

OCTOBER
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how often do governors say no?

A HISTORY OF ACTIONS FROM 1967-2020

california senate

OFFICE OF RESEARCH

*Each bill passed by the Legislature shall be presented to the Governor. It becomes a statute if it is signed by the Governor. The Governor may veto it by returning it with any objections to the house of origin, which shall enter the objections in the journal and proceed to reconsider it. If a Governor does not sign and does not veto, the bill becomes law.**

California Constitution, Article IV, §10 (a) and (b)(3)

- > Due to COVID-19 related challenges that necessitated unprecedented actions and a compressed legislative session, the Legislature greatly reduced the number of bills it heard in 2020 to focus on COVID-19 policy response and other priority areas. In a typical year, the Legislature sends anywhere from 870 to 2,143 bills to the governor for consideration. However in 2020, the Legislature passed 428 bills, which makes this year an outlier when comparing bill outcomes with those of past years.
- > Of the 428 bills Governor Newsom considered this year, 137 were Senate bills and 291 were Assembly bills. In total, he signed 372 into law and vetoed 56 bills. This is a veto rate of 13.08% for his second year in office.
- > The number of vetoes for 2020 is the fourth lowest of all the years reviewed in this report, beginning with 1967. The three years with the lowest number of vetoed bills were under Governor Jerry Brown (1982, 1981, 1978). In 1982, he vetoed just 30 of the 1,674 bills he considered, representing a veto rate of 1.79%.
- > Five of the six years with the highest percentage of vetoed bills (2008, 2010, 2009, 2004, 1998) were with Republican governors and Democratic majorities in both legislative houses (the exception was Governor Davis in 2000).
- > Governor Schwarzenegger holds the record for the highest percentage of bills vetoed in a year, 35.17% in 2008.
- > Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed more than a quarter (26.4%) of the 7,461 bills that he considered over his seven years in office. He signed the lowest average number of bills per year (784 per year over seven years).
- > The five years with the highest number of chaptered bills were all with Republican governors (1971, 1984, 1967, 1990, 1988). This was before bill limits were enacted by both houses of the Legislature beginning in the 1990s.
- > While the Legislature can override a governor's veto by a two-thirds vote in both houses, this action is rare and has not occurred since 1980. During the 1979-80 session, the Legislature overrode the governor's veto of two bills and eight items in the budget bill. Before that, the governor's veto had been overridden on only two occasions since 1973.

* From 1849 until the voters passed Proposition 1A (1966), governors could stop bills from becoming law by holding onto them and not signing or vetoing them. Proposition 1A ended the use of the so-called "pocket veto" by amending the California Constitution. Governor Pat Brown was the last governor to use the pocket veto.

GOVERNORS TOPPING THE CHARTS: 1967–2020

Most Chaptered Bills			Fewest Chaptered Bills		
1,821	1971	Reagan	372	2020	Newsom
1,760	1984	Deukmejian	652	2009	Schwarzenegger
1,725	1967	Reagan	729	2005	Schwarzenegger
1,707	1990	Deukmejian	733	2010	Schwarzenegger
1,647	1988	Deukmejian	745	2011	Brown
1,644	1982	Brown	750	2007	Schwarzenegger

Most Vetoes			Fewest Vetoes		
436	1990	Deukmejian	30	1982	Brown
414	2008	Schwarzenegger	35	1981	Brown
372	1988	Deukmejian	49	1978	Brown
362	2000	Davis	56	2020	Newsom
351	1998	Wilson	58	2003	Davis
336		Wilson	60	1979	Brown

Highest Percent Vetoes			Lowest Percent Vetoes		
35.17	2008	Schwarzenegger	1.79	1982	Brown
28.77	2010	Schwarzenegger	2.87	1981	Brown
26.99	2009	Schwarzenegger	3.31	1978	Brown
24.90	2000	Davis	3.97	1968	Reagan
24.58	2004	Schwarzenegger	4.40	1970	Reagan
24.53	1998	Wilson	4.43	1980	Brown

Who Considered the Most Bills?			Who Considered the Fewest Bills?		
2,143	1990	Deukmejian	428	2020	Newsom
2,063	1984	Deukmejian	870	2011	Brown
2,019	1988	Deukmejian	893	2009	Schwarzenegger
1,975	1971	Reagan	896	2013	Brown
1,839	1986	Deukmejian	941	2015	Brown
1,831	1985	Deukmejian	961	2005	Schwarzenegger

