

CALIFORNIA



Politics and Government

a practical approach

★ third edition ★

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To

the futures of
Adam David, Lee Daniel, and
Rachel Sarah Gerston
and
the memories of
Anna and Teter Christensen
Tillie and Chester Welliever

Preface

California politics and government can be as overwhelming as the state itself. So much is written and debated; so little is understood. This brief book attempts to make some sense of California's complex and volatile political system, with all its contradictions and extremes. We have included the nuts and bolts of the political process and institutions, along with frequent references to the people, groups, and issues that move them.

In earlier editions of this book, we noted the rapidity of change in California and its politics. Yet as we complete work on this edition, even we are taken aback by the pace of our state's transformation. Some of this movement is in personnel, as elections and term limits bring turnover among office holders, and this edition includes the 1994 election results.

But California has changed in other ways as well. Issues such as crime and immigration have come to the forefront of the state's politics. In this edition we discuss their impact on public opinion, elections, and policy making. As in previous editions, we consider California's diversity in almost every chapter, but current controversies about immigration and crime add a new dimension to the diversity of debate. We've also expanded our consideration of economic issues in California, as our state's recession and its budget crisis continue.

Beyond changes in personnel and issues, we've substantially reworked our chapters on parties, elections, the legislature, the budget, and public policy to reflect new perspectives on these traditional topics. In particular, we've tried to address the commonly expressed perception of gridlock in California government.

Many friends and colleagues helped us develop and produce this book. Researcher Bennett Blaustein provided meticulous assistance without which this would still be a work-in-progress. Charu Gupta also helped tie up loose ends. We were guided by the constructive critiques of reviewers: John Culver, California Polytechnic State University; Kristina Gilbert, Riverside Community College; Kenneth Kennedy, College of San Mateo; William Lammers, University of Southern California; and Ted Radke, Contra Costa College. Several colleagues at San

Jose State University and elsewhere who have used this book also offered suggestions which we followed and appreciated (send more!). And we continue to learn from our students and our many friends in politics, journalism, and academia. We're grateful to the production staff at Wadsworth, including Carol Carreon for her project management on an unusually tight schedule and Andrew Ogus for his excellent cover design. To these and countless others, we offer our deepest thanks.

Larry N. Gerston
Terry Christensen

About the Authors

Larry N. Gerston, a professor of political science at San Jose State University, has worked in or taught California politics for more than twenty-five years. He attempts to blend politics and theory whenever possible, viewing both as key components of the political process. His work experiences include stints for a Los Angeles county supervisor and a California assembly member. Gerston has written *Making Public Policy* and *American Government: Politics, Process, and Policies* and has coauthored *Politics in the Golden State* (with Terry Christensen) and *The Deregulated Society* (with Cynthia Fraleigh and Robert Schwab). Professor Gerston is a frequent contributor to the *San Jose Mercury News* and has served since 1980 as the political analyst for television station KNTV in San Jose. He also directs the Silicon Valley Poll, a quarterly public opinion survey of Santa Clara County. Between elections and other political adventures, he enjoys his wife, Elisa, and their three children, Adam, Lee, and Rachel.

Terry Christensen, professor and chair of the political science department at San Jose State University, writes books, scholarly articles, and newspaper columns on California state and local politics and British politics. He has authored *Neighborhood Survival* (1979), a book about urban renewal in London, *Movers and Shakers* (1982, with Philip J. Trounstein), a study of community power, and *Reel Politics* (1987), an analysis of American political movies. His latest book is *Local Politics: Governing at the Grassroots* (1995). A sometime television commentator and longtime political activist, Christensen has worked as a community organizer and campaign consultant and has served as a delegate to the South Bay AFL-CIO Labor Council and as a member of the Democratic State Central Committee. As his history may suggest, he advocates learning by participant observation, and he helped develop San Jose State's extensive internship program.

