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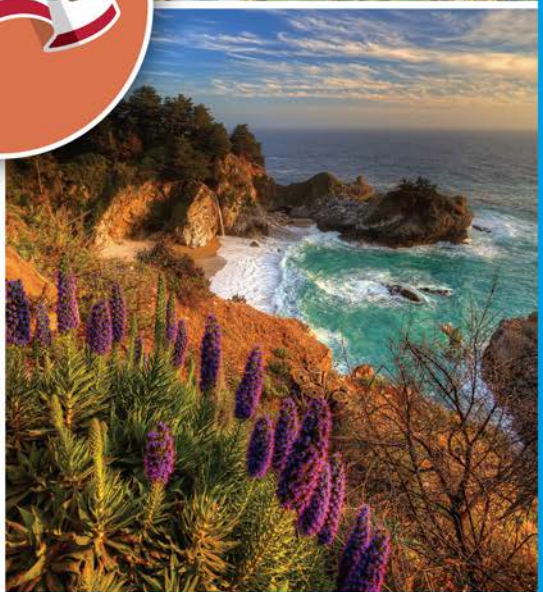
Fifteenth Edition

California Politics and Government

A Practical Approach

Larry N. Gerston | Mary Currin-Percival | Garrick Percival | Terry Christensen



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Gia Gerston, Peyton Holleran and Joe Gerston — spirited grandchildren who will forever keep their Zada young.
Dr. Martin Johnson — dear friend and mentor to Mary Currin-Percival and Garrick Percival who encouraged our teaching and research.
and
for our students.

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Preface

Imagine if you could be transported by a time machine back to 1990. That's a stretch not only because such devices don't exist but also because most of you weren't even born then! But that's when this book was first published. Compared to today's frenetic world, California then was a simple enough place. The state had 30 million residents, about 10 million people fewer than today. In California, the aviation industry produced military and commercial jets. General Motors also pumped out thousands of Chevrolets. Although droughts occasionally appeared, the state had enough water for its residents. In terms of race and ethnicity, California was 57 percent White, more than twice the percent of Latinxs, the second largest ethnic group. Large numbers of fruit and vegetable pickers from Mexico, commonly known as braceros, came and left the state routinely without incident, although those who came here permanently were treated with a barrage of anti-immigrant state laws. And, needless to say, there was no modern Internet, livestreaming, or texting.

Sound strange? It is to us, too.

Thirty years (and 14 editions) later, today's California is light years away from 1990. In place of a once-vibrant airplane manufacturing industry, the technology and social media sectors have become economic cornerstones for the state and nation. Tesla electric vehicles are now manufactured on the same site where General Motors once produced gas-guzzling Chevrolets. In present day California, droughts are longer and more threatening to the state's burgeoning population, as agricultural, urban, and environmental interests fiercely compete for water, or what is often described as "liquid gold." With respect to the state's demography, Latinxs now easily outnumber Whites in a state where no ethnic group comes close to having a majority. In recognition of its diversity, the legislature has passed numerous laws safeguarding the rights of racial minorities, women, and the LGBTQ community. These days, smartphones, laptops, and drones seem to be everywhere, but if you temporarily misplace yours, just ask Alexa!

Yes, California is a different place today and, in many vital ways, an exaggerated form of its former self. Consider that California has gained prominence for its million-dollar homes, yet has more poverty per capita than any of the other 49 states. More than twice as many patents have been issued to Californians than to those from any other state, yet the state ranks near the bottom in per capita student performance in public education. Agriculture still remains strong in California, but corporate farming makes it increasingly difficult for family farms to survive. It's a state virtually built on the concept of political reform and good government, except that more times than not special interests have manipulated changes made on behalf of the public into private gains. When measuring the state's accomplishments, California probably has as many "lasts" as "firsts," and that's part of what makes this place so intriguing.

Even now in our fifteenth edition, we continue to be amazed about the issues that dominate this state and the individuals who strive to deal with them. With each edition, our challenge has been to bring to the reader the ever-changing and fascinating stories that define California, while making sure that we explain the state's institutional fabric in a brief but compelling manner. This effort is no exception, given the COVID-19 pandemic that has rocked virtually every aspect of the state's existence from health tragedies to economic disarray. Still, we never tire of our endeavor, which is why we are pleased to present this edition. It's considerably different from our last edition and will doubtlessly be different from our next. That's California!

We have changed in one respect. Mary Currin-Percival and Garrick Percival, two valued colleagues at San Jose State University, have joined our team. The fact that they are part of the next generation allows us to better assess events and values with fresh contemporary eyes.

Many people have played a part in this exercise. Our colleagues in politics, the media, and elected office, as well as our fellow academics, have provided valuable counsel, insight, and criticism. Larry Gerston thanks his wife and in-house editor, Elisa, for her penchant for detail. Mary Currin-Percival and Garrick Percival thank their sons, Andrew and Ethan, for their love and support. We especially thank the following reviewers, whose comments have helped us prepare this edition: Herbert Gooch, California Lutheran University; George Gastil, San Diego State University; and Justin Levitt, Cal State Long Beach. As always, we continue to learn from our students, whose penetrating questions and observations inspire us to explore issues we might not have considered otherwise. Over the years, many have gone on to political careers in local, state, and federal offices and administrative positions, leaving us with the strong belief that California's best days are ahead.

Finally, we are indebted to the attentive team at Cengage, who managed production of the book. They include Lauren Gerrish, Product Manager; Sheila Moran, Managing Editor; Emily Hickey, Senior In-House Subject Matter Expert; Erika Hayden, Learning Designer; Sarah Cole, Senior Designer; Valerie Hartman, Senior Marketing Manager; Dana Edmunds, Senior Digital Delivery Lead; Product Assistant, Martina Umunna; and Manoj Kumar, Content Manager. Of course, we alone assume responsibility for the contents of the final product.

About the Authors

Courtesy of Larry N. Gerston

Larry N. Gerston, professor emeritus at San Jose State University, engages the political process as an author and an analyst. He has written 11 academic books in addition to *California Politics and Government: A Practical Approach*, including *Making Public Policy: From Conflict to Resolution* (1983); *Politics in the Golden State* (with Terry Christensen, 1984); *The Deregulated Society* (with Cynthia Fraleigh and Robert Schwab,1988); *American Government: Politics, Process and Policies* (1993); *Public Policy: Process and Principles (*1987); *Public Policymaking in a Democratic Society: A Guide to Civic Engagement* (2002); *Recall! California's Political Earthquake* (with Terry Christensen, 2004); *American Federalism: A Concise Introduction* (2007); *Confronting Reality: Ten Issues Threatening to Implode American Society and How We Can Fix It* (2009); *Not So Golden After All: The Rise and Fall of California* (2012); and *Reviving Citizen Engagement: Policies to Renew National Community* (2015). He has written more than 150 op-ed pieces for every major newspaper in California. Gerston is the on-air political analyst for NBC Bay Area television and KCBS radio. He speaks often on issues, such as civic engagement and political empowerment, and has authored four children's books.

Mary Currin-Percival is an associate professor of political science at San Jose State University. She earned her Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of California, Riverside in 2006. Her main areas of research are public opinion, political participation, and teaching and learning in political science. Her work has appeared in journals including *Journal of Political Science Education*, *PS:*

Political Science and Politics, *State and Local Government Review*, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *International Migration,* and *Newspaper Research Quarterly*. Her teaching interests include research methods, campaigns and elections, the presidency, politics and film, American and California government and politics, and campaign advertising. She also serves as the Director of the Institute for Public Affairs and Civic Engagement (IPACE) and for SJSU Votes! an on-campus voter registration, mobilization, and education initiative (www.sjsuvotes.org).


Courtesy of Mary Currin-Percival

Garrick Percival is associate professor and chair of the Political Science Department at San Jose State University. He earned his Ph.D. in political science at the University of California, Riverside in 2005. His work focuses on American politics, primarily the nexus between crime policy, racial politics, and inequality at the state and local levels of government. In 2015, he published a book titled *Smart on Crime: The Struggle to Build A Better American Penal System*. The book investigates the politics of the criminal justice reform movement and the promise and limits of prison reform in California and other U.S. states that, for a generation, pursued a "tough-on-crime" agenda. He is currently working on several research projects focused on local prosecutors and their relationship to California's deincarceration efforts. His work has appeared in *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, *Social Science Quarterly*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, and the *Policy Studies Journal*, among other outlets.


Courtesy of Garrick Percival

Terry Christensen is a San Jose State University professor emeritus of political science. He is the author or co-author of nine books. In addition to those co-authored with Larry Gerston, his works include *Local Politics: Governing at the Grassroots* (with Tom Hogen-Esch, 2006), and *Projecting Politics: Political Messages in American Films* (with Elizabeth Haas and Peter Haas, 2015). His experience in practical politics at the local level includes serving on numerous civic committees and commissions, advocating policy proposals, advising grassroots groups and advising and mentoring candidates for local office—many


Courtesy of Terry Christensen

of whom are his former students. He was the founding executive director of CommUniverCity San Jose (www.cucsj.org), a partnership between the City of San Jose, San Jose State University and adjacent neighborhoods through which hundreds of students learn about life and politics in their community through service projects proposed by neighborhood residents and supported by the city. He is also host and executive producer of *Valley Politics* (www.creatvsj.org/valley-politics/), a monthly television program focused on politics in San Jose and Silicon Valley.

Supplements for Instructors

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1

California's People, Economy, and Politics: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Learning Objectives

LO 1-1 Describe changes in California's population in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

LO 1-2 Discuss the rise and fall of California's nineteenth-century political machine.

LO 1-3 Explain how Progressive reforms shape California politics today.

LO 1-4 Summarize demographic change in the twentieth century and its impact today.

LO 1-5 Analyze the impacts of economic diversity and regional differences on California politics.

California. The very word invites endless adjectives. Massive. Splintered. Innovative. Paralyzed. Flashy. Quaint. Generous. Frugal. Fast-paced. Sluggish. Ask two people to describe California and you'll get three explanations—or more. That's because California is often defined in terms of one's experiences in the Golden State. The fact is that California fits all the descriptions just mentioned, and more. It's a state that almost defies description because of its many aspects that sometimes evolve, other times devolve, but rarely stay the same for very long. But

out of these many parts there is a whole, and that ever-changing entity can only be understood today by coming to terms with its past.

For most of its history, California has been at the cutting edge of social, economic, and demographic changes that are eventually experienced by other states. By size alone, California influences the rest of the country. With a population of nearly forty million, California is larger than many independent nations. With an economy that generated a gross domestic product (GDP) of $3.2 trillion in 2019, California would rank fifth in the world if it were a separate nation, larger than countries such as Brazil, France, and the United Kingdom. Although California's economy is large, it's also characterized by deep levels of inequality. Among the fifty states, California ranks seventh in millionaires, but it also has the highest supplemental poverty rate in the nation. Additionally, California is the most ethnically diverse state in the United States (and one of the most ethnically diverse places in the world).

The sheer size and complexity of California's economy and population make governing a challenge. And although much of California has thrived in recent years, the state's problems and challenges can also seem overwhelming: schools that are failing too many students, aging infrastructure (such as roads and water storage facilities), a mass shortage of affordable housing and skyrocketing homelessness, crushing poverty, drought and wildfires associated with climate change, and, most recently, the fight against the **COVID-19** pandemic. Government sometimes doesn't seem equipped to solve these problems. Political leaders come and go, some more concerned with partisan politics than public policy. Wealthy candidates and special interests are accused of "buying" elections and dominating the legislative process. Meanwhile, decisions on complex and sometimes obscure issues, ranging from taxes on fuel to rent control and living space for chickens, are delegated to the voters.

