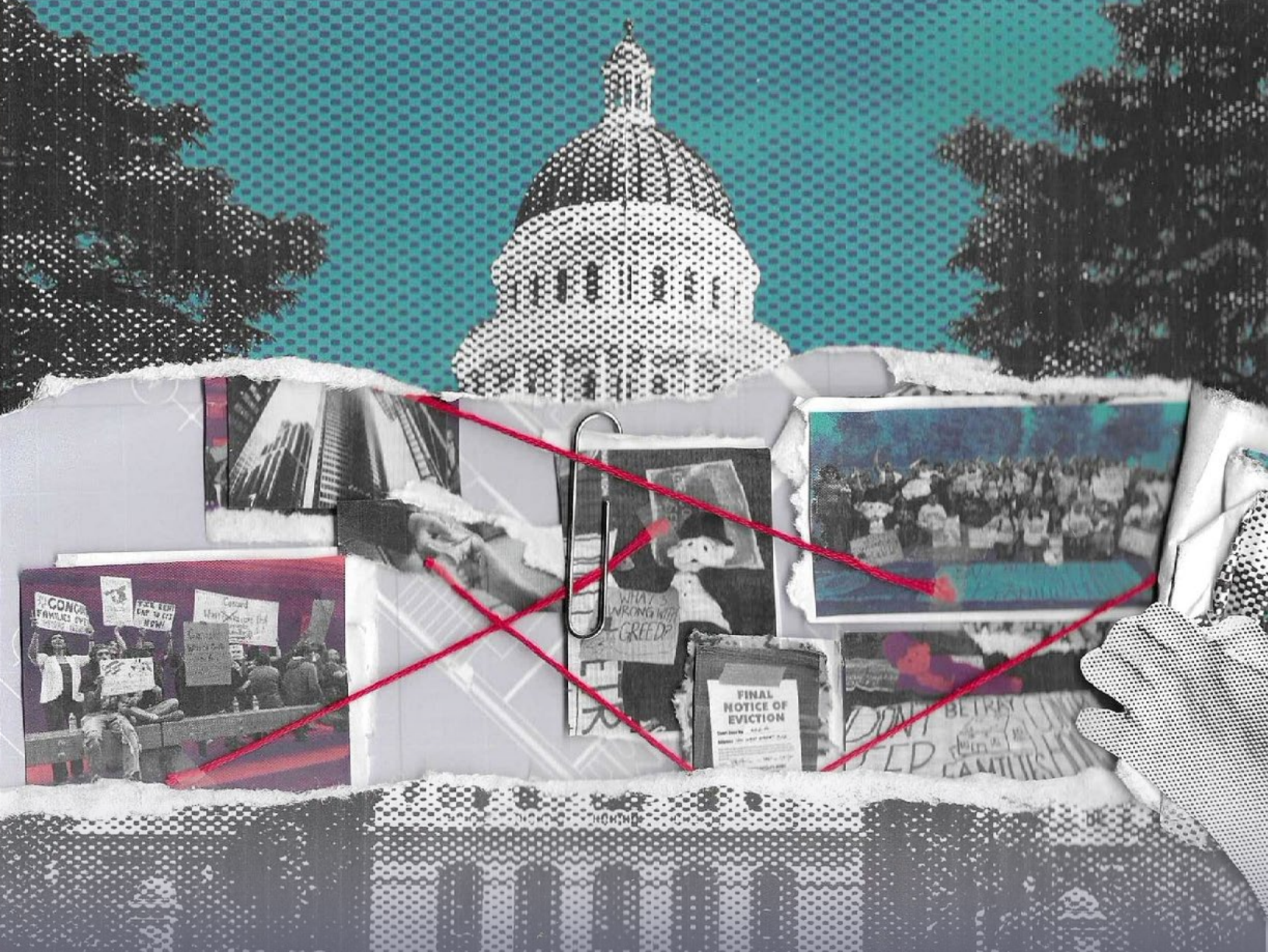




THE HIDDEN HEIST **CALIFORNIA**

***The California Apartment Association's
Attacks on Local Rent Stabilization***



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INTRODUCTION

State Bans and the Rise of Corporate Power

Communities across the U.S. today face growing threats to our physical, environmental, and economic survival, along with increasingly brazen corporate and authoritarian power grabs. While the second Trump regime has pulled back the curtain on egregious levels of corporate and billionaire control over our democracy, decades of “business as usual” corporate interference (in both red and blue states) got us here. Long before Trump entered office for a second term, corporations have worked through industry groups to covertly buy, bully, and bamboozle lawmakers and the American public in order to rig the rules of our economy and democracy to line their pockets — while they hide in plain sight. And as scholars have noted, the deeply unequal economic conditions that corporations have shaped and continue to benefit from in our country are essential conditions enabling authoritarianism to take root.¹

An important but largely invisible piece of the corporate quest to control American homes, workplaces, and democracy has been the rise of state laws — pushed by corporations and their lobbyists — that prevent communities from passing local policies protecting us at work, at home, and in our neighborhoods in the face of corporate greed. Through the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and industry lobbying groups, corporations have pushed these sweeping state bans — also referred to as “preemption” in some spaces — in all 50 states.² These corporate-driven state bans have grown at a rapid scale in recent years,³ undermining democracy and blocking local leaders and residents from working together to pass policies addressing basic needs for working families. Under state bans, essential protections like reasonable caps on rent increases, paid sick leave protections, incentives for affordable housing, and higher minimum wages have been stolen from millions of people.⁴

Long before Trump entered office for a second term, corporations have worked through industry groups to covertly buy, bully, and bamboozle lawmakers and the American public in order to rig the rules of our economy and democracy to line their pockets — while they hide in plain sight.