**California Politics and
Government
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Chapter 1

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

Like so much else about California, our state's politics appear to change constantly, sometimes unpredictably, and even inexplicably. Politicians seem to rise and fall more because of their personalities and campaign treasuries than because of their policies or political party ties. Issues seem to emerge from nowhere, to be resolved through multimillion-dollar ballot campaigns. California's government seems caught in gridlock—fragmented, directionless, and incapable of resolving the state's problems. Often these problems seem to be passed along to the voters, who appear to vacillate between left and right. Many Californians are too turned off to vote at all.

But however unpredictable or even silly California politics may appear, it is serious business that affects us all. And despite its volatility, California can be understood by examining its history and its present characteristics, especially its changing population and economy. The discovery and exploitation of rich natural resources and technological innovation have repeatedly transformed California's economy, and a variety of immigrant groups have made it a diverse, multicultural society. The resulting disparate economic and ethnic interests compete for the benefits and protections conferred by the government and thus shape the state's politics. Accordingly, to understand California today, and perhaps tomorrow, we need to know a little about its past and about the development of these competing interests.

Colonization, Rebellion, and Statehood

The first Californians were probably immigrants like the rest of us. Archaeologists think Native Americans crossed over the Bering Strait from Asia thousands of years ago and then headed south. In 1769 about 300,000 Native Americans were living mostly near the coast of what was to become California when the Spaniards started colonizing the area with a chain of missions and military outposts.

These native Californians were brought to the missions as Catholic converts and workers, but European diseases and the destruction of their culture reduced their numbers to about 100,000 by 1849. They never recovered. Today less than 1 percent of California's population is Native American. Their protest of the proposed sainthood of Father Junipero Serra, who led the mission-building, is only one sign of the scars left by Spanish conquest.

Other than build missions, the Spanish did little with their faraway possession, and little changed when Mexico, which included California within its boundaries, declared its independence from Spain in 1822. A few thousand Mexicans quietly raised cattle on vast ranches.

Meanwhile, expansionist interests in the United States cast covetous eyes on the territory's rich lands and its access to the Pacific. In 1835 Mexico rejected an American offer to buy the territory, but when Mexico and the United States went to war over Texas in 1846, recent Yankee immigrants to California seized the moment and declared independence from Mexico. After the U.S. victory in Texas, Mexico surrendered its claim to possessions extending from Texas to California.

At about the same time, gold was discovered in California. The gold rush that followed increased the area's foreign population from 9,000 in 1846 to 264,000 in 1852. Many immigrants came directly from Europe. The first Chinese also arrived, to work in the mines that yielded more than a billion dollars' worth of gold in five years.

The surge in population and commerce moved the new Californians to political action. By 1849 they had drafted a constitution, mostly copied from those of existing states, and requested statehood, which the U.S. congress was only too glad to grant. The organization of the new state was remarkably similar to what we have today. The forty-eight delegates to the constitutional convention (only seven of whom were native-born Californians) set up a two-house legislature, a supreme court, and an executive branch consisting of a governor, a lieutenant governor, a controller, an attorney general, a superintendent of public instruction, and a surveyor general. A bill of rights was also included in the constitution, but only white males were allowed to vote. The rights of women and racial minorities were ignored and, in addition to being denied the right to vote, California's Chinese, black, and Native American residents were soon prohibited by law from owning land, testifying in court, or attending public schools.

As the gold rush ended, a land rush began. Unlike the land in other states, where small homesteads predominated, much of California's land had been concentrated in huge parcels by the old Spanish and Mexican land grants. As early as 1870, most of the farmland was owned by a few hundred men. Their ranches were the forerunners of contemporary agribusiness corporations 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 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 had been set.