However confusing California politics may seem, it is serious business that affects us all. We can begin to understand California by examining its history, and some of the major social, political, and economic characteristics that help define it today.

From the First Californians to Statehood[1]

The first Californians were probably immigrants like the rest of us. Archaeologists believe that the ancestors of Native Americans crossed an ice or land bridge or traveled by sea from Asia to Alaska thousands of years ago, and then headed south. Europeans began exploring the California coast in the early 1500s, but colonization didn't start until 1769, when the Spanish established a string of missions and military outposts. At that time, the indigenous population of about three hundred thousand mostly lived near the coast.

Many of these natives were brought to the missions as Catholic converts and workers, but violence, European diseases, and the destruction of the native culture reduced their numbers to about one hundred thousand by 1849. Entire tribes were wiped out, and the Indian population continued to diminish throughout the

nineteenth century. Today, less than 1 percent of California's population is Native American, many of whom feel alienated from a society that has overwhelmed their peoples, cultures, and traditions. Poverty, a chronic condition in the past, has been alleviated somewhat by the development of casinos on native lands, a phenomenon that has also made some tribes major players in state politics.

Apart from building missions, the Spaniards did little to develop their faraway possession. Not much changed when Mexico (which included California) declared independence from Spain in 1822. A few thousand Mexicans quietly raised cattle on vast ranches and built small towns around central plazas.

Meanwhile, advocates of expansion in the United States coveted California's rich lands and access to the Pacific Ocean. When Mexico and the United States went to war over Texas in 1846, Yankee immigrants in California seized the moment and declared independence from Mexico. The United States won the war, and Mexico surrendered its claim to lands extending from Texas to California. By this time, foreigners already outnumbered Californians of Spanish or Mexican ancestry.

Gold was discovered in 1848, and soon after the '49ers started arriving in hordes. By 1852, the nonnative population grew to 264,000, up from 9,000 in 1846. Many came directly from Europe. The first Chinese people also arrived to work in the mines, which yielded more than a billion dollars' worth of gold in five years.

The new Californians soon took political action. A constitutional convention consisting of forty-eight delegates (only seven of whom were native Californians) assembled the **Constitution of 1849** by borrowing heavily from the constitutions of existing states; the convention requested statehood, which the U.S. Congress quickly granted. The constitutional structure of the new state approximated what exists today, with a two-house legislature; a supreme court; and an executive branch consisting of a governor, lieutenant governor, controller, attorney general, and superintendent of public instruction. The constitution also included a bill of rights, but only White males were allowed to vote. California's Chinese, African American, and Native American residents were soon prohibited by law from owning land, testifying in court, or attending public schools.

The voters approved the constitution, and San Jose became the first state capital. With housing in short supply, many newly elected legislators had to lodge in tents, and the primitive living conditions were exacerbated by heavy rain and flooding. The state capital soon moved on to Vallejo and Benicia, finally settling in 1854 in Sacramento—closer to the gold fields.

As the Gold Rush ended, a land rush began. Small homesteads were common in other states because of federal ownership and allocation of land, but California had been divided into huge tracts by Spanish and Mexican land grants. As early as 1870, just a few hundred men owned most of the farmland. Their ranches were the forerunners of the agribusiness corporations of today, and as the mainstay of the state's economy, they exercised even more clout than their modern successors.

In less than fifty years, California had belonged to three different nations. During the same period, its economy and population had changed dramatically as

hundreds of thousands of immigrants from all over the world came to claim their share of the "Golden State." The pattern of a rapidly evolving, multicultural polity was set.

Railroads, Machines, and Reform

Technology wrought the next transformation in the form of railroads. In 1861, Sacramento merchants led by Leland Stanford founded the company that would become the **Southern Pacific Railroad**. They persuaded Congress to provide millions of dollars in land grants and loan subsidies for a railroad linking California with the eastern United States, thus greatly expanding the market for California's products. Stanford became governor and used his influence to provide state assistance. Cities and counties also contributed—under the threat of being bypassed by the railroad. To obtain workers at cheap rates, the railroad builders imported fifteen thousand Chinese laborers.

When the transcontinental track was completed in 1869, the Southern Pacific expanded its system throughout the state by building new lines and buying up existing ones. The railroad crushed competitors by cutting shipping charges, and by the 1880s it had become the state's dominant transportation company, as well as its largest private landowner, with 11 percent of the entire state. With its business agents doubling as political representatives in almost every California city and county, the Southern Pacific soon developed a formidable political machine. "The Octopus," as novelist Frank Norris called the railroad,[2] placed allies in state and local offices through its control of both the Republican and Democratic parties. County tax assessors who were supported by the political machine set favorable tax rates for the railroad and its allies, while the machine-controlled legislature ensured a hands-off policy by state government.

People in small towns and rural areas who were unwilling to support the machine lost jobs and businesses. Some moved to cities, especially San Francisco, where manufacturing jobs were available. Chinese workers who had been brought to California to build the railroad also sought work in the cities when the railroad was completed. But when a depression in the 1870s made jobs scarce, the Chinese faced hostile treatment from those who came earlier. Irish immigrants, blaming economic difficulties on the Chinese and the railroad machine, became the core of a new political organization they christened the **Workingmen's Party**.

Meanwhile, small farmers who felt oppressed by the railroad united through the Grange movement. In 1879, the "Grangers" and the Workingmen's Party called California's second constitutional convention in hopes of breaking the railroad's hold on the state. The **Constitution of 1879** mandated regulation of railroads, utilities, banks, and corporations. An elected State Board of Equalization was set up to ensure the fairness of local tax assessments on railroads and their friends, as well as their enemies. The new constitution also prohibited the Chinese from owning land, voting, or working for state or local government.

The railroad soon reclaimed power, however, by taking control of the agencies that were created to regulate it. Nonetheless, efforts to regulate big business and

control racial relations became recurring themes in California life and politics, and much of the Constitution of 1879 remains intact today.

Growth fostered by the railroad eventually produced a new middle class of merchants, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and skilled workers who were not dependent on the railroad. They objected to the corrupt practices and favoritism of the railroad's machine, which they claimed was restraining economic development in their communities. This new middle class demanded honesty and competence, which they called "good government." In 1907, some of these crusaders established the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, a reform group within the Republican Party, and became part of the national Progressive movement. Their leader, **Hiram Johnson**, was elected governor in 1910; they also captured control of the state legislature.

To break the power of the machine, the **Progressives** introduced a wave of reforms that shape California politics to this day. Predictably, they created a new regulatory agency for the railroads and utilities, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Most of their reforms, however, were aimed at weakening the political parties as tools of bosses and machines. Instead of party bosses handpicking candidates at party conventions, the voters now were given the power to select their party's nominees for office in primary elections. Cross-filing further diluted party power by allowing candidates to file for and win the nominations of more than one political party. City and county elections were made "nonpartisan" by removing party labels from local ballots altogether. The Progressives also created a civil service system to select state employees on the basis of their qualifications rather than their political (machine) connections.

Finally, the Progressives introduced **direct democracy**, which allowed the voters to amend the constitution, create laws through initiatives, repeal laws through referenda, and recall (remove) elected officials before their terms expired. Supporters of an initiative, referendum, or recall must circulate petitions and collect a specified number of signatures of registered voters before it goes to the voters.

Like the Workingmen's Party before them, the Progressives were concerned about immigration. Antagonism toward recent Japanese immigrants (who numbered 72,000 by 1910) resulted in Progressive support for a ban on land ownership by "aliens" and the National Immigration Act of 1924, which halted Asian immigration. Other, more positive changes by the Progressives included giving women the right to vote, passing child labor and workers' compensation laws, and implementing conservation programs to protect natural resources.

As a result of these reforms, the railroad's political machine eventually died, although California's increasingly diverse economy also weakened the machine, as the emerging oil, automobile, and trucking industries gave the state alternative means of transportation and shipping. These and other growing industries ultimately restructured economic and political power in California.

The reform movement waned in the 1920s, but the Progressive legacy of weak political parties and direct democracy opened up California's politics to its citizens, as well as to powerful interest groups and individual candidates with strong personalities. A long and detailed constitution is also part of the legacy.

Direct democracy subsequently enabled voters and interest groups to amend the constitution, constantly adding to its length.

The Depression and World War II

California's population grew by more than two million in the 1920s (see Table 1.1). Many newcomers headed for Los Angeles, where employment opportunities in shipping, filmmaking, and manufacturing (of clothing, automobiles, and aircraft) abounded. Then came the Great Depression of the 1930s, which saw the unemployment rate soar from 3 percent in 1925 to 33 percent by 1933. Even so, more than a million people came to California in the 1930s, including thousands of poor White immigrants from the "dust bowl" of the drought-impacted Midwest. Immortalized by John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, rather than welcoming them, the state set up roadblocks and tried to ban indigent migrants. Many wandered through California's great Central Valley in search of work, displacing Mexicans—who earlier had supplanted the Chinese and Japanese—as farm workers. Racial antagonism ran high, and many Mexicans were arbitrarily sent back to Mexico. Labor unrest reached a crescendo in the early 1930s, as workers on farms, in canneries, and on the docks of San Francisco and Los Angeles fought for higher wages and an eight-hour workday.

The immigrants and union activists of this era changed California politics by voting for Democrats, thus challenging Republican dominance of the state. Thanks to the Depression and President Franklin Roosevelt's popular New Deal, Democrats become California's majority party in registration. Winning elections proved more difficult, however. The Democrats won the governorship in 1938, but their candidate, Culbert Olson, was the only Democratic winner between 1894 and 1958.

During the Depression, the state and federal governments invested heavily in California's future, building the Golden Gate Bridge (in just four years!) and the Central Valley Project, whose dams and canals brought water to the desert and reaffirmed agriculture as a mainstay of California's economy. With the onslaught

Table 1.1 California's Population Growth

Year	Population	Percentage of U.S. Population
1850	93,000	0.4
1900	1,485,000	2.0
1950	10,643,000	7.0
1970	20,039,000	9.8
1990	29,733,000	11.7
2010	37,253,956	12.0
2020 (est.)	39,512,223	12.0

Source: U.S. Census.

of World War II, the federal government spent $35 billion in California, creating five hundred thousand defense industry jobs. California's electronics and aircraft industries grew at phenomenal rates. The jobs brought new immigrants, including many African Americans, whose proportion of the state's population quadrupled during the 1940s.

Meanwhile, California's Japanese and Mexican American residents became victims of racial conflict. During the war, 120,000 Japanese Americans, suspected of loyalty to their ancestral homeland, were sent to prison camps (officially called "internment centers"). Antagonism toward Mexican Americans resulted in the Zoot Suit Riots in Los Angeles in 1943, when White sailors and police attacked Mexican Americans who were wearing the suits they favored, featuring long jackets with wide lapels, padded shoulders, and high-waisted, pegged pants.

Voters returned to the Republican fold as the economy revived. **Earl Warren**, one of a new breed of moderate Republicans, was elected governor in 1942, 1946, and 1950. Warren used cross-filing to win the nominations of both parties and staked out a relationship with the voters that he claimed was above party politics. A classic example of California's personality-oriented politics, Warren left the state in 1953 to become chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Growth, Change, and Political Turmoil

After Warren, the Republican Party fell into disarray due to infighting. Californians elected a Democratic governor, **Edmund G. "Pat" Brown**, and a Democratic majority in the state legislature in 1958. To prevent Republicans like Warren from taking advantage of cross-filing again, the state's new leaders quickly repealed that electoral device.