State bans have their roots in a white supremacist history, in which Southern white elites used state laws to suppress the political power and freedoms of Black people and thwart local efforts to advance more participatory, multiracial democracy.⁵ And this legacy continues in the racialized impacts of state bans today. Corporate-driven state bans harm the health and wellbeing of working people — especially working class communities of color — in myriad ways.⁶ The case studies in this report focus on state bans blocking local housing and workplace protections, which have disproportionately impacted communities of color, women, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, and disabled people.⁷ And increasingly, ideologically driven politicians, their corporate allies, and billionaire donors are pushing state bans that overtly target the safety and fundamental freedoms of all of these groups in ever-more oppressive ways.⁸

Corporations have also used state bans — and the arena of state government — to test tactics they are now unleashing at the federal level to assert dangerous levels of control over our democracy while demolishing checks on their power and profit.⁹ Understanding this stealth strategy of corporate power — including the corporate actors behind these bans, the tactics they use, and how these bans have blocked our freedoms and derailed our democracy — is critical to fighting back against the corporate-backed authoritarianism harming us all.

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CALIFORNIA AS GROUND ZERO FOR THE CORPORATE-DRIVEN HOUSING CRISIS

There are few places where corporate control is felt more acutely than in housing. Corporate tactics to solidify control over housing and housing policy across the country have driven escalating rents, deteriorating housing conditions, and waves of evictions,¹¹ especially over the past six years.¹² Thirty-three states ban local rent stabilization.¹³ Meanwhile, corporate talking points against caps on rent increases and tenant protections are often treated as fact and parroted by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle to justify state bans and prevent communities from passing sorely needed local housing solutions.¹⁴

And in city after city, debates about housing scarcity and how to increase supply obscure the reality that corporate landlords, private equity firms, and other corporate real estate interests have very often manufactured scarcity and driven escalating affordability crises that they profit from at every step of the way. They buy up available stock to create luxury housing in gentrifying neighborhoods or short-term housing for tourists.¹⁵ They use algorithmic tools that often raise rates far beyond inflation.¹⁶ And they evict tenants in favor of higher paying residents.¹⁷ State bans on rent stabilization and other local solutions to ensure affordability and protect tenants have been a key strategy for corporate landlords to amass escalating profit and power. And these bans perpetuate a cycle of crisis to the benefit of corporate returns, while communities suffer enormously.¹⁸

