

# Why Alhambra's Measure V is Necessary

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## The real losers behind Alhambra's reactionary dispute

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Alhambra's Measure V, if approved by voters this November, would limit the amount of money poured into its elections. It would implement donor limits of \$250 per person or entity and ban direct donations from developers, city contractors, and PACs. Donations are currently unlimited. It would also change the city's long-standing voting system that currently requires district-based candidates to win via city-wide vote.

The existing system is fraught. The amount of money that can be poured into elections by private advocacy groups dominates over any organic defense by the residents that comprise the majority. Combine this with the at-large voting system and you have a structure conducive to profiteers focused on a transactional city that can extract at will. Those with the deepest pockets who can profit from a spatially defined city catering to future, wealthier residents (i.e., real estate, finance, insurance, speculators, retailers) are best situated to game this system.

The fact is that the more affluent vote at higher rates than poorer people of color. There are reasons for this, such as scarcity of time for the working poor, and it is true that we can all do better to get out to vote. But it's unconscionable that the city exploits this by giving each voter four extra votes, amplifying this asymmetry to where it can permeate across the entire five-district city. Over time, it has allowed the few to reign over this majority minority, majority renter, and majority low income constituency. Measure V is needed to correct this, and has the potential for transformative change.

**Those organized opposing Measure V aren't advocating that everyone get out and vote. On the contrary, it's opposed to being stripped of the ability to cast multiple votes. "When you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression"**

Decades under the current system have enabled enough of city council and their co-opting beneficiaries the power and time to

establish such a thorough and enmeshed infrastructure that it can lull one to normal acceptance. The result is routine economic discrimination through regressive and trickle-down practices with detrimental effects extending beyond the vulnerable and into the environment and middle-class. Decision making is too often fait accompli with a "decide, deploy, and choreographed collaboration" tactic and where language is often used as a barrier in a city where about 70% of households speak a language other than English at home.

**The passage of Measure V is absolutely necessary to have any hope of unwinding this debacle. But it doesn't guarantee fair representation and a culture of inclusion. The corrupt practices of the past have affected the quality of life of neighborhoods. The loud reactionary blow-back is usually less concerned about true participatory planning and changing the status quo than it is that the status quo has not been working for them.** The strong protectionist contingency is enough to make one ill with the same deploy and defend tactic driven by their own biases. And these biases often exasperate problems that local government should not tolerate, no matter how loud the voice. This includes food scarcity, lack of shelter, racism, and an unsafe environment. Only public safety is addressed, and at 72% of the city budget is overblown. But the city neglects affordability and inclusion, whether it's a recently passed regressive sales tax for protecting property in the guise of "public safety" or exclusionary zoning with no affordable housing infrastructure. This perpetuates the scarcity afflicting too many, including that of social capital in this alternate, reactive power structure dominated by those unwilling to share. Asian groups with their own social circle, while large in numbers, are often excluded from civic engagement through boundaries of language and culture.

Even those considered "progressives" on city council have it backwards. Instead of thinking globally and acting locally, too often they think locally in the pejorative sense of parochialism and act globally in terms of performative ceremonials on national or global issues that amount to another voice in a sea or participation in mutual aid, both needed and admirable but arguably not the best use of their local power. It can appear to be "gains" through collaboration but often obscure the inequity. They are glad to fight economic and racial discrimination, as long as it's not in their backyard. While this is the privilege of the individual or special interest, it's not an option for any legitimate council member or civic group.

It's not enough for local government to say we are here and listening. It requires authentic outreach to enable participatory policy making and decision making. For the community to benefit from new development, our plurality demands multiple centers of power be recognized and included. We are still suffering from a marginalization of the majority through our corrupt system. There's no guarantee that will be fixed, especially if our leadership remains focused on moneyed interests, whether corporate or protectionist. It's important that we keep that in mind as we do the necessary work to enact Measure V and beyond.