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Purple California: Politics and Regional Realities in the Golden State

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“Important geographical divisions . . . are at the heart of the very close national battles between Democrats and Republicans. American politics becomes much more interesting when party battles are examined region by region” (Black and Black 2007, xi).

Introduction and Background

The idea of California has captivated artists, writers, dreamers, scholars, explorers, and free spirits for generations. People flock to the Golden State to find themselves and their fortunes in countless forms and the socio-political world has looked to California as the harbinger of future movements from the rise of the right and Ronald Reagan to the massive demographic shifts that made California the first majority-minority state in the United States (CBS News 2001; Panzar 2015).

Classifying California politically and geographically has been problematic for decades because, as scholars and politicians have repeatedly noted, there is no single idea of California. Due to its remarkable and changing socio-economic, demographic, and geographic diversity, conceptions about the state and its regionalism have changed notably over time.

One of the most enduring regional spatial models of California is Wolfinger and Greenstein’s (1969) view that California of the 1960s was divided between the North and the South with San Francisco and Los Angeles representing very different ideological leanings and histories. The view was a natural outgrowth of an 1859 movement by the California Legislature to split the state in two that was disallowed by the US Congress. Not only is this idea no longer in fashion, Douzet and Miller (2008, 28) have shown that the model has not been empirically valid since the 1980s.

Nonetheless, some pundits and many Californians still talk about varied values and histories between Normal and SoCal and continue to view the differences between northern and southern California as a factor of importance in state politics (Korey 2008, 23) and the division of California into Lowland, Fog land, and Smog land endures for many. Leo and Smith’s *Two Californias* initially released in 1983 and republished in 2013, makes the case that “Millions of people believe wholeheartedly that there are two Californias,” (3) and “They feed off each other, enrich each other, push each other on. It is hard to imagine one without the other” (93).

Carey McWilliams’ (1946) ideas on a north-south division are perhaps the most enduring to this day:

In the vast and sprawling state of California, most statewide religious, political, social, fraternal, and commercial organizations are divided into northern and southern sections . . . while other states have an east-west or a north-south division, in no state in the Union is the schism as sharp as California. So sharp is the demarcation in California that when state-wide meetings are held, they are usually convened in Fresno, long the “neutral territory” for conventions, conferences, and gatherings of all sort (McWilliams, 4).

While it is easy to make a cultural case that Northern Californians tend to look down on Angelenos as uncultured, narcissistic hedonists, and southern Californians see northerners as smug, cabernet-swilling liberals in a provincial, self-congratulatory tech-bubble. Scholars and observers have posited numerous models of California regionalism, but few have really endured in the public mind like McWilliams.

Gimpel and Schuknecht (2003), for instance, divide the state into five regions (Bay Area, North, South, Central Valley/Mountains, Coast), Baldassare (2000) focuses on four regions (Bay Area, Central Valley, Los Angeles County, and Orange County/Inland Empire). The State Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century (2000, 7) divides the state into 10 economic and cultural areas splitting the coast into five distinct areas. The most fine-grained regional work is that of Walters (1992) who portrayed the state as a place with 14 distinct regions where there are some regions, such as Los Angeles, comprised of one county, while other regions have as many as 12 rural counties such as those in the northeastern corner of the state.

The 14 regions and associated data Walters used to draw his distinctions are woefully out of date and the regions would look notably different today. Still, the fact remains that politicians and scholars have posited numerous approaches to dividing the state and clearly been intrigued by California’s amorphous and distinct regional cleavages (Ramakrishnan and Baldassare 2004, 19).

Despite a plethora of possible cut points, these distinctions are real enough politically and culturally that there have been over 200 instances when various separatist groups have attempted to divide the state into various forms. Just a year after California statehood, 1851 saw the first case where a delegation of southern California representatives wanted to split off from the north (Haddock 2012).

The most recent case occurred in 2014 when Silicon Valley venture capitalist Tim Draper offered a plan to divide California into six states that he argued would be more reflective of regional differences and conflicts, and California was becoming “increasingly ungovernable” as one state (Fields 2014). Draper’s plan created unequal states where West California would have 11.6 million people (Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara counties) and South California would have 10.8 million (San Diego, Imperial, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties).

Jefferson, with under a million people, would include 14 northern counties in California. The eight-county state of Silicon Valley would be the wealthiest while Central California (San Joaquin Valley and adjacent mountains) would be the poorest, with less than half of Silicon Valley residents’ income (Walters 2014).

While the Draper plan failed to collect enough signatures to make the ballot (Megerian 2014), Walters notes in summarizing the debate on Draper’s plan that it generated so much attention that it once again highlighted the regional political friction in a state where, “California’s cultural and economic diversity make it very difficult to effectively govern the state without some residents feeling alienated and even victimized” (Walters 2014).

Because there are regional differences socio-economically and culturally, Baldassare (2001, 13) has argued that the cleavages make it hard for Californians to unify and see themselves as

part of one state: “The major regions are drifting apart at a time there is a need to reach a statewide consensus on social, environmental, land use, and infrastructure issues.”

The paradigm of California division that has gained attention in the past decade, and seemingly plays out in election after election in the state, is a coastal/inland division—20 counties along the Pacific and San Francisco Bay and 38 counties inland. Korey (2008, 23) argues that, “Generally speaking (with notable exceptions), as one travels west to east in California, one also moves left to right politically.”

Drum (2013) postulates, “It’s true: California really is two states. Not northern and southern, though. Unless water is involved, LA and San Francisco can get along OK. Basically, what this chart shows is coastal vs. inland. Most of coastal California is as liberal as its stereotype, while inland California is somewhere to the right of rural Georgia. Lately, coastals have taken firm command of Sacramento, and inlanders haven’t figured out how to respond.”

More specifically, looking at demographic, state initiative, and electoral data, Doused and Miller (2008) find that the coastal counties that became electorally dominated by the Democrats (35) were akin to red and blue states, “The shifts have created within California an increasingly prominent east-west partisan divide that in many ways replicates the recent national division of liberal blue states on the coasts and the upper Midwest from conservative red states in much of the interior West, lower Midwest, and South.

One might say California has internally realigned such that its coastal region politically resembles New York state while the interior looks like Texas” (Douzet and Miller 2008, 36). Economic scholars and pundits have chronicled two very different economies. Medina (2012) reviewed the literature and declared, “Communities all along the coastline have largely bounced back from the recession, some even prospering with high-tech and export businesses growing and tourism coming back. At the same time, communities a few hours’ drive inland stretching to the Nevada and Arizona borders struggle with stubbornly high unemployment and a persistent housing crisis.

The same pattern holds the length of the state, from Oregon to the Mexican frontier. As economic and political matters are often intertwined, it should come as no surprise that the economic differences reinforce these perceived political east-west divisions. Doused and Miller note there are exceptions to the inland-coastal division, such as the GOP strength in some southern coastal area outside Los Angeles or the Democratic presence in the Inland Empire and Central Valley. But they still hold, “While these variations are important, the larger trends are redrawing the state’s political map along east-west lines” (Doused and Miller 2008, 36).

A brief look at electoral maps and outcomes over the past decade supports the idea of a coastal-inland division as electoral outcomes at the national and state level often show Democrats winning on the coast and Republicans winning inland. Of the 58 California counties, 20 hug the coast or San Francisco Bay. Looking at presidential elections between 2000 and 2012, 15 coastal counties voted consistently Democratic from 2000 through 2012, three were mixed, and two (Orange and Del Norte) were solidly GOP.

Inland, the picture varies a bit more depending on the election year so the inland-coastal divide may look stronger or weaker depending on the timing. Nonetheless, of the 38 that are inland, 22 (58 percent) were solidly GOP, 11 (30 percent) were mixed over the 12 years, and the remaining five were consistently Democratic. Doused and Miller (2008) summarize the position of many by arguing, “Democrats have now become dominant in almost every coastal county from the Oregon border in the north to the “Orange Curtain” in the south, while Republican strength has concentrated inland” (28).

While these narratives of a politically divided California are seemingly valid at first glance with electoral maps and the talk of separating the state into various smaller states and creating administrative regions, historical electoral statistics and public opinion data reveal remarkable similarity among the coastal and inland regions. The popular narratives that coastal California is moving left and the Inland right are incorrect. Californians, like Americans more generally, are remarkably centrist and pragmatic where there is widespread parity on issues ranging from environment to abortion and immigration to economic policy.

While Black and Black (2007) are correct in noting that geographical divisions are central to understanding partisanship and political outcomes and California has a powerful historical political legacy based on its geography, I argue that the contemporary political scene, with fairly consistent and centrist behaviors and preferences throughout the Golden State, does not reflect that legacy.

Registration Data—the Limited Case of Polarization

Electoral returns and voter registration in California are among the most transparent and potent sources of data that can be used to understand partisanship and questions of polarization. What is remarkable is that depending on which metric one selects, a very different story can be told with the data. The strongest evidence that many put forward for California polarization comes directly from presidential election results that regularly show a coastal-inland division when a county is plotted red or blue based on the winner (Politico 2012).

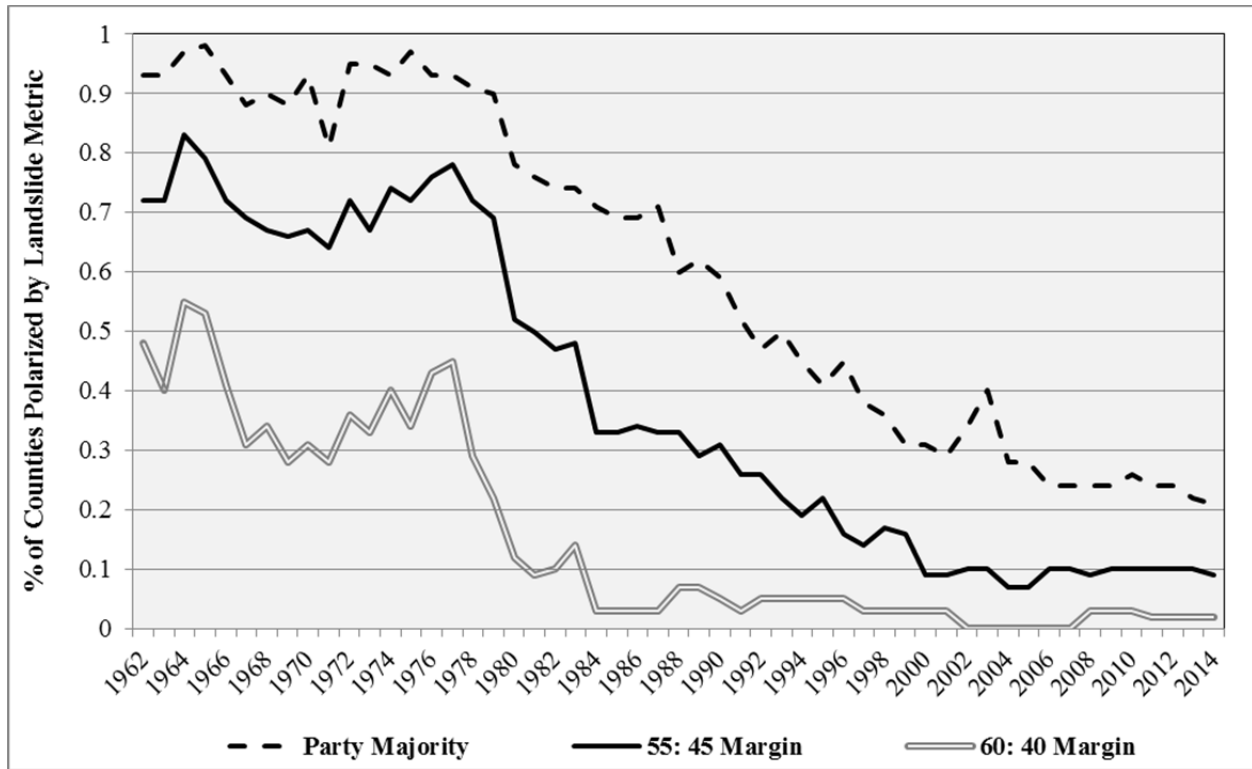
The problem with electoral data is that many electoral choices are polarized and require that citizens make extreme choices from limited options that do not allow for an opt-out position aside from voting a third party or abstaining (Fiorina and Abrams 2009, 16). A more novel way to assess the electoral leanings of Californians is to look at voter registration data by county over time. Registration data show that the strong pronouncement from the voting data, where California is polarized geographically between a Democratic blue coast and a red, conservative Republican inland central valley and mountain area, is overstated.