In California, there are more transnational, Fortune 500 corporations, including tech corporations like Apple, Alphabet, Meta, Uber, and Nvidia, headquartered in the state than anywhere else in the country.¹⁹ The presence and expansion of major tech corporations in particular have contributed to the state's stark levels of income and wealth inequality,²⁰ along with soaring housing costs in tech-dominated cities.²¹ While the state's major cities have faced famously high housing costs for years, the tactics of massive corporate landlords²² have spread soaring rent hikes from major urban centers into outlying towns and suburbs like Concord²³ and Salinas.²⁴

The California Apartment Association (CAA) has been a key architect of this crisis for decades, using a suite of buy, bully, bamboozle tactics to block nearly every attempt to strengthen tenant protections and rent stabilization at

WHAT ARE STATE BANS?

State laws — often pushed by corporations, their industry groups, and lobbyists — that prevent local communities from passing policies that create essential protections for working people in one or more issue area. Referred to as “preemption” in some spaces, state bans have become a tried and true strategy of the corporate deregulation agenda by dismantling existing local policies that check their power and profit — like local minimum wage ordinances — and blocking future ones from taking effect. Bans may 1) block communities from setting local standards that go beyond state law on a specific issue; 2) put strict limitations on how communities can set standards on a specific issue, or which aspects of the issue they can regulate at the local level; or 3) block communities from setting local standards on a specific issue, even when no state standard exists — thus shutting communities out of protections entirely (beyond the bare minimum of what is required by federal law).

State bans now exist in all 50 states, including some form of affordable housing or workers' rights related ban.¹⁰ We define these bans as:

- ⚡ **Affordable housing bans:** any state bans that constrain communities' ability to pass local policies that support access to affordable housing — like rent stabilization, just cause eviction protections, and incentives for affordable housing.
- ⚡ **Workers' rights bans:** any state bans that constrain local communities' ability to pass policies that set baseline standards for working people — like minimum wage ordinances, paid leave requirements, and fair scheduling policies.

the state level. In recent years, the California Apartment Association has extended their playbook to the local level, working with their members and allies like the California Association of Realtors to buy city council races and ballot measure campaigns, bully tenant advocates, and bamboozle councilmembers and voters in order to block attempts to set stronger precedents at the local level.



COSTA-HAWKINS: CALIFORNIA'S RENT STABILIZATION BAN

Driven by heavy landlord and real estate lobbying via the California Apartment Association (CAA) and California Association of Realtors (CAR), California's legislature enacted the Costa-Hawkins (CH) Rental Housing Act in 1995. Under CH, there can be no caps on rent increases for any single-family rental home, condominium, or apartment in buildings constructed after 1995.²⁵ In cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland where rent stabilization had already been enacted before CH, the ban extends all the way back to the year the local ordinance took effect, meaning: all units built in Los Angeles after 1978 are exempt from the city's rent stabilization ordinance; all units built in San Francisco and San Jose after 1979 are exempt; and all units built in Oakland after 1983 are exempt, effectively punishing those early adopter cities.²⁶

While dozens of local communities have elected to stabilize rents in California,²⁷ CH means that a third of the state's renters²⁸ — and up to a half in some suburban cities²⁹ — are excluded from these protections simply because they rent single-family homes. Meanwhile, California has the most single-family rentals in the nation at 2.1 million units.³⁰ CH also bans vacancy control, preventing any regulation of the amount landlords can raise the rent when a new tenant occupies a unit.³¹ In other words, current tenants may be protected, if they live in an apartment in a multifamily building that is at least 30-50 years old. But when they move out, landlords can raise the rent to any amount they like.³² Landlords are thus incentivized to push out long-term low-income renters, displacing thousands of families every year.³³



Tenant and housing advocates later successfully organized for the Tenant Protection Act (TPA) of 2019 (AB 1482), a temporary statewide measure, in effect from 2020-2030, to limit annual rent increases to no more than 5% plus the local inflation rate, or 10%, whichever is lower.³⁴ While the TPA covers many units left out of local rent stabilization ordinances under CH and provides a much-needed safeguard to renters living in covered units, it does not cover most single family homes³⁵ or include vacancy control. After initially working to defeat the bill, the California Apartment Association pivoted to pushing for amendments that diluted the impact of the bill.³⁶ They then treated it as an effective way to diffuse efforts to establish local rent stabilization. The association touted the bill's "indirect political benefits" to its members, noting "with a statewide annually adjusted rent cap in place, tenant activists and progressive city councils and county boards may be less likely to seek their own rent stabilization measures."³⁷