Railroads, Machines, and Reform

Technology wrought the next transformation in the form of railroads. In 1861 four Sacramento merchants, named Crocker, Hopkins, Huntington, and Stanford, founded the railroad that would become the **Southern Pacific**. A year later these four and their allies persuaded Congress to provide millions of dollars in land grants and loan subsidies for a railroad to link California with the eastern United States, thus greatly expanding the market for California products. Leland Stanford, then governor, used his influence to provide state assistance. Cities and counties also contributed, under threat of being bypassed by the railroad. To obtain workers at cheap rates, the railroad builders imported 15,000 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 others. The railroad crushed competitors by cutting its shipping charges, and by the 1880s it had become the state's dominant transportation company. Its manipulation of shipping rates eventually gained the Southern Pacific virtual control of California's economy and made it the state's largest landowner (11.5 million acres, or 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, worked through both the Republican and Democratic political parties to place allies in state and local offices. Once there, they were obliged to protect the interests of the Southern Pacific if they wanted to continue in office. Machine-supported county tax assessors set favorable tax rates for the railroad; the legislature ensured a hands-off policy on the part of the state.

Round One: The Workingmen's Party

Those who were unwilling to support the machine lost jobs, business, and other benefits. Some moved to cities (particularly San Francisco, where manufacturing jobs were increasingly available), along with the state's Chinese, who had completed their work for the railroad and drifted to urban centers in search of employment. The combination was explosive. When a depression made jobs scarce in the 1870s, hostilities broke out between the two groups. Led by Denis Kearney, Irish immigrants became the core of the **Workingmen's Party**, a political organization that blamed the railroad and the Chinese for their economic difficulties.

In 1879, the Workingmen's Party, small farmers, and other disaffected groups called a second state constitutional convention in hopes of breaking the power of the railroad. Their new constitution mandated the regulation of railroads, utilities, banks, and other corporations. An elected state Board of Equalization was created to ensure the fairness of local tax assessments on railroads. In addition, the new constitution prohibited the Chinese from owning land, voting, and working for state or local government.

By 1883 the reform impulse was spent and the Workingmen's Party was dead. The railroad reclaimed power, even taking over the agencies created to regulate it and pushing growth in southern California. The discovery of oil in the Los Angeles area furthered the railroad's agenda. Nonetheless, the efforts made during this period to regulate big business and control racial tensions were to become recurring themes in California life and politics.

Round Two: The Progressives

The growth fostered by the railroad eventually produced a new middle class. The economy grew more urban and more diverse, encompassing merchants, doctors, lawyers, teachers, and skilled workers, who were not dependent on the railroad. Nor were they tolerant of the corrupt practices and favoritism of the machine, which many felt was holding back the economic development of their communities. Instead, the new middle class demanded honesty and competence, which they called "good government." In 1907 a number of these crusaders established the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, a reform group within the Republican party (see Chapter 2), and became part of the national Progressive movement. They elected their leader, **Hiram Johnson**, to the governorship in 1910, and they also captured control of the state legislature.

To break the power of the machine, the **Progressives** introduced reforms that have shaped 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' usefulness as tools of bosses and machines. The parties' ability to hand-pick candidates by controlling the party conventions was taken away by giving voters the power to choose their party's nominees for office in primary elections (see Chapter 2). **Cross-filing** further diluted party power by allowing candidates to win the nominations of more than one political party. The Progressives made city and county elections **nonpartisan** by removing party labels from the ballot altogether. They also created a **civil service** system to select state employees on the basis of their qualifications rather than their political connections.

Finally, the Progressives introduced a system of **direct democracy**, which allowed the voters to amend the constitution and make law through initiatives and referenda and to recall, or 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 becomes a ballot measure or proposition.

Like the Workingmen's Party before them, most Progressives were alarmed about immigration. Antagonism toward recently arrived Japanese immigrants (72,000 by 1910) led the Progressives to ban land ownership by aliens and enactment of the National Immigration Act of 1924, which effectively halted Japanese immigration. On the other hand, the Progressives gave women the right to vote, introduced child-labor and workers'-compensation laws, and enacted conservation programs to protect natural resources.

Ultimately, California's increasingly diversified economy probably had as much to do with the demise of the railroad machine as the Progressive reforms did. The emergent oil, automobile, and trucking industries gave the state important alternative means of transportation and shipping. The reform movement waned in the 1920s, and California settled back to its traditional Republican domination. But the Progressive legacy of weak political parties and direct democracy opened up California's politics to its citizens, as well as to strong personalities and powerful interest groups.

