

California and Its Collapsing Blue-State Democrat Model

By Victor Davis Hanson

While the media and the new Democrat Party grow hysterical over the Trump counter-revolution, they are missing some of the most revolutionary and insidious changes in American society of the last century.



Much has been written about the collapse of the old orthodox Democratic Party, along with the growing irrelevance and dysfunction of the legacy media, elite universities, and state and federal agencies. But their growing unattractiveness is all related and was not just the result of top-down development.

Rather, current Democrat Party radicalism, street theater, and violence were merely reflections of its own preexisting cultural antipathy toward the middle class. The party is now a pyramidal coalition of the very wealthy and professional classes comprising the capstone, resting atop a vast, expanding bottom of the subsidized and working poor, strapped pensioners and retirees, angry indebted students, 30s-something urban wannabees, impoverished immigrants—including perhaps 30 million here illegally—and, increasingly, trapped residents of a dystopian big-city America.

The collapse of the blue-state/blue-city model and those who work within and promote it reflects the radical environmentalism of the college-educated, as well as an array of high taxes, high crime, endless government regulations, housing shortages, massive homelessness, illegal immigration, critical-legal-theory prosecutors, ethnic and racial chauvinism, defund-the-police city councils, and, most importantly, chronic budget deficits and vast, unfunded pension liabilities and obligations.

In response to this progressive implosion that accounts for Democrat Party unpopularity, under the radar are historic demographic shifts. They reflect two insidious phenomena.

One, the blue-state, urban/professional/college-educated profile has become antithetical to fertility.

No one knows exactly the contributory relative roles to childlessness played by the progressive embrace of abortion on demand or secularism and atheism. Certainly, the fixations on higher education certification, massive student loan debt, years of student limbo, prohibitive housing prices, and a cultural value system that places status, titles, careers, and degrees over children all further promote a declining birthrate.

But in the end, the cause of asymmetrical fertility does not matter: red-state, traditional populations are simply growing, while blue-state fertility remains stagnant.

Second, we are witnessing the greatest internal migration in U.S. history since the post-Civil War era. Millions are leaving California, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Illinois, and other northern blue states. And they usually head to Florida, Texas, Tennessee, South Carolina, and other red, low- or no-tax states. So large have become the dislocations that conservative red states will in the next decade grab some 10-12 congressional seats away from liberal

blue states along with some 10 or so votes in the electoral college.

The trends are not static but occurring at a geometric rate. The upper-middle and professional classes head to states with perceived lower crime, lower taxes, fewer regulations, better schools, and more affordable housing. Meanwhile, those left in blue states to pay the tab for the subsidized poor and expanding social welfare overhead shrink. For these remaining, the burdens per capita surge—in turn feeding even more exoduses.

We also may be witnessing soon the de facto implosion of a once affluent California—its growing poverty already visible in its decaying roads and infrastructure, dangerous and substandard public schools, soaring property crime, overcrowded, dysfunctional, and dangerous health care system, ethnic fragmentation, and the general bankruptcy and medievalism of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Those left to pay for its escalating social welfare costs and debt service are beginning to lament that the advantages of the state's climate, beauty, and once upbeat culture are no longer worth the downsides of its costs: big-city homelessness, decayed infrastructure, incompetent government workforce, crime, and general social dystopia.

In California, 50 percent of all births are now paid for by Medi-Cal, which serves 40 percent of the state. And yet the health welfare system is flat broke, nearing \$7 billion in the red. California has the highest taxes in the nation at 13.3 percent (plus an additional millionaire's tax). Its sales and gas taxes are also among the nation's steepest, while utilities charge the highest gas and electricity rates in the continental U.S.

These disequilibria are increasingly unsustainable.

One percent of Californians pay well over 50 percent of the

state's income taxes—and is leaving in droves. Power is exorbitant, in part due to inefficient solar/wind/green mandates, restrictions on oil, natural gas, nuclear energy, and new hydroelectric production.

In addition, some 4 million—or nearly 25 percent of utility users—simply no longer pay their monthly power bills and are yet usually not subject to cutoffs of power. They in turn must be subsidized by a shrinking number whose rates climb almost yearly.

There are two general rules of California's liberal, uni-party politics that symbolize the collapsing blue-state model: all know that the open borders and the generous welfare subsidies of the state explain why half the nation's illegal immigrants flocked to California, almost all in need of massive government aid.

And two, given the political demographics of a minority/majority state, it is political suicide to associate that 50-year massive influx with vast unfunded social service liabilities, poorer schools, rising crime, and the creation of an all-powerful ultra-left-wing government.

The California model addresses inequality not by insisting on legal-only immigration, rapid assimilation, integration, and acculturation of immigrants. It does not acculturate by back-to-basics K-12 schooling to ensure an emerging younger workforce competent in oral and written English, math, and civic education.