THE HIGH HEALTH COSTS OF CALIFORNIA'S HOUSING CRISIS

In California, vast wage inequalities driven by the tech industry³⁸ and the pernicious dominance of corporate landlords over housing policy at the state and local level have extended the long-standing housing crisis of California's major cities into smaller cities and towns. In communities like Concord and Vallejo, as much as two thirds of renter households are cost burdened.³⁹ Statewide, rents are among the highest in the nation.⁴⁰ Six of the twenty least affordable cities globally are located in California.⁴¹ And as a result of Costa-Hawkins, an estimated 2.5 million households (or over 40% of California's renting households) have been locked out of rent stabilization,⁴² contributing to an escalating affordability and displacement crisis. With a growing number of middle and low-income residents being displaced out of urban centers and further from work, there are more super commuters (or those who commute at least 90 minutes one-way to work) than anywhere else in the country.⁴³ In California, the majority of renters (over 3 million households) are cost burdened, meaning more than 30% of their income goes towards rental housing costs, and nearly one-third (over 1.5 million households) are severely cost burdened, with more than 50% of their income going towards rental housing costs.⁴⁴ Of the nation's 771,500 people experiencing homelessness, over 24% are located in California.⁴⁵

The health impacts of rising rents, soaring evictions, displacement and homelessness are immense. Housing cost burden forces residents into impossible trade-offs, as they struggle to afford food, transportation, childcare, and doctor's visits while keeping a roof overhead. A large body of research links housing cost burden to overcrowding; lower housing and neighborhood quality; exposure to harmful pollutants, toxins, and allergens; increased anxiety, financial stress and emotional strain; and lower educational attainment for children.⁴⁶ When rising rents displace residents out of their longtime neighborhoods, they may face worsening health due to loss of critical support networks and places of care, increased commutes, and stress.⁴⁷

And when landlords turn to eviction if tenants struggle to pay rent, a cascade of health consequences follows for entire families.⁴⁸ The associations between eviction and poor health outcomes have been well documented;⁴⁹ even the threat of eviction results in worsening physical health and increased rates of depression and suicide.⁵⁰ A recent study found that rising rents and evictions are linked to increased risk of mortality and premature death.⁵¹ And if evicted residents have nowhere to go—as a record number of Californians are experiencing⁵²—homelessness is devastating for both physical and mental health. Without the most basic of human needs, new health problems emerge and existing ones worsen.⁵³

THE CALIFORNIA VILLAINS

The national industry groups behind state bans in California:

NATIONAL APARTMENT ASSOCIATION

The National Apartment Association (NAA, parent organization to the California Apartment Association) is the primary voice of the corporate landlord lobby, with some of the country's largest multifamily corporate owners driving the agenda of the national association and its state affiliates. Representatives from Greystar, for example, hold three seats on the national association's board⁵⁴ and sit on multiple other state Apartment Association boards.⁵⁵ Major corporate landlords like Blackstone and its subsidiaries,⁵⁶ Essex Property Trust, and Avalon Bay Communities have collectively sent millions to power the association's affiliate campaigns to defeat stronger rent stabilization and tenant protection policies in California.⁵⁷ And the Apartment Association's state chapters have proudly touted their role in preserving corporate-driven bans and beating back local tenant protections.⁵⁸ Through its buy, bully, bamboozle tactics, the National Apartment Association and its state affiliates have ensured corporate members can continue cashing in on the escalating housing crises they contribute to in states like Colorado,⁵⁹ Tennessee,⁶⁰ and California — as discussed in this report.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS

The National Association of Realtors (NAR, parent organization to the California Association of Realtors) has combatted rent stabilization on residential and commercial properties in states across the country, while rallying its state and local affiliates to do the same.⁶¹ Its leadership team includes representatives from major real estate brokerage firms like Century 21 and Realty ONE Group.⁶² The National Association of Realtors lobbies against tenant protections,⁶³ opposes the regulation of short-term rentals,⁶⁴ and rails against the "expan[sion] of the authority of local governments" to provide oversight on property owners.⁶⁵ Its state chapters run well-funded political action committees that have used buy tactics to influence elections and lawmakers in states like Colorado,⁶⁶ Tennessee,⁶⁷ and California — as discussed in this report.