Boom State

California's population grew by more than two million in the 1920s (see Table 1-1). Most of the newcomers headed for Los Angeles, where employment opportunities in shipping, filmmaking, and clothing, automobiles, and aircraft manufacturing abounded. Growth continued at a slower pace during the Great Depression of the 1930s, this time bringing thousands of poor white immigrants from the nation's Dust Bowl. Many wandered through California's great Central Valley in search of work. They soon displaced Mexicans, who had supplanted the Chinese and Japanese, as the state's farm workers. Racial antagonism ran high, and many Mexicans were arbitrarily sent back to Mexico.

TABLE 1-1
California's Population Growth, 1850-1994

Year	Population	Percent of U.S. Population
1850	93,000	0.4
1860	380,000	1.2
1870	560,000	1.4
1880	865,000	1.7
1890	1,213,000	1.9
1900	1,485,000	2.0
1910	2,378,000	2.6
1920	3,427,000	3.2
1930	5,677,000	4.6
1940	6,950,000	5.2
1950	10,643,000	7.0
1960	15,863,000	8.8
1970	20,039,000	9.8
1980	23,780,000	10.5
1990	29,733,000	11.7
1994	31,700,000	12.3

Source: California Department of Finance.

The immigrants of the 1920s and 1930s also changed California politics. Many registered as Democrats, thus challenging the dominant Republicans. The Depression and President Franklin Roosevelt's popular New Deal helped the Democrats become California's majority party in registration, although electoral victories were another matter. Their biggest boost came from Upton Sinclair, a novelist, a Socialist, and the Democratic candidate for governor in 1934. His End Poverty in California (EPIC) movement almost led to an election victory, despite an unprecedented \$10 million campaign by the state's conservative establishment. The Democrats finally gained the governorship in 1938, but their candidate, Culbert Olson, was the only Democratic winner between 1894 and 1958.

World War II revived the economic boom; California's radio, electronics, and aircraft industries grew at phenomenal rates. The jobs brought new immigrants, this time including blacks. But despite the doubling of their proportion of the state's population during the 1940s, blacks were on the periphery of racial conflict. Suspected of loyalty to their ancestral homeland, Japanese Americans (unlike Italian or German Americans) were sent to prison camps during the war. Mexican Americans, too, were victimized when Anglo sailors and police attacked them in the "Zoot Suit Riots" in Los Angeles in 1943.

While the cities boomed, the Central Valley bloomed, thanks to water projects initiated by the state and federal governments during the 1930s. Dams and canals brought water to the desert and reaffirmed agriculture as a mainstay of the California economy. The defense industries that had supplemented California's industrial base during the war also became permanent fixtures, with aerospace and electronics adding to their momentum.

Although the voters had chosen a Democratic governor during the Depression, they returned to the Republican fold as the economy revived. Earl Warren, who symbolized a new breed of Republican, was elected to the governorship in 1942, 1946, and 1950, and became the only individual ever to win the office three times. Extolling "personal accountability," Warren staked out a relationship with the voters that he claimed was above party politics and used cross-filing to win the nominations of both parties. Ultimately appointed chief justice of the United States Supreme Court in 1953, Warren left California just as the Democrats were on the rise again.

Hoping to regain power after Warren's departure, Democratic activists tried to strengthen their party by organizing the California Democratic Council (CDC), a network of Democratic clubs. The CDC helped elect a Democratic majority to the state legislature as well as a Democratic governor, Edmund G. ("Pat") Brown, in 1958. To prevent Republicans from taking advantage of cross-filing again, the state's new leaders immediately outlawed that electoral device.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Democratic tandem in the legislative and executive branches moved the government forward with uncharacteristic speed. Completion of the massive California Water Project, construction of the state highway network, and organization of the higher education system were among the advances made to accommodate a growing population. But all these programs cost money, and after opening their purse strings during the eight-year