



# The Changing Political Landscape of California, 1968 to 2000

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores the political geography of California by analyzing regional voting behavior and the nature of the population at the county level from 1968 to 2000. Most methods have recognized three political regions in California: Southern California, Northern California, and the Central Valley. The logic for these regions is based on primary settlement patterns and political cultures. Patterns of Republican vote for president from 1968 to 2000 and the percentage of white population from 1970 to 1998 show that the state may be moving toward two political regions: one consisting of a more racially varied and urban coast; the other a less racially diverse and more rural interior.

CALIFORNIA IS an intriguing state for political geographers to study. The most populous state of the nation, California sends the most members to Congress and possesses the largest number of electoral votes. California has been a Democratic lock the past three elections, which was why Florida was so vital to the 2000 Bush campaign. California provided Al Gore with one-fifth of his electoral college vote and has been described as a Democratic-leaning state since Democrats have carried it since 1992 and control most of the state's elected offices and its US Senate delegation (Decker 2000; Smith 2000). But from 1968 to 1988, California was in the Republican column in presidential elections. George W. Bush devoted more resources to California than his father in 1992 and Bob Dole in 1996, and going into the last week of the campaign, Bush made a visit to California when polls showed him closing in on Gore's lead. But the Gore camp saw California as the key to their electoral college victory and eventually won an easy victory in California despite losing the closest and most controversial presidential election in history. A Bush upset in California would have made Florida moot.



California is the most expensive state in which to wage a campaign due to the existence of more than half a dozen media markets and due to its large social, political, and geographic scope. Both campaigns in 2000 employed Spanish-language media to attract the growing Latino vote. A winning campaign in California must appeal to different geographic areas and social groups. This has given the more socially diverse Democratic coalition an advantage. California is the first state in which whites are in the minority. But in many suburban and rural counties, whites are still in the majority, and they remain the single largest racial group in California. Regional differences, a changing population, and the cultural and physical vastness of California make it a fascinating state for political geographers to study. A geographical inquiry into the political effects of this cultural and physical regionalism is long overdue, especially when one considers the critical role played by California in American political geography.

In addition to the electoral vote, California is important because it signals many key political, economic, social, and cultural trends (Walters 1992). The ascendancy of Ronald Reagan in the 1960s, the antitax campaign of Proposition 13 in the 1970s, and the browning of California in the 1990s signaled new and important political and social trends forthcoming to the rest of the nation (Schrag 1998; Baldassare 2000). Former Governor Pete Wilson's (1991–1998) immigration politics resulted in a backlash against the GOP, and George W. Bush's "compassionate conservatism" tried to heal wounds among Latino voters, who are the dominant ethnic group in many regions of California (Clark 1998). Bush had hoped to mirror in California his modest success among Latino voters in Texas. But post-election analysis revealed that Bush lost the Latino vote decisively to Al Gore (*Sacramento Bee* 2000).

### **Political Regions in California**

Regional differences in California have roots in historical settlement and environmental patterns (Meinig 1998). A common north-south method divides California along the Tehachapi Mountains (Lawrence 1995; Meinig 1998). Garreau (1981) splits and places California into two of his nine nations. Northern California from



the Bay Area up to the North Coast is part of Ecotopia with the Pacific Coasts of Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Canada. The southern portion of the state is part of Mexamerica with the southwestern border areas of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. His approach divides California into a Yankee-New England North and a Latino-Anglo South. Regional texts such as Birdsall and Florin (1992) divide and place California into their North Pacific Coast, Southwest Border Area (like Garreau 1981), and Empty Interior regions of Anglo-America.

Other methods have divided California into 14 regions (Walters 1992); seven states named Deserts, The Sierra, Land of Fire, Land of Water, The Great Valley, The Fractured Province, and The Profligate Province (Fradkin 1995); and 4 regions called Los Angeles County, San Francisco Bay Area, Central Valley, and Orange County and the Inland Empire (Baldassare 2000). The most common political division has recognized slight variations of three political regions in California: Southern California, Northern California-Bay Area, and the Central Valley (Figure 1; Phillips 1969; Pierce 1972; Korey 1999; Jordan-Bychkov and Domosh 1999; Wolfinger and Greenstein 1969).

The purpose of this research will be to explore political regionalism in the state and the impact of changing populations upon political regions. Regional borders can be fuzzy and this project will not try to specifically delineate regional boundaries. It will accept a generalized three-region scheme as a guidepost in exploring the presence, change, or fluctuation of political regionalism in California. This study will gauge political regionalism in more contemporary times in order to gain insight into the present and future political geography of California. The regionalism suggested by Jordan-Bychkov and Domosh (1999) is influenced by Elazar's (1994) three political cultures and is similar to Phillips (1969). Northern California is part of the moralistic political culture of New England; Central California is influenced by the individualistic political culture; and Southern California is influenced by the traditionalist political culture.

