California Campaigns and Elections

Primary Elections: An early, preliminary election used by parties for the purposes of selecting candidate representatives to run against the other party in the general election

- Prop. 198 created a “blanket primary” in California, starting with the 1998 primary
- Arguments for a blanket primary:
  - (A) Broadens the field and gives the candidates more of a gauge on what they have to do with regard to campaign strategies in the November general election
  - (B) Gives independents and minor party voters an opportunity to vote in primaries
- Arguments against:
  - (A) Campaign costs increase because candidates have to spend more money to reach all voters – not just their own party voters
  - (B) Moderate candidates would probably be elected – which might not be indicative of what party voters want
- © Voting for another party would lead to abuse, such as a democratic voters voting for a weak GOP candidates, vica versa.
- The goal of Prop. 198 was to get candidates to focus on ideological center
- This might have diluted the influence away from both GOP conservative extremes and Democratic, liberal ones
- Non-Partisan Primaries: Primaries that nominate candidates that do not come with a partisan affiliation; parties cannot nominate that candidate
- Examples: judges, school boards, county and municipal offices, etc.

Voting in California:

Who Votes?

- (1) Over 80% are white
- (2) Most are home owners, not renters
- (3) Most are older
- (4) Most have a post-high school education
- (5) Growing number of Latino and Asian voters

Advantage: Incumbents – Why?

- Redistricting: Has led to electoral “safe seats” and districts that are limited to ideological constituencies that favor the incumbent
- TV Spending Ads: Between 1976 and 1990, over $860 million was spend on campaigns, for both candidates and propositions
- Direct Mail: Has become popular so as to target certain types of voters – such as in tight races where moderate, “swing voters” make the difference
- Political Action Committees (PAC’s): Fund about 60% of campaign contributions; 15% come from parties and legislative leaders; 25% come from candidate’s personal funds and individual contributions
- This all leads to candidate-centered election campaigns
- Often means weaker, less-disciplined parties

Party State and County Central Committees

- Made up of partisan office holders, nominees and appointees
- They do not represent the average, rank and file party voter – instead, the core party elites
- They adopt resolutions
- Coordinate fund-raising
- Try to encourage party enthusiasm
- However, actual campaigning and other duties of the candidate and office holder is done by the candidates themselves and their personal staff
- County Central Committees are elected by popular vote from different state assembly districts
- Size varies according to county – LA has over 300 members in each party in the LA CC
- State law prohibits parties from endorsing a candidate during a primary campaign
- This discourages parties from having a strong and effective state and county representation

Direct Democracy

- Has roots in the progressive era in the early 20th century
- Gov. Hiram Johnson (1911-1917) helped start the direct citizens initiative (ballot proposition)
- Permits voters to place a proposed law on the ballot by way of petition; petition signatures must be equal to 5% of votes cast in the last gubernatorial election
- Advantages: Intended to have citizens make policy directly – citizen empowerment
- Useful for removing incompetent officials and, also, the likelihood for corruption
- Helps to undermine “special interests”; elite interest groups cannot target incumbent legislators that are beholden to these groups for re-election; mutual accommodation cannot take place between special interests and elected officials
- Disadvantages: These special interests instead target voters and spend millions of dollars on TV ads and superficial “sound bytes” meant to sway voters
- Ballot initiatives are too complex and long for voters to be able to read and understand; public can be misled by technical language
- Process has been criticized for having propositions place too many restrictions on taxing and spending to the point where lawmakers have little choice in terms of making up a budget that is on time and that does not violate these Constitutional/ballot initiatives
- Too much direct democracy can possibly do damage to protecting and safe guarding the rights of the minority; propositions have sometimes been found to be unconstitutional, due to violation of federal/state civil liberties and constitutional freedoms

- The ballot initiative can be an effective tool for Governors to go over the heads of legislatures and have pass their policy agenda into law without having to bargain too much with the legislature

- Or, the Governor can threaten the use of the ballot initiative as a way to move the legislature closer to his policy proposition during negotiations for legislation

