

# California's Far North Deplores 'Tyranny' of the Urban Majority

*The New York Times*, by Thomas Fuller, July 2, 2017

REDDING, Calif. — The deer heads mounted on the walls of Eric Johnson's church office are testament to his passion for hunting, a lifestyle enjoyed by many in the northernmost reaches of California but one that Mr. Johnson says surprises people he meets on his travels around America and abroad.

"When people see you're from California, they instantly think of 'Baywatch,'" said Mr. Johnson, the associate pastor of Bethel Redding, a megachurch in this small city a three-and-a-half-hour drive north of San Francisco. "It's very different here from the rest of California."

Mr. Johnson lives in what might be described as California's Great Red North, a bloc of 13 counties that voted for President Trump in November and that make up more than a fifth of the state's land mass but only 3 percent of its population.

## Voting and Demographics

### County won by

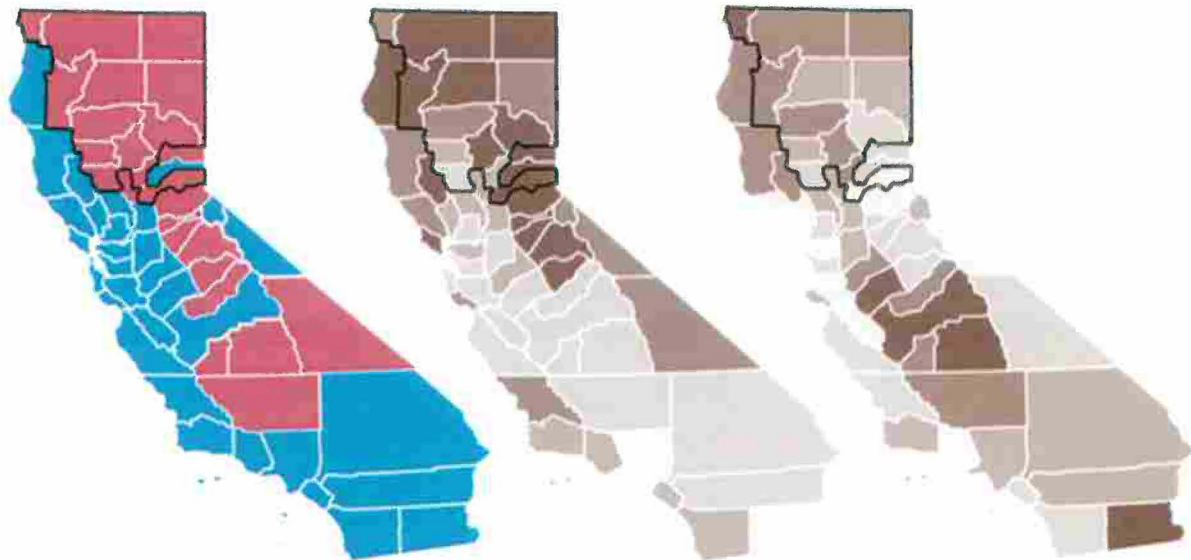
- Trump
- Clinton

### White

Percentage of population  
12% — 85%

### In poverty

Percentage of population  
7% — 27%



By Marc Benzaquen | Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections

From Hollywood to Silicon Valley, California projects an image as an economically thriving, politically liberal, sun-kissed El Dorado. It is a multiethnic experiment with a rising population, where the percentage of whites has fallen to 38 percent.

California originally had the senate divided by land area - each COUNTY had one senator. Predictably the low population areas dominated the...

California's Great Red North is the opposite, a vast, rural, mountainous tract of pine forests with a political ethos that bears more resemblance to Texas than to Los Angeles. Two-thirds of the north is white, the population is shrinking and the region struggles economically, with median household incomes at \$45,000, less than half that of San Francisco.

Jim Cook, former supervisor of Siskiyou County, which includes cattle ranches and the majestic slopes of Mount Shasta, calls it "the forgotten part of California."

In the same state that is developing self-driving cars, there's the rugged landscape of Trinity County, where a large share of residents heat their homes with wood, plaques commemorate stagecoach routes and the county seat, Weaverville, is an old gold-mining town with a lone blinking stop-and-go traffic light.

The residents of this region argue that their political voice is drowned out in a system that has only one state senator for every million residents.

This sentiment resonates in other traditionally conservative parts of California, including large swaths of the Central Valley, which runs down the state, and it mirrors red and blue tensions felt in areas across the country. But perhaps nowhere else in California is the alienation felt more keenly than in the far north, an arresting panorama of fields filled with wildflowers and depopulated one-street towns that have never recovered from the gold rush.

"People up here for a very long time have felt a sense that we don't matter," said James Gallagher, a state assemblyman for the Third District, which is a shorter drive from the forests of Mount Hood in Oregon than from the beaches of San Diego. "We run this state like it's one size fits all. You can't do that."

Many liberals in California describe themselves as the resistance to Mr. Trump. Residents of the north say they are the resistance to the resistance, politically invisible to the Democratic governor and Legislature. California's strict regulations on the environment, gun control and hunting impinge on a rural lifestyle, they say, that urban politicians do not understand.

The state's stringent air quality and climate change regulations may be appropriate for technology workers, Mr. Gallagher said, but they are onerous for people living in rural areas.

"In the rural parts of the state we drive more miles, we drive older cars, our economy is an agriculture- and resource-based economy that relies on tractors and trucks," Mr. Gallagher said. "You can't move an 80,000-pound load in an electric truck."