In control of both the governor's office and the legislature for the first time in the twentieth century, Democrats moved aggressively to develop the state's infrastructure. Completion of the massive California Water Project, construction of the state highway network, and creation of an unparalleled higher education system helped accommodate the growing population and stimulate the economy. Meanwhile, in the 1960s, Black and Latinx minorities became more assertive, pushing for civil rights, desegregation of schools, access to higher education, and improved treatment for California's predominantly Latinx farm workers.

The demands of minority groups alienated some White voters, however, and the Democratic programs were expensive. After loosening their purse strings during the eight-year tenure of Pat Brown, Californians became more cautious about the state's direction. Race riots precipitated by police brutality in Los Angeles, along with student unrest over the Vietnam War, also turned the voters against liberal Democrats such as Brown.

In 1966, Republican **Ronald Reagan** was elected governor; he moved the state in a more conservative direction before going on to serve as president. Still, during his tenure, Reagan signed into law the nation's (then) most liberal abortion policy along with a sizable tax hike. His successor as governor, Democrat **Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Jr.**, was the son of the earlier governor Brown and

a liberal on social issues. Like Reagan, however, the younger Brown led California away from spending on growth-inducing infrastructure, such as highways and schools. In 1978, the voters solidified this change with the watershed tax-cutting initiative, Proposition 13 (see Chapter 8). Although Democrats still outnumbered Republicans among registered voters, California elected Republican governors from 1982 to 1998 (see Chapter 7).

Democrat **Gray Davis** was elected in 1998 and reelected in 2002 despite voter concerns about an energy crisis, a recession, and a growing budget deficit. As a consequence of these crises and what some perceived as an arrogant attitude, Davis faced a rare recall election in 2003, becoming only the second governor in U.S. history to suffer that fate. The voters replaced him with Republican **Arnold Schwarzenegger**. Unpredictably to most observers, Schwarzenegger signed off on the nation's most progressive environmental legislation, confounding his fellow Republicans. Then, in 2010, former governor Jerry Brown was elected yet again in a dramatic comeback, making history as being both the youngest and the oldest governor of California. Brown was succeeded by Democrat **Gavin Newsom** in 2018. Newsom, the former mayor of San Francisco who served as California's lieutenant governor during Brown's last two terms, was elected while promising to pursue a more liberal policy platform than his more fiscally conservative predecessor. In his first year in office, Newsom was aided by the state's most robust economy in decades and big budget surplus. But, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, which forced him to roll back some of his more ambitious program initiatives. From the earliest days of Jerry Brown's second gubernatorial service through Newsom's first two years, large Democratic majorities in the state legislature have complemented their Democratic gubernatorial counterparts.

Meanwhile, the voters have become increasingly involved in policy making via initiatives, referenda (see Chapter 2), and **constitutional amendments**, the latter of which can be placed on the ballot by a two-thirds vote of the state legislature or by citizen petition and which require voter approval. In contrast to the U.S. Constitution, which has been amended only twenty-seven times, California's constitution of 1879 has been amended more than five hundred times, mostly because of the relative ease of doing so.

All through these years, the state's population continued to swell, outpacing most other states so much that the California delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives now numbers fifty-three—more than twenty-one other states combined. Much of this growth was the result of a new wave of immigrants facilitated by more flexible national immigration laws during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Immigration from Asia, Mexico, and Latin America increased greatly over this period. For example, about 85 percent of the six million newcomers and births in California in the 1980s were Asian, Latinx, or Black. Population growth slowed beginning in the 1990s. After years of rising housing and living costs that put a strain on many families' pocketbooks, 2019 actually saw more people leave California than arrive from other states. This exodus may or may not continue, but California's population has nonetheless continued to grow as a result of births and immigration from abroad. In 1990, non-Latinx Whites made up 57 percent of the state's population; by 2018, they were 36 percent.

Constantly increasing diversity enlivened California's culture and provided a steady flow of new workers, but it also increased social tensions. Some affluent Californians retreated to gated communities; others fled the state. Racial conflict broke out between gangs on the streets and in prisons. As in difficult economic times throughout California history, many Californians blamed immigrants, especially those who were here illegally, for their problems during the recession of the early 1990s. A series of ballot measures raised divisive race-related issues such as illegal immigration, bilingualism, and affirmative action.

California Today

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, if California were an independent nation, its economy would rank fifth in the world, with an annual GDP of $3.2 trillion. Much of the state's strength stems from its economic diversity. The elements of this diversity also constitute powerful political forces in state politics.

Half of California—mostly desert and mountains—is owned by the state and federal governments. Outside the cities, a few big corporations control much of the state's rich farmlands. These enormous agribusinesses make California the nation's leading farm state, with more than 77,500 farms producing more than four hundred commodities, including nearly half of the vegetables, fruits, and nuts and 20 percent of the dairy products consumed nationally. Grapes and wine are also top products, with thousands of growers and nearly four thousand wineries—nearly half of all the wineries in the United States.

State politics affects this huge economic force in many ways, but most notably in labor relations, environmental regulation, and water supply. Farmers and their employees have battled for decades over issues ranging from wages to worker safety. Beginning in the 1960s, under the leadership of Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers union, laborers organized. Supported by public boycotts of certain farm products, they achieved some improvements in working conditions, but the struggle continues today. California's agricultural industry is also caught up in environmental issues, including pesticide use and water pollution. The biggest issue, however, is water—or the lack of it. Most of California's cities and farms must import water from other parts of the state. Thanks to government subsidies, farmers claim 80 percent of the state's water supply at prices so low that they have been slow to improve inefficient irrigation systems. Meanwhile, the growth of urban areas is limited by water supplies. A prolonged drought between 2011 and 2017 hit both farmers and city dwellers hard, with lost crops in some places and rationing or penalties for wasting water in others. Today, with agricultural and urban interests in conflict, water policy is at the forefront of California politics, as it has been so often in the past.

Agriculture is big business, but many more Californians work in manufacturing, especially in the aerospace, defense, and high-tech industries. Employment in manufacturing, however, has declined in California in recent years, especially after the federal government reduced military and defense spending in the 1990s when the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union brought an end

to the Cold War. Jobs in California shifted to postindustrial occupations, such as retail sales, tourism, and services, which usually pay less than manufacturing jobs. Government policies on growth, the environment, and taxation affect all of these employment sectors, and all suffer when any one sector goes into a slump.

But the salvation of California's economy is innovation, especially in telecommunications, entertainment, medical equipment, international trade, and high-tech businesses. By the 1990s, California hosted one-fourth of the nation's high-tech firms, which provided nearly a million jobs. Half of the nation's computer engineers worked in **Silicon Valley**, named after the silicon chip that revolutionized the computer industry. Running between San Jose and San Francisco, Silicon Valley became a center for innovation in technology from computers to software and Internet-based businesses, including iconic companies like Hewlett-Packard, Intel, Facebook, and Google, which are headquartered there. Biomedical and pharmaceutical companies also proliferated, further contributing to California's transformation.

By 2016, the Silicon Valley region was leading the state and the country in job creation, but as high-tech firms expanded into San Francisco, issues of tax subsidies and gentrification arose, with affluent high-tech workers edging out local residents, driving up the price of housing, and changing the character of the city.

Computer technology also spurred expansion of the entertainment industry, long a key component of California's economy. This growth particularly benefited the Los Angeles area. Besides film and television production, tourism remains a bastion of the economy, with California ranking first among the states in visitors. Along with agriculture, high-tech, telecommunications, and other industries, these businesses have made California a leader in both international and domestic trade. All these industries are part of a globalized economy, with huge amounts of trade going through the massive port complex of Los Angeles/Long Beach, as well as the San Francisco Bay Port of Oakland.

Government policies on growth, the environment, taxation, regulation, and more affect all these employment sectors, from farming to tech and tourism. As a consequence, every one of them is politically engaged, with lobbyists and organizations ready to defend their interests and seek benefits from state government.

They are also interdependent, so all suffer when any one sector goes into a slump. The recession of the 1990s, for example, resulted from cutbacks in federal defense spending after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Then at the beginning of this century, the California-centered Internet boom went bust as thousands of dot-com companies failed to generate projected profits. At about the same time, an energy crisis hit California; prices for gas and electricity rose, and parts of the state experienced shortages of electrical power. These factors combined to push California into another recession. Tax revenues declined precipitously, producing a huge state budget deficit.

California's economy bounced back in 2006–07, but then in 2008, the Great Recession hit. By 2010, the unemployment rate was 12.4 percent (the U.S. rate was

9.7 percent). Population growth slowed, and a significant number of Californians fled to states with more jobs and a lower cost of living. Eventually, high-tech and Silicon Valley led the way to an economic comeback. In 2019, the unemployment rate fell below 4 percent, just slightly higher than the national rate of 3.6 percent. But, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic threw the economy into disarray as schools, restaurants, and many other businesses were forced to close, causing millions to lose their jobs.

Throughout its history, California has experienced economic ups and downs, recovered, reinvented itself, and moved on, thanks to the diversity of its economy and its people and their ability to adapt to change. Although some businesses have forsaken California for other states, complaining of burdensome regulation and the high cost of doing business in California, the skill and higher productivity of the state's workforce, access to capital, and quality of life compensate for such costs and keep the state attractive to many businesses.[3] Innovation continues to be an economic mainstay as well. Nanotechnology companies, for example, are concentrated in the San Francisco Bay Area, while biotechnology thrives in the San Diego region and green industry, such as solar power and electric cars, booms throughout California. Access to venture capital investment funds facilitates such innovation in California. Every year, more than half of all venture capital in the United States is invested in California—especially Silicon Valley. Another strength of the California economy is an astounding and ever-growing number of small businesses—many of which are minority owned. Most other states lack these advantages; some are dependent on a single industry or product, and none can match the energy and optimism brought by California's constant flow of immigrants eager to take jobs in the state's new and old industries.

California's globalized economy consistently attracts more immigrants than any other state. As of 2019, 10.7 million immigrants called California home. Foreign-born residents make up 27 percent of the state's population, more than double the percentage found in the rest of the nation. About 25 percent of these immigrants are undocumented. Fifty-one percent of California's immigrants are from Latin America (mostly Mexico), and 39 percent are from Asia (especially the Philippines, China, Vietnam, India, and Korea). Recently, however, immigrants from Asia have outnumbered those from Latin America. Significantly for the California economy, 79 percent of the state's immigrant population is of working age (eighteen to sixty-four).[4] As a consequence of so much immigration, 44.4 percent of all Californians over the age of five speak a language other than English at home,[5] resulting in a major challenge for California schools. Immigration and language have been hot-button political issues in California in the past and still are today in some parts of the state.

Table 1.2 shows the extent of California's ethnic diversity. Non-Latinx Whites outnumbered other groups until 2014, when Latinx became the single largest group, a trend that is projected to continue. Overall, the Black and White proportions of California's population have decreased, whereas Asian and Latinx numbers have grown rapidly since the 1970s. Currently, 77 percent of students in California's public schools are non-White.[6]

Table 1.2 California's Racial and Ethnic Diversity

	1990	2000	2019
Non-Latinx White	57.1	47.3	36.8
Latinx	26.0	32.4	39.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	9.2	11.4	15.8
Black	7.1	6.5	6.5
American Indian	0.6	0.5	1.6
Mixed Race	N.A.	1.9	3.0

Source: U.S. Census; California Department of Finance, www.dof.ca.gov (accessed July 23, 2012). 2010 figures do not add up to 100% because 0.2% for the new classification "some other race alone" is not included in this table.