Southern California is the most conservative of the three regions and influenced by the traditionalist political culture. Its conserva-

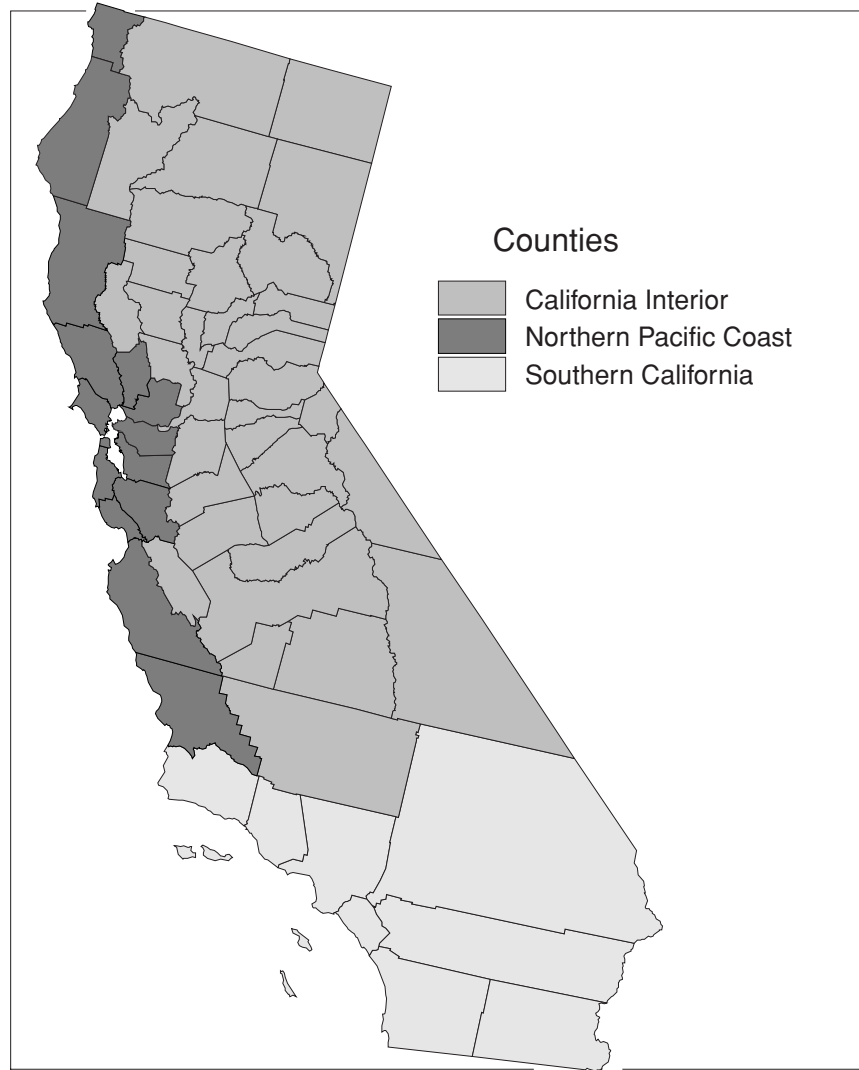


Figure 1. The Three Political Regions of California (Sources: Jordan-Bychkov 1999; Phillips 1969; Elazar 1994).

tism is in part attributed to the white protestant settlers from the Midwest, Great Plains, and South who immigrated to Southern California from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Wilson 1967; Rogin and Shover 1970; Meinig 1998; McWilliams



1999). The traditionalist political culture places a premium on governance by the elites of society and has its roots in the South (Elazar 1994). Political power is held by the wealthy upper-class dominated by white males. Government is a limited tool used by the elites to maintain the status quo—which benefits them. Southern California in the 1950s and 1960s became home to a hotbed of anticommunist conservatism and the John Birch Society, which was primarily led by wealthy white males (Dallek 2000). Suburban Orange County became home to many middle- to upper-class whites who found work in the defense and manufacturing industries and purchased homes after World War II (Dallek 2000; Walters 1992). Orange County voted heavily for Goldwater in the 1964 primary campaign and later for Nixon and Reagan (Rogin and Shover 1970). A majority white population, many World War II veterans, home ownership, economic growth and prosperity, and Protestantism created an individualistic, free-market, anticommunist, antitax, and conservative view of society and politics (Dallek 2000; Schrag 1998; Walters 1992; Wilson 1967; Rogin and Shover 1970). As long as Southern California was dominated by whites, Republicans expected a heavily populated region of support. Minorities supported Democratic candidates (Jackson 1991; Nakanishi 1991). Blacks moved into urban areas of Southern California in large numbers to escape poverty during the Great Depression and to find work in the burgeoning industries of Southern California during and after World War II (Dallek 2000). The emergence of larger Latino and Asian populations to the pre-World War II base of Latinos and Asians have changed the politics of this region, as Southern California has attracted the bulk of Latino and Asian migration (Clark 1998).

Ethnic heterogeneity and rapid growth during the Gold Rush Boom is offered as an explanation for Bay Area liberalism. The Bay Area and Northern California attracted East Asian, American, and European immigrants beginning with the Gold Rush (Meinig 1998; McWilliams 1999; Phillips 1969; Rogin and Shover 1970). Northern California attracted more Italian, Irish, German, and Chinese immigrants (Dallek 2000; Meinig 1998; Pierce 1974; Rogin and Shover 1970). As in Southern California, African-Americans also flocked to the Bay Area from the South (Birdsall and Florin 1992). The Bay



Area is hypothesized to be more liberal due to its explosive growth during the 19<sup>th</sup> century; its history as a seaport and international outlook; settlement by New Englanders; and its continued attraction to people from the Northeast as a “Greater New England” (Phillips 1969; Pierce 1972; Lind 1999; Meinig 1998). This region of California was influenced by Elazar’s (1994) moralistic political culture (Jordan-Bychkov and Domosh 1999). The moralistic political culture believes that the purpose of government is to help achieve the common good and use government to promote a better society. Northern California from the Bay Area to the Oregon border is considered a portion of the Yankee traditional formal culture region (Jordan and Domosh 1999). Former Governor Pat Brown (1959–1966) and his brand of liberalism in California can be interpreted as the embodiment of that political culture as Governor Reagan (1967–1974) embodied an opposite political culture.

