency and importance.

Based on my analysis of newspaper content, I found that 74% of the articles were pro-housing. These articles usually followed a particular format in which there were three quotes from individuals or organizations that supported pro-housing legislation and the production of new units. On the other hand,
there was only one quote from individuals or organizations representing NIMBY interests. I believe that this bias has contributed to shifting the conversation at the state level in favor of housing bills, even though some locals are still trying to prevent development in their neighborhoods.

Further analysis shows a quarter of the articles (25%) mention the homelessness crisis, indicating that it is a significant concern in California. Furthermore, over half of the articles (51%) refer to affordable housing, highlighting a growing awareness of the need for more affordable housing units in the state. Unions are mentioned in 19% of the articles, which may indicate a debate on their role in the construction of housing units. CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) is referenced in 15% of the articles, indicating concerns about the environmental impact of new housing development, but also about potential CEQA abuse.

I believe, and heard directly through my interview analysis, that state legislators are better positioned to circumvent housing impediments rather than local politicians. A crucial aspect is that policymakers at the state level can pass generalized policies that garner public support, with the expectation that such policies will lead to more housing, which is universally recognized as a need in the state thanks to newspaper coverage. People are happy to see more housing when they assume it will be built in areas outside of their own neighborhoods. This allows state legislators to avoid facing backlash from local homeowners about the specifics of proposed new apartment buildings in their own vicinity, which is something that local councilmembers do have to contend with.

Thus state legislators play a critical role in driving housing policy, and state-level housing experts have been instrumental in leveraging grassroots organizations like California YIMBY to pass state-level laws aimed at increasing housing production. An example of this is the modifications made to the California Housing Accountability Act in 2017, which increased its enforcement powers. As a result, localities have started to understand the consequences of failing to meet RHNA state-mandated housing targets, though the jury is still out as to whether the resulting pressure on them and will lead to more housing being built in every municipality throughout the state.
Politicians have unified messaging that highlights the severity of the housing shortage, the homelessness crisis, and the affordability crisis, emphasizing the need for state enforcement. To bolster their arguments, they rely on resources such as the Terner Center, the Randall Lewis Housing Initiative, and CA YIMBY to provide them with factual data. However, despite these efforts, aligning the independent interests of labor, tenants' rights advocacy groups, CBIA, and environmental advocacy organizations continues to be challenging and can weaken significant legislation. Nevertheless, with the benefits of positive news coverage and knowledge of the issues at hand, state politicians have the political cover they need to vote for state-led housing reforms. The key has been passing small technical fixes, which now provide the California State Attorney General with the tools to enforce housing production. We will have to wait and see the results of these efforts.

Section 7: Conclusion
California has adopted a state-led approach to increase housing production across the state. The success of this approach is due to the collaboration between different groups, including labor unions like The Trades, the CA Carpenter’s Union, and the California Builders Industry. Despite some splintering, coalitions have managed to align to pass significant affordable housing bills that increase density in areas with good public transportation. This legislation counteracts home rule zoning as is advocated for by the League of California Cities. State politicians have introduced small changes to existing housing bills, such as the RHNA Housing Element and the California Housing Accountability Act.

To build political capital and gain support for housing legislation, California state politicians have aligned their messaging to make the housing crisis a top issue in the state. By connecting issues such as the homelessness crisis, housing affordability, climate change, and long-term sustainability, they have garnered support for closing the housing gap. Pro-housing advocates and state politicians have been successful in changing public sentiment, as is evident from the 70% of Californians who acknowledge worrying about housing security. Newspapers have also played a role, showing a stance towards supporting housing
legislation. After an eight-year political process led by housing policy experts and legislators, significant housing legislation is starting to bear fruit. The California state attorney general is now enforcing RHNA housing element requirements throughout the state.

I must acknowledge that most of my interviewees had a pro-housing bias. The legislative experts who work for politicians are focused on passing housing legislation, while my YIMBY interviewee's job is to advocate for more housing. The scholars I interviewed are politically neutral, but their research points to building more housing. The developer I spoke with was the most balanced, as he lives in an exclusive community, but his job is to build housing. All of them believe that increasing the housing supply is the main solution to the crisis.

