

THE CLASSIFICATION AND REGIONALIZATION
OF CALIFORNIA POLITICS

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The quest for orderliness (in California politics) has tempted many able scholars to undertake huge, solemn, and painstaking chronological recitations in the hope that the political symmetry somehow would appear out of the fog. It seldom does.

Herbert Phillips

Regionalizing and classifying phenomena have been and continue to be major objectives of geographical research. Whether such attempts consider social or physical phenomena in single or multifactor regions, the objective is to group units expressing similar characteristics or behavior. Quantitative methods of analysis have allowed geographers to develop classificatory and grouping techniques designed to tease out salient patterns that identify distinct regional clusterings. One such technique is discriminant analysis which is based on determining the best group or class for an individual observation.¹ By considering a variety of pieces of information about each observation, and then establishing some a priori grouping, discriminant analysis minimizes the variance among the groups and maximizes the variance between groups. In this way not only can we determine whether we can actually discriminate between those groups we have established, but of equal importance we will find if the observations are included into the best group. Although discriminant analysis has been used primarily by economic and urban geographers in

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classifying regions and cities, it can be adopted just as readily to identify and classify political regions.²

In California, distinct political regions, the northern "liberal" and the southern "conservative," already have been identified by historians and political scientists.³ The Techachapi Mountains are generally accepted as dividing these two regions.⁴ The perceived regional distinctiveness and the perpetual dynamism of the state's politics have even been considered barometers of national political development.⁵

Sectional conflict

Contemporary political regions within a state or nation have their roots in previous cultures and settlement patterns. For more than a century contrasting regional political philosophies have characterized California. The northern part of the state, settled by New England and Middle West farmers and businessmen, has long been the center of a progressive philosophy that has contrasted sharply with the more traditional thought associated with southern California, an area populated by Deep and Border South migrants.⁶ The conflict was apparent as early as the 1850's when proslavery sympathy in southern California prompted its desire to form a separate state. However, the larger population in the north dominated the state's politics and the outbreak of the Civil War prevented the conflict from widening. These regional differences were apparent, for example, in Lincoln's electoral support in 1864, but they also persisted even during the Hiram Johnson Progressive-Republican era from 1900-1920 (Figure 1). Most of Johnson's strength in running for governor and senator was concentrated in the north, and the eventual defeat of his party and supporters was engineered by southern Californians who by then outnumbered northern voters. The difference in north-south political views was reflected in the support for the national Democratic party under Roosevelt in 1932 (Figure 1). The state Democratic party barely existed until 1958, when cross-filing (the opportunity to vote for any party's candidate) in primaries was finally eliminated. From 1910-1958 only one Democratic governor was elected.

