

# **THE 1994 CAMPAIGN: CALIFORNIA; Economy, Crime and Immigration Dominate First Debate in Governor's Race**

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## **Body**

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Gov. Pete Wilson and State Treasurer Kathleen Brown finally met face to face in a televised political debate on Friday night, with sharp, occasionally emotional exchanges over crime, illegal immigration and California's struggling economy.

But neither emerged a clear winner from the largely low-key hourlong confrontation, held in Sacramento and broadcast on statewide public television. As a result, Ms. Brown still faces an uphill struggle to overcome Mr. Wilson's lead of more than 10 points in what many political analysts say is one of the most important governor's races in the country this year.

The Governor, a 61-year-old Republican who was behind more than 20 points when he started his re-election bid but has since made a remarkable recovery, doggedly repeated the theme that has been the mainstay of his campaign: his "courage" to be relentlessly tough on crime and illegal immigration.

"Kathleen," he said at one point, breaking out of his normally soft monotone, "you lack the courage."

Ms. Brown, a 49-year-old Democrat, focused on the theme of her campaign, the struggling economy and what she described as Mr. Wilson's failure to halt its slide. She argued that she had a detailed plan for governing California, while Mr. Wilson had only "a plan for re-election."

Pollsters say that while Mr. Wilson is an unusually unpopular governor, Ms. Brown's own standing has eroded because she has never fully convinced voters that she has a solid vision for running the state. Thus her concentration through most of the evening on her "plan" -- except when the Governor questioned her "courage."

Then she switched tack and lashed back in the emotional high point of the night.

Her smile was replaced by a hard glare, and she asserted that she understood the need to be tough on crime because her own children had been crime victims, one in a date rape, one in a robbery.

"You know, Pete," she said, "you've misrepresented my positions on crime throughout this campaign. But I have to tell you that what I resent most of all is you questioning -- questioning -- my commitment to be tough on crime."

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"You cannot imagine what it's like to be a mother waiting for your daughter to come home in the evening and having her come home and comfort her because she's been raped. Or your son call while I'm working to say, 'Come home because I've been robbed.' "

She added, "So don't question my commitment."

Mr. Wilson, a political moderate on most issues, replied that he nevertheless had to question Ms. Brown's commitment because she opposed the state's death penalty while he favored it.

In fact, he argued, there is a long history in the Brown family of opposing the death penalty and being too liberal on crime. Ms. Brown's father, Edmund G. Brown Sr., and her brother, Edmund Jr., both served as governor, and both opposed the death penalty.

Polls show that Californians rank crime and the huge influx of illegal immigrants across the state's southern border among their top concerns, along with the state's flagging economy. As the economy has begun to strengthen a bit in the latter part of the campaign season, Mr. Wilson has benefited in particular from his emphasis on the crime and immigration issues while Ms. Brown has lost some ground on the economic issue.

To Ms. Brown's further despair, pollsters have also found that many voters believe that a male governor can handle crime and immigration problems more effectively than a female governor.

In trying to keep the economic issue alive, Ms. Brown returned again and again to her "plan," saying she would balance the state's budget and get the economy moving by cutting \$5 billion in waste and using the savings to strengthen education, transportation and other essential state services.

"It won't work," Mr. Wilson countered. "It's not a plan; it's a pamphlet."

He argued that he had already cut billions in waste from the state's budget and that even more would be cut if voters passed a proposition he supports to deny most social services to illegal immigrants. Ms. Brown, he contended, is as "soft" on the immigration issue as on the crime issue.

Midway through the debate, which the Governor had tried to avoid once he became the front-runner in the race, a question was posed that went directly to the national import of the Wilson-Brown race. Would Mr. Wilson serve out a second term should he win?

"Yes," he replied to the question.

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