The realization of the California dream is not shared equally among these groups. Although the median household income as of 2018 was $71,228 (U.S. median = $60,336), California has the highest poverty rate in the United States. Nineteen percent of Californians live in poverty according to the Census Bureau and it's estimated that another 19 percent are near poverty.[7] More than half the students in California's public schools qualify for free or reduced-price meals.[8] People of every race suffer from poverty in California, but it is worst among Latinx, Blacks, and Southeast Asians, who tend to hold low-paying service jobs; other Asians, along with Anglos, predominate in the more comfortable professional classes.

As the poor grow in number, some observers fear that California's middle class is vanishing. Once a majority, many middle-class families have slipped down the economic ladder, and others have fled to states with lower taxes and home prices. Recent growth has been concentrated in low- and high-wage jobs. Many people are doing very well at the top of the ladder, but more are barely getting by at the bottom. The income gap continues to widen as California's middle class shrinks.

The cost of housing is at the heart of this problem. Home prices dropped during the Great Recession of 2008–11, briefly increasing affordability for some families, but others suffered losses of equity and some lost their homes to foreclosure. Home values in California began rising again in 2012. In 2020, the median price of a single-family home was $607,000, whereas the U.S. median was $299,000.[9] A family would need more than twice the median household income in California to qualify for a mortgage to purchase a home at the median price. Californians spend substantially more of their incomes on housing than the national average, and fewer families can afford to own homes, especially in the coastal counties from San Diego to San Francisco. Expensive housing has forced many people to look for move to smaller inland communities with somewhat lower housing costs. This has created a whole group of so-called super-commuters—people who must now travel long distances (one-way commute times of two to three hours are not uncommon) to reach their places of employment in the larger urban centers. Overall, only 55 percent of Californians own their homes, which is well behind the national average, especially for Latinxs and Blacks. For the 45 percent

who can't afford home ownership, rents have also risen. So has homelessness. Every day, 134,000 Californians are homeless—25 percent of the U.S. homeless population.[10] The crisis in housing and homelessness now tops public concern, pushing both state and local governments to encourage construction of more housing and to look for ways to provide affordable housing. During his campaign for governor, Gavin Newsom pledged to oversee construction of three and a half million new homes in California by 2025. Reaching this target would require achieving a far higher rate of home construction than has been typical in recent years.

Access to health care has also been a problem for many Californians, but the successful implementation of Covered California—the state's version of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)—cut the percentage of residents without health insurance from 22 percent to 7 percent. President Donald Trump's efforts to roll back Obamacare coverage threatens this recent progress, but state leaders are resisting and looking for ways to expand access to include undocumented immigrants or even shift to a more extensive "single payer" system.

Geographic divisions complicate California's economic and ethnic diversity. In the past, the most pronounced of these divisions was between the northern and southern portions of the state. The San Francisco Bay Area tended to be diverse, liberal, and (in elections) Democratic, whereas southern California was staunchly Republican and much less diverse. However, with growth and greater diversity, the Southland also began voting Democratic. Today, the greatest division is between the coastal and inland regions of the state (see Figure 2.3). Democrats now outnumber Republicans in San Diego, and registration in the two parties is almost even in traditionally conservative Orange County, where Democrats have gained congressional seats in recent years.

But as the differences between northern and southern California fade, the contrast between coastal and inland California has increased. The state's vast Central Valley now leads the way in population growth, with cities from Sacramento to Fresno and Bakersfield gobbling up farmland. The Inland Empire, from Riverside to San Bernardino, has grown even more rapidly over the past quarter century. Although still sparsely populated, California's northern coast, Sierra Nevada, and southern desert regions are also growing, while retaining their own distinct identities. Water, agriculture, and the environment are major issues in all these areas, and wildfires are a major concern in the mountainous parts of the state. Except for Sacramento, inland and mountainous California are more conservative than the coastal region of the state. Perhaps ironically, the liberal counties of the coast contribute more per capita in state taxes, and the conservative inland counties receive more per capita for social service programs.[11] Although coastal California remains politically dominant, the impact of inland areas on California politics increases with every election.

These differences are such that parts of the state occasionally propose seceding, while many people lament California's underrepresentation in the U.S. Senate, where our two senators are matched by two from Wyoming with a population of less than six hundred thousand. Proposals to break California into three or even six separate states provoked a lot of discussion in recent years, but they never made it to the ballot.

California's People, Economy, and Politics

All these elements of California's economic, demographic, and geographic diversity vie with one another for political influence in the context of political structures that were created more than a hundred years ago. Past frustration with this system has resulted in dozens of reforms by ballot measure, a recall election, and even calls for a constitutional convention to rewrite the state constitution entirely. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, a 2019 survey of Californians reported that 54 percent thought the state was "going in the wrong direction."[12] The state's struggle with homelessness, skyrocketing housing costs, and income inequality has caused some Californians to take a relatively dim view of the state despite an otherwise strong economy. In the chapters that follow, we'll see how the diverse interests of our state operate in the current political system and gain an understanding of how it all works, how some changes may have improved conditions in our state, and what challenges remain.

Notes

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12. George Skelton, "Californians Think the State Is Going in the Wrong Direction. Here's Why," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2019-10-10/skelton-california-wrong-direction-poll.

Learn More on the Web

Check out the complete California constitution:
www.leginfo.ca.gov/const.html

For population statistics on the state or your area:
http://www.dof.ca.gov/Forecasting/Demographics/
https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ca

For historic images of California, including photographs, documents, newspapers, political cartoons, works of art, diaries, oral histories, advertising, and other cultural artifacts:
www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu

Get Involved

Choose an immigrant group from anywhere in the world and research the history of that group in California. If the group has a local advocacy organization or a festival celebrating its culture, consider volunteering and/or attending the festival to learn more about the issues affecting the group.

2

California's Political Parties and Direct Democracy

Learning Objectives

LO 2-1 Understand how and why the Progressives reformed California's political parties.

LO 2-2 Describe the organizational structure of California's political parties.

LO 2-3 Analyze the impact of the top-two primary on California politics.

LO 2-4 Comment on the possibility of California becoming a one-party state.

LO 2-5 Compare and contrast the supporters of California's political parties.

LO 2-6 Explain the different forms of direct democracy.

LO 2-7 Discuss the proliferation of ballot measures in recent years.

As we noted in Chapter 1, California seems to have become a one-party state. Democrats dominate every branch of government, and Republican presidential candidates don't bother to campaign in California because they know they can't win here. Of course, the fact that Democrats dominate elections doesn't keep candidates from elsewhere coming to the state in search of campaign funds, which Californians generously provide.

With one-party dominance, the constitutional checks and balances that the different branches of government are supposed to provide may not function. It's also far from the ideal of two-party governance, in which voters have a genuine choice between parties with different ideologies and platforms, and the same party does not always win. So, what is a political party, and what has brought California to the current dominance of one party?

Theoretically, political parties are organizations of like-minded individuals and groups that pursue public policies based on shared ideology, offer

candidates for public office, and provide the candidates with organizational and financial support and hold them accountable if they are elected. In most states, parties do these things, but in California parties are weak as organizations and perform none of these functions effectively. History tells us why: The Progressive reformers intentionally weakened political parties to rid California of the railroad-dominated political machine. In doing so, they unintentionally made candidate personalities, media manipulation, and fat campaign war chests more important in elections, not only between parties but in competition between candidates of the same party.

But if party organizations are weak in California, how can one party dominate? Largely because of the failure of the other major party to attract enough voters to prevail. A post-Progressive reform, the "top-two primary" introduced in 2011, has resulted in an increasing number of general election ballots pitting two candidates of the same party against one another rather than candidates of differing parties. This has reduced competition and voters' choices, but it has also resulted in competition within the dominant party between liberals and moderates—an emerging two-party system within a single party?

The Progressives also introduced **direct democracy**. Through the initiative, referendum, and recall, California voters gained the power to make or repeal laws and to remove elected officials between elections. The reformers' intent was to empower citizens, but, in practice, interest groups and politicians are more likely to use—or abuse—direct democracy.

The Progressive Legacy

To challenge the dominance of the Southern Pacific Railroad's political machine, Progressive reformers focused on the machine's control of party conventions, where party leaders nominated their candidates for various offices. Republican reformers scored the first breakthrough in 1908, when they succeeded in electing many anti-railroad candidates to the state legislature. In 1909, the reform legislators replaced party conventions with **primary elections**, in which the registered voters of each party chose the nominees. Candidates who won their party's primary in these elections faced the nominees of other parties in **general elections** in November. By instituting this system, the reformers ended the power of the machine—and the political parties—to pick candidates.

In 1910, Progressives won the office of governor and majorities in the state legislature. They quickly introduced direct democracy to give policy-making authority to the people. They also replaced the "party column ballot"—which permitted bloc voting for all the candidates of a single party by making just one mark—with separate balloting for each office. In addition, Progressive reformers introduced **cross-filing**, which permitted candidates of one party to seek the nominations of rival parties. Finally, the Progressives instituted **nonpartisan elections**, which eliminated party labels for candidates in elections for judges and local government officials.

These changes reduced the railroad's control of the political parties, but they also sapped the strength of party organizations. By allowing the voters to circumvent an unresponsive legislature, direct democracy paved the way for interest groups to make public policy. Deletion of the party column ballot encouraged voters to cast their ballots for members of different parties for different offices (**split-ticket voting**), increasing the likelihood of a divided-party government. Cross-filing enabled candidates of one party to win the nomination of what should have been the opposing party, effectively eliminating competition. Nonpartisan local elections made it difficult for the parties to groom candidates and build their organizations at the grassroots level.

In 1959, when Democrats gained control of the legislature for the first time in more than forty years, they outlawed cross-filing, which had been disproportionately helpful to Republican incumbents. This marked a return to the **closed primary** in which candidates filed for nomination for their own party only.

California's Political Parties: System and Supporters

Because of the Progressive reforms, political parties in California operate under unusual constraints. Although the original reformers have long since departed, the reform mentality remains very much a part of California's political culture.

The Party System

By state law, political parties qualify to place candidates on the ballot if a number of voters equal to 1 percent of the vote in the most recent gubernatorial election sign up for the party when they register to vote. Alternatively, parties can submit a petition with signatures amounting to 10 percent of that vote. Once qualified, if a party retains the registration of at least 1 percent of the voters or if at least one of its candidates for any statewide office receives 2 percent of the votes cast, that party remains qualified for the next election. By virtue of their sizes, the Democratic and Republican parties have been fixtures on the ballot almost since statehood.

Minor parties, sometimes called **third parties**, are another story. In 2020, the American Independent, Green, Libertarian, and Peace and Freedom parties qualified for the ballot along with Democrats and Republicans. The American Independent Party attracts some people who want to register as independent voters—until they learn that this is a very conservative party founded by segregationists in the 1960s.[1] For these voters, registering "no party preference" is a better expression of independence. None of these small parties has been able to break the hold of the two major parties, although the Greens have elected a few city and county officials. For reasons we'll address shortly, these parties are probably doomed.

California voters choose their party when they **register to vote**, which can be done right up to Election Day. Since 2017, citizens are automatically registered to vote when they obtain or renew their driver's licenses or IDs or when they apply for a change of address (unless they opt out). This process removes an obstacle to voting, although early trends show that it has resulted in no significant change in voter turnout.

Before the Great Depression, California was steadfastly Republican, but during the 1930s, a Democratic majority emerged. Since then, Democrats have dominated in voter registration (see Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2), although their proportion has declined from a peak of 60 percent of registered voters in 1942 to 46.1 percent in 2020. Republican registration has slipped to 24.2 percent, whereas only 5.7 percent signed up with other parties.[2]

"Independent" voters (those who designate **no party preference** when they register) hit an all-time high of 27.5 percent in 2018, up from just 9 percent in 1986). In 2020, 24 percent of registered voters in California were designated no party preference (see Figure 2.2).[3] Despite the Democrats' advantage in registration, Republican candidates have won six of the last thirteen gubernatorial elections.