THE CORPORATE PLAYBOOK: BUY, BULLY, BAMBOOZLE

THE TACTICS CORPORATIONS USE TO PUSH STATE BANS FALL INTO THREE PRIMARY BUCKETS. OFTEN, CORPORATIONS USE A COMBINATION OF ALL THREE:



BUY

Corporations pour funds into amassing political power over lawmakers and voters — like writing campaign checks and hiring pricey lobbyists — and leverage this influence to ban policies that protect community wellbeing.



BULLY

Corporations use legal, economic, and other threats — like lawsuits, raising prices, or leaving town — to pressure elected officials and community members into banning policies that hold them accountable.



BAMBOOZLE

Corporations push misleading information — like political ads and talking points about how tenant protections hurt working people — to sway lawmakers and community members against policies that check corporate power.

The CAA's Buy, Bully, Bamboozle Tactics

LOCKING CALIFORNIANS OUT OF STRONGER STATE PROTECTIONS

Corporate landlords have used their full playbook of tactics - including massive buys and bamboozles by the California Apartment Association to turn legislators and voters against tenant protections,⁶⁸ and multiple community-driven measures to revoke Costa-Hawkins. In 2018, 2020 and 2024, housing advocates attempted to repeal Costa-Hawkins via ballot initiative.⁶⁹ The real estate industry mounted vast campaigns, spending almost \$300 million in opposition spending across all three ballot measure fights⁷⁰ to misinform voters and maintain rent structures that benefit the largest corporate landlords in the country.

And in 2024, voters were subjected to a constant onslaught of mailers and TV ads from the CAA blasting misleading information and in some cases, outright lies, about that year's repeal measure, Proposition 33.⁷¹ Corporate owners sounded a false alarm that passage would undo protections for renters already enshrined in law – an especially deceptive claim, given that the same actors fought tooth and nail against those very reforms.⁷² One notorious TV commercial⁷³ and broadside⁷⁴ featured UC Berkeley professor Ken Rosen (appearing as an independent expert despite deep ties to the real estate industry)⁷⁵ claiming that Prop 33 would repeal “more than 100” state housing laws, including affordable housing requirements and eviction protections, and would strip the attorney general of the ability to enforce housing laws.⁷⁶ Another claim was that Prop 33 would eliminate protections for seniors and veterans.⁷⁷ In fact, the measure did not contain any language about seniors and veterans, nor does the law it would have repealed. Drowning out accurate information with a constant barrage of landlord-driven propaganda⁷⁸ and out-and-out falsehoods, corporate landlords with the CAA massively undermined the democratic process and bamboozled cost-concerned Californians into voting against a critical solution for combating the affordability crisis.

As always, opponents argued that rent stabilization would hurt property owners' profits to the point where they can't afford to build.⁷⁹ It's a red herring: California courts (and the US Supreme Court)⁸⁰ have held that that rent stabilization policies must allow landlords to earn “a just and reasonable return on their property.”⁸¹ Meanwhile, California's biggest housing profiteers regularly boast to investors how they benefit from the ongoing affordable housing crisis. The private equity firm Blackstone, for example, is one of the nation's largest landlords, owning over 275,000 units of rental housing in the United States⁸² and at least 9,000 housing units in California alone.⁸³ The company is notorious for buying up single family homes and raising the rents exponentially.⁸⁴ Unsurprisingly, the company has contributed heavily to efforts to defeat local rent stabilization across California.⁸⁵ In 2023, Blackstone told its stockholders that a “shortage of housing has resulted in pricing power for rental housing assets.”⁸⁶ And on a 2024 investor call, Blackstone executives called it “good news” that multifamily and other real estate construction rates were down.⁸⁷