California is one of 31 states and Washington, DC, that collect data on partisan registration and have been doing so for over 50 years. The value of the data is that registration offers Californians the chance to select a major party, a minor party, or simply decline to state. Being able to state “no party preference” allows citizens to vote and engage, and, since 2011, vote in open primaries while rejecting not only the general partisan labels, but the often polarized choices presented by political elites. While “no party preference” does not reveal the specific ideological standing and political views of California voters, it does give observers the opportunity to gauge centrist and general dislike toward the major parties.

Figure 1 plots voter registration trends over time by looking at all 58 California counties from 1962 through 2014 and does so via three levels of partisan dominance in counties with such dominance significantly declining over time. Voters were able to register as Democrats, Republicans, Independents, or a minor party. Those who opted for a minor party were discarded from the calculation and the percentage of those registering for minor parties over the 52 years never exceeded six percent and averaged about four percent.

Given the three major choices Californians could make, the three trends present in Figure 1 break down each county to see if it was dominated by Republicans or Democrats in terms of registration at three different levels—does one party hold a majority of those registered (50 percent or more), a margin of 55 to 45 percent, and finally a landslide margin of 20 points of more.

Figure 1. Landslide Counties in California by Voter Registration: 1962–2014



Source: California Secretary of State.

The data in Figure 1 reveal a clear and powerful trend along all three lines plotted and demonstrate that one-party dominance in California counties by Democrats or Republicans was basically nonexistent by the end of 2008. All three metrics peaked in the early 1960s and follow the same track to present day low points with a slight uptick in the late 1970s that was close to the peak moment for each. In the early 1960s, 98 percent of California counties had clear partisan majorities in one direction or the other despite the fact Californians could register as Independents.

That number dropped to only 21 percent of the counties having one party holding a majority of registered voters in 2014—a drop of 76 percent. Cognate declines can be found with the other two trend lines as well. The 55 percent or more trend line followed the same general trajectory as the majority line and dropped from a high of 83 percent to a current low of 9 percent. The “landslide” metric of counties having a party control more than 60 percent of any county mirrored the other two trends and dropped from a high of 55 percent in 1964 to two percent by 2014—a decline of almost 97 percent. The 60 percent metric revealed there were no polarized counties in California between 2002 and 2006.

These three cut points on voter registration have been used in the literature by Bishop (2008) and Abrams and Fiorina (2012). They reveal pronounced and sharp declines in party dominance in California counties and suggest a rise in moderation across counties. Such strong, consistent findings look different from voting data and reveal a huge decline in county-level party domi-

nance. The 60 percent metric is the most often used cut point and given the fact that only two percent of California counties were party dominant by 2014, it is hard to argue that there has been an increase in state level polarization in an east-west divide or any divide by 2000. Landslide counties are now the exception, not the norm, in California.

Participation and Engagement in California

Perceptions in politics count for quite a bit (Jervis 1976) and even if voter registration casts serious doubt on the claim that there is an east-west divide in California, more evidence is needed as electoral maps are hard to ignore. For instance, could the perception of a statewide inland-coastal divide exist because a subset of people in San Francisco or Santa Cruz engage more heavily in social media or protest movements?

Moreover, is it the case that these counties have a larger number of liberally inclined activists while Orange or Fresno counties have a similar group of conservative activists? The empirical answer is that the two regions, like their voter registration data, are remarkably similar and few differences exist in terms of voter or political engagement in the state.

Looking at actual election turnout rates over the past 30 years reveals minor regional differences. Over the past six presidential election cycles and the turnout for those races, when breaking down turnout by inland and coastal regions the rates all hover in the mid 50 percentile and around the 30th percentile for off-year congressional races. The average difference among the coastal and inland region for the presidential races was 5.2 points, while congressional turnout difference was roughly four points.

These are hardly noteworthy differences in terms of general participation. What is noteworthy is that turnout rates among the eligible-to-vote population in California are lower than the national averages in general and in the coast slightly higher, more closely resembling the national average but lower by 2–5 points since 1992 (Gans 2012). Only in 1996 was coastal California turnout higher at 54.1 compared to the national average of 51.4. All of this is to say that Californians are not leaders in electoral participation.

In 2012, the national turnout was roughly 58 percent while California was about 56 percent (Sullivan 2013). That being said, looking at the 50 states and DC, California ranked 41st in terms of turnout with 36 states above the national average. The national comparison and the regional lack of real turnout differences reveals a fairly disengaged California electorate, hardly different regions in terms of one voting and the other opting out.

Elections are only one way to participate in democratic politics. Countless other forms of engagement abound—from grassroots organizing to contributing resources, and it is valuable to see if there are regional differences in California. Table 1 reports data from PPIC, which queried thousands of Californians on their volunteer activities in 2002.

The results are not particularly strong in revealing major regional differences. The first three columns examine volunteer trends. Respondents were asked if they had volunteered in the past 12 months and could state that they did not volunteer at all or volunteered for particular amounts of time. There is parity across all three groupings presented in Table 1 and in both cases roughly half of all Californians in both the coastal and inland regions did no volunteer work, a third did up to five hours of volunteer work in the past year, and about 15 percent did more than six hours.

The final column presents data that PPIC collected a year later in 2003 via an index of seven questions that asked respondents if they volunteered for a particular group, organization or type of work. No specifics were asked beyond “yes” or “no,” and the seven items were: an edu-

Table 1. Volunteering Trends in California: 2002 and 2003

	Have you volunteered in your community during the past 12 months? % Up to 5 Hours (2003)	6 Hours or More (2003)	No Volunteering (2003)	7-Item Mean Index (2002)
Inland	33.5	12.9	52.8	1.99
Coastal	33.4	15.3	50.1	2.04
CA	39.6	14.5	51.0	2.00

cational institution, artistic/cultural organizations, human services organizations, religious organization, sports organizations, ethnic organizations, and health institutions. The average respondent named two organizations, and the average was virtually identical in coastal and inland regions.

Volunteer patterns revealed no regional differences and a fairly disengaged California citizenry. Fortunately, PPIC data from 2002 measured specific elements of electoral behavior as well and the data reveal few differences regionally when Californians are queried about specific political behaviors. Table 2 presents eight measures of political behavior from voting to attending political meetings to writing letters to officials. Inland and coastal regions have practically identical rates of participation and engagement with the largest difference being five points on writing an official a letter where the California average is 30 percent.

Californians do not generally participate differently from other Americans. The national row presents data from alternative surveys that offer close measures to those from the 2002 PPIC poll. There is near parity with the national figures for Californians with two exceptions. First, Californians are modestly more inclined to be members of political organizations with 16 percent of Californians being members compared to 10 percent of the nation. Second, the 2002 GSS notes that six percent of Americans have attended a rally whereas 16 percent of Californian's have—a difference of 167 percent. Even with these two measures being different for California compared to the nation, regional differences are not present and Californians did not lead the nation in political engagement.

Lastly, none of the aforementioned tables and figures account for the intensity of political behavior and regional differences may exist. Figure 2 presents 2002 PPIC data on the number of strong partisans and extremists regionally and compares that data to California as a whole and the national average. Strong partisans are individuals who respond that they are “strong” on the 7-point party identification scale and since the 1990s has hovered around 30 percent of the electorate. Activists identify as Republican or Democrat, have worked for a candidate or party, and typically comprise five percent or so of the eligible electorate.

There is no statistical difference between the percentage of strong partisans in the electorate between California regions and California and the national average with the number hovering around 31 or 32 percent. For Democratic and Republican partisans, there are minor differences regionally and nationally. Democrats have an edge in identification on the coast by five points, 18 to 13, and Republicans have the edge inland by seven points—19 to 12.

Table 2. Electoral Behavior in 2002: California and the United States

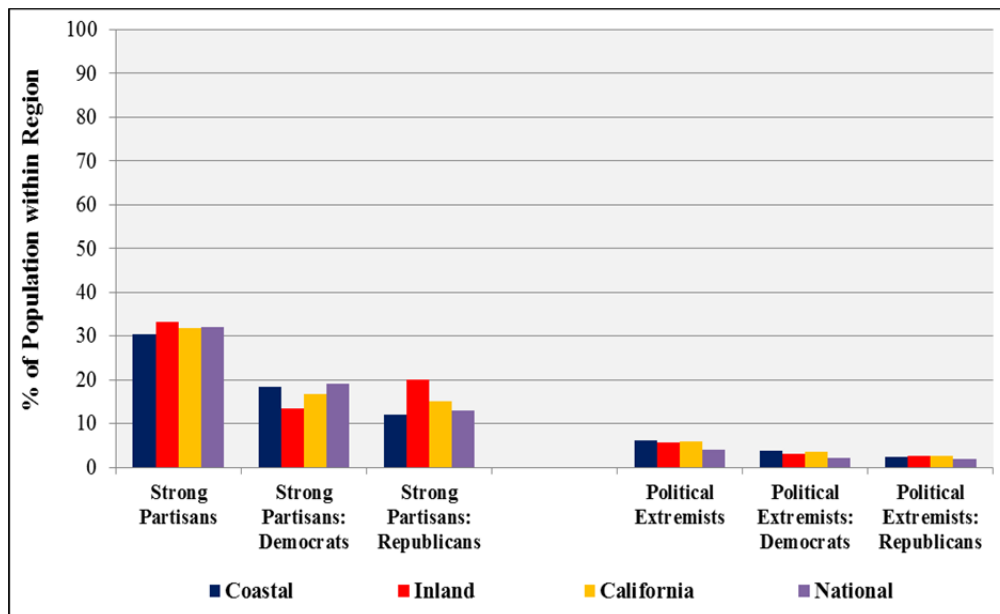
	How Often Vote? % Always/Nearly Always	Letter to Official	Attended a Rally	Local or School Issue Meeting	Signed A Petition	Worked for a Party	Given Money	Member of Political Org
Coastal	74.81	31.82	15.78	39.69	40.0	7.69	22.74	16.37
Inland	73.24	24.91	15.43	39.51	37.12	7.02	21.22	15.29
CA	74.25	29.37	15.64	39.63	38.97	7.45	22.20	15.99
National	74.0%	27.9%	6%	43% 2000 ^a	42.5%	9%	23.4%	10.4
National Source	National Constitution Center 2002	GSS 2002 ^b	GSS 2002	2000 Census Survey	GSS 2002	Chicago CFR 2002	GSS 2002	USCID 2006

Note: Data unweighted. Aggregated PPIC data from 8.2002 and 10.2002 survey items.

^a Here is a list of things people may have the time to do. . . . In the past year, have you . . . attended a public meeting on town or school affairs?

^b GSS asks the last 5 years “Over the past 5 years have you done any of the following to express your opinion about an issue or your support for a cause: Contact an elected official by phone, letter, or e-mail”

Figure 2. Political Partisans and Extremists in California: 2002



Source: PPIC 8 and 10.2002 and ANES 2002 data.