But the Bay Area is sharply divided along racial and economic lines, due to high housing costs in San Francisco, wealthy suburban fragmentation from white blue-collar and poorer minority populations, and the fast-growth industries of Silicon Valley in Santa Clara County (Walters 1992). Some approaches even separate San Francisco County from the larger Northern/Pacific Coastal/Bay Area (Korey 2000). The Green Party has a base in the less-populated North Coast counties of Humboldt and Del Norte (Heppen 2000a). Environmental activism and conflicts between environmental activists and the logging industry have strongly influenced the politics of this region (Fradkin 1995). Northern California outside of the Bay Area is more white, rural, and not as wealthy as the Bay Area, but most regional approaches have included Northern California and especially the Northern Coast with the Bay Area (Phillips 1969; Jordan-Bychkov and Domosh 1999; Garreau 1981).

The Central Valley has economic and settlement roots in agriculture and was predominantly a conservative Democratic area (Phillips 1969; Baldassare 2000; Korey 1999). This region was influenced by the individualistic political culture of Elazar (1994; Jordan-Bychkov and Domosh 1999). In the individualistic political culture, politics and government are seen as prizes to win in order to benefit individuals or small groups—to the victor go the spoils. The pres-



ence of political conservatism in this region is attributed to the migration of many people from Oklahoma and Arkansas during the Dust Bowl and Great Depression (McWilliams 1999). Currently, this is one of the fastest-growing regions of the state and has leaned more toward Republicans due to the dominance of agribusiness and a large white population (Baldassare 2000; Korey 1999; Walters 1992; Phillips 1969). Though agribusiness still dominates, the area has been moving toward a more diversified economy and increased suburban migration by whites from Coastal California (Baldassare 2000; Walters 1992). Latinos have influence in this region due to farm labor union activism and a growing urban population with increased political clout (McWilliams 1999; Garreau 1981; Dallek 2000; Schrag 1998; Baldassare 2000).

In summary, previous research has generally supported the thesis of three political regions of California resulting from three different settlement patterns occurring during 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrations. Furthermore, the influx of immigrants into California has changed the social dynamics and political behavior of the state (Clark 1998; Baldassare 2000). This research will investigate the validity of these regions in recent times and determine whether any change of these regions is related to new settlement patterns involving the growth of nonwhite populations and the browning of California.

### **Methodology in Exploring Political Regions in California**

In order to test for the continuation or change of regionalism in California and the impact of a changing population, this study will measure the degree and location of spatial clustering of political behavior and white populations. As a surrogate for political behavior, the data in this study will be limited to the percentage of the total vote received by Republican candidates in presidential elections from 1968 to 2000 at the county level. White populations are used as a surrogate for the nature of the population. Counties with low percentages of white populations have more diverse populations. While precinct- and census-track and block-level data limit the problems of ecological fallacy, the purpose of this article is not to aggregate group behavior down to the individual level. The analy-

sis of presidential elections will begin in 1968 because 1964 marks the end of an era in presidential politics in the nation and California (Shaw 1999; Archer and Taylor 1981).

California at the national scale has been subject to factor analysis, which has placed California in a voting pattern similar to many northeastern states from 1896 to 1980 as part of a northern core using Democratic votes for president at the state scale (Archer and Taylor 1981). The election of 1964 marks the end of the normal liberal vote in the northern core, and the following election signals the beginning of the new north voting period (Archer and Taylor 1981). We begin our county-level analysis using 1968 as a starting point because it signals a new era.

Republican votes are used because they offer a philosophy that has been primarily conservative since the end of the New Deal Era. In California's 1964 Republican Primary, Goldwater defeated the moderates, ushering in the conservative influence later solidified by Ronald Reagan in 1966 and 1970 (Dallek 2000; Rogin and Shover 1970; Phillips 1968). That is when the conservative wing of the GOP gained an advantage over the moderate wing of the Republican Party (Brennan 1995; Lind 1995; Caldwell 1998). Ronald Reagan's 1966 victory is seen as the moment the conservative movement moved from being a fringe element of the GOP to a dominant force in California politics that foreshadowed the national conservative movement (Dallek 2000). Nationally, that movement was born with the 1968 Nixon campaign. Statewide gubernatorial and senatorial elections are important, but they will not be analyzed. Presidential elections are more easily comparable to other studies, states, and the rest of the country that may be undergoing rapid population changes.

Moran's I test for global spatial autocorrelation will be employed first because it provides an indication of global spatial clustering and spatial dependence. It determines whether the Republican vote or white population clusters in counties of similar levels. Moran's I near 1 and associated z-score indicates spatial clustering of the data. Moran's I near 0.0 and associated z-score would indicate a more random pattern. The use of Moran's I is important because it can

provide indication of regionalism in the vote, which offers evidence for political regions.