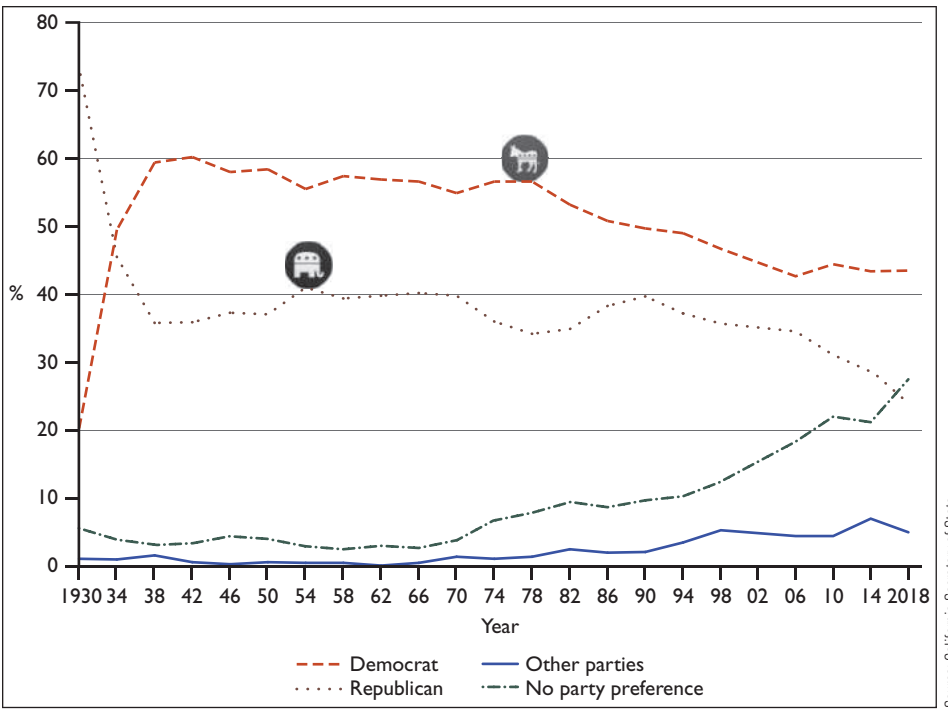

Figure 2.1 Party Registration during Gubernatorial Election Years.

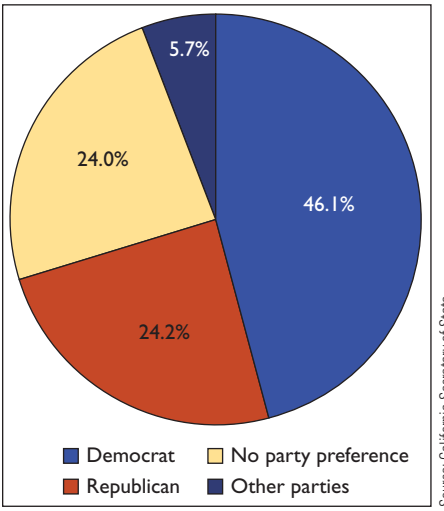

Figure 2.2 Party Registration in California, October 2020.

Beginning in 2016, sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds in California were able to **preregister to vote** (with active voter registration at age eighteen). Interestingly, among Californians preregistered to vote, an even greater percentage are designated no party preference (29.1 percent) or registered Democrat (46.1 percent) and far fewer are preregistered as Republican (16.5 percent) or other party (8.2 percent).[4]

For much of its history, California used closed primary elections to select the nominees of each party for state offices and Congress. Voters registered with a political party could cast their ballots in the primary only for that party's nominees for various offices. The winners of each party's primary election faced off in the November general election, when all voters were free to cast their ballots for the candidates of any of the parties.

But in 2010, over the strenuous objections of the political parties (another indication of their weakness), voters approved a **top-two primary** system that went into effect in 2011. In a top-two primary, no matter what their own party affiliation, voters may choose their preferred candidate from any party; the two who win the most votes face off in the November election, even if they're from the same party. This applies to state constitutional offices (for example, governor, attorney general, controller), state legislative offices, and U.S. House and Senate races. Advocates of this system hoped that instead of concentrating their appeals on the core of their own parties (liberals for Democrats and conservatives for Republicans), candidates would reach out to independent and moderate voters, which would mean that those elected would be more moderate and willing to compromise when they got to Sacramento, thus reducing the likelihood of partisan gridlock.

Since the May 2011 special election for California's 36th congressional district (to fill a vacancy), candidates for California's November ballot have been chosen in top-two primaries. These elections have been more competitive, with

more close races and more incumbent officeholders facing challengers from within their own parties than in the past. Perhaps inevitably, the top-two system has resulted in more than twenty general election runoffs between candidates of the same party in every election since 2012, including the races for U.S. Senate in both 2016 and 2018. Whereas in the closed primary system, the general election choice was between the nominees of all the parties that had entered candidates in the primary, in these races voters chose between members of the same party.

In the 2018 U.S. Senate race, for example, voters in the November general election could select either incumbent Dianne Feinstein or challenger **Kevin de León**. Feinstein was considered more moderate and de León more liberal, but both were Democrats, much to the dismay of many Republican voters. More than 1.3 million voters who cast ballots in the 2018 race for governor (which pitted a Democrat versus a Republican) declined to vote for a candidate in the Democrat-only U.S. Senate race. Some same-party races for other offices saw traditional liberal Democrats challenged by more moderate "business" Democrats, many of whom attempted to appeal to Republican voters. Advocates of the top-two primary may be pleased that, as they hoped, more moderates have been elected to the legislature,[5] but some voters are disappointed that they no longer have a choice between candidates of different parties, while party leaders are alarmed by nasty and expensive battles within their parties. Democrats may be ascendant in California, making it virtually a one-party state, but the top-two primary has generated plenty of competition within the dominant party.

An additional impact of the top-two primary is the likely demise of the small parties. Not a single minor party candidate for legislative or statewide office has made it to the top two since the system was initiated in 2011. Surely these parties will eventually disappear under this system.

State law dictates not only whether parties qualify for the ballot but also party organization. The main parties have similar structures with a state **central committee** as the highest-ranking body. These committees are comprised of party candidates, officeholders, county chairpersons, and some appointed members. In addition, Democratic voters elect members from each assembly district, and Republican county central committees elect or appoint members. Each party's state central committee elects a chair who functions as party spokesperson.

Beneath the state central committees are county central committees. Voters registered with each party choose committee members every two years during primary elections. The party's nominees for state legislature and officeholders are also members. The state and county party committees draft policy positions for party platforms, although candidates and elected officials often ignore these. Some county committees recruit volunteers and raise money for party candidates. Despite their low public profile, county committees are sometimes rife with conflict among activists. Avid liberals usually dominate Democratic county committees, whereas staunch conservatives rule Republican committees.

Party committees can endorse their preferred candidates in primary elections, which could become more important with the top-two primary system because party activists could support whichever candidate they view as most loyal. In the past, such party endorsements were rare, but both parties have endorsed

more actively in recent elections. Voters don't always pay attention to such endorsements, however, and their influence is also limited by the inability of the parties to deliver organizational support to the chosen candidates. Liberal Democratic activists, for example, endorsed Senator Dianne Feinstein's opponent in the 2018 election but she won anyway.

Party Supporters

Besides the official party organizations, many caucuses and clubs are associated with both major parties. The California Republican Assembly is a resolutely conservative statewide grassroots organization that has dominated the Republican Party, thanks to an activist membership. On the Democratic side, liberals dominate through hundreds of local Democratic clubs organized by geography, gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

Party activists such as these are a tiny percentage of the electorate, however. The remaining support base comes from citizens who designate their party affiliations when they register to vote and usually cast their ballots accordingly. Public opinion polls[6] tell us that voters who prefer the Democratic Party tend to be sympathetic to the poor and immigrants; concerned about health care, education, and the environment; in favor of gay rights, gun control, and abortion rights; and supportive of tax increases to provide public services. Those who prefer the Republican Party are more likely to oppose these views and to worry more about big government and high taxes. Of course, some people mix these positions.

Both major parties enjoy considerable support, but the more liberal Democratic Party fares better with Blacks, city dwellers, union members, and residents of coastal California and the Sacramento area (see Figure 2.3) as well as young voters. Latinx voters also favor Democrats, a tendency that was strengthened by Republican support for several statewide initiatives relating to immigration and affirmative action. Voters among most Asian nationalities also lean Democratic, an inclination that has increased in recent years. As with Latinx voters, Asian interest in the California Republican Party has been weakened by policies and candidates perceived as anti-immigrant. The inability of Republican candidates to win support from minority voters is surely the major factor in Democratic dominance in California.[7] More Latinx and Asian voters participate every year, so unless Republicans can do more to win them over, the party may be doomed in California.

The more conservative Republican Party does better with Whites, suburbanites, and rural voters, and in the Central Valley and inland California, as well as with older, more affluent voters, and with religious conservatives. These constituencies are more likely to turn out to vote than those that support Democrats, but as of 2020 support for the party has declined so much that the advantage in turnout may have been lost. As the state continues to grow younger and more diverse, Republicans tend to be older and White. Party leaders are alarmed. Former Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger says his party is "the Titanic after it hit the iceberg," and a former California state party chair says "We have not yet been able to figure out how to effectively communicate and get

Source: California Secretary of State.

Figure 2.3 California's Partisan Division by County, 2020.

significant numbers of votes from non-Whites," warning the national Republican Party that the California party is "the canary in the coal mine."[8]

In the past, Republican candidates sometimes succeeded by winning the support of Democratic voters, thanks to charismatic candidates, clever campaigns, and split-ticket voting. But in the 1990s, ticket splitting declined, and instead voters increasingly voted a straight party-line ticket—either all Democratic or all Republican. This includes no-party-preference voters, who, contrary to

common wisdom, are not necessarily independent. Most tilt toward one party or the other, with Democrats enjoying greater support.[9] The rightward thrust of California's Republican Party on issues like climate change, abortion, gun control, and immigration has also driven independent voters to the Democrats—and driven some Republicans to switch to no party preference.[10] President Trump's low popularity in California has also contributed to this. Some candidates who were once Republicans have even eschewed the party label and run for office as independents.

Direct Democracy

Thanks to the Progressives, Californians who are frustrated by the outcome of candidate elections have another way to participate in the political process. To counter the railroad machine's control of state and local governments, the Progressive reformers guaranteed the people a say through the mechanisms of direct democracy: recall, referendum, and initiative. Referenda and initiatives appear on our ballots as "propositions," with numbers assigned by the secretary of state; local measures are assigned letters by the county clerk.

The Recall

The least-used form of direct democracy is the **recall**, which empowers voters to remove officeholders at all levels of government between scheduled elections. Advocates circulate a recall petition with a statement of their reasons for wanting a named official to be removed from office. They must collect a specific number of voter signatures within a certain time period. The numbers vary with the office in question. At the local level, for example, the number of signatures required ranges from 10 to 30 percent of those who voted in the previous local election; these signatures must be collected over periods that vary between 40 and 160 days. A recall petition for a judge or a legislator requires signatures equaling 20 percent of the vote for that office in the last election; whereas for state executive officeholders, the figure is 12 percent. In these cases, petitioners have 160 days to collect the signatures. If enough signatures are collected and validated by the secretary of state (for state officeholders) or by the city or county clerk (for local officeholders), an election is held. The ballot is simple: "Shall [name] be removed from the office of [title]?" The recall takes effect if a majority of voters vote yes, and then the vacant office is filled either by an election or by an appointment—whichever state or local law requires. Elected officials who are recalled cannot be candidates in the replacement election.

