

California Was a Paradise, Then Newsom Happened

By Victor Davis Hanson

People talk about the [California disaster](#), but I don't think we fully appreciate the severity and the manifestations of it. And the best barometer to discover that is how many people are leaving. It's estimated that somewhere between 400,000 and 500,000 Californians left in '25, '26.

Now, the problem with that is they're not leaving a barren state. They're not leaving a cold Alaska. They're leaving the most beautiful state in the country that for years under a bipartisan system of Pat Brown, Ronald Reagan, George Deukmejian, Pete Wilson, and to some extent Arnold Schwarzenegger, it had wonderful governance.



[So, why are they leaving?](#) Why have 11 to 12 million people, a quarter of the present population, left California?

Well, the Reason Foundation just did a comprehensive study of all the roads in all the states and ranked them according to congestion, quality of roads, bridges, everything. California was 49th, 49th in the country.

In terms of school scores, it's down to about 40 to 41 in the nation, even though it's 13th in the amount of money it spends. It's got one-third of all the homeless people, maybe up to nearly a half in some studies.

It's got a third of all the welfare recipients. Twenty-two percent of the people live below the poverty line.

Think of this. It has the highest gasoline taxes in the nation and [the highest gas prices](#), and that's a combination. It refuses to tap its considerable fifth-in-the-nation oil and natural gas reserves to the full extent that it could.

It shut down the timber industry. It shut down the mining industry.

So, we're paying because of our green fanaticism on oil blends, and we've been driving out oil refineries, and we have these high taxes.

We're paying \$7 to \$8 a gallon right now for gas. We have the highest electricity rates in the continental United States. Only Hawaii has it higher. Think of that.

We have some of the highest property crime rates in the country. San Francisco, until recently, was the highest property crime rate city per capita in the nation.

Our sales tax is among the top 10. We have the highest income taxes. Now, we know why this is the problem.

We know why, why this all happened. We haven't had a

Republican governor in nearly 20 years since Arnold Schwarzenegger left. We have no statewide offices that are Republican, no attorney general, no lieutenant governor, no state controller, nothing.

We have 52 seats in the Congress. We only have seven, you know, it's like 12% ... We only have seven Republican congressmen, and yet Donald Trump almost got 30%, 40% of the vote. So, we have less than a third of what we should be proportionally represented in Congress.

All of the state and local judges, after 20 years of governance by left-wing [officials], are left-wing themselves.

So, the judicial, the executive, and the legislative branches are all one party, supermajorities in both legislatures. No statewide officer that's a Republican.

What do you do about it? Well, who is the iconic victim? Who has been at the center of this maelstrom for the last 30 years? One man, [Gavin Newsom](#).

He's never had a job outside the public sector since 1997 when Jerry Brown appointed him to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. He was there for eight years. Then where did he go? He went to mayor of San Francisco for eight years. Then where did he go? He went to lieutenant governor.

Then where did he go? He's governor for six years. And why did this happen? We see all the symptoms, but why did it happen? Why did we have a monoparty state?

I think it's pretty easy. Three things happened. No. 1: One quarter of the population, as I said, fled the country.

And these weren't just anybody. These were the middle, upper-middle, and upper, upper-middle-class taxpayers, small businesses who couldn't take the high taxes and the poor infrastructure.

And they left. And they left a beautiful scenic California to places, I'll be frank, that are not so hospitable, Utah, Tennessee, Nevada.

In other words, they left California that was a paradise, and they went to places that were man-made paradises, but had none of our natural advantages. So, that was one factor.

We have the highest number of foreign-born people of any state, any state. It's about 11 million people in California were not born in the United States.

It's up to nearly 29% of the population. Many of them, not all, but many of them are here unlawfully. That required an enormous civic project of assimilation, acculturation, integration.

And what did we get instead from these Democrat administrations? We got DEI tribalism and ethnic chauvinism, and that manifests itself in higher crime rates, in truck drivers who are issued licenses who are not qualified to drive and pose a hazard on the freeway, to drug cartels, you name it.

San Francisco, as I said, had the highest per capita property crime rate.

And then the third tester in this sad mosaic is not just people leaving and not just people coming in unlawfully in many cases, but without sufficient preparation to be an American citizen from a different country without civic education.

We have now about \$14 trillion of market capitalization in Silicon Valley, and the whole political nexus has shifted to San Francisco, where the most radical politicians the last 20 years were funded with this huge war chest by very affluent people who were never subject to the consequences of their baleful ideology.

And I'm talking about Barbara Boxer, Dianne Feinstein, Kamala Harris, Willie Brown, Gavin Newsom, Jerry Brown, Nancy Pelosi, some of the most powerful politicians in the state and the country, and very left-wing have moved the state from a centrist, center-right state that was well-governed under Reagan and Deukmejian and Wilson to one of the [most poorly governed states](#) in the nation that people do not want any part of.

Is there any hope? Well, we would have to do a lot of things. We would have to tell people that we're not gonna tolerate one-third to almost 40% of the nation's homeless people.

Maybe Spencer Pratt, if he's elected mayor, or Steve Hilton can say, "We're not going to put up with it. You can't do it.

"We're not going to issue all these general benefits for people who fornicate, inject, urinate, and defecate on our streets in a medieval fashion, and we're going to close our borders. We're gonna operate closely with ICE because we're trying to stop this high crime rate, much of it from people who are here unlawfully.

"More importantly, we're gonna have to cut the taxes and regulations or every oil refinery is gonna flee the state."

Two big ones have just left, and that's one reason, along with the high taxes and the prohibition on new oil and gas development, even though we're number five in the nation on potential reserves, that we have the highest gasoline prices by far in the country.

We're also going to have to look at voter fraud. We know that California has the most liberal, lax mail-in and early voting protocols in the country. The stories abound, the statistics are there, that there's no way to verify who gets a ballot and how many ballots a person gets. There's no photo ID, nothing, and that has to be radically changed.

Can we do all of these things? I don't know. But if we continue to elect the people who are responsible, what's gonna happen? People are going to flee, flee, flee.

And remember a final thing. There's a very strange dynamic. The people on the left who created this mess were primarily the denizens from San Diego to Santa Rosa on the coast, about 700 or 800 miles.

Some of the wealthiest real estate in the United States, some of the wealthiest people in the United States.

This was a utopian project on homelessness, on DEI, on open borders, on lavish budgets. Gavin Newsom, remember, came in with about \$214 billion budget, just six years ago. It's \$350 billion now. He raised the budget 64% in just six years.

So, they are exempt. We're the lab rats. They are exempt from their experiment, this utopian California experiment.

And who else keeps voting these people in? The people who are exempt vote them in, and the people who are very poor from countries around the world, impoverished, they find the California entitlement and welfare system, nothing's wrong with it.

It's full of fraud. It's full of mismanagement, waste, and abuse, but it is very generous.

So, you've got a medieval society with a very small but powerful wealthy elite that keep voting in this left-wing project, and then a large pyramid base of poor people. As I said, probably 27% not born in the United States, and then you've got a shrinking middle.

Add it all up and you have the mess we have today in California.

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