

Population Trends: Challenges to State and Local Government

by Bruce E. Cain

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The spectacular facts of California's growth are well documented. Between 1980 and 1990, California grew at approximately two times the national growth rate, or about 2.5 percent per annum. About half of that growth was from domestic and foreign migration. It has changed the racial and ethnic mix of California in substantial ways. The state's population is currently 25 percent Latino, 57 percent non-Hispanic white, 10 percent Asian, and is projected to increase to approximately 30 percent Latino and 12.7 percent Asian by the year 2000 if the current trends hold. The African-American population is expected to remain stable at about 8 percent.

Inevitably, these changes are going to challenge California's political institutions in important ways. There are actually two different types of population growth occurring in California, each presenting different challenges to California's institutions. The first is immigrant, inner-city growth. The political challenge of this type of growth is partly one of overloading California's infrastructure, but primarily one of incorporating new immigrants into the mainstream culture. The second kind of growth is suburban, white, and middle class. It has little to do with the strains of social incorporation, but it has severely burdened the capacities of California's infrastructure—that is, such things as roads, schools, water, and so on.

The first type of growth, that due to migration, has been substantial. In the last decade 3.3 million people have been added to California due to migration alone. Two-thirds of them have come from foreign nations, and approximately

one-third from other parts of the United States. Foreign immigrants consist of a legal component of approximately 1.67 million people and a harder-to-count undocumented component in the range of a million or so, most of whom are Latino. In addition, the nonwhite population has increased as a result of net births over deaths. This type of growth has placed a relatively high demand on the health-care system, and particularly, hospital emergency services. It has also put a substantial demand on the educational system, both in terms of adjusting the curriculum to the cultural needs of these new populations and in terms of the sheer volume of children attending school. Contrary to popular opinion and the image that proponents of Prop 165 tried to convey in the 1992 election, it has not put tremendous strains on the welfare system, even though there are some exceptions. In particular, some of the Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees from Southeast Asia who came to the United States for political rather than economic reasons have become dependent on welfare, but that is not generally true of the Latino or other Asian communities. Ironically, the nonwhite immigrant growth conforms to the rational planner's ideals to a greater degree than white suburban growth, because it increases the density of urban areas, which helps on the margin to decrease the aggregate amount of commuting by placing people's residences closer to their places of work.

The distinctive challenge of foreign immigration is incorporation. Only a third of the legal immigrants, let alone the undocumented, eventually become citizens. One consequence of this



Los Angeles street scene.

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is that there is a big gap in California between political representatives and the percent of the nonwhite population as compared to the percent of nonwhite voters. For example, in the 1990 Feinstein-Wilson race for governor, approximately 9 percent of the voters were Latino compared to 25 percent of the population. This political underrepresentation has given rise to a number of struggles over the way in which we do business at the city, county, and state levels. Suffice it to say that, with the beefing up of the Voting Rights Act, California in future decades is going to have to adjust the way it elects representatives at all levels to ensure more proportionate representation of its racial and ethnic minorities. Along the way, California may in the future have to abandon its Progressive-era institutions such as at-large elections and city-manager forms of government.

It may also lead to reform of the initiative process some time in the future. It is more than a little ironic that at a time when the legislature is electing increasing numbers of minorities in carefully crafted districts that California is increasingly doing business by initiative and shifting power out of the hands of the legislature into the executive branch as a result of term limits.

These phenomena are connected. The initiative is in essence an at-large election in which the state's median voter prevails. Since districts are drawn on the basis of population and respect racial and ethnic neighborhoods, the policies produced by the legislature and the policies produced by the initiative will not be the same.

Due to the minority-representation gap (that is, the minority share of the electorate being substantially lower than its share of the population), minority voices are underrepresented in initiative outcomes. The problem of minority dilution combined with a host of initiative abuses (that is, paid signature gatherers, special-interest capture, sloppy craftsmanship, initiative overload, voter ignorance, appallingly shallow initiative campaigns) will inevitably lead to some initiative reform in the future.

Turning toward nonimmigrant growth, a little under a million migrants came into California from other states. Half of them were non-Hispanic whites, coming primarily from the states of Texas, Arizona, and Colorado. Much of this growth is suburban, occurring in counties such as San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego, Santa Clara, Contra Costa, and Sacramento. This kind of growth, of course, poses far fewer cultural challenges—the children of white suburban migrants watch MTV, eat at McDonald's, wear surfer clothes, own roller blades, and do all the things that are part of our California "culture." It also has less implication for the demand for social services since these migrants are even less likely to use welfare, to need bilingual education, etc., than the rest of the population.

