

# Political Polarization in California: The Politics of Negativity

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**Overview:** Political polarization has grown significantly in California and the United States in recent years ([article](#)), as more Americans struggle to engage with and respect the “other” side. We are interested in exploring how the public negativity of California’s politicians has driven this ideological divide, particularly among state officials who adopt incendiary, hyper-partisanship language for political gain, at the expense of ostracizing political “others.” How has this negativity translated into legislation and political cooperativeness? Unlike the highly visible and frequently decried crises like wildfires, crime, or poverty, political polarization poses a uniquely troubling challenge to Americans—an invisible, psychological burden that insidiously erodes democracy. Addressing this issue will place California lawmakers themselves in the firing line, where they must confront some uncomfortable truths about the politics of negativity.

## Questions:

1. How have politicians’ negative sentiment evolved over time (specifically, during the post-2016 era, COVID, when Twitter changed ownership, and after January 6th)? Are there particular political areas of high (and low) negativity (e.g., the environment, education, immigration etc.)?
2. How is politicians’ negative sentiment associated with social engagement (likes, replies, etc.)? How might this incentivize negativity as a product of political weaponization?
3. What words do politicians employ across parties (word analysis)? Could a diverging focus on party concerns induce polarization?
4. Does party negativity translate into differences in legislative behavior? Do more party-negative politicians participate significantly less in bipartisan legislation? That is, is party resentment more reflective of legitimate negativity (i.e., party-negative politicians cooperate less with the other side) or political expediency?
5. Do certain groups of politicians (intersected by class, race, gender, or age) use negative sentiment more than others?
6. To what extent does negative political rhetoric anticipate the introduction and passage (or rejection) of more partisan (i.e., less bipartisan) bills?

## Methodology:

1. Scrape data from one of the social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook) or some other area through an API or Python—this may be particularly difficult.

2. Obtain legislative information (e.g., records of bills, its sponsors, the distribution and party status of voters and naysayers) through a website like [LegiScan](#).
3. Integrate the datasets.
4. Apply sentiment analysis through a pretrained model furnished by Hugging Face and its transformers library.
5. Generate graphs, data visualizations, analysis, and econometrics to evaluate the legitimacy of our questions.