The differences account for regional cleavages but are not huge. National percentages mirror the partisan picture along the coast, and the difference between the national percentage of Democratic and Republican strong partisans and the California figures is two percent. These minor differences are hardly large enough to claim the state is deeply divided in terms of partisan identification.

As for activists, data reveals little in the way of regional differences but California has a marginally higher number of activists compared to the national trend. The overall percentage of activists on the coast compared to inland is practically identical with a two-point difference between the California number of six percent and the national figure of four percent.

When activists are broken down by partisanship, there is no difference regionally with California having about 60 percent activist Democrats and 40 percent Republican, but they are evenly distributed regionally. There are slightly more Democratic activists in California compared to the national figure—3.5 to 2 percent and Republicans are .5 points more. As with the partisan figure, these differences are minor and insignificant regionally and in comparison to national figures.

These data show there is little coastal/inland difference in terms of communal and political engagement. The empirics are particularly valuable given the widespread perception that coastal cities like San Francisco and Santa Cruz lead the way in political engagement and activism compared to the sleepy Central Valley (Gendron and Domhoff 2009; Brook, Carlsson, and Peters 2001). While the data may be over a decade old, it captures a moment when the US was in the midst of what many think of as the nadir of the “culture wars” (Fiorina and Abrams 2009; Hartman 2015) and shows where California fit into that larger narrative.

Parties and Ideology

In addition to issues of political engagement and behavior, any examination of polarization must look at questions of ideology and change over time. PPIC and the Field Poll have a number of key measures like the strong partisan and activist data that reveal that Californians are generally unhappy with their political choices: party favorability ratings are rarely over 50 percent with the GOP hovering around the low 30s and Democrats around the low 40s . Long-term trends regarding approval of elected officials and ideology reveal strong regional parity and convergence, but no divergence over time.

Table 3 presents aggregated 2010 through 2014 data from PPIC on the question, “In your view, do the Republican and Democratic parties do an adequate job representing the American people, or do they do such a poor job that a third major party is needed?” There is no statistical difference between the inland and coastal regions. The national figure comes from Gallup in 2014, and California is on trend with the nation as only about a third of Californians believe the parties do an adequate job representing the American people.

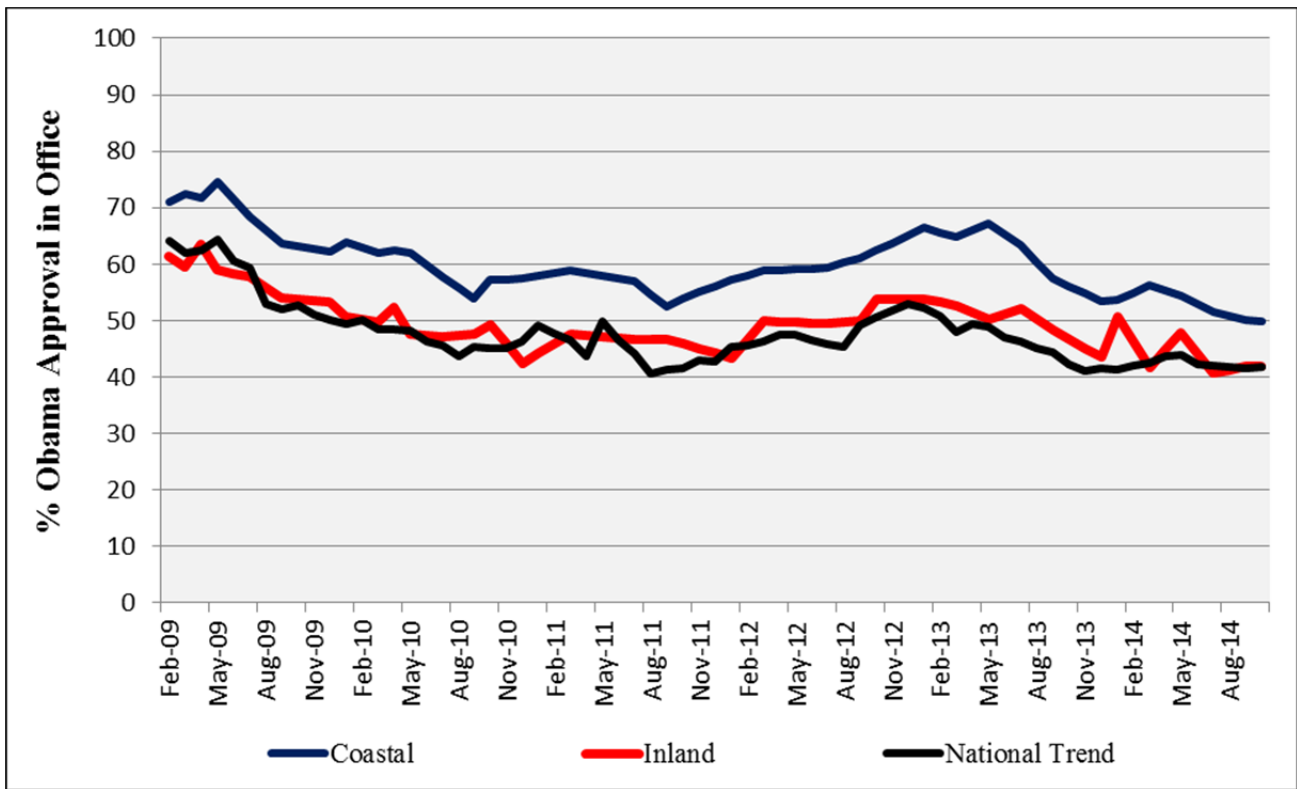
PPIC has earlier data from September 2004 and October 2006, and when the earlier cases are added, the regional difference shrinks: 37.5 percent of those along the coast are unhappy and 37.6 percent in the inland with 37.5 the state average. As for satisfaction with presidential choices, likely voters were asked, “Would you say you are satisfied or not satisfied with your choices of candidates in the election for US President on November 4th?” There is PPIC data for the 2008 and 2012 elections, and while the levels of satisfaction are higher for the candidates, there is again regional parity despite the fact that Obama and his opponents were deemed highly polarized.

Table 3. Perceptions of Parties and Representation in California

	2014: % Who Believe Parties Do an “Adequate Job”	2008: Satisfied with Presidential Candidates	2012: Satisfied with Presidential Candidates
Coastal	36.8	59.2	58.9
Inland	35.2	52.6	54.4
California	36.3	57.1	57.5
National (Gallup)	35.0	-	-

Source: PPIC and the Gallup Organization.

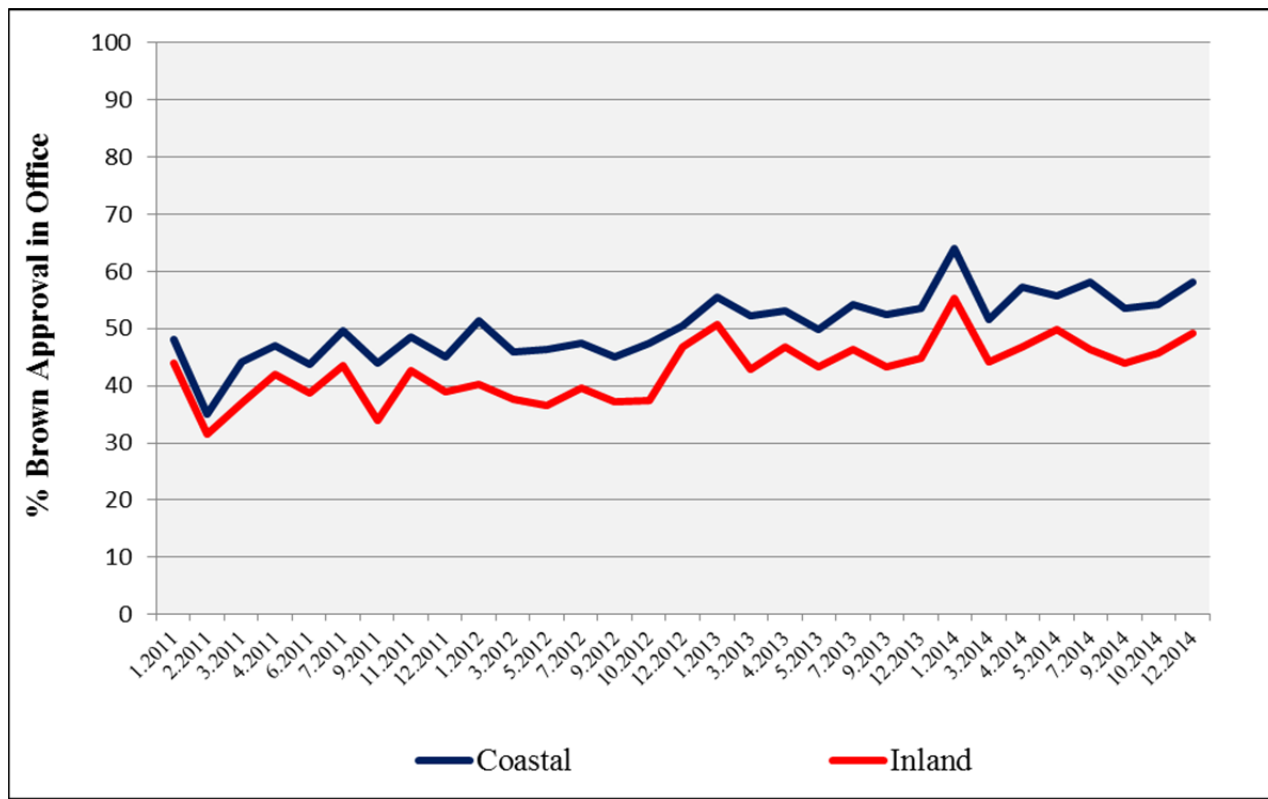
Figure 3. Presidential Approval: Barack Obama



Source: PPIC and Gallup.

Building on the idea of candidate satisfaction, President Obama and California Governor Jerry Brown are two fairly polarizing figures (Fiorina and Abrams 2009; Bellantoni 2016; Jeffee 2011) and it is reasonable to believe that if California regions were diverging, that would be re-

Figure 4. Gubernatorial Approval: Jerry Brown



Source: PPIC.

flected in the approval rates of Obama and Brown. Figures 3 and 4 plot the approval rates for each leader, and all of the approval trends track incredibly well.

For President Obama, the inland trend matches the national trend with a gradual decline in approval from the low 60s to the low 40s. The coastal trend mirrors the inland trend starting with a high at the beginning of Obama’s term with approval ratings in the high 60s/low 70s and dropping to the 40s—a 20-point decline. The average difference between inland and coastal trends over the course of President Obama’s term was nine points with a maximum of 17 that has now dwindled to six.

As for Governor Brown, Figure 4 presents PPIC data for the past four years of his term and, like President Obama, the trends track identically those living in the coastal region, and there has been a gradual increase in Brown’s approval in both regions beginning with the mid 40s and mid 30s for the coastal and inland and then the high and low 50s respectively with an average difference of about 11 points between coastal and inland regions by no real divergence in the trends revealing some general differences in attitudes but not polarization whatsoever.

Taken collectively, given the fact that candidates tend to polarize electorates in a world of “affective partisan polarization” and sorting, which refers to the increasing hostility felt by partisans toward people on the other side, it is reasonable to expect greater hostility to the increasingly purified and increasingly extreme “other side” and the data does not reveal this for Obama or Brown.

