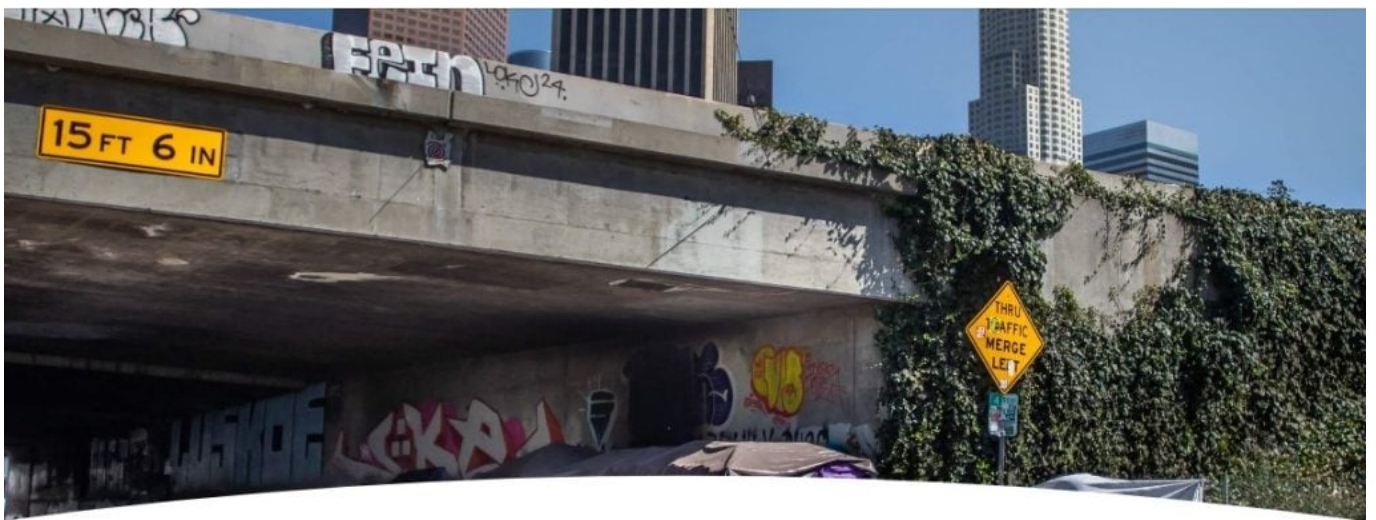


Can California Still Be Saved?

By Victor Davis Hanson

The recent California gubernatorial and Los Angeles mayoral elections—where, remarkably, Steve Hilton and Spencer Pratt both appear to have advanced to the general election in November—offer a glimmer of hope.



Could it be that some on the Left, along with a number of Independents, have finally realized that neither wealth nor an upscale ZIP code can protect them from the Left's vindictive socialist madness?

California gas prices, even prior to the Iran war, had reached the highest levels in the continental United States.

The cause is self-evident: left-wing policies that forbid most new gas and oil exploration, impose radical green-fuel mandates and levy the highest gas taxes in the U.S. and drive out oil refineries.

Illegal immigration has soared. Currently, some 11 million Californians—28 percent of the resident population—were not born in the U.S. This foreign-born demographic exploded at

precisely the time that civic education and melting-pot assimilation and integration were denigrated in the public schools and replaced by ethnic chauvinism and pre-civilizational DEI tribalism.

A third of the nation's welfare recipients and nearly a third of the homeless live in California. Almost a quarter of the state's population lives below the poverty line.

California has the highest electricity rates in the mainland United States and the steepest income taxes in the nation. And yet it annually runs the highest budget deficits of the 50 states.

Despite massive unfunded pension debts of \$265 billion, the state has spent billions of dollars on illegal-alien subsidies, from free health care to solar panels.

The state has wasted between \$15 billion and \$20 billion on its Bakersfield-to-Merced high-speed rail line since the project was approved in 2008. Not a single foot of track has yet been laid in the past 18 years.

Less than a third of California public school students read at proficient levels.

Gavin Newsom's first budget as governor in 2019–20 was \$214 billion. His newest 2026 budget is \$350 billion—a 63 percent increase in spending in just six years.

About 12 million Californians have fled the state since Newsom began his uninterrupted three-decade political career in 1997. And it seems that the more Californians have left, the greater the yearly exodus grows, with a likely 400,000 to 500,000 leaving in 2026–27.

Mass flight from the most beautiful state in the Union is the greatest indictment of the Democrat monopoly–supermajorities in both houses of the legislature, overwhelming numbers of

liberal-appointed state judges, and no statewide Republican executive officeholders.

Only 13 percent of California's 52-member congressional delegation is Republican. Yet Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump won 38 percent of the state's vote in 2024—nearly triple the percentage of its paltry seven congressional seats.

In the most recent Reason Foundation 50-state ranking of roads and highway infrastructure, California (with its temperate weather) ranked 49th in the nation, only ahead of frigid Alaska.

We know the cause of these California disasters—one-party rule for nearly two decades and the rise of Silicon Valley-funded, powerful left-wing Bay Area politicians (Barbara Boxer, Willie Brown, Jerry Brown, Dianne Feinstein, Kamala Harris, Gavin Newsom, Nancy Pelosi).

The neo-socialist new Democratic Party is strongest in California and has pushed through a slate of disastrous radical-green policies, sanctuary-city madness, harebrained schemes to deal with homelessness, critical race and legal theories, and solar and high-speed-rail boondoggles.

Left-wing Bay Area politicians rely on Silicon Valley's \$11 trillion in market capitalization and on public unions like the SEIU and the CTA. Election Day in California is a mere construct, since winners often mysteriously do not emerge for weeks.

Add it up: massive legal and illegal immigration, an unprecedented exodus of the upper middle class, and an enormous influx of new wealth have created a medieval society of the well-off and the very poor—with increasingly few in between.

We know the medicine to save California, but the Left feels it

is worse than the disease.

Sane leaders would create humane, drug-free relocation shelters for the treatment of the homeless far from downtowns, coupled with strict enforcement of vagrancy laws.

They would push vast new investment in infrastructure and roads.

They would end no cash bail and return to three-strikes-and-you're-out sentencing.

Californians require the restoration of their oil, timber, and mining industries.

We must finally end the divisive and nihilist tribal chauvinism of DEI hiring and admissions.

Closed borders and an end to sanctuary-state and sanctuary-city status would lead to a return to diverse, legal, meritocratic, measured, melting-pot immigration.

Across-the-board tax reductions and deregulation could win back fleeing wealth and investment.

Stiff penalties for welfare and entitlement fraud would deter the chronic looting of state programs.

Sane water policies would end the vast outflow of scarce water into the ocean.

Finally, the schools will either reject failing therapeutic curricula and embrace a return to traditional classical education or ensure an illiterate population unable to maintain even the basic infrastructure and institutions they inherited from far better-educated previous generations.

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