Nonetheless, domestic migrants place a strain on California's government and infrastructure in several ways. First, white suburban migrants create enormous demand for the existing housing stock. Nonwhite immigrants who move into inner-city areas find inventive ways to use existing housing stock, occupying garages and

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crowding into small apartments. But white suburban migrants require a detached home with appropriate acreage and suitable amenities. This causes high housing prices and enormous congestion on the freeways. The experience here in Pasadena with the 210 freeway is parallel to that of the 101 in Santa Clara or the 24 in Contra Costa. The outward expansion of the low-density suburbs and the separation of places of residence from places of work increasingly congests the roads. In the Bay Area, 34 communities have a net inflow of traffic during working hours whereas 128 communities have a net outflow. In addition to traffic, there are other problems such as increasing air pollution and sewage.

When discussing these problems, urban and regional planners tend to postulate three goals. The first is consistency: state, regional, and local planning should be noncontradictory, such that the planning goals in Walnut Creek mesh with those in Lafayette, or those in Pomona with those in Pasadena. A second goal is concurrency; that is, new development and new infrastructure should be brought in at the same time in order to avoid situations of growth without the supporting infrastructure. And the third one is compactness; suburban sprawl can be controlled by filling in urban areas and increasing urban density. Some of my Berkeley colleagues refer to this as the three C's: consistency, concurrency, and compactness. The challenge is how to realize the three C's given the tradition of unbridled entrepreneurial growth and an extremely fractured local governmental structure. In the Bay Area alone there are 9 counties, 97 municipalities, and

more than 700 special districts, some of them belonging to the county and some of them belonging to cities. Needless to say, planning coordination is a problem when you have that much governmental fractionalization. There is a movement in the state now to consider proposals that will somehow put a rational structure on local and county government in order to deal with the problems of growth management. Bay Vision 2020 recently issued a report that called for an appointed regional government to set standards for and constraints upon development. This new regional government would not issue detailed plans, but it would have a veto power over any plans or projects that were developed in its area, along with sanctions to enforce its decisions. In addition, this new governmental body would have jurisdiction over many areas that are currently controlled by cities, counties, and special districts. For example, jobs and housing proximity, urban open-space provisions, the infilling of inner-city areas, the provision of affordable housing, guaranteeing high-quality water and air, transportation, the siting of new airports, and perhaps even regional tax sharing would fall under this new form of government.

It may well be the case that the existing structure of California government with state, county, and local government and special districts is an anachronism. As the demands of growth accelerate, old structures may not be adequate to deal with the problems of ever-expanding regions. There is a lively debate as to which is the better solution: a centralized, hierarchial regional government, or economic incentives plus a system of regional governance using existing multilateral and bilateral commitments between local agencies.

Apart from the issue of structure, there is the issue of consensus. If you impose regional structure where there is no consensus about growth management, then instead of growth management, there is only growth regulation leading to endless litigation. Growth management plans will not be implemented in a timely fashion, and there will be endless lawsuits over specific planning decisions. A recent study by two Berkeley professors, Marty Landau and Randy Hamilton, looked at the Land Conservation and Development Commission in Oregon and the State Land Planning Agency in Florida, and found that in both cases there were numerous problems stemming from the lack of underlying consensus. In Oregon, 90 percent of the plans that were produced by the 278 local jurisdictions were rejected on first submission, and a number of the jurisdictions have still not developed a

The LA suburbs keep expanding—here near Valencia.



growth plan that was acceptable to the agency.

In California, there is no consensus about growth management. There are people who feel very strongly that we can not have continued uncontrolled growth, but there are many others, particularly in minority and low-income areas, who believe that closing off growth could have serious implications for the economic welfare of the state and for the job opportunities of their citizens.

I am convinced that growth management will be a major issue in California for decades to come. As yet, however, growth management has not been a major issue in statewide campaigns. Many people thought it would be important in the Feinstein-Wilson race for governor, but for a variety of reasons it took a back seat to discussions of taxes and crime during the 1990 election. The same is true of the recent 1992 election. But at the city and county levels, growth development politics have been and will continue to be central for years to come. If we ask the question, "Can we envision a California with no growth?" my answer would be, "No, I do not think we can." The best that we can hope for is some sort of managed or limited growth. Growth for California has historically been the device that allows us to avoid a lot of very critical choices that we might otherwise have to make. When the pie isn't expanding, it forces us to make difficult trade-offs between different kinds of programs and different ways of paying for them. I do not think that California is ready to do that, although it inevitably will have to. I would urge that, as we think about growth management, we remember that building a consensus about growth management goals is as important as setting up a structure to implement them, and second, that the current political reality is that growth has historically been an important pillar of California government. If we take it away abruptly, we may find that a lot of things start crumbling. □

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