A comment about ideology is warranted, and the PPIC and Field Polls have queried thousands of Californians annually asking about their ideological positions, which allows for a fairly strong portrait of California ideas and how they have or have not changed over time. The PPIC and Field Poll data are different in terms of length of time and how ideology is queried. Both sets offer over 30 years of trend data and reveal the same overall finding—not great divergence ideologically between the inland and coastal regions.

The Field Poll data presented in Figure 5 show decades of inland and coastal trends with very little difference regionally in any of the four categories presented, again suggesting that the notion that California is two states is overblown. The Field Poll has been asking thousands of Californians the following question since 1982: “Generally speaking, in politics do you consider yourself conservative, liberal, middle-of-the-road, or don’t you think of yourself in these terms?” The Field Poll asks subsequent branching questions but begins with this important item because it gives respondents an opportunity to reject traditional classifications or place themselves in the center.

This differs greatly from the American National Election Studies (ANES), for instance, which presents respondents with a 7-point scale from “extremely liberal” to “extremely conservative” and does not offer a choice to opt out—though many offer “haven’t thought much” or “don’t know” responses. The unique feature here is that measuring ideology explicitly gives respondents a choice to state that they reject the notion of a firm ideological position at the start and liberals and conservatives to state their preferences; others who want to opt out may do so.

The first notable finding in Figure 5 is that there is practically no variance across the four ideological measures over time in terms of region—the ideological trend lines track nearly perfectly. The trend lines for “middle of the road” and “don’t think of oneself in ideological terms” terms never diverge more than two points and the average difference for liberals and conservatives was both six points with the greatest distance for liberals in the time series at seven and for conservatives nine. These average differences are hardly massive regional cleavages and make the case that the east/west political divide is not nearly as strong as many argue.

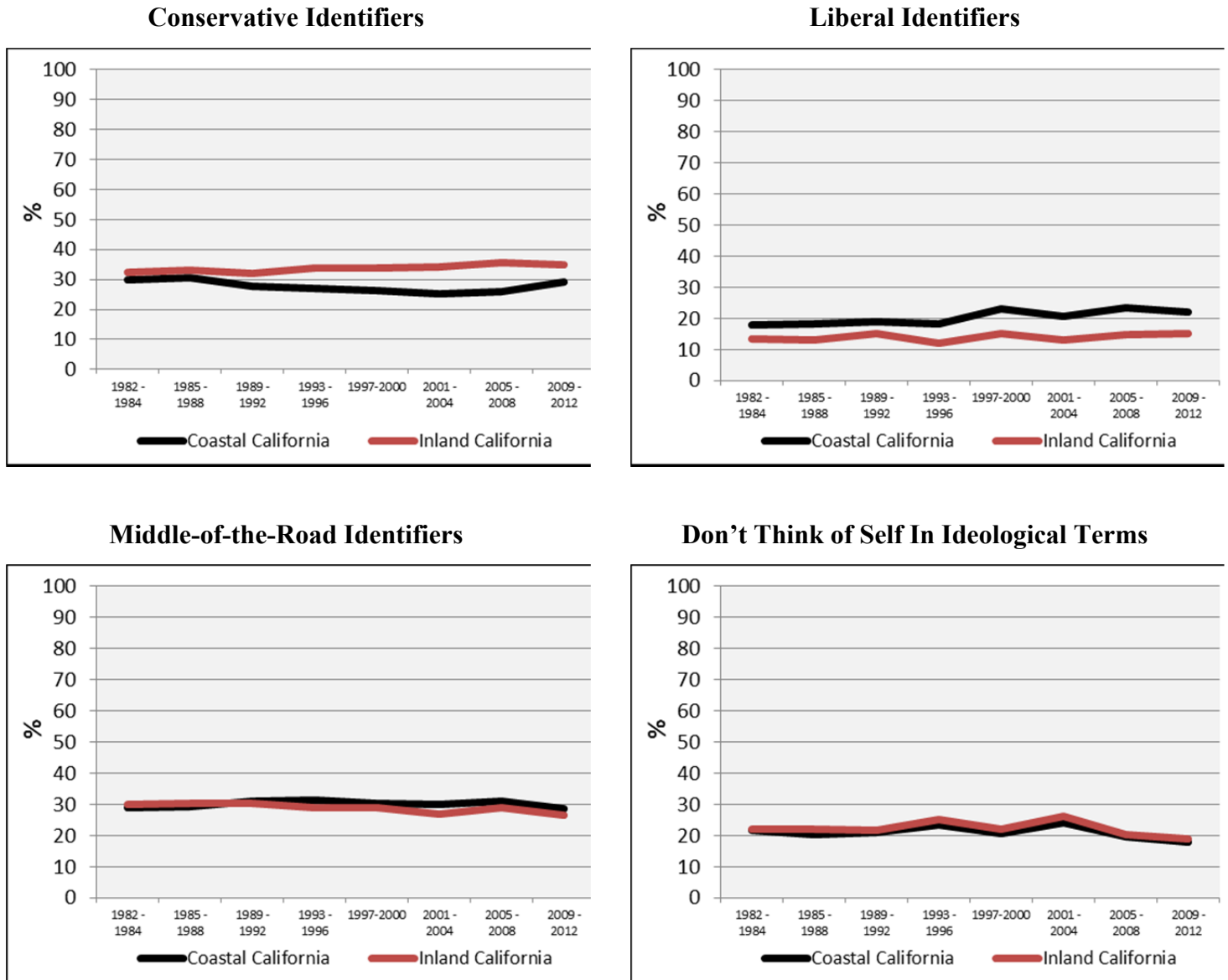
The second notable finding is where ideologies are distributed as a whole and the fact that conservative identifiers outnumber liberal identifiers 30 to 20 percent, something many may find surprising. The overwhelming plurality of Californians are either middle-of-the-road ideological identifiers or reject the ideological label altogether. Of the California electorate, 30 percent identifies as middle of the road and roughly 20 percent regularly opt out of the traditional thinking of ideology and choose to not think of themselves in ideological terms.

Collapsing the middle and nonideological positions, both the coastal and inland average percentage of the electorate identifying as such is 51 percent since the early 1980s. Taking the Field data over time as a whole, it becomes apparent that not only are there no appreciable east/west differences, but liberals are the smallest group in the state with conservatives edging them out by 10 points and centrists and nonideologues holding a clear majority over the last three decades.

To further confirm the Field Data, PPIC has been asking a question about ideology and offers a five-point scale where respondents are asked, “Would you consider yourself to be politically very liberal, somewhat liberal, middle-of-the-road, somewhat conservative, or very conservative?” An opt-out item was not offered.

PPIC has asked this since 1971 with a break in the 1980s but still offers a 40-year picture of ideology and change in California. The narrative presented in Figure 6 looks a bit different from the Field Poll data because the trend begins in the 1970s and there is a clear bimodal distribution of ideological positions that gives way to a normal distribution by the last time period.

Figure 5. Field Coastal/Inland: Ideology

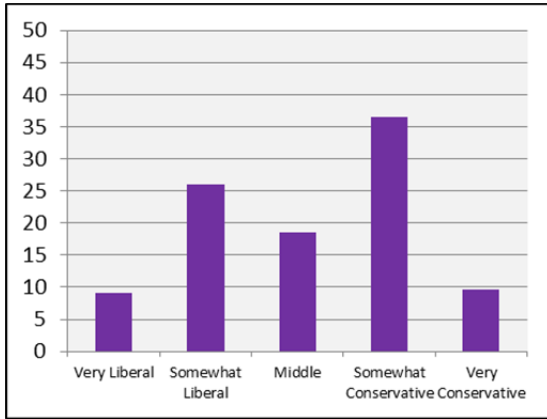


Source: Field Research Data. 2006 data used registered voters only.

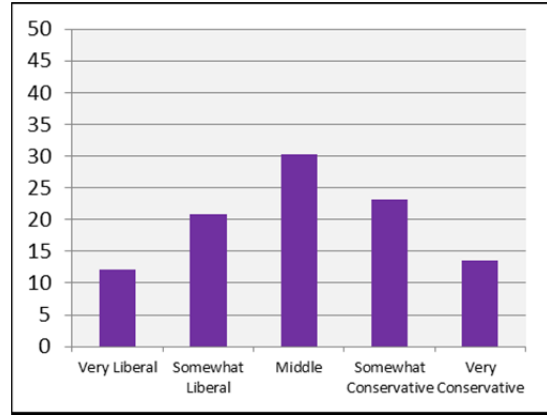
Figure 6 presents a picture of California as a whole and breaks the data down by inland and coastal regions from two moments in time, 1971–1975 and 2012–2014. Not only do all three geographic areas track almost perfectly, but the PPIC data reveals a moderating trend for California on the whole where those in the middle comprised on average 16 percent in the 1970s and ideologues were 82 percent with 63 percent being moderate ideologues and 19 percent strong ideologues.

Figure 6. Five-Point Political Ideology in California Coastal and Inland Regions

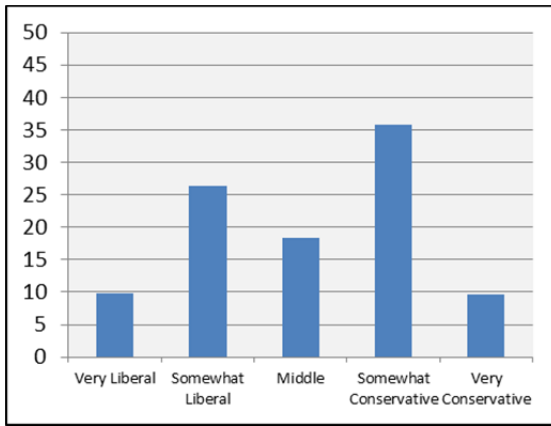
California: 1971–1975



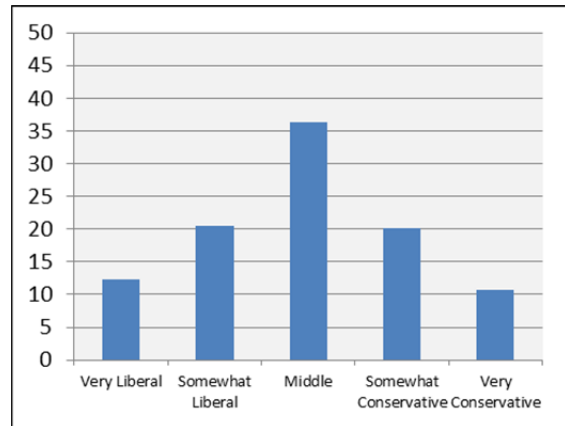
California: 2012–2014



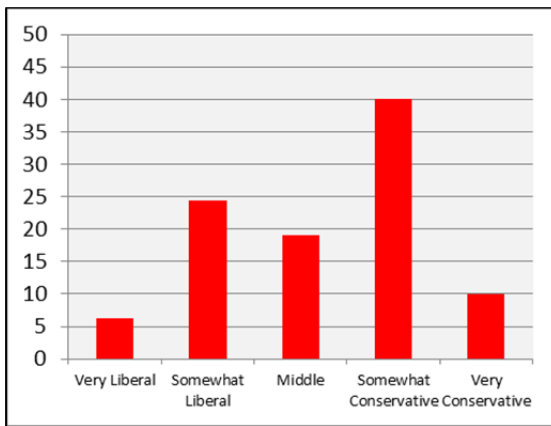
Coastal: 1971–1975



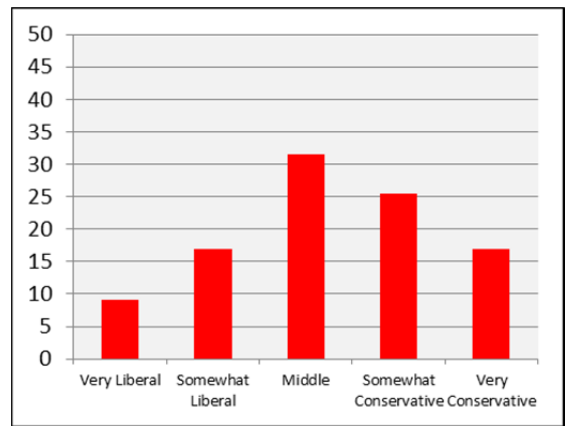
Coastal: 2012–2014



Inland: 1971–1975



Inland: 2012–2014



Source: PPIC. DKs Dropped.

logues. As with the Field data, the skew is to the right with moderate conservatives outnumbering moderate liberals 39 to 26 percent.