BUYING CITY COUNCILS AND LOCAL BALLOT MEASURE CAMPAIGNS, BULLYING ADVOCATES AND BAMBOOZLING LOCAL VOTERS

Having spent hundreds of millions to mislead voters about Costa-Hawkins, the corporate landlord and real estate industries have begun targeting what local control remains to regulate landlords and protect renters. While California is home to four of the ten most expensive large cities in the country for tenants,⁸⁸ the crisis extends to cities statewide. The California Apartment Association and its members and allies have shown a willingness to interfere with any California city that tries to pass tenant protections, no matter how small or outside the core of large metropolitan areas.⁸⁹ Corporate landlords, real estate interests, their lobbying groups and local members are committed to shutting down tenant rights not only in renter-heavy cities like Los Angeles and San Francisco, but anywhere residents and elected leaders have attempted to enact rent stabilization or other tenant protections. In recent years, the Association has unleashed its buy, bully, bamboozle tactics in communities like Concord, Salinas and Marin County, places where grassroots organizing may be swamped by the vast resources of corporate-backed industry groups. In turning its focus to these smaller markets, the Apartment Association is demonstrating its refusal to cede any ground to tenant rights movements in communities across California.

CONCORD

In March 2024, following an eight-year campaign by community groups to force the city to address corporate rent-hiking and tenant displacement,⁹⁰ the Concord City Council passed rent stabilization as well as eviction protections for most tenants.⁹¹ Despite strong opposition from the Apartment Association and local property owner associations,⁹² the Council voted to cap rent increases at 3% – or 60% of the yearly change in cost of living (known as the Consumer Price Index), whichever amount is less.⁹³ Area realtors quickly filed a petition to force a voter referendum on the ordinance, delaying its implementation. With the Apartment Association choosing to sit out a hurried 30-day drive to gain signatures,⁹⁴ the effort failed to make it to ballot, and the protections went into effect in April 2024.⁹⁵



The Apartment Association sprang into action, devoting financial and staff resources to dismantling the new ordinance. While the Association did not contribute directly to any City Council races in 2024, one of the organization's PACs, Golden State Voices United,⁹⁶ sponsored a series of attack mailers targeting councilmembers including Mayor Edi Birsan,⁹⁷ a champion of tenant protections, who lost his seat by just over 100 votes.⁹⁸ The Apartment Association received a financial boost from Silicon Valley-based Vasona Management. Vasona, by far the largest property owner and manager in Concord, reflects the consolidation of rental property ownership in the hands of outside corporate investors.⁹⁹ Vasona donated \$218,916 in 2024 to the Association across its issues committee, independent expenditure committee, and PAC.¹⁰⁰ Individuals employed by or connected to Vasona donated a total of \$4,999 to Birsan's opponent Pablo Benavente.¹⁰¹ Within weeks of taking his seat, Councilmember Benavente pushed to dramatically dilute Concord's tenant protection ordinance.¹⁰² In Concord, the Apartment Association has made full use of the bamboozle tactics it honed at the state level. When the City Council was first poised to pass tenant protections in 2024, the Association flooded homeowners with text messages that were filled with misleading statements about the ordinance. This text message campaign targeted all homeowners in the city, even though the majority of single-family homeowners would not be impacted by the ordinance in any way. In response to the Association's text campaign, the City sent an email stating: "staff has learned that misinformation about the ordinance is circulating within the community, and we want to clarify that single-family homes WILL NOT be subject to the proposed rent stabilization provisions."¹⁰³ Then before a public meeting in March 2025, the organization sent text messages that called upon residents to urge the City Council to "vote YES on Councilmember Pablo Benavente's proposal to cap Concord rents."¹⁰⁴ Again, this message was misleading: while the ordinance already capped rents at 3%, Councilmember Benavente's proposal would have actually increased the allowable rent cap to 7%.¹⁰⁵