Who Signed the Most Bills as Governor?			Who Vetoes the Most Bills as Governor?		
Brown	17,809	(1975–82; 2011–18)	Deukmejian	2,298	(1983–90)
Deukmejian	12,530	(1983–90)	Schwarzenegger	1,970	(2004–10)
Reagan	12,486	(1967–74)	Wilson	1,890	(1991–98)
Wilson	9,394	(1991–98)	Brown	1,623	(1975–82; 2011–18)
Schwarzenegger	5,491	(2004–10)	Davis	1,098	(1999–03)
Davis	5,140	(1999–03)	Reagan	843	(1967–74)

CHAPTERED AND VETOED BILLS: 1967–2020

Year	Governor	Chaptered Bills	Vetoed	Total Bills	Percent Vetoed	Party Majority Senate/Assembly
1967	Reagan (R)	1,725	83	1,808	4.59	D/D
1968	Reagan (R)	1,474	61	1,535	3.97	S/D
1969	Reagan (R)	1,619	78	1,697	4.60	S/R
1970	Reagan (R)	1,628	75	1,703	4.40	R/R
1971	Reagan (R)	1,821	154	1,975	7.80	D/D
1972	Reagan (R)	1,442	165	1,607	10.27	D/D
1973	Reagan (R)	1,218	107	1,325	8.08	D/D
1974	Reagan (R)	1,559	120	1,679	7.15	D/D
1975	Brown (D)	1,280	93	1,373	6.77	D/D
1976	Brown (D)	1,487	127	1,614	7.87	D/D
1977	Brown (D)	1,261	70	1,331	5.26	D/D
1978	Brown (D)	1,432	49	1,481	3.31	D/D
1979	Brown (D)	1,207	60	1,267	4.74	D/D
1980	Brown (D)	1,381	64	1,445	4.43	D/D
1981	Brown (D)	1,186	35	1,221	2.87	D/D
1982	Brown (D)	1,644	30	1,674	1.79	D/D
1983	Deukmejian (R)	1,317	138	1,455	9.48	D/D
1984	Deukmejian (R)	1,760	303	2,063	14.69	D/D
1985	Deukmejian (R)	1,607	224	1,831	12.23	D/D
1986	Deukmejian (R)	1,521	318	1,839	17.29	D/D
1987	Deukmejian (R)	1,504	231	1,735	13.31	D/D
1988	Deukmejian (R)	1,647	372	2,019	18.42	D/D
1989	Deukmejian (R)	1,467	276	1,743	15.83	D/D
1990	Deukmejian (R)	1,707	436	2,143	20.35	D/D
1991	Wilson (R)	1,231	259	1,490	17.38	D/D
1992	Wilson (R)	1,374	336	1,710	19.65	D/D
1993	Wilson (R)	1,306	229	1,535	14.92	D/D
1994	Wilson (R)	1,299	311	1,610	19.32	D/D
1995	Wilson (R)	982	93	1,075	8.65	D/R†
1996	Wilson (R)	1,171	114	1,285	8.87	D/R
1997	Wilson (R)	951	197	1,148	17.16	D/D
1998	Wilson (R)	1,080	351	1,431	24.53	D/D
1999	Davis (D)	1,025	246	1,271	19.35	D/D
2000	Davis (D)	1,092	362	1,454	24.90	D/D

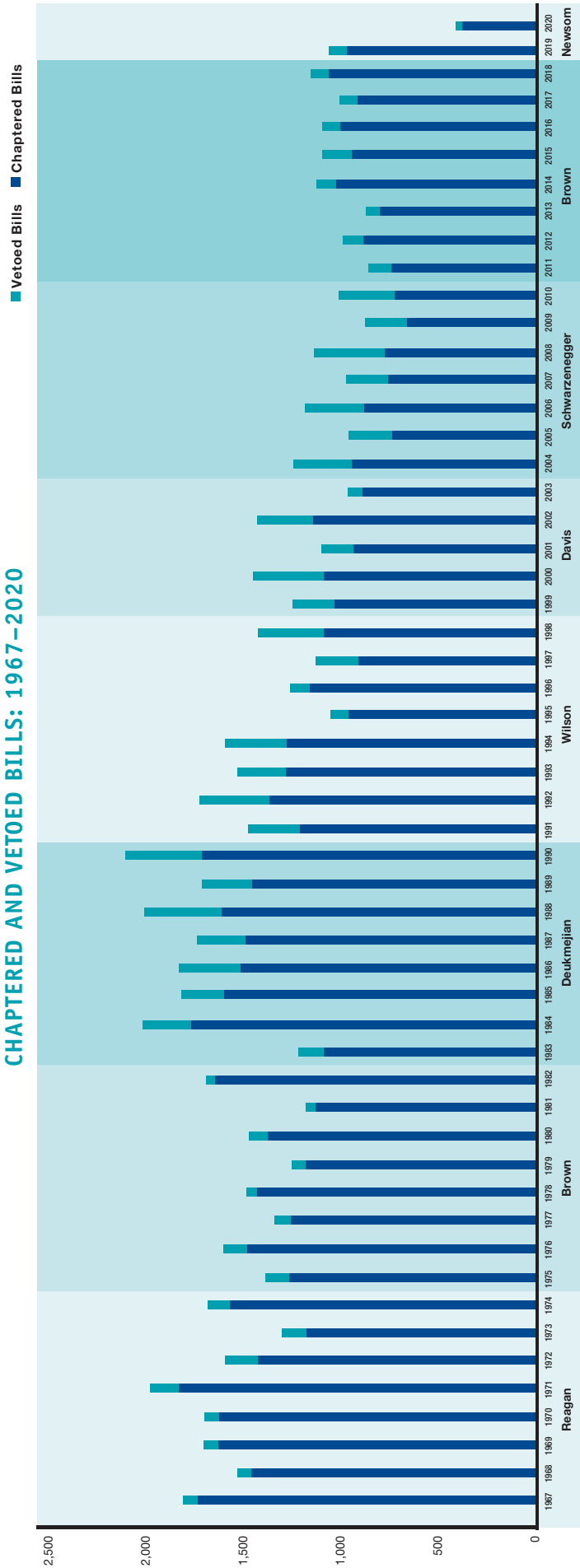
† In 1995, one Independent Assembly member was replaced by a Republican in a recall election to give the Republicans a majority in the Assembly.