Unfortunately, I was not able to get the viewpoints of labor unions, non-profit housing advocacy organizations, and neighborhood associations. This may be due to a change in public perception caused by publications, newspaper articles, and academic studies, as they may feel that any opinion given will be used against them. According to my research, the most compelling argument put forth by NIMBYs and advocates for local land control is that issues specific to a locality require solutions tailored to that area. In all, my impression is that few want to go on the record as supporting a NIMBY position, at least as a statewide policy.

Another limitation of my research was the sample size of only 80 newspaper articles analyzed. This smaller sample may not be fully representative of all newspapers and their coverage on the housing crisis throughout the state. As a result, it is possible that important and influential newspapers were missed in the analysis.

The key takeaways for other states, such as South Carolina, facing a housing shortage crisis are to align messaging by making housing security, climate change, and transit part of one issue. This helps the public understand that state-led policies, including density near transit, can effectively solve state-wide housing issues. It is also important to chip away at the sanctity of single-family housing and normalize
duplexes, triplexes, and cottage neighborhoods, giving land authority back to property owners as it was before the country segregated land-uses. Furthermore, it is important to pass legislation and not give up on the core concept of housing bills. Instead, the goal should be to learn about the coalitions and players that support and oppose your bill, as well as building on failed bills.

The effectiveness of state-led legislation in closing loopholes used by localities and addressing permit issues remains uncertain. However, progress has been made through the implementation of ADU legislation, SB 35, and AB 1207, which have led to the construction of new housing units. While the impact of politicians, newspapers, grassroots YIMBY organizations, and negotiations with labor unions is understood, further research is required to develop laws that streamline the development of market-rate housing. Although California is exploring CEQA reform, reconciling the need for environmental protection with the need for housing production is complex and requires further investigation. As the effects of climate change continue to manifest themselves, determining the best messaging to promote density, transit, and housing for all remains a critical issue.
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Appendix

Appendix A
IRB Recruitment Email

Dear xxx,

I am a graduate student at Clemson University and am writing my thesis on the politics of California housing legislation. I am working with Dr. Eric A. Morris, Professor of City and Regional Planning in the Nieri Department of Construction, Development and Planning, at Clemson. Dr. Morris is the principal investigator who is supervising me as I conduct the project.

As part of my project, I am interviewing experts in California housing policy. Given your background, you are somebody whose expertise and opinions on the politics surrounding housing in California would be extremely valuable to us.

I would like to conduct a 30–40-minute interview with you over Zoom about these issues. I will be asking questions about California’s housing shortages, the regulations surrounding housing in California, legislation that has addressed these issues, how various groups interact in housing policy making in California, your ideas for how to address California’s housing needs, etc.

There are no incentives or payments for the interview, other than contributing to knowledge about issues in California housing and potentially helping to generate ideas to address housing problems in California and nationwide. It is important to note that I am seeking your expertise about housing issues but do not plan to focus on your past record or actions specifically, so I anticipate that no harm can come to you for participating. If you wish to stop participating in my study at any time you may do so.

I have received permission to contact you and conduct the interview with you from Clemson’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), the body which ensures that reach participants are treated fairly and are not harmed. IRB has reviewed my protocol including the topics I will ask about.

I am scheduling interviews for February, ideally in the next two weeks permitting your schedule. Is there a time you are able to connect?

If you have any questions about the study please contact me, Dr. Morris at emorr7@clemson.edu or the Clemson institutional review board at IRB@clemson.edu.

Thanks,

Andy Daly
Graduate Student in City & Regional Planning
(310)994-4566
Appendix B
IRB Questions and Persona

NOTE TO IRB:

We understand we were not to contact potential interviewees before your approval of this study. Below we list people we intend to contact and questions and topics we will ask them about. If these specific people are not available to speak with us, we intend to approach other people with similar roles. We will inform you as you think necessary if we need to contact backup interviewees.

Ned Resnikoff, Policy Director for California YIMBY

Meeting Booked 2/16/23 for 45 minutes.