By the 2008 and 2012 cycles, the overall distribution shifted with moderates the modal distribution with those in the middle at 32 percent—twice the number of the 1970s. The overall average for ideologues dropped to 68 percent with 44 percent moderate and 24 percent very ideological. The skew is, again, slightly to the right, which suggests there has been some ideological sorting that cannot be explicitly demonstrated with this data. Nonetheless, the statewide data on ideology shows a fairly typical distribution and suggests California has not taken a hard turn to the left or the right over the past 40 years and has, as earlier figures have shown, moderated.

Figure 6 presents a similar narrative to that which emerges in Figure 5 and clearly demonstrates the regional differences between east and west with respect to ideology are, again, minor. Figure 6 illustrates California had a right of center bimodal distribution in the 1970s in both regions and distribution shifted to a normal curve by the late 1990s through 2014.

In the 1970s, the skew to the right was roughly four points more in the inland regions for moderate conservatives and three points for moderate liberals in the coastal regions, but these are not huge differences. By 1999, which I do not show, the coastal region showed a strong normal curve with moderates easily the dominant group.

As for the inland areas, by contrast, the curve became far more normal by 1999 but distribution skews more heavily to the right. From 2012 through 2014, for instance, moderates make up the modal category with 32 percent of the population. Moderate conservatives are 25 percent compared to 17 percent moderate liberals and 17 percent strong conservatives and 9 percent of strong liberals. That being said, the present distribution is far more normal and centered than any measured distribution to date.

The PPIC and Field Poll ideology data along with presidential and gubernatorial approval statistics and approval of parties casts doubt on any claim that there are deep ideological divisions between the east and west in California. If citizens in the two regions were that divided politically and socially, the long-term ideology trends and approval of key figures would reveal differences as is true on the national level. Only minor differences emerge in California.

A Look at the Issues

The data from party registration to ideological positioning to actual electoral results collectively make a strong case for fairly homogenous political orientations and beliefs across California. These indicators do not specifically address the various policies and issues that Californians regularly confront. The PPIC and the Field Poll have been asking questions on these issues over time and allow for long-term regional comparisons that generally reveal few notable inland-coastal differences.

Among the items asked over the past decade, some areas are covered more heavily than others, such as immigration compared to the environment. Moreover, while both major data sources have one-off items and examine many issues and policy questions with numerous measures, I focus on several larger, longer-term trends that are more representative of key current positions in California. A one-time response to a salient and politically charged item may look different as the issue evolves over time and fails to capture the support of Californians.

Consider the highly charged gay-rights-centered Proposition 8 in 2008. Prop. 8 eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry. It was ruled unconstitutional by the federal courts in 2010 and was a highly charged political wedge issue. In October 2008, the Field Poll asked over

1,000 Californians “Proposition 8 is the initiative to eliminate the right of same-sex couples to Marry. (Did/would) you vote yes or no on Prop. 8?”

The state appeared deeply split with 42 percent Yes and 43 percent No. Breaking down the Yes responses on Proposition 8 by region using Field Poll results, 41 percent of those along the coast would support Prop. 8 compared to 58 percent of inland voters for a difference of 17 points. PPIC asked the question three times in 2008 before the election and found smaller differences of around 11 points.

If one were to only consider the data in the Field Poll, the case could be made for California regional polarization. The 14-year trend from PPIC data in Figure 7 shows growing support in both inland and coastal regions for gay marriage with a 43 percent increase along the coast and a 55 percent increase inland. The trends track and there is an average difference regionally of a little over 10 points showing the regions moving in the same direction, which is hard to visualize if only the 2008 Field Poll data is considered.

Taking into account the aforementioned concerns about data and larger California trends, the primary socio-economic concern on the minds of Californians in 2014 was “the environment” though not many environmental survey items have been queried over time. The Field Poll found in April of 2014 that 88 percent of Californian’s believed that the state was in the midst of a water shortage, but there was no clear consensus about whether the situation was due more to a lack of water storage and supply facilities in the state, or users not using existing supplies efficiently.

Statewide, 27 percent cite the former, 37 percent the latter, and another 24 percent say both are responsible.” (DiCamillo and Field 2014) A few items provide a longer-term picture of Californians opinion on environmental matters. The first in Figure 8 comes from PPIC which asked respondents, “How serious a threat is global warming to the economy and quality of life for California’s future? Do you think it is a very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not at all serious threat?”

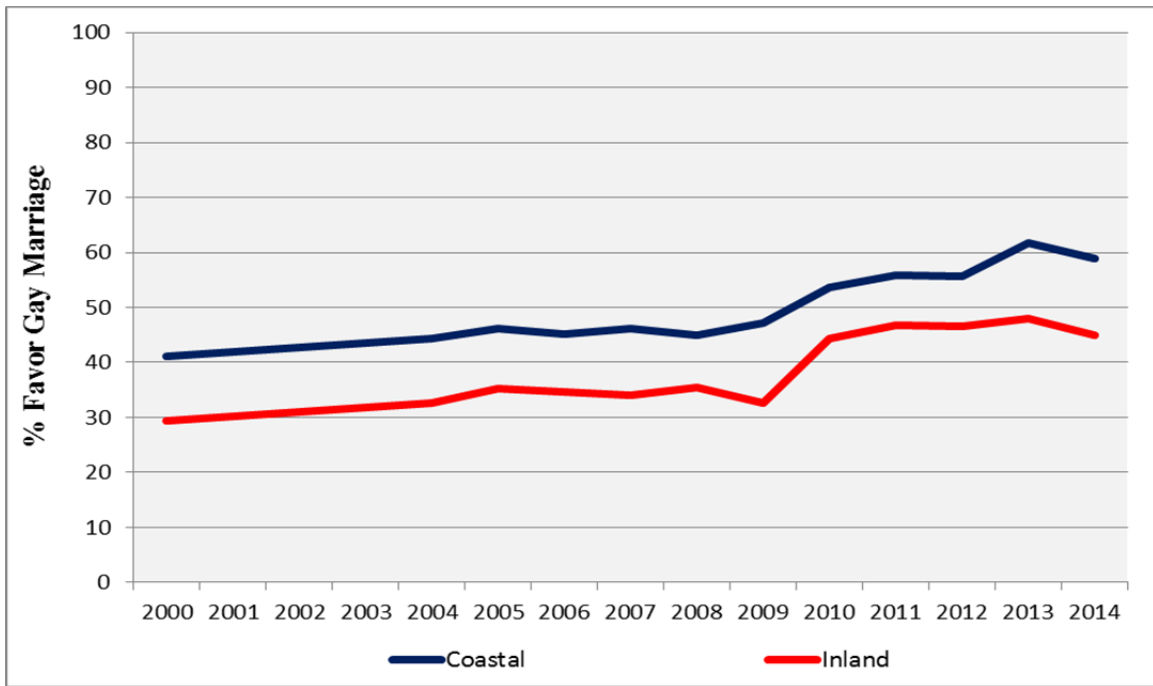
Figure 8 plots the trend for those who respond “very serious” as it fluctuates between the high 30s and the high 50s and the trends occasionally converge with those along the coast marginally more concerned compared to those inland.

Figure 9 shows a small regional gap tracking over 14 years when Californians were asked whether stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy or were worth the cost. Figure 9 plots PPIC “worth the cost” responses. While there is an average gap of roughly 11 points, the two regions trend in the same direction and do not diverge.

Placing Californians in national context, Pew asked the identical question in 2011 and 53 percent of Americans believe “stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost” compared to 39 percent who say, “stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy” (Pew 2011). Coastal Californians are above the national average at 60 percent saying it is worth the cost. Inlanders are lower than the national average at 44 percent.

In June of 2010, the Field Poll asked Californians if they defined themselves as environmentalists: “Some people think of themselves as environmentalists, while others do not. Would you say that the term environmentalist applies to you definitely, only somewhat, or not at all?” Along the coast, 24 percent said they were definitely environmentalists compared to 23 inland and when “only somewhat” is included the difference goes to 84 percent compared to 81 percent—no real difference again. As environmental issues grow in importance, there is little reason to think that there will be any real regional difference in priorities going forward (Field 2010).

Figure 7. Do You Favor or Oppose Allowing Gay and Lesbian Couples to Be Legally Married?



Source: PPIC Data.

Figure 8. Global Warming is a Serious Threat to the Economy and Quality of Life in California