Recalling state officeholders is easier in California than in the other seventeen states where recall is possible. These states usually require more signatures, and whereas any reason suffices in California, other states require corruption or malfeasance by the officeholder. Nevertheless, recalls are rare in California. A dozen or so recalls are on local ballots in any given year (usually by parents angry with school board members); only about half of the officials who face recall are

removed from office. In 2018, a state legislator was recalled (see Chapter 5), one of only six to have been recalled in the history of direct democracy. The most dramatic use of the recall came in 2003 when Governor Gray Davis became the first statewide official ever recalled.[11] 2018 witnessed another dramatic use of the recall when Santa Clara County voters recalled Superior Court Judge Aaron Persky after he sentenced former Stanford University swimmer Brock Turner to a light sentence following his conviction on sexual assault charges (see Chapter 6).

The Referendum

The **referendum** is another form of direct democracy, in this case allowing voters to nullify acts of the state government. Referendum advocates have ninety days after a law is enacted to collect a number of signatures equal to 5 percent of the votes cast for governor in the previous election (623,212 based on the 2018 vote). Referenda are even rarer than recalls. Of the fifty-one referenda on California ballots since 1912, voters have revoked acts of the government thirty one times. The most recent example came in the 2020 election cycle when voters repealed a law passed by the legislature in 2018 that banned the use of cash bail in the criminal justice system.

The Initiative

Recalls and referenda are reactions to what elected officials do. **Initiatives** allow citizens to make policy themselves by drafting new laws or **constitutional amendments** and then circulating petitions to get them on the ballot. Qualifying a proposed law for a vote requires a number of signatures equal to 5 percent of the votes cast for governor in the last election; constitutional amendments require a number of signatures equal to 8 percent (997,139, based on California's 2018 election). If enough valid signatures are obtained within 180 days, the initiative goes to the voters at the next election or, on rare occasions, in a special election called by the governor. As of 2012, all citizen initiatives are on the November general election ballot only—a move advocated by Democrats because voter turnout is higher in November than in primary elections. This means that more people participate in these decisions, but it also ensures the maximum turnout of Democratic voters.

Another recent change allows petitioners to refer initiative proposals to the legislature for consideration after 25 percent of the required signatures have been collected. If the legislature takes acceptable action on the initiative, its supporters can withdraw their proposal. Advocates of this change hoped it would mean more thoughtful consideration through the legislative process and, ultimately, better law. In 2016, a nasty and expensive election battle was avoided when the legislature and governor reached a compromise that satisfied the proponents of a ballot measure to raise the state's minimum wage, and the latter withdrew their initiative. In 2018, the soft drink industry qualified an initiative that would have made it harder to pass local taxes but withdrew the measure when the state legislature

Table 2.1 The Track Record of California Initiatives*

Period	Number	Number	
		Adopted	Rejected
1912–1919	31	8	23
1920–1929	34	10	24
1930–1939	37	10	27
1940–1949	20	7	13
1950–1959	11	1	10
1960–1969	10	3	7
1970–1979	24	7	17
1980–1989	53	25	28
1990–1999	61	24	37
2000–2009	60	21	39
2010–2019	51	27	24
2020	12	5	7
Total	404	143 (36.5%)	249 (63.5%)

*Not including legislative initiatives.
Source: California Secretary of State.

passed a thirteen-year ban on new soda taxes. Tech companies did something similar to minimize regulation of privacy regulations.[12]

The subjects of initiatives vary wildly and are often controversial. In the past, voters have approved limits on bilingual education, banned same-sex marriage, and set standards for the size of chicken cages. Other recent propositions have dealt with regulation of gun ownership, the death penalty, rent control, and legalizing the sale of marijuana.

Twenty-three other states provide for the initiative, but few rely on it as heavily as California. Relatively few initiatives appeared on ballots until the 1970s, however (see Table 2.1). Then political consultants, interest groups, and politicians rediscovered the initiative, and ballot measures proliferated, peaking with eighteen initiatives on both the 1988 and 1990 election ballots. The 2016 ballot also saw a high number of initiatives, because qualifying for the ballot was made easier when the historically low voter turnout in 2014 meant only 365,880 signatures were required to qualify. High turnout in the 2018 election changed that to 623,212 signatures for 2020 and 2022. Note, however, that nearly two-thirds of all initiatives are rejected; others have been overturned or modified by the courts.

Legislative Initiatives, Constitutional Amendments, and Bonds

The state legislature can place propositions on either the primary or general election ballots (unlike citizen initiatives). **Legislative initiatives** include new laws that the legislature prefers to put before the voters rather than enact on

its own. The top-two primary measure, for example, was put on the ballot by the legislature as part of a deal to win the vote of a Republican senator for the proposed budget.

Voter approval is also required, via legislative referendum, when the governor or the legislature seeks to issue **bonds** (borrowing money) to finance parks, schools, transportation, or other infrastructure projects; for state constitutional amendments; and when the legislature proposes a change to a previously passed citizen initiative. In 2020, the legislature proposed and voters rejected Proposition 16, which would have reinstated affirmative action in California. Affirmative action—which involves the conscious consideration of race, ethnicity, or gender in college admissions or in the awarding of government contracts—had been banned for twenty-four years, after voters supported getting rid of the practice in 1996. After a heated battle over Proposition 16, affirmative action will remain banned in California.

Voters in 2020 made another significant change to the constitution by passing Proposition 17. The initiative expanded the voting rights of people on parole (parole involves the supervision of people released from prison who are reentering the community). Before the adoption of Proposition 17, California's constitution gave people on probation (a criminal sentencing alternative that avoids prison) the right to vote, but not those on parole. This marks just the latest effort in California to expand the number of people who can vote.

The Politics of Ballot Propositions

You might suppose that the recent proliferation of ballot propositions is the result of a sudden surge in citizen action, but in fact it stems largely from the opportunism of special interests, individual politicians, and public relations firms.

Although intended as a mechanism for citizens to shape policy, even the most grassroots-driven initiative costs around two million dollars to gather signatures and millions more to mount a successful campaign. "If you pay enough," declared a former chief justice of the California Supreme Court, "you can get anything on the ballot. You pay a little bit more and you get it passed."[13] But opponents to ballot measures spend even more and usually win. Pharmaceutical companies ("big pharma") spent $109 million to defeat a 2016 measure that would have required state agencies to pay lower prices for prescriptions. Kidney dialysis companies set the record in 2018, with $111.5 million paid out to fight union-sponsored regulations—equivalent to $16 for every "no" vote. That same year, landlords spent big money fighting a rent control measure. Energy, oil, and tobacco interests have also spent heavily fighting environmental- or consumer-oriented initiatives, and labor unions are big financial backers of tax measures and other initiatives that serve their interests. Lots of this money comes from out of state, because California is seen as setting precedents for campaigns elsewhere.

Total spending for campaigns for and against propositions in 2020 was more than $750 million, exceeding the spending record of $542 million set by the 2016 proposition campaigns. Most of this money comes from corporations, unions, and obscure political action committees (PACs), sometimes from out of state. A study

by the California Fair Political Practices Commission concluded that "a handful of special interests have a disproportionate amount of influence on California elections and public policy."[14]

Wealthy individuals also use their resources to influence public policy through initiative campaigns. Business magnate Charles Munger spent tens of millions of dollars advocating redistricting reform (successfully). Napster cofounder and first Facebook president Sean Parker, was a major supporter of the 2016 initiative to legalize marijuana to the tune of $8.6 million. Similarly, politicians use initiatives to further their own careers or shape public policy. Governor **Jerry Brown** won voter approval for his 2012 initiative to increase state revenues, although Charles Munger contributed more than $35 million to the campaign against the measure. In 2016, Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, perhaps to keep himself in the public eye as a candidate for governor in 2018, sponsored a successful gun control measure even though the state legislature had already passed similar laws. And in 2018, Republican leaders sponsored a referendum to repeal a recently enacted gas tax on the ballot in hopes that it would increase Republican voter turnout. It didn't, and the voters rejected the repeal.

Others also take advantage of direct democracy. Public relations firms and **political consultants**, virtual "guns for hire," have developed lucrative careers managing initiative and referenda campaigns; they offer expertise in public opinion polling, computer-targeted mailing, and television advertising—the staples of modern campaigns. Some firms generate initiatives themselves by conducting test mailings and preliminary polls in hopes of snagging big contracts from proposition sponsors.

Political ideology and party politics also shape the initiative wars. Stymied by Democratic dominance of the state legislature for so long, Republicans, conservatives, and business interests have, often successfully, resorted to the initiative process to pursue their agendas, especially with regard to taxes (see Chapter 8). In 2011, the Democratic majority in the legislature countered by mandating that all citizen initiatives be voted on in November, when more Democrats participate, rather than during primary elections, when lower turnout produces a more conservative electorate.

Surely the Progressive framers of direct democracy didn't intend that moneyed interests should have the advantage over the efforts of regular citizens. But direct democracy still offers hope to those out of power by enabling them to take their case to the public. Grassroots groups have won some initiative battles in recent years, including funding mental health programs by increasing taxes on the rich and regulating the treatment of farm animals, despite the strong opposition of agribusiness. The 2016 ballot included propositions addressing the death penalty, an increase in cigarette taxes to fund health care, and regulations on drug prices, whereas rent control was put before the voters in 2018. Some passed and some failed, largely due to massive spending by opponents, but they all got on the ballot largely by grassroots efforts. Well-funded opponents often defeat such grassroots-generated measures, but at least direct democracy provides non-elites an opportunity to make their cases.

Besides the problem of big money, the initiative process sometimes doesn't result in good laws. Because self-interested sponsors draft initiatives and media masters run campaigns, careful and rational crafting of proposals is rare. Flaws or contradictions in the laws enacted by initiative may take years to resolve, sometimes in the process of implementation or through the legislative process—or by taking the issue back to the voters with successor initiatives. The recent reform that allows initiative proponents to withdraw their measures if the legislature enacts laws that meet their concerns may improve this situation by providing an opportunity for more thoughtful drafting of the laws and decreasing the likelihood that they'll be challenged in the courts. Disputes about initiatives that do go to the ballot are still likely to end up in court, however, as state and federal courts are asked to rule on whether the initiatives are consistent with other laws and with the state and federal constitutions. In recent years, courts have overturned all or parts of initiatives dealing with illegal immigration, campaign finance, and same-sex marriage. Such rulings may seem to deny the will of the voters, but the electorate cannot make laws that contradict the state or federal constitutions.

The increased use of direct democracy has also had an impact on the power of our elected representatives. Although we expect them to make policy, their ability to do so has been constrained by initiatives in recent decades. This is particularly the case with the state budget, much of which is dictated by past ballot measures rather than by the legislature or the governor.

The proliferation of initiatives, expensive and deceptive campaigns, flawed laws, and court interventions have annoyed voters and policy makers alike. Perhaps as a consequence, two-thirds of all initiatives are rejected (see Table 2.1). The recent reform allowing the legislature to modify and enact proposed ballot measures may result in somewhat fewer initiatives and sounder policy, but Californians still express frustration with the volume of initiatives they face and the expensive and often confusing campaigns. Opinion polls, however, consistently report a solid majority in support of direct democracy—in concept.