Contact information: ned@cayimby.org, (510) 982-6977

California YIMBY (yes in my backyard) works hand in hand with state senators and assemblymembers to write pro-housing legislation. The four-year-old organization helped write and pass Senate Bill 9, the California Housing Opportunity & More Efficiency (HOME) Act. This legislation re-zoned all of California’s single-family homes to allow duplexes and split lots. California YIMBY also co-authored, Assembly Bill 1401. That ended parking mandates for builders within a ½ mile of areas near transit. The organization has had multiple bills fail and has faced significant pushback from affordable housing advocates. We hope Mr. Resnikoff can outline the political landscape for housing policy in California at both the state and municipal levels, can identify his proposed solutions for the state’s housing problems, and can elaborate on tactics that are successful and unsuccessful in the policy making process.

1. What is California YIMBY and how did it become involved with writing pro-housing legislation with California legislators?
2. What have been the organization’s major successes and failures?
3. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
4. What are the biggest obstacles to expanding housing construction?
5. How might these obstacles be overcome?
6. Who has supported and opposed the legislation you have proposed? Why?
7. What kinds of people are active in your organization? What motivates them to get involved?
8. Of the legislation that has passed, what specific provisions are consistently removed?
9. What lessons can be learned from your experience in overcoming opposition?
10. Do you work with specific municipalities, cities, or towns? If not, why is the state more effective for passing pro-housing legislation?
11. Which measures in your opinion will produce the most housing units?
12. In summarizing the last 4 years of legislation work, what would you change about the first few bills that California YIMBY supported/wrote?
13. What are the challenges that non-profits face in the political process of supporting/writing legislation?
14. What next steps would you and your organization like to see to support affordable housing in California?

Rob Northoff, Policy Director, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO.

1st email sent on 1/31/23, 2nd email sent on 2/6/23, Called on 2/13/23.

The labor association was instrumental in passing Measure JJJ, a ballot measure that Los Angeles County passed in 2016. The measure required all Los Angeles counties to adopt a Transit Oriented Communities plan by 2017. It was written as an inclusionary zoning method, encouraging increased density, reduced FAR.
requirements, and lower parking spaces in exchange for a percentage of affordable housing. The AFL-CIO wrote a clause that mandated local union workers contracted for all projects. As policy director, Rob can elaborate on AFL-CIO’s level of involvement in writing the measure. He can describe his group’s ways of advocating for the measure, build support, and getting the measure passed. He can also explain why the specific contents of the measure were important, such as why they chose to support a measure that bypasses city councils and was implemented county-wide.

1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What are the biggest obstacles to expanding housing construction?
3. How might these obstacles be overcome?
4. Why did your organization support a ballot measure as opposed to working with county and/or state legislators?
5. Who have been the biggest opponents/obstacles to crafting inclusionary and TOC oriented up-zoning?
6. What obstacles did you face getting measure JJJ on the ballot? Funding issues? What kind of political support did you have?
7. Who are the AFL-CIO’s biggest allies?
8. What language/mandates did you wish was included in measure JJJ? What is the measure missing if anything?
9. How did you market the measure to the public to ensure voter support? What are the best strategies to get out a pro-housing message?
10. What are you and your organization working on in terms of future legislation/measures?
11. What motivates AFL-CIO to be involved with the legislative process? How are is the organization expanding its influence?
12. What other organizations/non-profits do you work with?

Jim Ries, Senior Vice President at Craig Lawson & Co.

Email- jries@craiglawson.com Contact (310)838-2400 ext 101

1st email sent on 1/31/23, 2nd email sent on 2/6/23, left a VM on 2/13/23

Craig Lawson is a land use consulting firm; Jim Ries has 30 years’ experience in development and land use entitlement. Jim’s expertise is in obtaining entitlements for affordable housing and density bonus projects. He has worked with non-profit developers like Skid Row Housing Trust, Mercy Housing and Adobe Communities. He has a master’s in urban planning and was quoted in multiple LA Times articles articulating issues surrounding regulation barriers for developers. He can detail how cities get past enforcement mechanisms to under-produce housing even with state-mandated targets. He understands developer obstacles. For example, he notes that LA cities regulatory policies force projects with 50 units or more to complete a full analysis under CEQA. The Environmental Impact reports can take 18 months and add $200,000 to $300,000 to the building process.