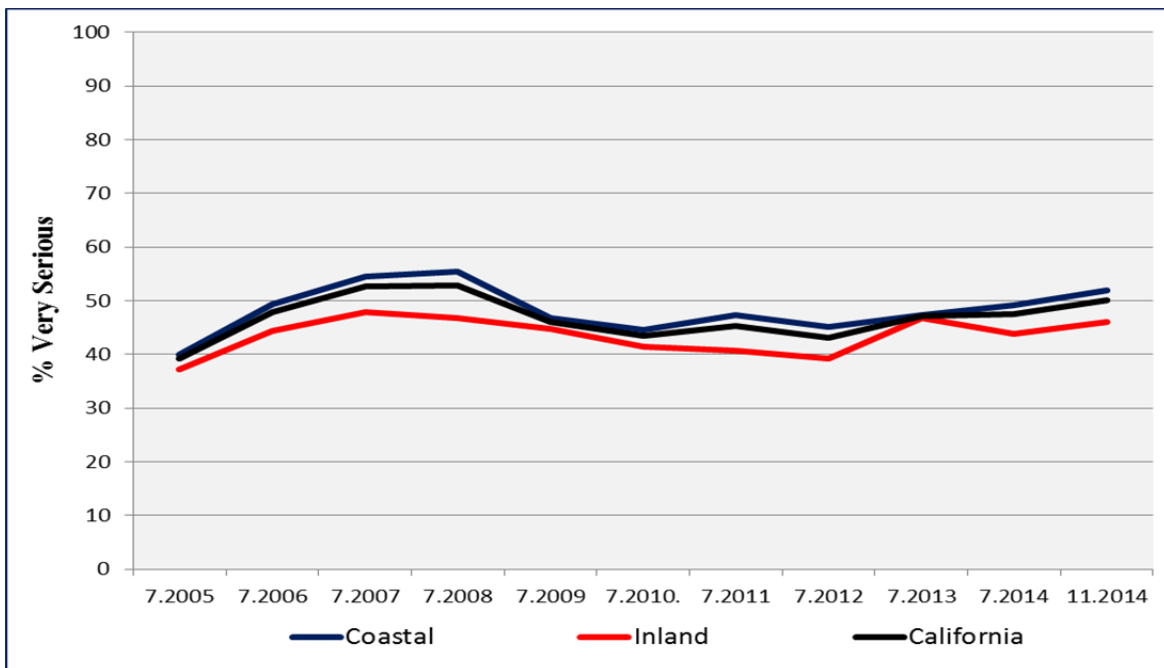
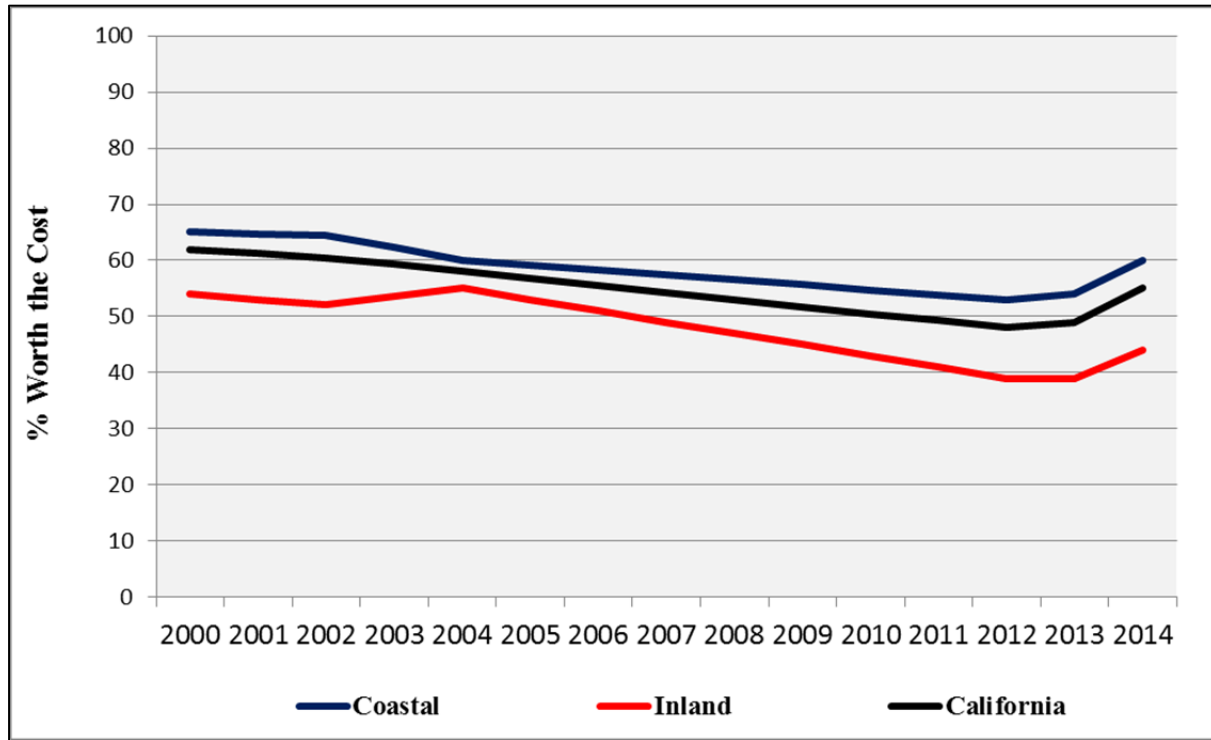


Figure 9. Environmental Regulations Are Worth the Economic Costs



Source: PPIC.

Immigration

Immigration has been an issue for decades in California, and once again there is little difference regionally when Californians are given a chance to express their opinion in a serious manner. Observers like Hanson (2010) have written that large waves of illegal immigration have led to two Californias where “elites and masses have given up on the ideal of integration and assimilation, perhaps in the wake of the arrival of 11 to 15 million illegal aliens.”

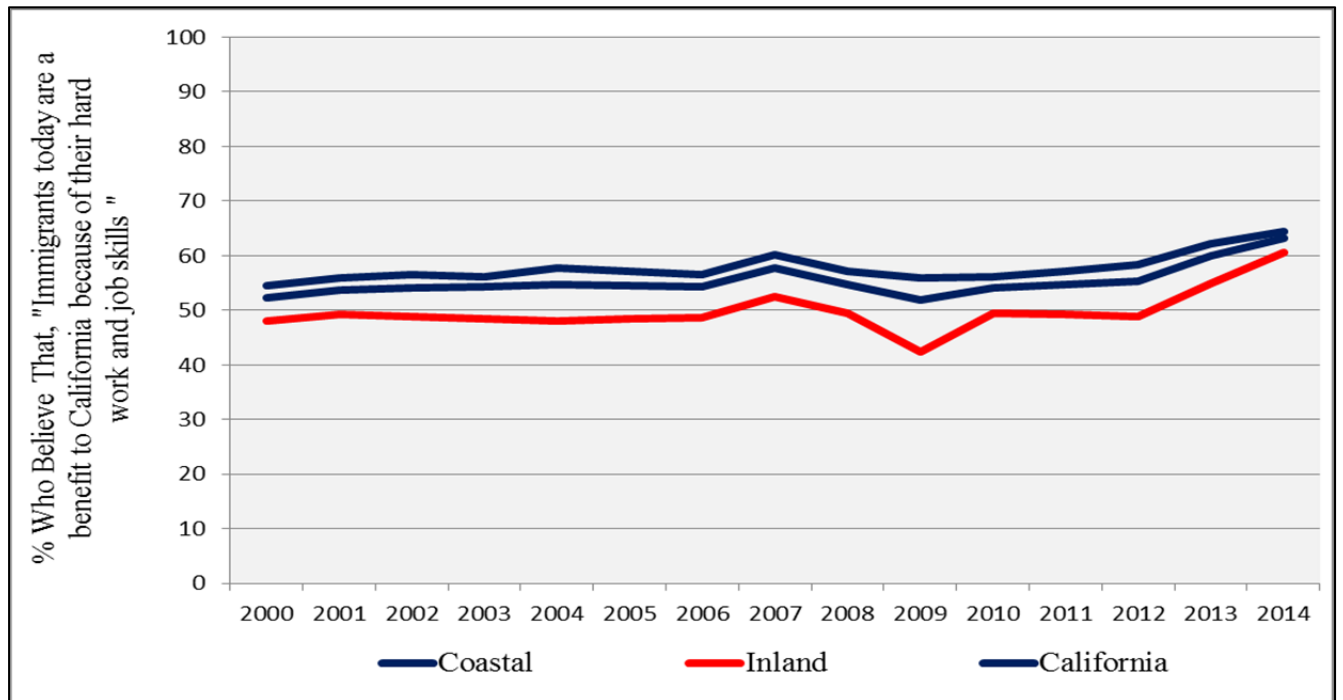
The inland now is punctuated by abandoned farms, Third World living conditions, pervasive public assistance, unemployment rates that run between 15 and 20 percent, and the departure of whites, blacks, and Asians from many of the small, often rural towns to more racially diverse upscale areas. Hanson wrote in 2012: “On the coast, it’s politically incorrect to talk of illegal immigration. In the interior, residents see first-hand the bankrupting effect on schools, courts and health care when millions arrive illegally without English-language fluency or a high school diploma—and send back billions of dollars in remittances to Mexico and other Latin American countries (Hanson 2012).”

Despite these oft-reported trends regarding socio-economic and demographic variation, Table 8 and Figures 10 and 11 clearly show that attitudes toward illegal immigrants are not being impacted by some of these inland realities. Table 8 presents a number of aggregate PPIC immigra-

Table 8. Inland and Coastal Immigration Policy Positions Compared: 2008–2014

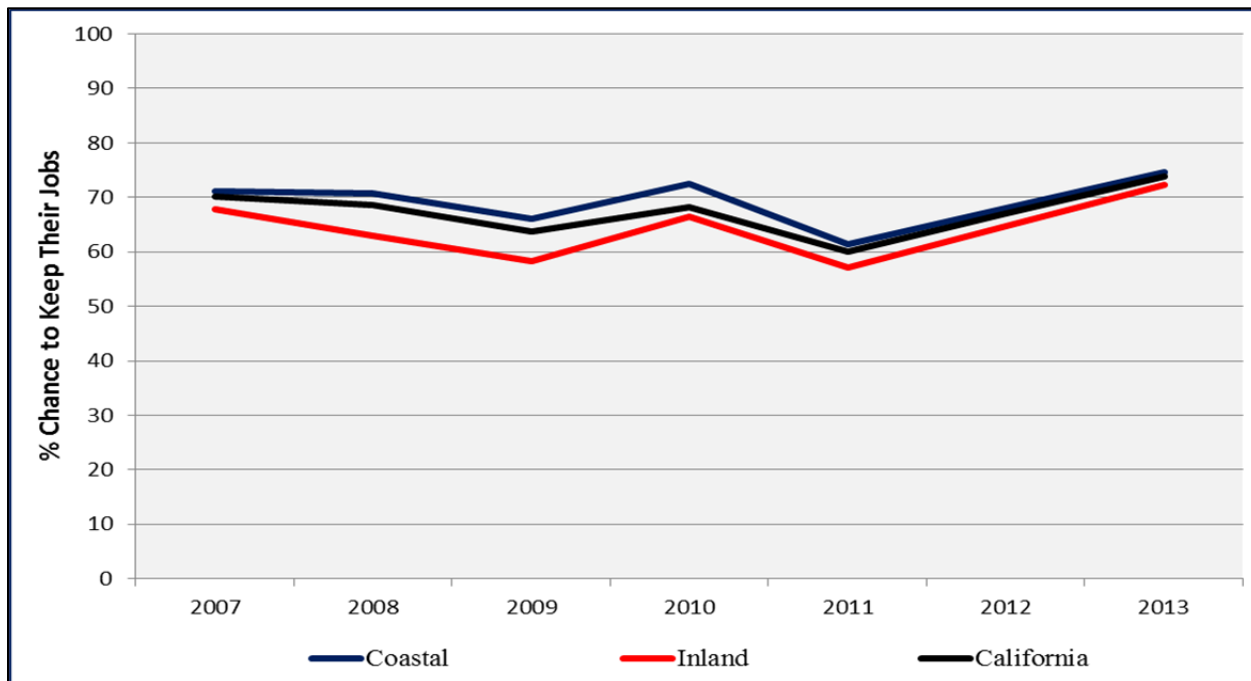
	Coastal %	Inland %	California Mean %
Favor Path for Legal Immigration of Illegal Immigrant if College or Military Service	67.4	59.8	65.2
Priority: Address the Status of Immigrants Vs. Securing Border	47.6	41.9	45.8
Path to Citizenship: If Immigrants Met Basic Civil Requirements	83.8	82.1	83.1
Overall, do you support or oppose a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants?	64.5	59.0	62.7

Figure 10. Immigrants Are a Benefit to California



Source: PPIC.

Figure 11. Illegal Immigrants Should Be Given a Chance to Work and Apply to Stay in the US



tion-related responses to questions asked since 2008 but not regularly enough to present a long-term trend.

The table reveals how question wording and response options can impact discussion. Californians are much more likely to support a path for citizenship of illegal immigrants if basic civil requirements include a waiting period, paying fines and back taxes, passing criminal background checks, and learning English. Such a question received 83 percent support. A more open-ended question such as “overall, do you support or oppose a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants” registered 20 points lower support at 63 percent. Despite the question variations, Table 5 demonstrates that regardless of wording there is fairly strong parity regionally on various questions of immigration.

Taking a longer view, in Figure 10 residents were asked to choose if immigrants to the state are a benefit or burden: “Please indicate which statement comes closest to your view: [1] immigrants are a benefit to California because of their hard work and job skills or [2] immigrants are a burden to California because they use public services.”

Similar to the findings in Figure 10, Californians have been asked: “If you had to choose, what do you think should happen to illegal immigrants who have lived and worked in the United States for at least two years? [1] They should be given a chance to keep their jobs and eventually apply for legal status, or [2] They should be deported back to their native country?” Figure 11 plots the percentage who support immigrants and their employment over seven years. The lines converge in 2013 with well over 70 percent of Californians by 2013.