Instead, any resulting disequilibria brought about by the sudden vast influx of some of the world's poorest is explained by systemic racism and unearned "privilege"—and thus to be remedied by DEI therapeutics. Rather than fighting the left to acculturate 27 percent of the resident population that is foreign-born and prepping them to help run a once sophisticated and complex state government, each year hundreds

of thousands of exasperated Californians just flee.

Moreover, California is thought to have one of the largest underground economies of the 50 states, likely reflecting that its huge foreign-born and mostly poorer population is struggling economically. In the Central Valley, it is not unusual to see thousands of residents shopping at vast weekend swap meets, eating regularly at local, ad hoc roadside canteens, and buying everything from flowers to bicycles from entrepreneurial vendors that dot almost every busy rural crossroads. Most of these exchanges are not recorded for either sales or income tax purposes and pose a huge loss of revenue for the state.

Another blue-state pathology is the asymmetrical application of the laws. And California again reflects this trend of being the most overregulated and underregulated, the most lawful and lawless state in the nation. Its upper-class coastal elite insists upon the nation's strictest zoning and green regulations. (Gavin Newsom used the voter-approved multibillion-dollar water construction bond not to build a single reservoir as mandated, but rather to blow up four existing dams and lakes.)

The result makes it almost impossible to build new power plants, housing developments, freeways, dams, reservoirs, aqueducts, or even to either finish or quit the monstrous high-speed rail, multibillion-dollar boondoggle.

Half the state, mostly its poorer and immigrant population, largely seeks to bypass these cumbersome regulations. It is almost impossible to travel through the state's interior and not see single-family homes with surrounding shacks, trailers, and lean-tos with substandard, illegal wiring, plumbing, and sanitation. Semi-rural homesteads that traditionally housed one family may now include four or five.

The regulatory agencies of the state exempt the poor from

their massive violations of housing and building codes. They compensate for their dereliction by redirecting their energies instead to auditing the shrinking number who follow the laws and will pay fines if cited—yet another reason why the more affluent flee California.

I once asked a building inspector who arrived to certify an upgraded solar breaker box whether he was aware that a mere half-mile away, twenty or so people were living in what was once a single-house compound. Sagging Romex wire without conduit was visibly strung to a number of parked trailers, all without toilet facilities. When I asked him why not venture into that complex, he flashed, "I'm not crazy, sir."

The result is a growing cynicism in California, as in all the blue states. Left-controlled city councils, state legislatures, universities, and executive agencies promote the narrative that the wealthy are greedy, selfish, and 'don't pay their fair share.' The problem with that strategy of blame-gaming the more successful is that it is starting to run out of the more successful. As revenue shrinks and deficits climb, shouting at the increasingly diminishing upper-middle class only makes them more resentful and determined to leave.

In the current conundrum, we have forgotten completely the old themes of a blue-state Democrat Party. The 1996 Democratic National Convention manifesto that spearheaded Bill Clinton's successful reelection emphasized secure borders, legal-only immigration, tough crime enforcement and punishment, balanced budgets, fiscal responsibility, and "personal accountability." That agenda today in California would condemn any adherent as a racist, xenophobe, or MAGA fanatic.

In its place, the party became more intolerant, narrower in its cultural emphases, and uninterested in existential crises such as housing, secure borders, power generation, infrastructure, and crime. Without answers or correctives to the damage it inflicted, it instead focused on what was

largely seen as irrelevant to the state's struggling minority populations—LGBT advocacies, transgendered men competing in women's sports, racial reparations, DEI-mandated programs, and boutique environmentalism.

The result may be that Californians no longer really believe there is a political solution to their crises and fleeing is becoming the only viable option—for those who can afford or are willing to move. Those left are inured to their dogmas that “they”—the allegedly culpable and greedy—will always remain so rich, so selfish, and so always a part of California, California that the government income streams will remain limitless to fund redistribution.

The only mystery is whether other blue states following California's disastrous lead will pause and pivot, or are also already too far gone to make the necessary adjustments.

In addition, the growing dysfunction and irrelevance of the mainstream media—from network news to the old print conglomerates—of elite universities and of the federal government itself are, in part, due to their location in and symbiosis with the dead-end, blue-state model of culture, economics, and politics.

In sum, America is entering a historic reversal.

The old traditional impoverished South is becoming the engine of American prosperity. The Northern Midwest, the Northeast, and the West Coast—for a century the font of American dynamism—have become stagnant and inert, and are shrinking.

These blue loci survive for a while longer on the fumes of the work of past generations who operated under completely different assumptions and models antithetical to those of the present—and thus are regularly damned by those who squandered their once-rich inheritance.

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