In the face of the Apartment Association's misinformation onslaught, Concord renters and tenant advocates urged lawmakers to preserve the new protections, testifying to the extreme difficulties in locating affordable housing in the area and noting that escalating rents are a primary driver of poverty in California.¹⁰⁶ The Apartment Association, meanwhile, hired residents to pose as opponents at those public meetings,¹⁰⁷ and handed out "repeal rent stabilization" signs and t-shirts.¹⁰⁸ Disturbingly, renter advocates reported aggressive behavior on the part of paid protestors at one of these meetings, including a physical assault against a tenant activist; further, Concord police restricted access to the meeting for city residents and tenant activists, while facilitating entry for Apartment Association representatives and their paid supporters.¹⁰⁹ In March 2025 the Council voted three to two to weaken the reforms,¹¹⁰ increasing the rent increase cap from 3%, one of the strongest limits in the Bay Area, to a flat rate of 5%¹¹¹, one of the weakest.¹¹² This seemingly small change will cause the rent for an average-priced apartment in Concord to increase by an additional \$413 per month, or \$4,956 in a single year, over the course of the next five years — an amount that will greatly increase housing insecurity among low-wage workers.¹¹³ The new measure went into effect on May 22, 2025.¹¹⁴ The California Apartment Association heralded the "historic shift" in the region's housing policy, noting that "[r]arely do local governments revisit rent stabilization ordinances."¹¹⁵ Of course, California's corporate landlords are working to ensure that they do just that.

SALINAS & MARIN COUNTY

In September 2024, the Salinas City Council passed three ordinances to strengthen tenant anti-harassment protections, enact just cause eviction protections, and limit annual rent increases to 2.75%.¹¹⁶ The Council had engaged for over a year in a process of community engagement to study the issues of rent increases and resident displacement before unanimously passing the measures.¹¹⁷ That fall, the real estate industry jumped into local electoral politics. In the November 2024 election, five of seven Council seats were filled by new members, with three incumbents replaced.¹¹⁸ CAR had given the maximum donation of \$5,500¹¹⁹ to each of the new council members for their 2024 campaigns.¹²⁰ In May 2025,¹²¹ all five voted to repeal the rent stabilization and eviction protection ordinances.¹²² In celebrating the outcome, the California Apartment Association noted that the repeal vote "followed a major political turnover in Salinas."¹²³ Since this corporate-backed repeal, Salinas residents conducted a signature-gathering effort to delay the repeal and successfully put the issue on the November 2026 ballot.¹²⁴

In November 2022, Fairfax became the first town in Marin County and the smallest in California to pass rent stabilization,¹²⁵ approving a 5% cap¹²⁶ and other tenant protections in 2022.¹²⁷ Corporate property owners, managers and realtors aggressively campaigned for a ballot initiative to reverse those reforms. Measure 1's passage in 2024 repealed the town's Just Cause Eviction and Rent Stabilization Ordinances.¹²⁸ The language subsequently codified into law sounds more like election propaganda than typical legalese, bemoaning that the prior protections were passed "without any input from housing providers;" and, without evidence or citations, claiming that "according to local realtors," the 2022 measures had already "reduc[ed] the pool of buyers willing to own here."¹²⁹ Over half of the funds collected by the two big committees behind the referendum came directly from the California Apartment Association and CAR.¹³⁰

Ballot measures in San Anselmo and Larkspur that would have put in place new renter protections were defeated in November 2024. Larkspur voted no on Measure K, which would have capped annual rent increases at 3%.¹³¹ The PAC

formed to defeat the measure raised \$218,090, over 91% of which came from four players:

- ⚡ \$52,000 from the California Apartment Association
- ⚡ \$49,500 from Carmel Partners, a national real estate investment fund¹³²
- ⚡ \$49,000 from Prime Group, with more than \$15 billion in real estate assets nationwide¹³³
- ⚡ \$49,000 from Hummingbird Hill, one of the largest property owners in Larkspur¹³⁴

And in San Anselmo, the City Council passed a provisional ordinance in April 2024 to cap annual rent increases at 5%. Even though the ordinance would only go into effect if enough signatures were gathered to place the issue on the November ballot,¹³⁵ the owners of the 70-residence Parkside Apartments in San Anselmo immediately filed a lawsuit against the town saying it would deny property owners a “fair return.”¹³⁶ The signature effort was successful, but the resulting ballot measures N and O, to enact rent stabilization and eviction protections, respectively,¹³⁷ were defeated. The opposition PAC “Marin Residents Against Extra rent stabilization in San Anselmo” raised \$79,900 from only three groups:¹³⁸

- ⚡ \$49,900 from the California Association of Realtors PAC
- ⚡ \$20,000 from Parkside Apartments
- ⚡ \$10,000 from Marin Residents PAC, the CAR-dominated committee that also organized the Fairfax repeal campaign.