Political Parties and Direct Democracy

So, has California become a one-party state? Democrats hold every statewide office, supermajorities in both houses of the state legislature, and a majority of the state supreme court. Voter support for the Republican Party has wilted, especially among young people, minorities, and even independents. The top-two primary system has produced same-party runoff elections for both of California's U.S. senators and several legislative seats, denying voters a choice between the two parties. And the parties, as organizations, do not have the power to control who their candidates are or the resources to help party-selected candidates succeed. All this does not make California a one-party state, however. Democrats may yet self-destruct through overconfidence or intraparty competition. Arnold Schwarzenegger proved Republicans can still win statewide elections in California. But to be successful statewide candidates in contemporary California politics, Republicans must find ways to appeal to a significant share of the growing

number of no-party-preference voters. They have a steep hill to climb. John Cox, the Republican challenger to Governor Gavin Newsom earned only 38 percent of the statewide vote in 2018. To increase support in future elections, the party will need to win over young and minority voters, many of whom register no party preference; however, President Trump's policies and rhetoric made this less likely.

Genuinely competitive parties are surely better for voter choice and for democracy, but even if California becomes a one-party state, the mechanisms of direct democracy guarantee minority parties, citizens, and interest groups an alternative means of making policy and holding government accountable.

Notes

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13. Ronald George, "Promoting Judicial Independence," *Commonwealth*, February 2006, p. 9.

14. California Fair Political Practices Commission, *Big Money Talks: A Report*, Sacramento: California Fair Political Practices Commission, 2010.

Learn More on the Web

For public opinion polls, including archives:
"Statewide Survey," **https://www.ppic.org/survey/**

For information about California's political parties:
American Independent Party: **www.aipca.org**
California Democratic Party: **www.cadem.org**
California Republican Party: **www.cagop.org**
Green Party of California: **www.cagreens.org**
Libertarian Party of California: **www.ca.lp.org**
Peace and Freedom Party: **www.peaceandfreedom.org**

To find out more about elections and ballot measures:
Ballotpedia: **www.ballotpedia.org**
California Secretary of State: **www.sos.ca.gov/elections**
California Voter Foundation: **www.calvoter.org**
League of Women Voters: **www.smartvoter.org and www.easyvoterguide.org**
Voter's Edge of California [a joint project of MapLight and the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund (LWVCEF)]: **https://votersedge.org/ca**

Get Involved

Volunteer or intern for a political party by contacting their office in your county. You'll get a chance to see what goes on there and to observe the sorts of people who are active in the party you choose and learn about their perspectives on the issues.

3

California Elections, Campaigns, and the Media

Learning Objectives

LO 3-1 Explain how variation in voter participation affects election outcomes.

LO 3-2 Describe and evaluate the diversity of California candidates and population.

LO 3-3 Evaluate the relationship between political parties and candidates.

LO 3-4 Analyze the roles of money and media in campaigns.

LO 3-5 Understand the changing role of media in California politics.

Do political campaigns matter or do voters just vote their party preference? During political campaign season, many people get rather annoyed by what can seem like an endless loop of political TV ads, robocalls, tweets, and Facebook posts. But if people don't vote according to their party preference (and remember 24.0 percent of California's registered voters express no party preference), how else can people learn about candidates and ballot measures? A typical California ballot requires voters to make decisions about over twenty elective positions and propositions. Even the best-informed citizens find it difficult to choose among candidates for offices they know little about and to decide on obscure and complicated propositions. Political party labels provide some guidance, but with the **top-two primary**, voters must choose between candidates of the same party with increasing frequency.

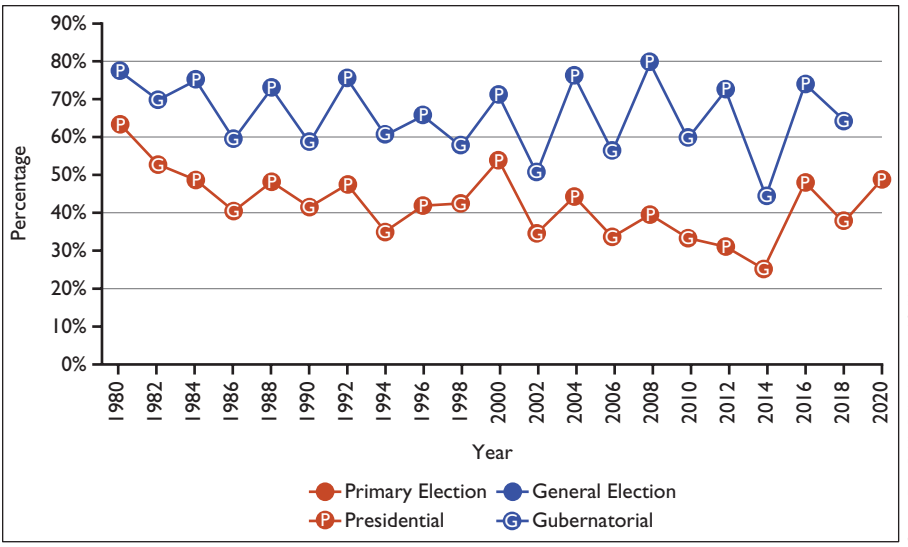
Like it or not, campaigns and the news media are important sources of information for California voters. And, as we'll see, both play crucial roles in shaping California elections. In fact, one can argue these sources are especially important in a state like California, known for its dynamic society. One-third of California

voters were born elsewhere and many voters in every election are participating for the first time. Residents also move frequently within the state, reducing the political influence of families, friends, and peer groups and boosting that of parties, campaigns, and the media.

The Voters

California citizens who are eighteen years or older are eligible to vote unless they are convicted felons in prison or in mental institutions. Those eligible must register to vote by completing a form available at post offices, libraries, and other public places or online at registertovote.ca.gov. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds can preregister and then vote as soon as they are eighteen. Since 2017, citizens are automatically registered to vote when they obtain or renew their driver's licenses or state IDs, unless they specifically opted out of registering.

Altogether, more than 25.1 million Californians are eligible to vote. Over 22 million (over 87 percent) were registered in 2020, however, and many of those who are registered don't regularly vote. In the 2014 gubernatorial election, only 42.2 percent of registered voters participated, but this number jumped to 64.5 percent in 2018. **Voter turnout** rates are higher in presidential elections, which are held in even-numbered years, alternating with gubernatorial elections. In 2020, 73.6 percent of the state's registered voters participated in the presidential election. Fewer voters participated in primary elections, however—46.9 percent in the 2020 presidential primary and 37.5 percent in the 2018 gubernatorial primary (see Figure 3.1).[1]



Source: From Public Policy Institute of California, "The Ties That Bind," 2004. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 3.1 Participation of Registered Voters in Primary and General Elections, 1980–2020.

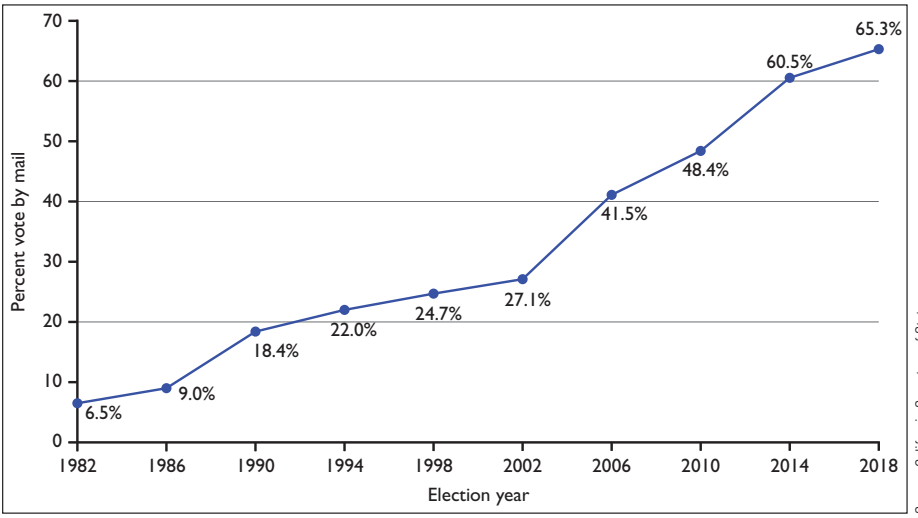


Figure 3.2 Voting by Mail in California's Gubernatorial Elections.

Traditionally, voters went to designated precinct (or neighborhood) polling places to cast their ballots, but, over the years, more and more Californians have opted to **vote by mail** because it's so much more convenient (see Figure 3.2). Voters sign up to vote by mail when they register to vote, and then ballots are automatically sent to them for every election. All they have to do is complete their ballots and get them in the mail by Election Day or drop them off at their precinct polling place that day. Three smaller counties (Alpine, Sierra, and Plumas) received permission from the state to allow only vote by mail.

The California legislature gave a major boost to vote by mail when it passed the **Voter's Choice Act** in 2016. When fully implemented in all counties in 2024, the Voter's Choice Act will provide all registered voters in California with an opportunity to vote by mail. Beginning twenty-nine days before an election, each registered voter will receive a ballot by mail that then can be returned by mail, at a secure ballot drop box, or in-person at newly created county vote centers. Voters can change their party registration, register to vote "same day," and vote in person at a vote center. In 2018, five counties (Nevada, Napa, San Mateo, Madera, and Sacramento) implemented the Voter's Choice Act. In the March 2020 primary election, fifteen counties implemented the law. Vote by mail in all counties was implemented earlier than expected, however, due to a national crisis.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Gavin Newsom issued an executive order requiring all counties to provide vote by mail ballots to all registered voters in time for the 2020 election, though opportunities still existed for in-person voting. The executive order was challenged by two Republican assembly members disputing the governor's power in this area. After a short legal battle in the county and state appellate courts, the state legislature passed, and the governor signed, a law requiring counties to mail ballots to registered voters and for those ballots to be counted if received within seventeen days of the general election, as long as they are postmarked by Election Day.[2]

Vote by mail is more convenient for voters as many people prefer to deal with California's complex ballots at their leisure. Increased voting by mail and easier registration may have increased voter participation slightly, though the statewide effect of the Voter's Choice Act won't be measured until 2024.

Vote by mail affects campaign strategy in California. Increasingly, campaigns push identified supporters to vote by mail to ensure their participation. Now, with many more people voting by mail—up to three weeks before Election Day—campaigns have had to change tactics. Rather than a big push in the last few days before the election, candidates must spread their resources over a longer period. In addition, since same-day registration is easier under the Voter's Choice Act, candidates may work harder to appeal to new voters.

Why do so many Californians choose not to vote though? There is no singular reason. Lots of people don't vote because they're still not registered. This group may consist of non-citizens; people who are incarcerated or on parole; or those who are apathetic, unaware, or just generally distrustful of politicians and the political system. But millions who are registered often do not vote. Most commonly, nonvoters say they're just not that interested in politics or they're too busy. Others report being confused by all the messages that bombard the airwaves and Internet during a typical California election cycle.

Could voter turnout in California be improved? Certainly, the answer is "yes," but some solutions are more easily adopted and implemented than others. Registration, for example, can't be made much easier, but making Election Day a holiday could make voting more convenient for some voters. Mailing ballots to all registered voters, making same-day registration easier, and having vote centers on college campuses (with 10,000 or more students) on and before Election Day (all required under California's Voter's Choice Act or a 2019 amendment) will likely increase turnout, especially among younger voters. Although ballots are already available in many languages, simplifying their content could also help. Perhaps better civic education would improve turnout, but that may require wholesale changes to public education curriculum or strengthening traditional civic associations that have declined in popularity over time. More news coverage of state and local events might also stimulate turnout, but that, too, is a difficult fix, as newspapers across the state have shrunk in size or folded altogether. Stronger political parties that inspire and mobilize voters could increase turnout, but there are many structural barriers to building a stronger party system in California (see Chapter 2).