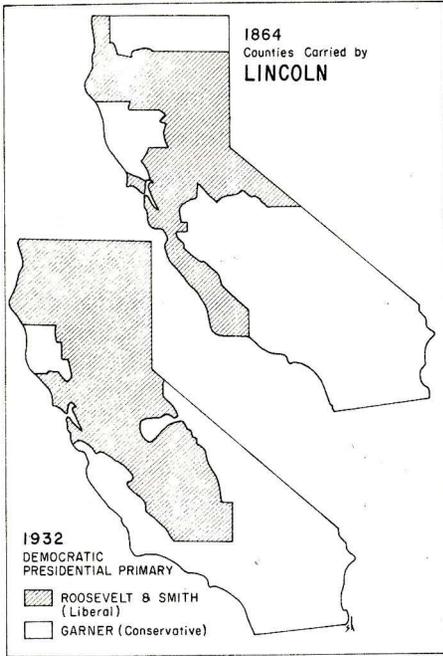


Figure 1

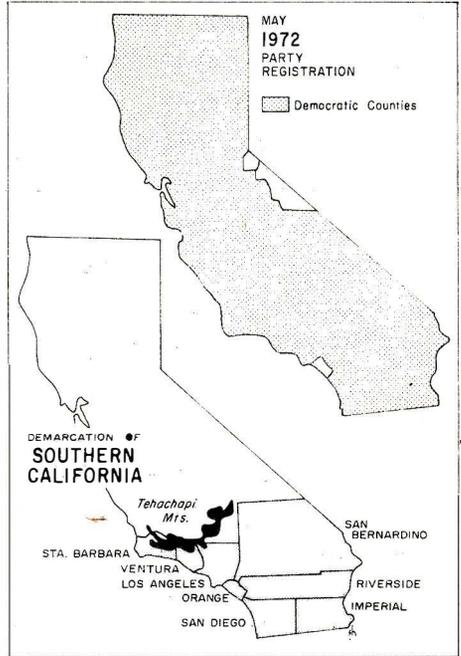


Figure 2

The development of contemporary politics in California began following Earl Warren's appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court. Three times elected governor (1942-1953) and even winning primaries in both parties, Warren weakened the conservative opposition within the state Republican party. His departure from state politics coupled with the end of cross-filing not only contributed to open philosophical conflicts within the Republican party but led to the reemergence of a solid Democratic party. Thus, 1958 marks the beginning of the modern competitive two-party system in California. Prominent names in the state's history have reflected this rivalry, viz., Knight, Knowland, Nixon, Kuchel, Reagen, Murphy, Brown, Yorty, Cranston, and Tunney. Since 1958, voters have consistently been given a choice between a conservative Republican and a liberal Democratic candidate in all senatorial and gubernatorial elections save the Kuchel (R) vs. Richards (D) senate race in 1962 and the gubernatorial race in 1974. The terms "liberal" and "conservative" are relative to each election, but in each the voters have had a distinct philosophical choice.

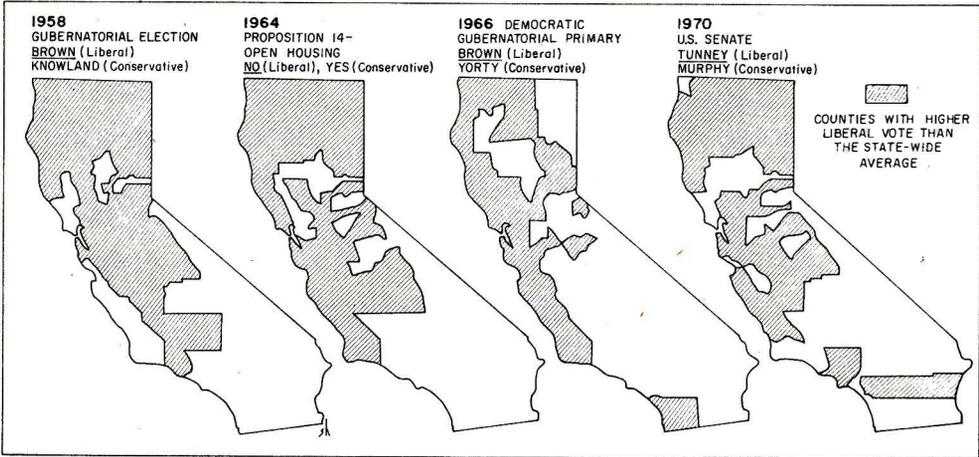


Figure 3. Recent California Election Results.

Patterns in electoral geography

To date, laypersons and political scientists recognize the Techachapis as a reliable measure for delimiting northern "liberal" and southern "conservative" California.⁷ However, it is questioned at this juncture whether this physical feature is indeed an appropriate measure for dividing the state into political regions (Figure 2). In view of the fact that all but three counties have a Democratic registration majority, this is not considered a valid measure for identifying regional political contrasts

In representing the results of recent elections, the distinctiveness in regional voting as well as philosophical orientation is apparent (Figure 3). These maps show counties where liberal support was greater than the average for the state. The relative consistency in voting pattern during this fourteen-year span is striking as is the similarity to Lincoln's and FDR's support.

Delimiting political regions

County data on eleven recent state-wide elections are used to determine whether distinct political regions exist (Table 1). State issues and candidates were considered a better measure for identifying political regions than recent presidential elections, because the results of state elections are not confounded by national issues and candidates. These voting data, tabulated in percent liberal for each election and each county, were first subjected to a factor analysis. Three factors emerged which altogether explained 79 percent of the total variance. The first was labeled a Republican primary factor as it grouped voting results of primary elections. The second dimension that emerged grouped general election results. The third factor grouped the propositions included in the data set. Thus, the three factors identified distinct groupings of elections.