CONCLUSION

Californians are not alone in the struggle for an affordable and sustainable place to live amidst a tightening grip of corporate control over our housing options, the way our cities develop, and the income we have to afford a home. Across the country, people's basic needs are being pushed out of reach while our avenues for protecting ourselves and improving the conditions of our daily lives are increasingly restricted by corporate interference. And no matter where we live, the same set of corporations are very often working through state industry groups to buy, bully, and bamboozle our lawmakers into governing in ways that favor corporate profit over public good.¹³⁹

As our communities grapple with the transformative changes needed to truly push back on the corporate-authoritarian stranglehold on American life, exposing and disrupting the corporate playbook that got us here will be paramount. Indeed, state government has been — and continues to be — a pivotal testing ground for the current federal regime. After working for decades to push state bans on local policymaking and proclaiming the superiority of state government, corporations are now recycling the same buy, bully, and bamboozle tactics they've honed at the state level to push for federal bans on state regulations. Major tech corporations have spent at least \$100 million to influence federal lawmakers and argued against a "patchwork of regulation" in their efforts to block state governments from creating regulations to protect people from the myriad potential harms of AI,¹⁴⁰ for example. And many of the same corporations and billionaire CEOs in industry groups behind state bans across the country have unapologetically aligned with Trump's authoritarian agenda through contracts enabling mass surveillance, kidnappings and detentions by ICE,¹⁴¹ unquestioned rollbacks of DEI policies,¹⁴² and directly funding Trump's personal projects.¹⁴³

Collectively, we must expose the corporations that have plundered our lives and banned our freedom for too long. Familiarizing ourselves with their false claims, tired talking points, egregious buys, and dirty threats can equip us to better fight back. Corporations developed these tactics to curtail the power of everyday people. Yet we have seen that when communities organize across race, class, gender, and geography to defy corporate greed and authoritarian power grabs, we can push corporations to end their complicity in attacks on our communities and reverse the march towards autocracy. Together, we can make their playbook a losing game and build an economy and democracy that truly serves the people and our needs, not corporations and their greed.

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91. The ordinance included protections for no-cause evictions, such as compensating the tenant when the owner wants to move into the unit or when the unit needs substantial renovations. See City of Concord website, "Rent Stabilization and Just Cause for Eviction - Rent Program," www.cityofconcord.org/1172/Rent-Stabilization-and-Just-Cause-for-Ev.
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94. While the California Apartment Association put out materials condemning the Council for failing to adopt the proposal of then-Deputy Mayor Carlyn Obringer to bring the proposal to a referendum, the organization did not participate in gathering signatures for the petition, seemingly making the decision to revisit the measure with new Council members in place the next year. See Mike Nemeth, "Concord City Council passes rent stabilization law despite opposition," California Apartment Association, March 21, 2024, [caanet.org/concord-city-council-passes-rent-control-law-despite-opposition/](#); "Concord Letter 3-1," California Apartment Association, [caanet.org/u/2024/03/ConcordLetter3-1.pdf](#).
95. "Rent Stabilization and Just Cause for Eviction - Rent Program," City of Concord Website, [www.cityofconcord.org/1172/Rent-Stabilization-and-Just-Cause-for-Ev](#); Jennifer Wadsworth, "The ad offered a quick \$250. The job? Shilling for a bunch of landlords," San Francisco Standard, April 16, 2025, [https://sfstandard.com/2025/04/16/landlords-paid-activists-concord-rent-control/](#)
96. The CAA was the largest contributor to this PAC in 2024. See California Secretary of State, Cal-Access Search, [https://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/Campaign/Committees/Detail.aspx?id=1460317&session=2023&view=received](#)
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