Then this paper will employ the “new”  $G_i^*$  Statistic (Ord and Getis 1995; Anselin 1995a; Anselin 1995b). This statistic identifies local clusters of the vote. It can identify local indicators of spatial association (Anselin 1995a). This statistic measures the extent to which a county is surrounded by high or low values. A positive and significant z-score of the new  $G_i^*$  statistic indicates spatial clustering of high values of Republican voting or white populations centered on a county, while a negative and significant z-score reveals spatial clustering of lower Republican votes or white populations centered on a county. In other words, the new  $G_i^*$  statistic is able to show which counties cluster as areas of higher or lower Republican support, or levels of white population relative to the state as a whole. The new  $G_i^*$  statistic has been used to study electoral and political behavior (O’Loughlin *et al.* 1994; O’Loughlin *et al.* 1998; Heppen 2000b). Counties with no cluster indicate a more random pattern—voting for Republicans and white populations does not cluster here. The z-score values of the new  $G_i^*$  statistic are mapped and categorized into five classes that correspond to different degrees of spatial clustering of similar voting behavior:

1. Very weak clusters (negative z-score with significance level of  $p < 0.01$ )
2. Weak clusters (negative z-score with significance level  $0.05 < p < 0.01$ )
3. No clusters (positive or negative z-score with significance level of  $p > 0.05$ )
4. Strong clusters (positive z-score with significance level  $0.05 < p < 0.01$ )
5. Very strong clusters (positive z-score with significance level of  $p < 0.01$ ).

Discernible regions can be statistically verified when counties group together. Maps of elections which highlight or are representative of major spatial trends or events are presented in this article. A more liberal Bay Area and Northern California should register clusters of low support for Republicans, while Southern California



and the Central Valley and Interior should register clusters of higher, but declining levels of support for Republican candidates, because these areas are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse (Baldassare 2000; Schrag 1999).

S-mode factor analysis has been another successful method of determining political regions based on voting behavior (Archer and Taylor 1981; Shelley *et al.* 1996). S-mode factor analysis lacks the ability to integrate spatial data. S-mode factor analyses, unlike the methods employed here, do not take into account the spatial structure (contiguity of the counties) of the units of analysis. Previous studies (Archer and Taylor 1981; Shelley *et al.* 1996) have examined California at the state scale and have found California to behave in a manner similar to the Northeast. This study seeks an approach at the county level using a methodology that includes both political data and spatial data.

### **Changing Politics and Regions in California**

The Republican vote in California is spatially clustered and has decreased since 1988, and that election marks a new trend in the behavior of the vote (Table 1). From 1968 to 1984, spatial autocorrelation remained steady as the Republicans carried the state in every presidential election. In fact, California became the key to the Republican Party's western and southern strategy in presidential elections (Phillips 1969). Nixon and Reagan's ability to capture their home state gave the GOP an important electoral college advantage. The 1984 map of the presidential election is fairly typical of the 1968 to 1984 time period in presidential elections (Figure 2). Conservative Southern California is a hot spot of Republican voting, and liberal Northern California is a cold spot of Republican voting. But from 1988 to 1996, spatial autocorrelation of the Republican vote increased as the proportion of the vote decreased. After Dukakis in 1988 ran a close campaign, Democrats have won the state from 1992 to 2000.

Michael Dukakis ran the most competitive race since Lyndon Johnson won the state in 1964, and since 1992 California has been safely in Democratic hands. The dramatic increase in spatial clustering of the vote is temporally related to declining Republican

**Table 1. Moran's I Test For Spatial Autocorrelation Presidential Elections in California Counties 1968–2000 for Republican Candidates**

Year	Vote	Moran's I	Mean	St. Dev.	Z-Value	Prob.
1968	47.8	0.261768	-0.018	0.085897	3.251705	0.001147
1972	55.0	0.2857891	-0.018	0.086048	3.525143	0.000423
1976	49.3	0.2029085	-0.018	0.085694	2.572557	0.010095
1980	52.7	0.2881669	-0.018	0.085058	3.594124	0.000325
1984	57.5	0.2465616	-0.018	0.084139	3.138911	0.001696
1988	51.1	0.3830115	-0.018	0.085408	4.689882	0.000003
1992	32.6	0.4615794	-0.018	0.086150	5.561483	0.000000
1996	38.2	0.5078539	-0.018	0.086291	6.088663	0.000000
2000	41.7	0.5547395	-0.018	0.086323	6.629560	0.000000

Sources: *America Votes: A Handbook of Contemporary American Election Statistics*. 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996; California Secretary of State, Statement of Vote, 2000.

fortunes. The Republican vote is becoming more spatially concentrated and lower as it plunged from over 50 percent in 1988 to only about one-third of the total vote in 1992. That was the year of Ross Perot's candidacy, which worked to depress the Republican vote. In 2000, the Republican vote rebounded to almost 42 percent, but that still represented a 12-point gap. Ralph Nader received approximately 3.9 percent of the popular vote. Unlike in Florida, the Nader vote did not influence the race in California, but California was one of Nader's best states.

Since 1988 marks a new era of declining and increasingly spatially dependent Republican votes, it is important to see what counties are accounting for the decline. Figure 3 presents clusters of counties where the Republicans have lost the most votes or gained the most votes, as measured by the difference between the total percentage of the vote from 1988 to 2000 in presidential elections. This map represent clusters of counties where the GOP has lost the most support or gained the most support. The greatest decline from 1988 to 2000 is in Southern California. The former base of the GOP is becoming increasingly diverse, and Republican associations with language and anti-immigrant propositions have hurt its ability to win favor with many Latinos (Baldassare 2000). Clinton and Gore