Table 1
Variables Used to Delineate California's
Political Regions

1958	Gubernatorial Election	Brown Vote
1962	Gubernatorial Election	Brown Vote
1962	Republican Senatorial Primary	Kuchel Vote
1964	"No" Vote on Proposition 14	Open Housing
1964	Senate Election	Salinger Vote
1966	Democratic Gubernatorial Primary	Brown Vote
1966	Gubernatorial Election	Brown Vote
1968	Republican Senatorial Primary	Kuchel Vote
1968	Senate Election	Cranston Vote
1968	"Yes" Vote on Proposition 3	College Bonds

When the factor scores for each county on each factor were mapped on Cartesian coordinates, several distinctive clusterings or groupings became apparent. Some groupings could be identified easily as being more "liberal" or "conservative" than others. Instead of arbitrarily using the clusters of counties that appeared on the graph paper as a basis for delimiting California's political

regions, three models using discriminant analysis were designed. Factor scores were used for counties on the above three factors. The purpose of testing these statistical models was to determine the most accurate way to delimit the state's voting regions.

The first analysis tested the accuracy and appropriateness of the Techachapis for politically delimiting northern from southern California. All counties that were north of the mountains were included in one group. The other group included counties south of the mountain range. The discriminant analysis model for this grouping was not highly accurate as eight counties geographically included in "liberal" north had voting patterns like those classified in the "conservative" south. Likewise, a number of other counties had probabilities barely surpassing the 0.5000 cutoff for inclusion in the north or south. This indicated the need for a much finer classification.

A second classification, based on voting behavior rather than geographic location, grouped counties into three classes: those consistently deviating in a liberal direction, those deviating in a conservative direction, and those classified as transitional, that is, having no consistent pattern. Results from this discriminant analysis like the first indicated a larger number than expected in the middle or transitional region. This again necessitated a classification that had more than three groups.

In view of the lack of success in dividing the regionalizing the state into broad categories, we used a third model to divide the state into five groups, from consistently liberal to consistently conservative in voting. This grouping was the most successful in that only two counties, San Joaquin and Glenn, were misclassified (Table 2). In these five regions, the highest coefficients, that is, those variables that best discriminated the political regions, were the 1958 gubernatorial election, the 1964 Open Housing proposition, and the 1966 Democratic gubernatorial primary. When the counties in each of these five regions are mapped, it is readily apparent that physical features, party registration, and geographic location are all unacceptable criteria

Table 2
Discriminant Analysis Classification Matrix
California's Political Regions

	Group				
	1	2	3	4	5
Liberal	26	0	0	0	0
Leaning Liberal	0	7	1	1	0
Transition	0	0	4	0	0
Leaning Conservative	0	0	0	4	0
Conservative	0	0	0	0	15
TOTAL	26	7	5	5	15

Source: Calculated by authors.

for delimiting regions (Figure 4). While recognizable portions of the state are consistently liberal and consistently conservative, the regions are not always neat and compact nor are they always contiguous. For example, the conservative voting in the northern Sacramento Valley is similar to voting in the southern part of the state.

As we have seen, Californians have traditionally been able to vote for candidates at opposing ends of the political spectrum. The results of elections pitting a conservative against a liberal candidate have demonstrated a marked regional consistency throughout the state's recent history. Liberal and conservative voting regions identified through cartographic and multivariate statistical techniques are more irregular when candidates with similar ideological views are nominated. This situation appeared most recently in the 1974 election for governor.