1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What are the biggest obstacles to expanding housing construction?
3. How might these obstacles be overcome?
4. Do you support past state-led bills and measures? Like Senate Bill 9, Measure JJJ, Senate Bill 35, and state-wide ADU requirements?
5. From a developer’s perspective, what are the biggest obstacles to increasing housing density/units?
6. Is it possible to develop denser housing by right?
7. If not, how do developers work with planning agencies or city councils when applying for building permits and variances? Do these collaborations tend to be successful? Why or why not?
8. What tools do cities/localities use to avoid building state-mandated housing?
9. Have state-led bills and measures helped?
10. What coalitions and alliances are the most helpful to build housing?
11. Does the public perceive developers as part of the solution to the housing crisis? If not, how can attitudes toward developers and denser development be changed?
12. Do you see developers fostering political alliances?
13. What are the most effective tools for building housing? State-wide zoning changes? Local cities zoning changes? Ballot measures?
14. If you could get anything passed, what would you suggest that will build more housing?

Severiano (Steve) Christian, Legislative Director for CA State Senator Scott Wiener (D-SF)

Severiano.Christian@sen.ca.gov

Completed w/ Mehgie & Tate

Senator Weiner wrote Senate Bill 35, the landmark law that enforced streamlining and expediting housing approvals in cities that are not meeting their housing goals. Senator Wiener’s office has worked on strengthening enforcement of Regional Housing Needs Assessment requirements from CA Housing and Community Development. They helped re-write “builder’s remedy” to be used as an enforcement tool. Steve and his team authored Senate Bill 50, legislation that was killed but started the pro-housing movement state-wide. Steve is Senator Wiener’s legislative director and his insight on failed bills and obstacles faced are key to my research.

1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What are the biggest obstacles to expanding housing construction?
3. How might these obstacles be overcome?
4. Who/what are your greatest tools to write/pass housing legislation? Non-profits, city council members, YIMBY cities?
5. Do your constituents support building housing? Why or why not? How do you educate your constituents to support more housing?
6. What are the biggest obstacles in passing legislation?
7. What lessons can be learned from killed bills/measures? Do you have to pare down legislative amendments due to political pressure?
8. How do you overcome opposition? Who are you most likely to hear from when introducing pro-housing legislation?
9. What bills/measure garner the most support?
10. Do you feel that the public supports pro-housing legislation? Who are your biggest detractors?
11. What techniques does your office use to garner support from the public, interest groups, etc.?
12. What measures have been the most effective? Has there been pushback from cities/municipalities on passed bills?
13. Is taking the political stance of being in favor of building more housing, a republican or democrat issue? Is it bipartisan?

David Garcia, Policy Director for the Terner Center for Housing Innovation, UC Berkeley. Contact-david.a.garcia@berkeley.edu.

Completed on 2/13/23

Dr. Garcia leads the Terner Center’s engagement with local, state, and federal housing policy. The center supports research-driven policy ideas, proposals, and papers. They have published studies covering housing regulations and land use in California. David is quoted in LA Times often. He lobbies for pro-housing bills and is an advocate for expanding of housing supply to lower housing costs. He has written about obstruction techniques used by localities throughout the state.

1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What are the biggest obstacles to expanding housing construction?
3. How might these obstacles be overcome?
4. What is the nature of the Terner Center? How is it funded and staffed? Who is its constituency? Does it collaborate with other groups, governments or organizations statewide?
5. How involved is the institute in lobbying and writing pro-housing legislation?
6. What in your opinion, are the biggest obstacles to passing state-mandated housing mandates and legislation that favors density?
7. Do you support measures that have recently passed like Senate Bill 9 (Duplex Bill), SB 35 (Housing unit requirements), ADU legislation, Assembly Bill 1401 (Parking mandates)?
8. What is your opinion on localism? What obstacles do exclusive cities put in place?
9. What can local planners do to counter NIMBYism?
10. How do you view the Terner Center’s role, as an academic institution, in the YIMBY fight?
11. What is the most effective tool for you? Interaction with state senators/assemblymembers, giving quotes to newspapers, working with non-profit institutions?