A recently passed gas tax, pushed through by the Democratic majority, will disproportionately hurt rural voters, he said.

Taxation and hunting are two issues northerners are quick to seize upon when criticizing laws they feel are unfairly imposed by the state. But there are also more fundamental issues related to incomes and job opportunities that split California into a two-speed economy.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, unemployment rates hover around 3 percent. In the far north, where many timber mills have shut down in recent years, unemployment is as high as 6 percent in Shasta County and 16.2 percent in Colusa County.

Despite a go-it-alone ethos, residents of the 13 counties in the northern bloc are much more likely to receive government medical assistance than those in the Bay Area. In the north, 31 percent take part in Medi-Cal, the California Medicaid program, while the Bay Area rate is 19 percent, and California's overall figure 28 percent.

United States Representative Doug LaMalfa, a Republican representing Northern California's First District, blames regulations that have shut down industries for the economic disparities.

"They've devastated ag jobs, timber jobs, mining jobs with their environmental regulations, so, yes, we have a harder time sustaining the economy, and therefore there's more people that are in a poorer situation."

Because incomes are significantly lower than the state average and the region is so thinly populated, tax revenue from the far north is a fraction of what urban areas contribute. In 2014, the 13 northern counties had a combined state income tax assessment of \$1 billion, compared with \$4 billion from San Francisco County.

Resentment toward the rest of California has a long history here — there have been numerous efforts to split the state since its founding in 1850. After the presidential election, a proposal to secede from the union, driven by liberals and known as Calexit, gained attention.

Residents here have long backed a different proposal for a separate state, one that would be carved out of Northern California and the southern reaches of Oregon. Flags of the so-called State of Jefferson, which was first proposed in the 19th century, fly on farms and ranches around the region.

Jefferson, named after the president who once envisioned establishing an independent nation in the western section of North America, is more a state of mind than a practicable proposal. Many see it as unrealistic for a region that has plenty of water and timber but perhaps not enough wealth to wean itself away from engines of the California economy.

However, two recent initiatives have channeled the deep feeling of underrepresentation.

In May, a loose coalition of northern activists and residents, including an Indian tribe and the small northern city of Fort Jones, joined forces to file a federal lawsuit arguing that California's legislative system is unconstitutional because the Legislature has not expanded with the population.

### States Legislatures With the ... Most Constituents per Member

States	Population per House member	States	Population per Senate member
California	489,310	California	978,620
Texas	183,127	Texas	886,100
Florida	168,927	Florida	506,782
New York	131,972	Ohio	351,922
Ohio	117,307	New York	319,287



## Least Constituents per Member

States	Population per House member	States	Population per Senate member
Wyoming	9,768	South Dakota	24,528
Maine	8,803	Vermont	20,868
North Dakota	8,052	Montana	20,659
Vermont	4,174	Wyoming	19,537
New Hampshire	3,327	North Dakota	16,105

Source: Citizens for Fair Representation et al. v. Secretary of State Alex Padilla

The suit, filed against the California secretary of state, Alex Padilla, who oversees election laws in California, calls for an increase in the membership of the bicameral Legislature, which since 1862 has capped the number of lawmakers at 120.

The lawsuit argues that California now has the least representative system of any state in the nation. Each State Assembly member represents nearly 500,000 people and each state senator twice that.

“This arbitrary cap has created an oligarchy,” the lawsuit says.

By contrast, each member of the New York State Assembly represents on average 130,000 people; in New Hampshire, it’s 3,330 people for each representative.

Mark Baird, one of the plaintiffs, says residents of California’s far north feel as though they are being governed by an urbanized elite.

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“I wake up in the morning and think, ‘What is California going to do to me today?’” said Mr. Baird, a former airline pilot who owns a ranch about an hour’s drive from the Oregon border. In a grass valley framed by low-lying hills, Mr. Baird’s pastures are filled with his small herd of buffalo and a few pens of horses and donkeys.

Mr. Baird complains of restrictions on the types of guns he can own. “It’s tyranny by the majority,” he said. “The majority should never be able to deprive the minority of their inalienable rights.”

Scott Wiener, a state senator representing San Francisco, says he has sympathy for the concerns of rural voters but rejects the proposal for a larger legislative body.

“When you have a state as big and diverse as California, decisions are made that we don’t all agree with,” he said.

The second initiative is a proposed amendment to California's Constitution that would change the method for dividing districts of the Legislature's upper house, the Senate. Instead of being based on population as they are now, Senate seats would be tied to regions, giving a larger voice to rural areas in the same way the federal Senate does.

"I am asking the people with power to give up some of their power in order to allow all the voices in the state to have a little bit more strength than they do right now," said Mr. Gallagher, the assemblyman.

Northern Californians point out that the United States House of Representatives and Senate are based on the compromise between population and geography.

"What I can't get over is that a court can rule that it's not good for the state but it stands up at the federal level," said Mr. LaMalfa, the congressman. "We wouldn't have a union if we hadn't come up with that compromise."

Mr. LaMalfa, who lives on a farm, says California's urban denizens think of the rural areas as their "park," and deplores what he describes as trophy legislation to protect animal species.

"You have idealists from the cities who say, 'Wouldn't it be great to reintroduce wolves to rural California?'" Mr. LaMalfa said. He has a half-serious counterproposal: "Let's introduce some wolves into Golden Gate Park and the Santa Monica Pier."

*Doris Burke contributed research.*

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