Famous and Significant Ballot Propositions

- Prop. 13 (1978)
  - Cut property taxes in half – included residential home and business prop.
taxes
  - Property tax increases were limited to just 2% of the purchase price of a
house – this meant that property taxes would not grow to keep pace with
inflation; this amounted to a cut in real terms
  - Passed with 64% of vote
  - Led to the slashing of local services
  - Local govts. (city and county) and school districts – which were largely
funded by property tax revenues – lost revenues
  - These local entities became dependent on state “bail-outs” (state-level
funding from the state budget)
  - This led to the loss of local autonomy for local govts.
  - Prop. 13 also made it very difficult to raise most taxes (in most cases, 2/3
public support from ballot initiatives is required)
- Prop. 98 (1988)
  - Originated from a coalition of public education/teacher groups
  - Due, in part, to prop. 13, school districts felt a funding crunch
  - School-aged population was exceeding the level of state/local funding schools
were receiving
  - Prop. 98 was a constitutional amendment that:
    - (1) Reserved (“earmarked”) approx. 40% of the state general budget for
public education (K-12, Community Colleges)
    - (2) Allocated additional revenue for purposes of class size reduction and
increasing teachers’ salaries
- (3) Devoted future budget surpluses to education, instead of returning budget surplus $ to taxpayers
- Many who oppose Prop. 98 complain that this constitutional budget provision give the legislature very little room to maneuver if 40% of the budget cannot be touched;
- Forces law makers to cut discretionary funding such as higher education (CSU, UC systems), medi-caid, health care programs, etc. or possibly raise taxes during times of budget deficits
- Prop. 187 (1994) – the “Save Our State” Initiative
- Mandated the eliminating of health, medical and educational services to illegal immigrants and their children
- Required public school officials to report any illegal immigrants to appropriate authorities
- Its passage was blocked by a federal court due to its arguable violation of the 14th Amendment’s “Equal Protection” Clause
- The State Justice Dept. pursued its passage in federal court under the Wilson Adm.; Did not pursue under the Davis Adm.
- Helped spur the drive to motivate and energize Latinos to register, turn out and vote Democratic; contributed to California’s turn toward the Democratic left
- Props. 209 (1996, eliminating of affirmative action for state/public agencies, schools, colleges hiring and admissions) and 227 (1998, Limiting bilingual ed. programs to “English only” programs in public schools) also helped with the drive toward Latino voter turnout and greater support for Democratic candidates
- Percent minority of California electorate increased from 18% in 1990 to 28% in 1998-2003
- Prop. 5 (1998)
- Originated by a longstanding dispute between the 40 Indian tribes and state officials
- Federal law allows Native American tribes to engage in whatever gaming is allowed by the state; thus, state gaming officials and tribes have to negotiate gaming compacts
- Prop. 5 required the governor to approve virtually any tribal casino application
- No restrictions would be placed on the number of casinos or machines per casino
- Controversial video slots would be allowed
- Supporters of Prop. 5 called themselves “Californians for Indian Self-Reliance”
- As “sovereign nation”, they are morally and legally justified to run their own casinos as they see fit
- Much of the gaming revenue has been used to pay for Indian health care, education and lift Indian reservation economies out of poverty
- Opponents of prop. 5 consisted of Las Vegas casinos, horse tracks, law enforcement and Christian fundamentalists (STRANGE BEDFELLOWS, INDEED!!)
- Argued that Prop. 5 sanctioned "unregulated, untaxed and unlimited gambling"
- Tribes spend nearly $70 million to pass prop. 5, topping that of the $28 million spent by the Nevada casino

The Recall of Gray Davis

- Structure: The difficulty for putting a recall measure on the ballot requires a low threshold (burden);
- No proof of legal malfeasance is needed; simple unpopularity is sufficient
- Petition signatures need to equal 12% of turnout for last gubernatorial election (in this case, approx. a little less than 900,000 valid petition signatures were needed)
- Political Climate: Post 2002 election discovery of $38 billion budget deficit
- Recall supporters claimed that Davis knew the magnitude of the deficit, but hid it from voters only after he was re-elected
- Also, Davis was blamed for the price gouging and "rolling blackouts" that resulted from the energy crisis of 2001 - led to all time lows in Davis approval rating (27%)
- Unlike the 2002 re-election campaign, Davis was faced with a more "acceptable" moderate GOP opponent who was also more charismatic and famous
- While a majority of Latinos did vote "no" on the recall (55%), this was still less than the projected % of Latino's who were expected to vote "No" on the recall (65% - according to one simulation model)
- Thus, ENOUGH Latinos were persuaded to vote for the recall; that combined with the 60% white support made the recall successful
- Enough Democrats (40 percentile) were persuaded to vote for the recall; combined with the solid Republican bloc of support (80-90 percentile), the recall was successful
- A majority of BOTH men (60%) and women (53%) supported the recall
- Enough women (42%) voted for Arnold to combine with male support for Arnold
- A combination of web access, talk radio and grass-roots efforts combined with the recall effort being bank-rolled by Darrel Issa - the "Rescue California" committee that was funded with $1.8 million of Issa's $ helped make the recall campaign successful

- Recall needed to pass by a simple majority "yes" vote
- If that case, the successful replacement needed the largest plurality vote to win - even as low as that % might have been
- Potential Problems:
- Voters faced an overwhelming array of candidates - approx. 135!
- There was the problem of party/electoral strategy for both the Democrats and GOP: For the Dem's: Support just the "NO" vote effort? Just Bustamante on the replacement ballot? Both?
- For the GOP: Support the ideologically less attractive, but more electable/viable Arnold? Support the true conservative and Republican McClintock?
- Due to structure and rules of the ballot, the winning replacement candidate could have received LESS votes that the "NO" vote for the recall