Paavo Monkkonen- Professor of Urban Planning and Public Policy at UCLA.

Contact: paavo@luskin.ucla.edu

Interview Completed

Dr. Monkkonen researches Localism and the politics of housing development. He has written about opposition to development in Los Angeles. Dr. Monkkonen is an expert on local land-use regulations, socio-economic segregation, and advises politicians on equity and housing.

1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What are the biggest obstacles to expanding housing construction?
3. How might these obstacles be overcome?
4. Who are the biggest forces that oppose the development of housing?
5. Who are the most important players (non-profits, politicians, neighborhood associations, planners) that educate and push for housing regulation change?
6. How does local land-use pressure work? What can local planners due to limit change limiting zoning requirements?
7. What is the best mechanism for counteracting localism?
8. What are the biggest obstacles to changing zoning? Should it be the regional and state role to mandate housing requirements?
9. Do you support measures that have recently passed like Senate Bill 9 (Duplex Bill), SB 35 (Housing unit requirements), ADU legislation, Assembly Bill 1401 (Parking mandates)?
10. What coalitions, non-profits, politicians are most successful at garnering support and passing pro-housing legislation?
11. In your opinion, should zoning have inclusionary housing requirements or remove arbitrary requirements (i.e., minimum lot requirements, parking spaces)?
12. In your opinion, what is the most effective way to passing pro-housing legislation?

Tina McKinnor- Assemblymember of California or her legislative lead on staff.

Meeting Booked w/ Sean Porter 2/20/23 at 1:30pm EST

Her office is focused on addressing housing, the homelessness crisis, and housing equity in Los Angeles. She recently co-authored and passed Assembly Bill 1743. This was part of a 38-bill housing package signed into law on September 28, 2002. AB 1743 requires local governments to report the amount of housing that was produced and occupied in the previous year.

1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What are the biggest obstacles to expanding housing construction?
3. How might these obstacles be overcome?
4. What tools do cities/localities use to avoid building state-mandated housing?
5. Do your constituents support building housing? Why or why not? How do you educate your constituents to support more housing?
6. Who do you reach out to when writing pro-housing legislation? Other politicians? Lobbying and interest groups?
7. How does your office package the benefits of housing bills? Helping with homelessness, providing workforce/affordable housing, lowering the cost of housing?
8. What are the biggest obstacles in getting a housing bill passed? What lessons have you learned from failed bills?
9. Do you support measures that have recently passed like Senate Bill 9 (Duplex Bill), SB 35 (Housing unit requirements), ADU legislation, Assembly Bill 1401 (Parking mandates)?
10. If you cannot pass a bill, what is the most problematic requirement that is asked/will be removed?
11. What tools are needed to enforce RHNA housing requirements at the local level?
12. Is taking the political stance of being in favor of building more housing, a republican or democrat issue? Is it bipartisan?
13. What lessons can be learned passing bills at the state level that can be used by local cities/towns/regional areas?

Laura Raymond, Director ACT LA- Alliance for Community Transit- Los Angeles (or contact Alfonso Directo Jr., the Advocacy Manager)- alfonso@allianceforcommunitytransit.org

lraymond@allianceforcommunitytransit.org

1st email sent on 1/31/23, 2nd email sent to Laura on 2/6/23. Alfonso said No, sent follow-up.

Ms. Raymond opposed Senate Bill 50 legislation, eventually leading to the bill’s demise according to the LA Times. ACT-LA authored Measure JJJ and the organization lobbies for dense, transit-oriented housing. They viewed SB 827 and SB 50 as undermining efforts for affordable housing requirements locally. After pulling support, SB 50 was killed in the state legislature. ACT LA helps RHNA determine target housing units for areas across Los Angeles. They organization suggested 456,643 units of affordable housing is needed between 2021-2029 in Los Angeles County.