Finding ways to boost participation can help build a more representative democracy. This is because those who do turn out to vote are not a representative cross section of the actual population. Non-Latinx Whites, for example, make up 41 percent of California's adult population but 55 percent of likely voters. Although Latinx Californians make up 35 percent of the adult population, they make up only 21 percent of likely voters. Asian Americans comprise 15 percent of the population and 14 percent of likely voters and Blacks make up 6 percent of the population and make up 6 percent of the likely voters.[3] Disparity in turnout means that California's voting electorate is not representative of the state's population.

Language, culture, citizenship status, and socioeconomic class are probable barriers to registration and voting among underrepresented groups. This situation

is slowly changing, however. Latinx were just 8 percent of the state's registered voters in 1978 but are over 19 percent today, and the number continues to rise. Still, voter registration lags among Latinx citizens, who comprise an astounding 58 percent of all unregistered voters in California.[4]

Differences in the levels of voter participation do not end with ethnicity. Likely voters lean Democratic and are ideologically mixed. They are more likely to be homeowners, U.S. born, wealthier, better educated, and older.[5]

According to recent reports, 46 percent of likely voters in California are age fifty-five or older, although this group is 33 percent of the state population, whereas adults aged eighteen to thirty-four are 32 percent of the population and only 22 percent of likely voters.[6] All this adds up to a voting electorate that can be more conservative than the population as a whole, which explains how Republicans can sometimes win statewide elections despite the Democratic edge in registration and why liberal ballot measures often fail.

Of course, voting is only one form of political participation. Many people sign petitions, attend public meetings, write letters or emails to officials, and contribute money to campaigns. Studies have found, however, that California lags behind other states in "non-electoral civic engagement."[7] As with voting, those who participate most are White, older, more affluent, homeowners, and more highly educated. Does the differential in voting and other forms of participation matter? It seems self-evident that elected officials pay more attention to the concerns of those who participate than those who do not.

More recently though, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, a Black Minneapolis resident, at the hands of Minneapolis police officers, one of multiple instances of police brutality against Black Americans, widespread protests erupted across the nation. In California, tens of thousands of young people (as well as older people) participated in these acts of unconventional political participation. As a result, the news media, businesses, and elected officials have begun to seriously address some of the concerns raised in these protests, such as economic justice, criminal justice reform, and ending police violence against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

The Candidates

When we vote, we choose among candidates, but where do candidates come from? In some states, political parties recruit and groom candidates, but California's party organizations are too weak for that. The wide-open nature of the **top-two primary** system—also called the nonpartisan blanket primary—further weakens the prospects of candidate recruitment by the parties. Political leaders looking for allies or interest groups to advance their causes sometimes recruit candidates. But most candidates are self-starters with an interest in politics who just decide to run and then seek support. Often, they're party activists or staffers for elected officials. The rising cost and increasing negativity of campaigns have discouraged some people from running, although wealthy individuals who can fund their own campaigns have offered themselves as candidates in recent years. Most candidates start

at the bottom of the political ladder, running for school board or city council, and work their way up, building support as they go. Others gain experience as staff members for elected officials, eventually running for their boss's job. Wealthy candidates sometimes skip such apprenticeships and run directly for higher office. Voters are often skeptical of wealthy candidates who haven't worked their way up through the political ranks; voters fear they lack political experience or worry rich candidates are trying to "buy" an election.

Historically, candidates in California have been even less representative of the population than the electorate. Most have been educated White males of above-average financial means. The 1990s brought change, however. Underrepresented groups such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, and gay men and lesbians grew in strength and organization, and structural changes facilitated their candidacies. **Term limits** restricting the number of times legislators could be reelected were introduced, thus ensuring greater turnover in the state legislature. In addition, **redistricting** after the censuses of 1990, 2000, and 2010 resulted in redrawn legislative and congressional districts that gave racial-ethnic minority candidates new opportunities.

These changes resulted in a surge of successful women and Latinx candidates for the state legislature and Congress (see Chapter 5, Figure 5.3) and many have been elected as county supervisors, city council members, mayors, and school board members. Female candidates had a particularly good year in 2018, when fifty-three women were elected to state and federal office and three won statewide office. Overall, however, both women and Latinxs are still underrepresented in public office in California.

Although they form a smaller racial minority, African Americans gained a foothold in state politics earlier than Latinxs, electing state legislators and winning statewide office, but Black representation has shrunk as that of other racial-ethnic minorities has increased and the state's African American population has not grown proportionately. However, Tony Thurmond, the state superintendent of public instruction is African American and Vice President Kamala Harris, former California U.S. Senator, is Black and South Asian. Asian Americans are currently the most underrepresented of California's racial minorities, although fifteen are members of the state legislature, and two statewide offices (treasurer and controller) are currently held by Asian American women. Electing candidates has been challenging for Asian Americans because many are recent immigrants who are not yet rooted in the state's political system and because there are cultural and political differences among the Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Koreans, South Asians, and others. But like women and Latinxs, these groups generate more candidates in every election and many Asians now serve on city councils and school boards.

Lesbians and gay men achieved elected office later than any of these groups. Greater bias was a factor in the past, but more than one hundred openly LGBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) individuals have won election to local offices and as judges, and seven serve in the state legislature, including Toni Atkins, the leader of the state senate.

Despite recent electoral successes, all these groups remain underrepresented partly because of racism and sexism but also because many members of these groups are economically disadvantaged, which makes it hard to participate in politics, let alone to take on the demands of a candidacy. Women, people of color, and gay men and lesbians are usually not plugged in to the network of lobbyists, interest groups, and big donors that provide funds for California's expensive campaigns. The fact that non-Whites are less likely to vote or face more eligibility barriers than Whites further reduces their candidates' potential. Nevertheless, when someone from any of these groups becomes a candidate, members of the group are excited to see one of their own running and voter participation within the group increases. Recently, for example, Vietnamese candidates have galvanized their communities, and several have won public office. Meanwhile, organizations within each of these constituencies recruit, train, and support candidates, and the diversity of California candidates and elected officials increases with each election.

The Money

The introduction of primary elections in 1909 shifted the focus of campaigns from political parties to individual candidates, and the introduction of the top-two primary in 2010 reinforced that trend. Thanks to these reforms in candidate selection, California's political parties have little or no control over who their candidates will be; and because the parties also contribute little money or staff, political aspirants must raise money, recruit workers, research issues, and plot strategy on their own—or with the help of expensive consultants.

Without significant help from the parties, candidates must promote themselves, and the cost of running for state assembly or senate often exceeds one million dollars. Spending on races for all candidates for the state legislature totaled over $156 million in the 2018 election and over $287 million for congressional candidates. Campaigns for the eight statewide offices topped $222 million, with the candidates for governor leading the pack.[8]

Interest groups, businesses, and wealthy individuals provide the money. Much campaign financing is provided by **political action committees (PACs)**, which interest groups use to direct money to preferred campaigns. For a list of the top organizational donors, see Table 4.1 in Chapter 4. Legislative leaders such as the speaker of the assembly and the president pro tem of the senate also raise huge sums from such sources and channel the money to their allies; individual candidates raise money by directly asking potential contributors for donations and by organizing special fundraising events, which range from barbecues to banquets and concerts. They also solicit contributions through targeted mailings and the Internet.

Concerned about the influence of money and turned off by campaign advertising, Californians have approved a series of initiatives aimed at

regulating campaign finance. The **Political Reform Act of 1974** required public disclosure of all donors and expenditures through the **Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC)**. In 2000, voters approved **Proposition 34,** a legislative initiative setting contribution limits for individuals and committees. Data presented in Table 3.1 show limits on campaign contributions to state offices over the 2019–2020 election cycle. These figures are limits placed on each election, with primary, general, special, and runoff elections considered separate elections.

Proposition 34 also set voluntary spending limits for candidates. These figures are shown in Table 3.2. Candidates who accept spending limits have their photo and candidate statements published in the official ballot booklets that go to all voters; candidates who decline the limits are excluded from the booklet. Most candidates for the legislature and statewide offices other than governor comply with the spending limits; those who do not lose the moral high ground to those who do, which may influence some voters. There is no limit, however, on how much a candidate can contribute to his or her own campaign, which enables wealthy candidates to substantially fund their own campaigns.

Like most reforms, Proposition 34 has had unintended consequences. Money is given to political parties to spend on behalf of candidates rather than to the candidates themselves. In 2018, the Democratic Party spent $24 million while the Republican Party raised $13.8 million. More significantly, the new spending limits have been subverted by **independent expenditures** by PACs or groups specially organized by political consultants in support of candidates. Independent spending exceeded $167 million in the 2018 campaigns for legislature and

Table 3.1 Proposition 34 Limits on Contributions to State Candidates, 2019–2020

Contributor	Legislature, assembly, or senate	Statewide, except governor	Governor
Person	$4,700	$ 7,800	$29,200
Small contributor committee	$9,300	$15,500	$31,000
Political party	No limit	No limit	No limit

Source: California Fair Political Practices Commission, *www.fppc.ca.gov.*

Table 3.2 Voluntary Expenditure Ceilings for Candidates for State Offices, 2019–2020

Office	Primary	General election
Assembly	$ 620,000	$ 1,085,000
Senate	$ 930,000	$ 1,395,000
Governor	$9,302,000	$15,503,000
Other statewide offices	$6,201,000	$ 9,302,000

Source: California Fair Political Practices Commission, *www.fppc.ca.gov.*

statewide offices.[9] Top independent expenditure groups include the Chamber of Commerce, teachers' and other unions, charter school advocates, and oil companies. In the past, union money went to Democrats whereas most business contributors focused on Republicans. But with Republicans reduced to what may be a long-term minority in the legislature, business interests that have traditionally contributed to Republicans have now begun taking advantage of the top-two primary to support moderate or "business" Democrats running against more traditional liberal, union-friendly Democrats. Their hope is that these more moderates will be more sympathetic to their interests. In 2016, for example, independent expenditures by special interest groups topped $22 million in sixteen runoff elections between Democrats running for the state legislature.[10]

Some of this money is directly contributed to candidates, but even more is spent through independent committees supporting the candidates; and in some campaigns, independent expenditures exceed those of the candidates. The increase in such spending was accelerated with the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision that the First Amendment prohibited government limits on independent expenditures by unions and corporations. The only restriction on independent expenditures is that they cannot be coordinated with the campaigns of the candidates they support. Because they are not directly associated with the candidates, "independent" mailings and television ads often feature the most vicious attacks on opponents.

Tracking campaign spending—to "follow the money"—has become ever more complex and difficult due to independent expenditures, ballot measure committees, PACs with names that cloak their real purpose and backers (the "Coalition to Restore California's Middle Class" is entirely funded by Chevron and other oil companies), and PACs that contribute to other PACs to obscure the individuals and interests who are actually funding campaigns. Proposition 34 regulations have been condemned as "ineffective" and even cynically deceptive "reforms."[11] Meanwhile, groups like Common Cause continue to seek ways to limit the role of money in politics.

Campaigning California Style

Campaign contributors hope to elect allies who will support their interests, and they expect their money to buy ready access and long-term influence. Candidates deny making specific deals, however, insisting that they and their contributors merely share views on key issues. Millions of dollars flow into candidates' coffers through this murky relationship—and "independent" PACs spend still more, supporting candidates sympathetic to their causes.

So much money is needed because California campaigns, whether local or statewide, are highly professionalized. Unable to count on the political parties for funds and support, candidates hire political consultants to recruit workers, raise money, conduct public opinion polls, design advertising, and perform virtually all other campaign activities. These specialists understand the behavior of California voters and use their knowledge to their candidate's benefit.