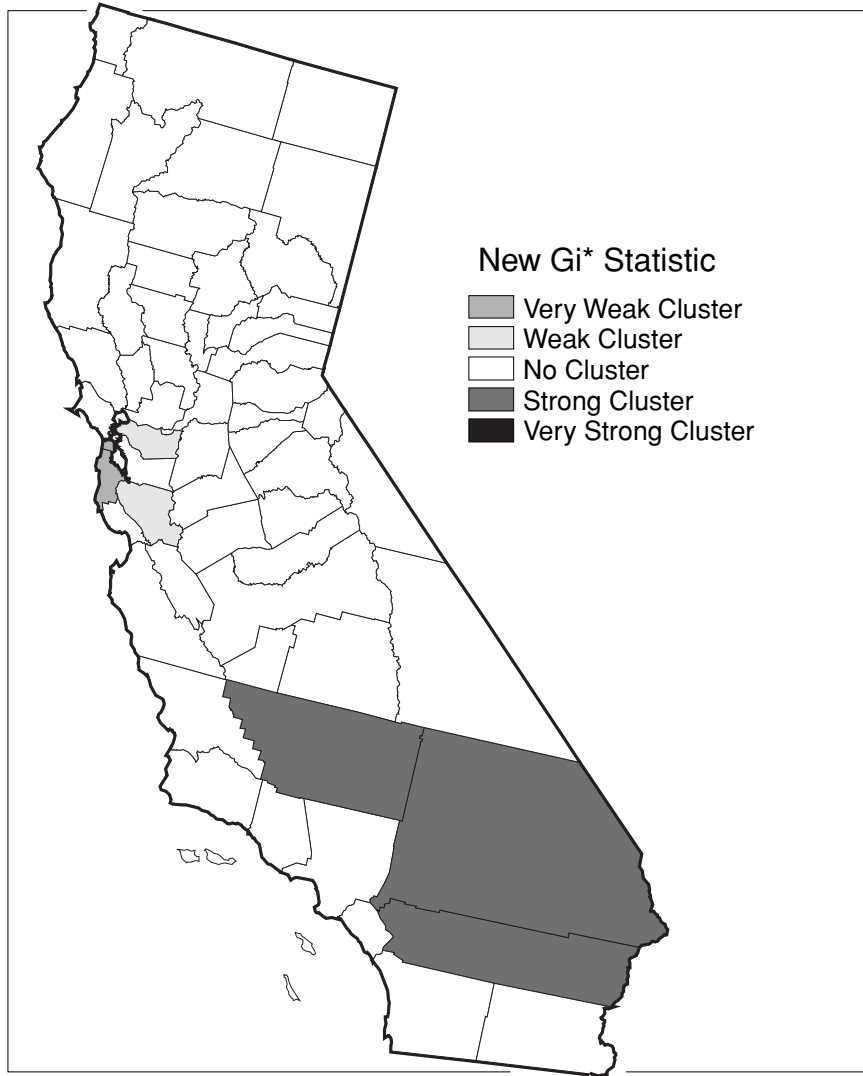


Figure 2. Clusters of Affection and Disaffection for Republican Ronald Reagan in the 1984 Presidential Election.

won California handily due to its increased support from minority voters.

If there is a relationship between the nature of the population and the Republican vote, the next step is to determine whether coun-

ties experiencing drastic changes in the Republican vote are also counties where the nature of the population is changing. The white population of California is spatially dependent from 1970 to 1998 as measured by Moran's I (Table 2). The degree of spatial clustering has remained steady since 1985, even though the population has become more diverse with the now minority-but-plurality status of whites. The degree of the spatial dependence of white populations increased from 1970 to 1975 in California. During the 1980s and 1990s, the degree of spatial dependence remained constant as the Republican vote decreased and became more spatially dependent, especially in Southern California.

Southern California's Los Angeles and Orange counties remain the top destination of immigrants (Clark 1998). The Bay Area ranks second as a destination for foreign immigrants (Clark 1998). The political impacts of immigration have been associated with English language initiatives and policies of allowing illegal immigrants access to public services (Hero 1998; Clark 1998; Baldassare 2000). Figure 4 presents a map of clusters where the white population has experienced the greatest decline as a proportion of the total population. This map was constructed by subtracting the white population of 1998 from 1970. Negative numbers indicate a growth in nonwhite populations. All counties experienced declines of white population.

**Table 2. Moran's I Test For Spatial Autocorrelation White Population California Counties 1970 to 1998**

Year	Moran's I	Mean	St. Dev.	Z-Value	Prob.
1970	0.3222887	-0.018	0.085902	3.956045	0.000076
1975	0.4059517	-0.018	0.085810	4.935273	0.000001
1980	0.4381534	-0.018	0.085837	5.308889	0.000000
1985	0.4624543	-0.018	0.086285	5.562962	0.000000
1990	0.4587652	-0.018	0.086476	5.508013	0.000000
1995	0.4656309	-0.018	0.086580	5.580679	0.000000
1998	0.4563386	-0.018	0.086623	5.470635	0.000000

Sources: State of California, Department of Finance, *Race/Ethnic Population Estimates: Components of Change for California Counties, April 1990 to July 1998*. Sacramento, California, May 2000; State of California, Department of Finance, *Race/Ethnic Population Estimates: Components of Change for California Counties, July 1970–July 1990*. Sacramento, California, July 1999.

