

# Opinion: Split the state democratically

By Joe Mathews

All proposals to split California into multiple states share the same defect: a foolish fixation with geography.

The new “Cal 3” initiative, which would create three states, is simply the latest measure (the first was pre-Civil War) to make the mistake of dividing us up by regions.



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The splitters’ logic is that many Californians are unhappy because we live in a state with too many people who don’t understand us because they’re too different from us. Splitters imagine we’d get more of what we wanted if only we lived in smaller Californias where more people were like us.

But this logic doesn’t apply here because our regions are too much like our state—too vast and too diverse. No matter how you split us, millions of us would remain trapped in states with too many people with whom we don’t agree.

So if you must break up California, do it democratically, geographically. Let every Californian choose their state, based on their dreams not their address. If California is really a state of mind, doesn’t each mind deserve its own state?

The hard part would be figuring out the right categories for division. To start, let's stipulate that California shouldn't be divided by age, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, religion or race, since forming states on a discriminatory basis is probably unconstitutional, even under President Trump.

When I pose the question of how best to divide California, the most frequent answer is: by income. Why not give the billionaires their own state, since they like to decide everything? But, sadly, nothing would stop the billionaires from using their money to impose their values on the states for the millionaires, yuppies, the poor, and whatever's left of the middle class.

Housing might be one basis for a split. We could divide the place up by preference on that most divisive issue—density—with those who like tall buildings near transit no longer forced to share a government with devotees of the single-family home. Or why not exploit the way that Proposition 13 has divided us by property taxes, with new homeowners paying higher levies that subsidize their older neighbors? You could divide the state by the decade your current home was purchased and its tax base set. (You renters could have your own state too.)

Traffic could divide us too, with states for those who drive to work alone, carpoolers, bicycle riders, and scooter enthusiasts? A small state could serve the 5.3 percent of Californians who actually use public transit. Or since the digital word is already polarizing our democracy, we could have states based on preferred social media platform, smartphone brand, or whether you rely on Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, or basic cable.

Health, a serious obsession here, might help break us up. We could divide by exercise (traditional yoga, hot yoga, barre, jogging, walking), smoking (cigarettes, cigars, nonsmokers,

potheads, and vapers), food (vegans, vegetarians, meat eaters, faddish dieters), or childbirth method (with competing states of Doula, Midwife and Ob-Gyn).

We could divide by ideology (2nd Wave, 3rd Wave, and 4th Wave Feminism, with a fourth state for those who are pro-woman but just don't like the word feminist) or energy source (solar, wind, geothermal, fossil fuels, or nuclear, the last of whose residents could leave the AC on to keep their cores cool).

Since Californians take their entertainment very seriously, it might provide a basis for peaceful breakup. Why not four different Californias, each ruled by a stunning musical diva? I'd live in Beyonceland, but would respect those who chose to reside in KatyPerryland, TaylorSwiftopia, or The State of Rihanna. Or we could split into four states called Star Wars, Star Trek, The Matrix, and "Sorry, But I Actually Have a Girlfriend and a Life."

The fairest way would be to make the split random, with each Californian assigned by lottery to a different state. The downside is that each state would be a smaller version of today's California.

And if you don't like any of these ideas, why not try placating Tim Draper, the venture capitalist bankrolling the "Cal 3" initiative?

I saw Draper recently in San Mateo, where he had closed down 3rd Avenue for a "Blockchain Block Party." Draper, a big believer in digital currency, handed out chocolate Bitcoins and revealed a banner saying "Tim Draper Predicts... Bitcoin Will Go to \$250,000 by 2022."

Bitcoin trades at \$7,000 as I write, but we could still give Draper and his cryptocurrency disciples their own state, while creating separate states for those who pay with phones and with credit cards.

Let's also maintain one California for those who prefer the security of cash—since they live in a state full of crazy ideas for tearing itself to pieces.

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