1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What are the biggest obstacles to expanding housing construction?
3. How might these obstacles be overcome?
4. What opposition did you face in crafting and proposing Measure JJJ?
5. What worked in passing Measure JJJ?
6. ACT LA is primarily involved on the regional Los Angeles County level, what is your opinion of state led pro-housing legislation?
7. Who and what topics do you consider most important when proposing legislation? Homelessness, affordable housing, housing supply (etc.)?
8. What opposition did you face in crafting and proposing Measure JJJ?
9. Who are your biggest allies in writing/promoting legislation?
10. How do you overcome local opposition to inclusionary zoning changes?
11. Do you support the recent passing of Senate Bill 9, Senate Bill 35? What impact will they have on housing development?
12. In your opinion what is the difference between a state top-down approach and local measure/bills?
13. Do you work with politicians? If so, who? If not, why?

Julie Ross, the Chair of the Planning, Land Use & Development Committee of The Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa.

PLUC@ncwpdr.org

1st email sent on 1/31/23, 2nd email sent on 2/6/23, follow-up on 2/13/23

The Planning and Land use committee advises NCWP (Neighborhood Council of Westchester/Playa), a quasi-governmental agency created by City of Los Angeles Charter. NCWP gives a voice to those who live, work, or own property in Westchester, Playa Del Rey and Playa Vista. It was established in 1999, Julie liaisons with developers and lobbies on behalf of Westchester/Playa Del Rey residents. She oversaw the master plan amendment of Loyola Marymount University, a local college.
1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What policies does your group generally favor to address the housing problem?
3. What are the beliefs of your constituents about housing issues?
4. What is your opinion of local zoning versus state-led bills/measures to change housing requirements?
5. How does the SOHA support and/or oppose housing legislation?
6. Do you support measures that have recently passed like Senate Bill 9 (Duplex Bill), SB 35 (Housing unit requirements), ADU legislation, Assembly Bill 1401 (Parking mandates)?
7. What is the mechanism for helping and making the community aware of zoning changes/ potential housing legislation?
8. Do you work with politicians, non-profits, city council members? If so, how?
9. What are the biggest obstacles that SOHA faces in having your collective voice heard?
10. Do you have examples of developments that overreached, were stopped because of not compiling with housing legislation?
11. What are the most effective tools for advocating your positions? Social media, newspaper articles, direct political representative interaction?
12. What housing legislation changes does the SOHA and Sherman Oaks community support?
Mr. Lopez and Mr. Coleman works in the Zoning Integration Program. They both head units that are part of a comprehensive Zoning Code revision for 35 communities in Los Angeles. They are re-writing zoning laws to focus on physical design of building instead of prohibiting incompatible uses.

1. Who are the major players in making housing policy and what are their positions?
2. What policies does your group generally favor to address the housing problem?
3. What are the beliefs of your constituents about housing issues?
4. What is your opinion of local zoning versus state-led bills/measures to change housing requirements?
5. Do you support measures that have recently passed at the state-level like Senate Bill 9 (Duplex Bill), SB 35 (Housing unit requirements), ADU legislation, Assembly Bill 1401 (Parking mandates)?
6. Do you and your department work with politicians, non-profits, city council members? If so, how?
7. How do you and your department interact with communities when introducing and reforming zoning?
8. Who are the biggest opposing forces when introducing new zoning in communities?
9. How do you market and discuss changing zoning laws to focus on design as opposed to restrictions? What is your gauge of public understanding of zoning?
10. What is the goal of the reformed zoning integration program? Have you needed or used political support?
11. Will the program help close the housing gap in Los Angeles? What would you recommend stimulating the building of more housing units?
Appendix C
IRB Exempt Consent Form

Information about the Research Study
Clemson University
Politics, Players, and Legislation in the California Housing Crisis

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Dr. Eric A. Morris is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Morris is a Professor of City and Regional Planning at Clemson University. He is conducting the study with Andy Daly. Mr. Daly is a master’s degree student at Clemson and this project is his master’s degree thesis. Mr. Daly is Dr. Morris’s student and will be completing the research under Dr. Morris’s supervision.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this research is to study the politics surrounding California’s housing shortage and particularly potential solutions for it. This includes understanding 1) the nature of the problem, including how political process surrounding housing in California works today; 2) determining possible solutions for the problem from the perspectives of varied stakeholders; 3) identifying who the main interest groups surrounding housing in California are, what their positions on the issues are, and how they participate in the policy process; and 4) discovering the prescriptions of different players in the housing policy arena for moving housing policy forward in the state and nation.