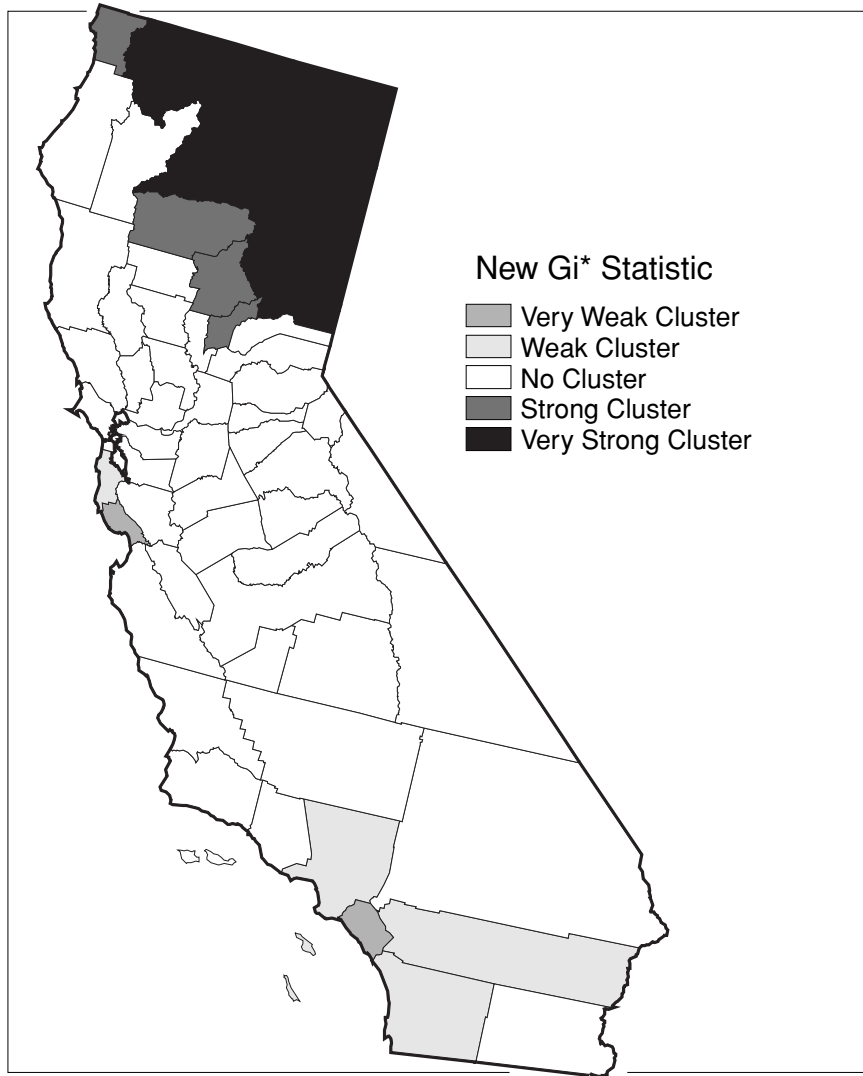


Figure 3. Clusters of the Greatest Gain and Greatest Loss in the Republican Vote for President from 1988 to 2000.

The results are then subject to a new  $G_i^*$  statistical analysis, which reveals clusters of counties where the decline of white population has been the greatest—indicating greater diversity—and clusters of counties where the decline has been the weakest. Figure 4 shows

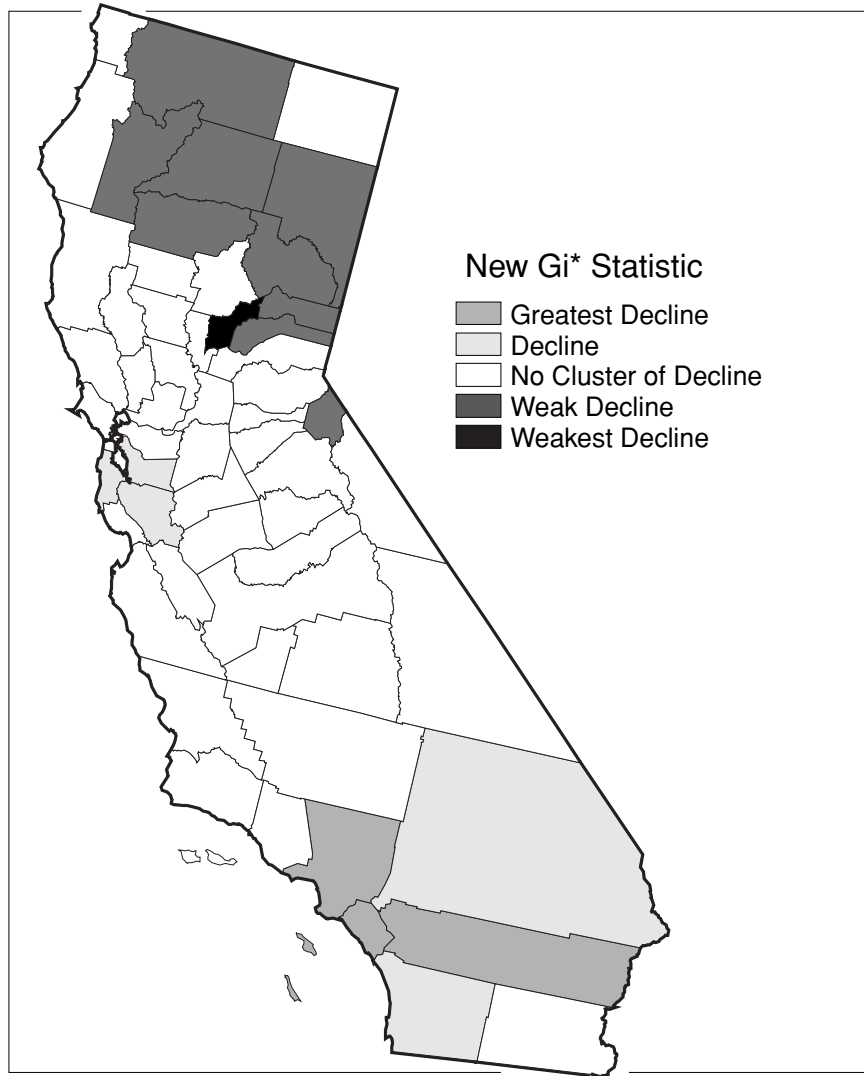


Figure 4. Clusters of the Greatest Decline and Least Decline in the Proportion of the Population Which is White from 1970 to 1998.

that the greatest increase of racial diversity is in Southern California. Southern California has experienced the greatest concentrations of declining white population as a proportion of the total population, and it also represents an area of declining Republican fortunes.