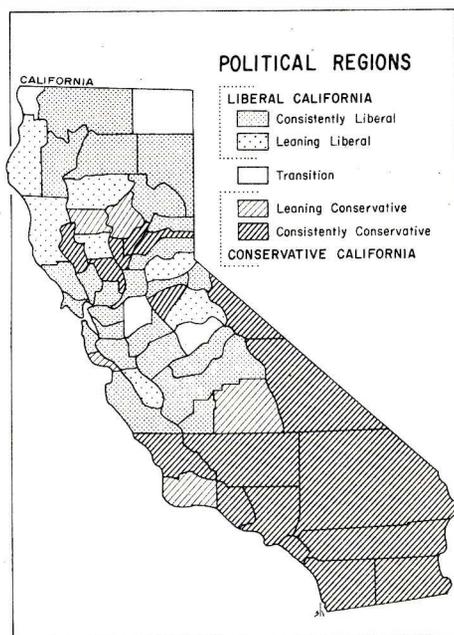


Figure 4

During the 1974 elections, in which Watergate influences and personalities became a factor in state as well as national politics, an analysis of most elections for statewide offices showed the established regional voting patterns were reinforced. Conservative Republican H.L. Richardson won his party's senatorial primary by sweeping the populous counties of "conservative" California while John L. Harmer did the same by winning the party race for lieutenant governor. In the same 1974 primary "liberal" Republican Houston Flournoy defeated conservative candidate (then Lieutenant Governor) Edward Reinecke for the governor's race. This primary marked the first time the Republicans had nominated a liberal for that post since Earl Warren.

With liberal Edmund G. Brown, Jr. nominated by the democrats and liberal Republican Flournoy by the Republicans, Californians were asked to choose between liberal personalities, a marked change from previous elections. The final vote revealed Brown won with 50.2 percent and Flournoy 47.3 percent, a very narrow Democratic victory considering a ten percentage point spread in some pre-election polls. As a liberal Flournoy made significant inroads into the traditional populous counties of "liberal" California by carrying Napa, Marin, and Contra Costa in the Bay Area and several counties in the Sacramento Valley. Brown counterbalanced this altering of the state's voting regions by receiving some support in southern California; he carried populous Los Angeles County. This reversal in the state's electoral geography, plus the turnout of registered voters being less than the state average in several large southern counties that usually vote conservative, insured Brown's narrow election victory.

Conclusion

Multivariate quantitative techniques such as discriminant analysis have utility in political geography research when regionalization and classification are called for. A classification technique such as discriminant analysis, when used in conjunction with maps and an understanding of political and social history, is useful in analyzing regional politics as in the case of California.

Given the dynamic population changes occurring in the urban South and Southwest, ample opportunities exist for additional research using aggregate voting data and investigating regional changes. The large scale immigration of Northeast, Middle West, and Southern residents to Florida, Texas, Arizona and California is certain either to sharpen existing political regional cleavages, as is apparent in California, or to alter them substantially. The spatial facets of this problem are numerous and the political geographer with proper field, cartographic, and quantitative skills can contribute to its understanding.

NOTES

¹Brian J.L. Berry, "Groupings and Regionalizing: An Approach to the Problem Using Multi variate Analysis," in W.L. Garrison and D.F. Marble, eds., *Quantitative Geography, Part.I. Economic and Cultural Topics* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University, Department of Geography, 1967), pp. 219-51 and Leslie J. King, "Discriminatory Analysis: A Review of Recent Theoretical Contribution and Applications," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 46 (1970 Supplement), pp. 367-78.

²Leslie J. King, "Discriminatory Analysis of Urban Growth Patterns in Ontario and Quebec, 1951-61," *Annals*, Association of American Geographers, Vol. 57 (1967), pp. 566-78.

³Recent political science efforts that specifically treat voting are Neil Morgan, *The California Syndrome* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969); R.E. Wolfinger and R.T. Greenstein, "Comparing Political Regions: The Case of California," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 63 (1969), pp. 74-85 and J.E. Mueller, "Voting on the Propositions: Ballot Patterns and Historical Trends in California," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 63 (1969), pp. 1197-1212.

⁴C. McWilliams, *Southern California Country* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), p. 4 and Neil Peirce, *The Megastates: People, Politics, and Power in the Ten Largest States* (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 565.

⁵Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1969), p. 414.

⁶R.D. Delmatier et al., *The Rumble of California Politics: 1848-1970* (New York: Wiley, 1970) and H.L. Phillips, *Big Wayward Girl, an Informal Political History of California* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968).

⁷Wolfinger and Greenstein, *op. cit.*, reference 3, p. 74.