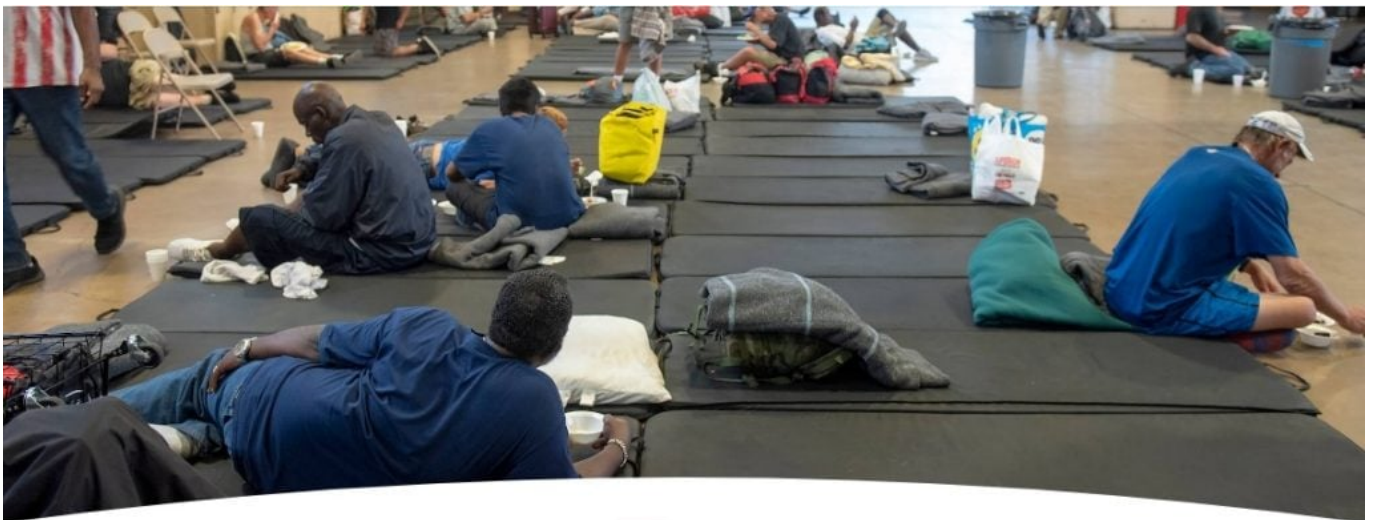


Is California Reaching Critical Mass?

By Victor Davis Hanson

By any measure, California is a failed state—and a national embarrassment.

Taxes? It has the highest income and gas taxes in the nation.



Roads? A Reason Foundation survey ranks it 49th among the states.

Mass flight? Between 250,000 and 350,000 more Californians leave the state than move in each year. Housing, gas, insurance, and electricity prices? The highest in the continental U.S.

Illegal aliens, the poor, the homeless, the foreign-born, and welfare recipients? The largest numbers in the U.S.

Public K–12 schools? Test scores in the bottom quartile.

Poverty? Twenty percent live below the poverty line.

So, what happened to the nation's most richly naturally endowed—and once best governed—state?

The Left took total control—after millions of the embattled middle class fled. Millions more impoverished immigrants, legal and illegal, took their place. Left-wing Silicon Valley spawned some of the wealthiest elite liberal enclaves in the world.

The result was a neo-feudal society that was hardly democratic.

Millions of subsidized poor compose the bottom. A beleaguered middle continues to shrink. An ultra-rich apparatus of left-wing coastal professionals and investors rules from the top.

As upper-bracket taxpayers fled, taxes rose on those who remained to fund expanding entitlements for newly arrived poor would-be residents. In turn, even more of the middle class left.

The remaining pyramidal economic structure ensured a Democratic monopoly—further entrenched by changing balloting laws, gerrymandering voting districts, vote harvesting, fueling public employee unions, and ignoring or undermining popular referenda.

In 2014, Californians voted for Proposition 1, a \$7.5 billion water bond designed to solve the state's chronic water storage deficit.

Included was \$2.7 billion specifically designated for new reservoirs, as the last major reservoir had been built in 1980, when California had roughly half its current population.

Despite the people's vote, bureaucracies, elected officials, and green activists blocked all new reservoir construction.

Adding insult to injury, Governor Gavin Newsom instead used \$250 million from the Proposition 1 fund to blow up four dams on the Klamath River. They had once provided storage, electrical generation, recreation, and flood control.

Californians have twice voted in referenda (for Proposition 209 and against Proposition 16) to bar the use of racial preferences for contracting, admissions, and promotion in public institutions.