Voluntary Consent: Participation is voluntary, and you have the option to not participate.

Activities and Procedures: We have identified you as an important participant in California housing policy making. Your part in the study will be to provide expert testimony regarding the housing crisis in California, how the political process surrounding housing in the state works, and your ideas about how the crisis might be successfully resolved, particularly through the use of public policy. You might comment on legislation and regulations you might think appropriate, your perspective on the political landscape and challenges facing crafting successful housing policies in California, your thoughts about how these challenges might be surmounted, etc.

We will conduct an interview with you on these issues. Note that we are focusing on your opinions about the political landscape and policy making process, and don’t wish to focus on your specific actions or personal participation in the process.

The interview will be on Zoom and will be recorded so we can accurately reproduce your thoughts and opinions. We will destroy your recording upon completion of the research process.

Participation Time: We anticipate the interview lasting about 30 to 40 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts: We have identified you because you are a public figure with expertise in the housing process in California, and thus commonly discuss your thoughts on this issue in the public arena. However, it is possible that ideas or opinions you state could generate controversy that may harm you. Also, it is possible that you may disclose sensitive information about the past behavior of yourself or others that could potentially harm you or your reputation. To minimize these risks, we stress that we will not be interviewing you directly about your participation in the political process, but your opinions about that process. We encourage you to not disclose any sensitive information beyond what is needed to give us your opinions, and to not express opinions that may result in any sort of harm to yourself or others. We have no desire to cause embarrassment or harm to study participants and have no interest in publishing any information that we believe is of a compromising nature. We will also be destroying the recordings of the interviews upon completion of the research process.
Possible Benefits: You may not benefit directly for taking part in this study. However, you will be contributing to the body of knowledge about the pressing problem of housing in California, and your thoughts and ideas might help to generate solutions for housing policy problems in the state and nation.

AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING AND PHOTOGRAPHS

The interview will be conducted on Zoom. To ensure that participants’ ideas are faithfully reflected in the research, these interviews will be recorded. The recording will be stored on a single computer and back-up hard drive. The recording will be analyzed using qualitative data analysis software. We will erase the recordings upon completion of the research process.

EQUIPMENT AND DEVICES THAT WILL BE USED IN RESEARCH STUDY

We will be using a MacBook computer to conduct and record the interviews using Zoom software. We will be using a Seagate backup portable hard drive.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The primary purpose of the study is to gather data for the completion of Mr. Daly’s Master’s thesis at Clemson. It is also possible that the results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications or educational presentations.

The interviews will be private: participants will be interviewed individually by Mr. Daly alone. There need be no other observers for the interview unless the participant wishes to have others present.

The interviews will be recorded. Only Mr. Daly and Dr. Morris will have access to those recordings. They will be stored on Mr. Daly’s hard drive, Mr. Daly’s Seagate backup portable drive. The recordings will be erased at the end of the research project.

It is important that the research products identify you since your role in the political process is important in understanding your perspective. However, as noted above we do not have any desire to collect information about you and your role in the process that might in any way harm you. We will focus on your opinions about public policy issues, not your own personal behavior or role in the process.

Identifiable information collected during the study will be retained for 1 year but will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

HEALTH RESOURCES

If taking part in this study caused any discomfort, remind you of negative situations or experiences, or if you just need to connect with someone, consider the following confidential resources:

- Mental Health America of Greenville County’s CRISIS line: (864) 273-8255. Free, 24/7 crisis phone line.
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline Chat: suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat, free chat line available 24/7
- I Am Alive: iamalive.org, free crisis chat line available 24/7
- Crisis Text Line: Text “Tigers” to 741-741. Free, Confidential, 24/7; Crisistextline.org
- National Sexual Assault Online Hotline: https://hotline.rainn.org/online, free online chat line available 24/7
- Contact a mental health professional of your choice, at your own expense.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. The Clemson IRB will
not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study-related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Eric A. Morris at emorri7@clemson.edu and/or Andy Daly at (310)994-4566 or awdaly@clemson.edu.

CONSENT

By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.