The PPIC data fits nicely into the outcome of a 2015 USC poll that found California voters see immigrants as beneficial to society at higher rates than the rest of the nation. Fifty-nine percent of California voters believe immigrants strengthen society and 35 percent believe they weaken it (Kruzman 2015). By contrast, 49 percent of US voters believe immigration is beneficial while 43 percent believe it is detrimental. This aligns with PPIC's 2014 data.

The USC report found a “clear division along party lines, with the majority of Democrats harboring positive feelings about immigration and cultural diversity and the majority of Republicans coming out against it.” While there may be such a partisan difference, the partisanship does not emerge in geographic terms as it should if the regions were truly geographically polarized. Instead, the inland and coastal areas have basically converged in terms of attitudes toward illegal immigrants and their ability to remain in the United States.

Economic Outlook

Turning to the economy, there are no long-term trends in the data but rather a number of occasional survey items from 2008 through 2014 that are aggregated and presented in Table 5. The regional differences are all within a few points of one another. As an example, Californians were asked, “The state is projected to have a budget surplus of several billion dollars over the next several years. In general, how would you prefer to use this extra money? Would you prefer to pay down state debt and build up the reserve or would you prefer to use some of this money to restore some funding for social service programs that were cut in recent years?”

The question tends to be highly polarizing in terms of partisan responses tending to sort nicely (Abrams and Fiorina 2011), and Table 5 shows that 50 percent of respondents in both regions support the idea of paying down the debt and building up a reserve and suggest that both the inland and the coast are torn about how to respond in term of priorities. As with immigration, the responses here tend to sort politically and do not support the idea that one region is particularly more liberal or conservative than the other.

Another example is the oft-surveyed government regulation of business where Californians are asked: Please indicate which statement comes closest to your own view, even if neither is exactly right. Government regulation of business in California is necessary to protect the public interest; [OR] Government regulation of business in California does more harm than good. The Pew Research Center asked the question in February of 2012 and 57 percent of Democrats believed government regulation is needed to protect the public compared to 17 percent of Republicans—a clear partisan distinction (Pew 2012). The difference is even larger when conservative Republicans are considered and the number drops to 12 percent and jumps to 64 percent for liberal Democrats again suggesting that the two regions are far more diverse and less polarized than many believe.

The remaining six items in Table 5 reveal no meaningful regional differences as well as wide parity on raising taxes on the wealthy. Perhaps most surprising are the final two items where only half of Californians believe they pay too much in state and local taxes. This figure is about 10 points higher than the national figure where 40 percent say they pay more than their fair share.

Given the general, national disdain for taxes and questions about fairness (Motel 2015), a slight majority in both regions believes the present state and local tax system is very fair or moderately fair rather than not too fair or not fair all. Given the history of property taxes and the 1978 “tax revolt” related to CA Proposition 13, it is surprising to see such positive responses to the local tax climate (Moore 1998).

Table 5. Inland and Coastal Economic Policy Positions Compared: 2008–2014

	Coastal	Inland	California Mean
% Pay Down Debt and Build Up A Reserve	50.1	51.5	50.7
Favor Raising State Taxes on California Corporations	56.7	51.9	55.8
Favor Raising State Income Tax on the Wealthy	68.9	63.1	67.1
Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest	52.8	46.9	50.9
In today’s economy, everyone has a fair chance to get ahead in the long run.	49.7	48.8	49.4
Favor Stricter Federal Regulations on Banks (3.2010)	59.4	54.6	57.9
Pay too much in taxes	50.1	52.0	50.6
Tax system is Very and Moderately Fair	57.8	54.9	55.7

Source: Field Poll and PPIC.

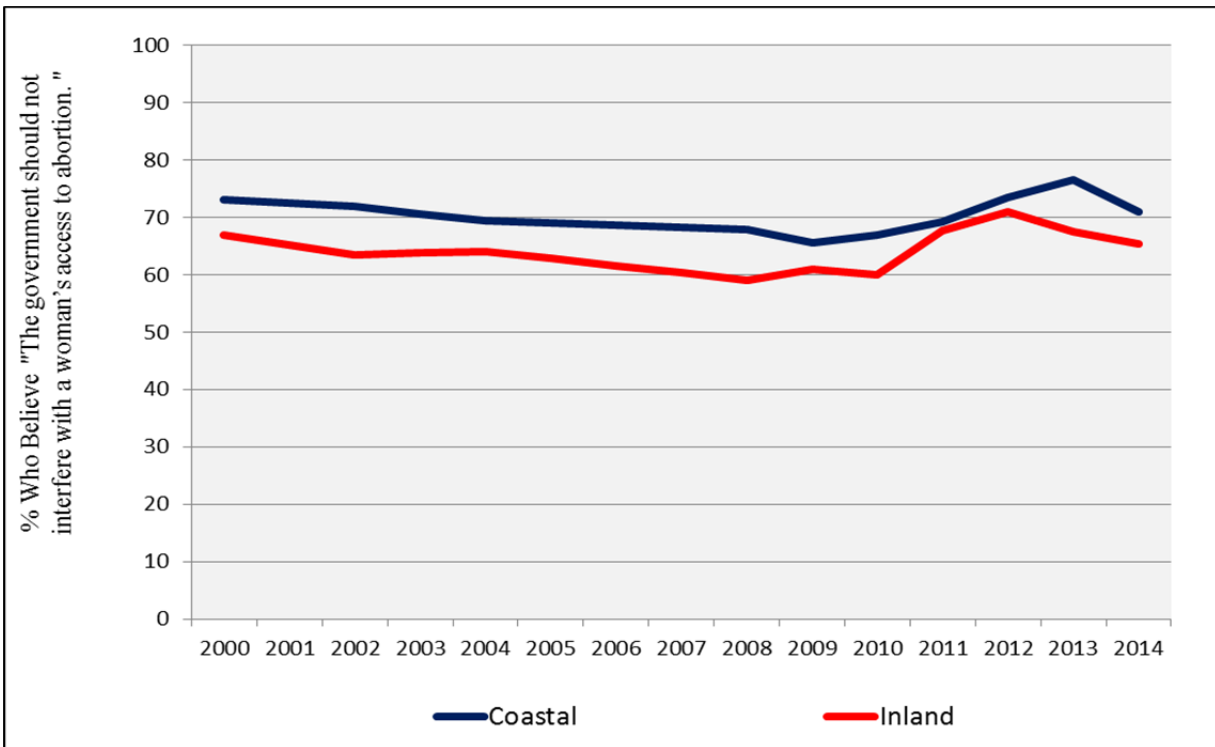
Social Policy

Many social policy items have been at the root of the so-called “culture wars” and once again the regional differences in California are fairly minor. Figure 12 presents data on one of the most heated and contentious political issues in California and the United States—abortion (Lawrence and Cummins 2014, 263). The Field Poll, which last examined the issue comprehensively in 2010 found little change in the past 30 years in terms of California’s general long-standing support for women to have the right to a legal abortion (DiCamillo and Field 2010).

In 2010, 71 percent of voters favored “making no change to the state’s current abortion laws or making abortion easier to obtain” and the same percentage endorsed the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which granted the constitutional right to an abortion. The Field Poll did find appreciable and predictable differences by PID where 28 percent of Democrats would like to make abortion easier to obtain compared to 10 percent of Republicans and 40 percent of Republicans would like to see abortion harder to obtain compared to 16 percent of Democrats. These partisan differences are not apparent in regional terms if abortion is examined in California as the east and west are only points apart in Figure 12.

In Figure 12, Californians were asked which of two statements comes closer to their view: “The government should pass more laws that restrict the availability of abortion; or [2] the government should not interfere with a woman’s access to abortion.” Plotting the “should not interfere” position, both the inland and coastal regions have strong majorities—65 and 71 respectively—by 2014 and the positions not only tracked over 14 years, they barely moved and even con-

Figure 12. Abortion Attitudes in Inland and Coastal California



Source: Field Research Data.

verged in 2011 at 70 percent arguing for not interfering with a woman’s right to choose. Abortion has long been a central issue in the so-called culture wars, but it is barely a skirmish geographically in California.

In addition to positions on abortion not revealing an inland/coastal divide, Table 6 presents a number of key aggregated social policy positions PPIC has examined over the past decade, and they, like abortion, reveal minimal regional cleavages. These policy items are not so regular in the PPIC data that a long-term trend can be explicitly created. Nonetheless, the data shows remarkable regional similarities in terms of gun control while the issue nationally has shown strong partisan sorting (Pew 2015).

For example, a 2015 survey from Pew found that 71 percent of Republicans say it is more important to protect gun ownership rights rather than control gun ownership. That number drops to 25 percent with Democrats. In the PPIC data in Table 6, the regional difference on gun ownership is only four points suggesting that the regions are show very little political polarization on this heated issue.

On inequality, Pew found that while Americans agree there has been a growing gap in terms of the rich and everyone else, there is a strong partisan difference in terms of action. Pew found 45 percent of Republicans support the idea that the government should do something to reduce the gap while 90 percent of Democrats advocate action (Pew 2014). PPIC asks a related item: “Should the government do more to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in this country,

Table 6. Inland and Coastal Social Policy Positions Compared: 2008-2014

	Coastal	Inland	California Mean
Legalization of marijuana.	48.9	45.1	47.8
The Government Does Not Do Enough to Regulate Gun Access	62.5	58.5	61.3
Government Policy Can Reduce Poverty	43.8	44.3	43.9
Rich Poor Gap: Govt Should Do more to Close PPIC 3.2014	63.5	56.6	61.4
Poverty is a Big Problem in society today	67.5	70.3	68.4

Source: Field Poll and PPIC.

or is this something the government should not be doing?” The regional difference here is seven points where majorities in both coastal and inland regions—64 and 57—believe government should do more which casts doubt on the argument that the regions are diverging politically. The remaining three items in Table 6 reveal minor differences as well.

The Role of Government

While Californians have not commented in large numbers about the role of government or its ability or inability to function, there are only minor differences in attitudes in this area. In March 2014, PPIC asked if the government should, “do more to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in this country, or is this something the government should not be doing?” The gap between east and west was only six points—63 to 57 percent believing the government should do more. A six point gap in aggregate from 2008 through 2014 is also present for the ANES-style question of the trade-off between government services versus taxes where 49 percent of coastal Californians would rather pay higher taxes and receive more government services compared to 43 percent of those inland.

PPIC asked respondents five times between 2013 and 2014 about their approval of the government shutdown in Washington and Californians uniformly disapproved of the way Republicans in Congress handled the federal deficit and debt ceiling with only 20 percent of coastals and 22 percent of inlanders.

A bigger difference emerged when Californians were asked if they approved of “the way that President Obama is handling the federal deficit and debt ceiling” at about 10 percent with 50 percent approval in the east and 40 percent in the west. While this may indeed be the largest difference, it was also incredibly politicized and is in line with the longer-term trend regarding President Obama in Figure 6 that revealed similar regional difference since Obama took office.

As for the government's role in larger society and values, Figure 13 examines a 16-year trend in opportunity to "get ahead." Californians were asked to choose between the statements that in California today, "all people have an equal opportunity to get ahead" or "the government should do more to make sure that all Californians have an equal opportunity to get ahead." Figure 13 plots the trend over time in support of governmental involvement in promoting equal opportunity and the regions again track nicely.

Along the coast, an average of 48 percent support government involvement, and inland 41 percent support involvement. The trends fail to diverge with the average difference being seven points and the greatest difference being nine points in 1998 shrinking to six by 2013. Nationally, Californians align with America as a whole. A 1999 CBS poll that asked Americans to select between two options: "Should the federal government see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living, or should the government stay out of it and let every person get ahead on their own?" Americans were 45 percent affirmative and Californians were 44 percent affirmative (CBS News Poll 1999). Over a decade later in 2011, little had changed with 45 percent of Americans preferring governmental involvement, which squares perfectly with the 44 percent of Californians (Gallup Organization 2011).