The mountainous, northern interior of California has experienced the weakest decline of white populations in California, and it represents an area of Republican growth. The GOP has grown the greatest in the mountain counties of the interior. The human landscape of these counties is dominated by its overwhelming white homogenous population and economic activities with roots in primary industries such as logging and mining (Fradkin 1995).

A map of clusters of affection and disaffection for George W. Bush based on the new  $G_i^*$  statistic reveals that the Bay Area remains a place of considerable Republican weakness (Figure 5). The traditional Republican base in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego counties has disappeared as a source of strength for the GOP. The new home to a cluster of Republican support is now in the northern interior of the state. Figure 3 shows that the six-county Southern California area has shown dramatic decreases in Republican support. This is an area of increasing Latino and East Asian migration. Latino voters in Los Angeles and the suburbs are more likely to support Democrats (Baldassare 2000; Clark 1998). With the increase in ethnic heterogeneity in Southern California as this region is increasingly becoming less white, the Democrats are gaining a foothold in Southern California (Table 3). In Los Angeles County, whites are no longer in the majority, and their majorities in Orange and San Bernardino counties are decreasing (Baldassare 2000).

These findings suggest a bivariate relationship. A bivariate or multivariate analysis incorporating other social and economic variables is hampered by the county level data used in this study and open to the problems of ecological fallacy during the 32-year time period of this study. Exit polling of the 2000 election offers insights into individual voting.

Exit polling of 2,600 voters in the 2000 presidential election by the *Sacramento Bee* (2000) found Al Gore winning among Latino and African-Americans by large margins and among women by a wide margin, while effectively tying Bush for the votes of whites and Asians and all males. Gore lost the Protestant vote to Bush, but he won heavily with Jewish, non-religious, and non-Christian religions, and won the Catholic vote by 16 points. Among independent vot-

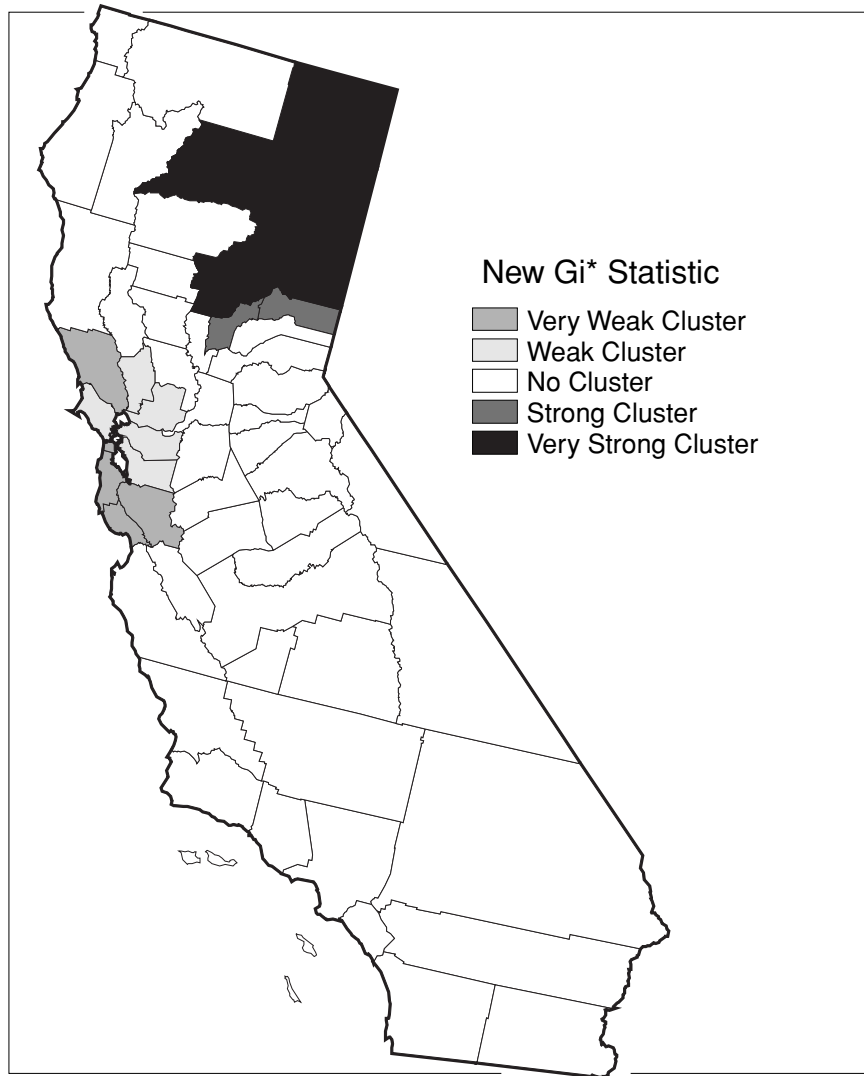


Figure 5. Clusters of Affection and Disaffection for Republican George W. Bush in the 2000 Presidential Election.