Most public universities simply ignored the law. They continued their “diversity” quotas under new names, relying on left-wing elected officials and judges to ignore again the will of the people.

Preferential admissions, along with racially segregated dorms and graduation ceremonies, continued under euphemisms and denials. “Theme” houses, “affinity” graduations, and “safe spaces” practice “affirmative” discrimination.

California voters in 2008 passed Proposition 11 to stop political gerrymandering by creating a supposedly nonpartisan state redistricting commission of five Democrats, five Republicans, and four Independents. Two years later, the commission took over redrawing congressional districts as well.

But Democratic lobbyists and lawyers sabotaged the goal of disinterested redistricting according to population and geography. Instead, racial preferences and the interests of the Democratic majority of incumbents prevailed to warp the intent of the voters.

Although Republicans usually achieved nearly 40 percent of the California vote in national elections, two decades later there were only seven Republicans in the 52-person congressional delegation, or a mere 13 percent of the state’s representatives.

But even that tiny contingent was considered too generous by the Left. Thus, in 2026, it will likely be further redistricted down to four or five seats.

The balloting mess in the recent Los Angeles mayoral race

further reminds the nation and the world just how dysfunctional and anti-democratic California has become.

Democrats warp elections without the need for the old Chicago way of outright ballot theft or destruction. Instead, they do so in a “legal” manner by passing insane laws that ensure fraud and Democratic victories.

The winners in the strange jungle primaries—usually both Democrats—were not announced until a week after the polls closed. One of the eventual winners in mayoral race, the socialist Nithya Raman, had already given her teary concession speech after coming in well back at third on election night.

The Republican Spencer Pratt was comfortably ahead of her in second place on Election Day—only to lose, as expected, when large numbers of late ballots that broke roughly 90 percent Democratic were counted.

Remember, every registered voter is sent a mail-in ballot. If it is postmarked on election day, it can arrive at vote centers up to seven days after the election.

No one really knows whether the ballots are mailed to the dead, to former or nonexistent addresses, or to legally eligible voters—by design. In 2024, when losing presidential candidate Kamala Harris won the state by 20 points, only 0.09 percent of all ballots cast were rejected.

Anyone can register and receive a provisional ballot on the same day.

Ballot harvesting and ballot curing are legal.

Campaign operatives can round up voters, gather their ballots, and deliver them en masse to a voting center.

They can register anyone to vote, provide a ballot, and then deposit it immediately afterwards.

There is no requirement to provide proof of U.S. citizenship to get a driver's license. Yet a license is not even needed to register. Any credit card without a picture suffices.

And it gets worse still.

If the potential voter has no license, no Social Security number, no proof of U.S. citizenship, and no credit cards, he still will be registered—once harvesters provide him with a “unique identifier” number.

He can then vote that very day without any ID at all.

If, in California, you claim you are illiterate and cannot write your name—no problem.

You simply make a mark—anything from an X to a happy face. No one asks whether an illiterate can read the names on the ballot.

Then your handler serves as a “witness” and signs his name. Such witnesses are almost always vote harvesters, and they can sign as many ballots as they wish.

If all that doesn't work, ballot “curers” can be called in help remedy rejected partisan ballots post facto.

Democrats now rely on the system to ensure supermajorities in both houses of the state legislature, no statewide Republican officeholders, a tiny vestigial Republican congressional contingent, and almost exclusively Democratic-appointed liberal judges.

The more Democrats control the state, the more socialist, anti-democratic—and autocratic—California becomes.

Their gift to the nation is a third-world failed state, now in danger of societal collapse.

Fires rage—given ideologically driven prohibitions on brush

and forest management, cuts in fire departments, and sheer bureaucratic incompetence.

Multibillion-dollar boondoggle rail projects rust.

Billions of welfare dollars are stolen with impunity. Illegal aliens who cannot speak or read English are given passes to obtain commercial trucking licenses—as if California's critical road signs are written in some language other than English.

A quarter of residents can't pay their sky-high power bills on time—and correctly assume that the state and the utility companies will mostly foot their delinquent bills.

Since 2020, over 100,000 criminals have been released early from state prisons—and most have little fear that their present and future crimes will earn them another prison sentence.

Half the state's births are paid for through state-supplied welfare coverage.

And now the homeless without addresses or IDs can determine elections.

In sum, import poverty; romanticize illegal immigration; demonize the middle class; drive out private-sector capital; and exempt elites from the consequences of their own ideology—and you're left with a state where democracy dies, along with everything else.

First published in [American Greatness](#)