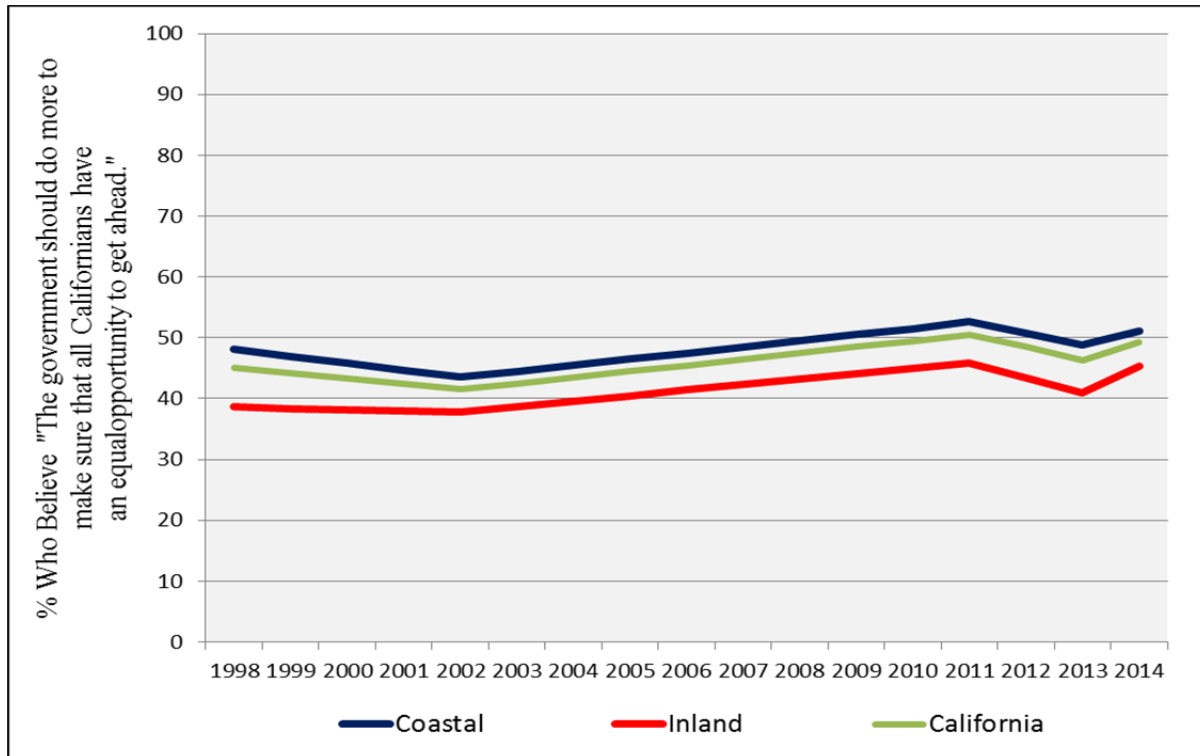
Californians are not divided on questions about the nature of government as it relates to the American people and their trust for government. Figure 14 presents two PPIC trends from 2008 through 2014 that explicitly query Californians about how they see the government as it relates to society at large. The top panel presents data from the item that asks Californians to choose between two extremes: "Would you say the state government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, or that it is run for the benefit of all of the people?"

The ANES item, which asks the question based on the entire country, runs the same length of time and averages 34.3 percent of the nation in support of the idea that the government is run for the benefit of all. In California, 23 percent of coastals support the notion that the government is run for the benefit of all and 20 percent of those inland, and the trends track nicely suggesting that Californians are more pessimistic on the idea that government is there to help others. The lower panel asks respondents: "How much of the time do you think you can trust the state government in Sacramento to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time." Always and most of the time are plotted and there is little regional difference—25 percent for the coast and 23 percent for the inland—with a state average of 24.2 percent. The state mean is 15 points lower than the national ANES during the same period of 39.8. While the national item looks at the federal question and the California questions refer to Sacramento, it still appears that Californians are not only uniformly frustrated with the state of government but that they are even more frustrated when compared to the average American.

Conclusion

The narrative of two Californians is alive and well in the media and in the minds of many Californians. In November of 2015, an *LA Times* headline stated "Coastal Voters Upbeat on Economy, Inland Residents Anxious" and proceeded to discuss various economic concerns and differences between the east and the west along with the different socio-economic outlook between coastal and inland California (Finnegan 2015). Original survey data from a USC Dornsife/*Los Angeles Times* poll was presented and these differences led Dan Schnur to conclude that, "This is a tale of two Californias."

Figure 13. Government and Opportunity



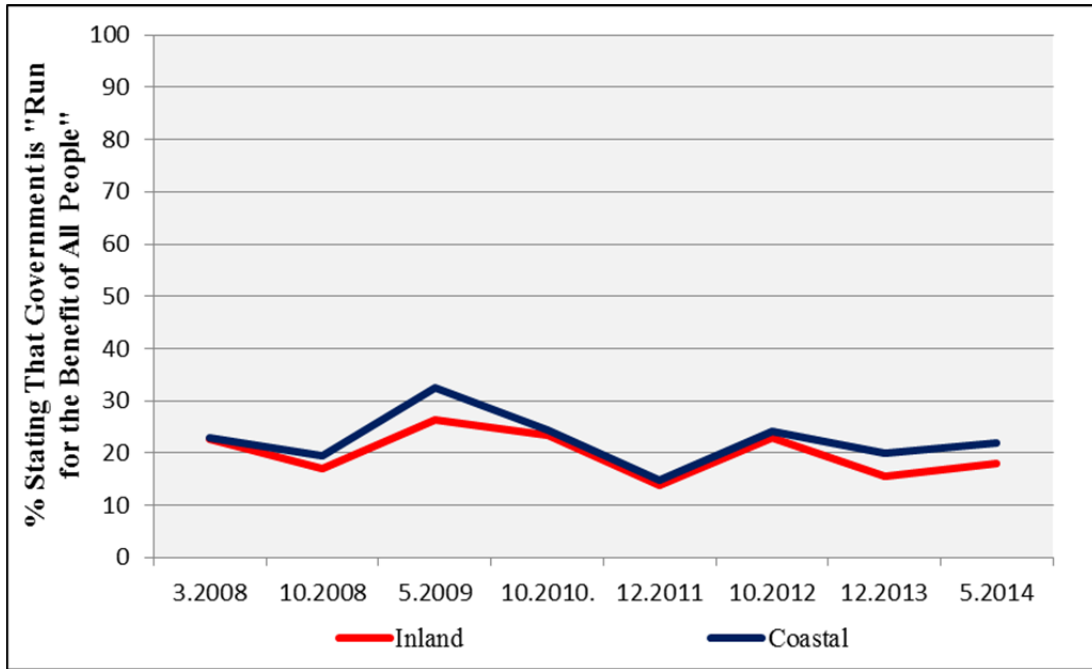
Source: PPIC Figure 14 plots the positive “benefits California” responses. Aside from an inland blip in 2009, the trend tracks regionally and all regions have gained about 10 points in support for the benefit position growing from a slim majority in the mid-50 percent support range to a comfortable mid-60 percent support figure.

Earlier in 2012, Victor Davis Hanson captured Schnur’s sentiment by stating that “Driving across California is like going from Mississippi to Massachusetts without ever crossing a state line.” He continued by noting that the inland and coast are “two radically different cultures and landscapes with little in common, each equally dysfunctional in quite different ways. Apart they are unworldly, together a disaster.” Hanson concluded that California can be characterized as, “a postmodern narrow coastal corridor that runs from San Diego to Berkeley, where the weather is ideal, the gentrified affluent make good money, and values are green and left-wing. This Shangri-la is juxtaposed to a vast impoverished interior, from the southern desert to the northern Central Valley, where life is becoming premodern” (Hanson 2012).

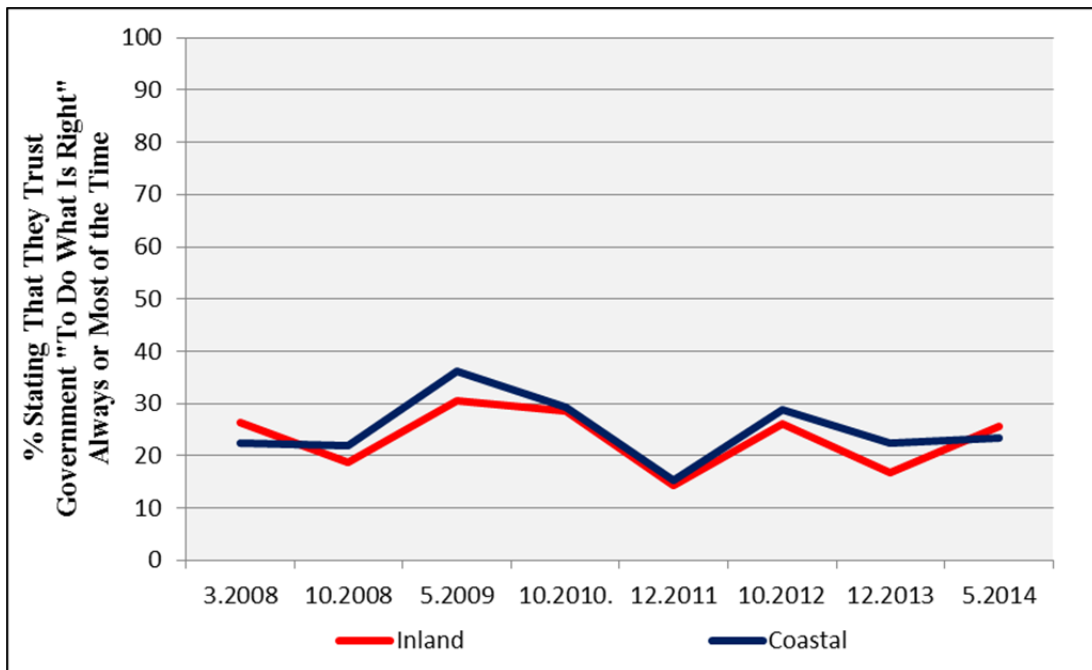
Despite the Hanson and Schnur narratives, the ample evidence presented here makes it quite clear that the divides politically and culturally that seem to pervade the California consciousness are not actually playing out politically or geographically in the state. Few meaningful divisions between the inland and coastal regions exist in terms of policy preferences and outlook toward institutions. Ideological scales have shifted in the regions from bimodal distributions to normal distributions with centrists making up the majority and counties with landslides in terms of party registration have dropped precipitously from the 1960s through the mid-2010s.

Figure 14. Percent Who Believe that the Government in California . . .

“...Is Run for the Benefit of All The People”



Trusted to “Do What is Right...Just about Always and Most of the Time”



Source: PPIC

California may have demographic, cultural, geographic, economic, and historical differences when the state is bisected into its eastern and western halves. However, these factors are not producing in aggregate real significant regional differences politically, ideologically, or in terms of policy proposals. Californians are remarkably similar in their political outlook and while small differences and elite sorting and polarization can and often do give the appearance of a deep and stable red-blue inland-coastal divide, deeper empirical work reveals that such a simple conception of California's regions and their ideas greatly misses the mark on the ground truth about those living the Golden State. Californians are generally centrists, occasionally left of center, rarely extreme, in line with the attitudes and outlooks of the United States as a whole, and diffused fairly evenly though the eastern and western parts of the 31st state (Sankin 2013).

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