ers, Gore also won by 16 points. Bush won a majority only among voters earning more than \$100,000, while Gore won all lower-income groups. Socially and economically, California is becoming less dependent on defense and traditional white-collar jobs, and the shift

**Table 3. Decrease of White Population by Percentage in Southern California Counties 1970–1998**

County	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1998
Los Angeles	70	62	53	47	41	36	33
Orange	89	83	78	71	64	60	57
Riverside	79	76	74	68	64	62	61
San Bernardino	81	77	73	66	61	57	55
San Diego	84	78	74	69	65	62	61

Sources: State of California, Department of Finance, *Race/Ethnic Population Estimates: Components of Change for California Counties, April 1990 to July 1998*. Sacramento, California, May 2000; State of California, Department of Finance, *Race/Ethnic Population Estimates: Components of Change for California Counties, July 1970–July 1990*. Sacramento, California, July 1999.

toward non-defense-related high-technology, the entertainment industry, and consumer and business services has weakened the traditional Republican base (Smith 2000; Decker 2000). Furthermore, older voters are moving out of the state, and they are being replaced with a younger and more ethnically diverse population (Decker 2000; Smith 2000). In conclusion, Bush did well only among white, male, wealthy Protestants—a losing coalition for any party in the increasingly racially diverse state of California.

This diversity suggests a two-tiered political regionalism in 2000 (Figure 6). Al Gore won the counties of the Bay Area, Sacramento, and North Pacific Coast and the southern counties of Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Imperial. These southern counties are the most diverse. Coastal California both north and south can be considered a liberal-Democratic region. These counties are also the most populated. Bush did capture the southern suburban counties of Orange, Ventura, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. Urban and coastal California have experienced the most rapid, striking changes in political timber and population as they have experienced the impacts of an increasingly diverse population. In Southern California, the white suburban base is not strong enough to carry the state for either party (Table 3). The conservatism of the area may be replaced with a more liberal attitude brought by migrants from Latin America and East Asia, and a younger population. The growth and political



have supported Republicans (Santillan and Subervi-Velez 1991; Nakanishi 1991).

### **The Future of Political Regions in California**

The evidence for three political regions in California seems to be fading. While there are still North and South contrasts, the two giants, Los Angeles and San Francisco, seem to be sharing common political and social characteristics. This may signify a spatial realignment in California, with the fast-growing Bay Area and Southern California becoming more Democratic while the less-populous and slower-growing Central Valley and especially the northern interior may be the Republican region of the state. California may be better analyzed using a different approach suggested by Hero (1998).

Hero (1998) finds that the political culture of the state is defined by the ethnic/racial makeup (social diversity) of the state's population. This approach is less dependent on primary settler groups, unlike Elazar (1994), and is more dependent on recent settlement patterns. California is classified as a bifurcated state. Bifurcated states have a large minority population in conflict with the white population. California presents a unique case because whites are in the minority. But the preponderance of white economic and political power and the divisions among the various ethnic/racial groups of California place whites in the dominant position (Hero 1998). The anti-immigrant propositions of Pete Wilson and the English language propositions can clearly be interpreted as conflict between the two groups. In examining language and immigration initiatives in California at the county level, Hero (1998) found a positive correlation between increased ethnic diversity and political behavior. Counties with sizable minority populations voted differently from counties with more homogenous (white) populations. Coastal California is the more diverse portion of the state. Bush lost or had closer races in more diverse states such as New York, Michigan, and Illinois.

The interior of California, which has not been experiencing rapid population growths of nonwhite populations, can be classified as a homogenous state. Homogenous states have a large population primarily of people with Northern and Western European roots, with small populations of minorities (Hero 1998). Bush did best in the



Great Plains and Rocky Mountain states—which are classified by Hero (1998) as homogenous.

It is conceivable that California can be characterized as a state with a bifurcated coastal region and a homogenous interior region. The homogenous interior and suburban Southern California provides a base for the Republican Party. The Democrats counter with a base in Coastal California. The GOP won 39 counties in California while Gore won only 19—the vast majority along the Pacific Ocean or connected to the Bay Area, except for heavily Hispanic Imperial, and he carried the state by a healthy margin.

### Conclusions and Discussion

The Democrats have been the benefactors of a changing political geography within the Golden State. The characteristic of voter-rich Southern California is drastically different from the days when Nixon and Reagan carried the state. Bill Clinton and Al Gore have firmly placed California into the Democratic column and there is little evidence that George W. Bush can make California competitive without a lot of hard work. With Southern California and the Bay Area leaning toward Democratic and the sparsely populated northern interior supporting Republicans, the only region in flux appears to be the Central Valley. It has been a hot spot for neither party, and though large, it cannot carry the state by itself. This region was carried by Bush in 2000, but the population is becoming more diverse (Baldassare 2000). Perhaps the strategy suggested by Phillips (1969), which is based on three political regions in California, is outdated and the Democrats with their multiethnic coalition have realized that there are only two political regions in California, with the racially diverse coastal region being paramount to victory. Looking into the future, it appears that California will continue to be a Democratic state in presidential elections. Survey data from the 2000 election and the analysis from 1992 to 2000 also supports this claim. It appears the rapidly growing and changing Pacific Coast is taking the Golden State into a new direction, while other less-populated and less-diverse regions are going back to the future. If the northern and southern metropolises of California fully join forces, the party better able to speak to their needs will carry the state.

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