CHAPTERED AND VETOED BILLS: 1967–2020

Year	Governor	Chaptered Bills	Vetoes	Total Bills	Percent Vetoed	Party Majority Senate/Assembly
2001	Davis (D)	948	169	1,117	15.13	D/D
2002	Davis (D)	1,170	263	1,433	18.35	D/D
2003	Davis (D)	909	58	967	6.00	D/D
2004	Schwarzenegger (R)	954	311	1,265	24.58	D/D
2005	Schwarzenegger (R)	729	232	961	24.14	D/D
2006	Schwarzenegger (R)	910	262	1,172	22.35	D/D
2007	Schwarzenegger (R)	750	214	964	22.20	D/D
2008	Schwarzenegger (R)	763	414	1,177	35.17	D/D
2009	Schwarzenegger (R)	652	241	893	26.99	D/D
2010	Schwarzenegger (R)	733	296	1,029	28.77	D/D
2011	Brown (D)	745	125	870	14.37	D/D
2012	Brown (D)	876	120	996	12.05	D/D
2013	Brown (D)	800	96	896	10.71	D/D
2014	Brown (D)	931	143	1,074	13.31	D/D
2015	Brown (D)	808	133	941	14.13	D/D
2016	Brown (D)	900	159	1,059	15.01	D/D
2017	Brown (D)	859	118	977	12.08	D/D
2018	Brown (D)	1,016	201	1,217	16.52	D/D
2019	Newsom (D)	870	172	1,042	16.51	D/D
2020	Newsom (D)	372	56	428	13.08	D/D

D=Democrat, R=Republican, S=Split

CHAPTERED AND VETOED BILLS: 1967-2020



Notes

For nearly all the years from 1967 through 2020, this report counts only the bills from regular sessions, not the bills from extraordinary sessions. The exception is for 2015 and 2016 where the information also includes extraordinary session bills.

The “chaptered bills” column on pages 3–4 includes bills that a governor allowed to become law without signature. See California Constitution, Article IV, §10 (b)(3). For example, in 2000, Governor Davis signed 1,088 bills and allowed four measures to become law without his signature, for a total of 1,092 chaptered bills. In 2011, Governor Brown allowed one bill to become law without his signature. In 2014, Governor Brown allowed one bill to become law without his signature. In 2016, Governor Brown allowed two bills to become law without his signature.

For 2010, the “chaptered bills” column on page 4 includes four bills signed by Lieutenant Governor Abel Maldonado, as acting governor.

In the 1990s, each house of the Legislature introduced “bill limits” for each member. Currently, the limit in a two-year session is set at 40 bills in the Senate and 50 bills in the Assembly. In the Senate, the limit does not apply to a constitutional amendment or any type of resolution. In the

Assembly, the limit applies to a constitutional amendment but not to a resolution. In both the Senate and the Assembly, the limit may be suspended with respect to a particular bill by approval of the Committee on Rules.

The number of chaptered bills comes from the bound statutes for each year, plus information from the Office of the Governor. The number of vetoes comes from file records kept in the Office of the Governor. Robert Williams, deputy legislative secretary to the governor in several administrations, started the files in the 1950s. In subsequent administrations, the governor’s legislative staff has maintained the files that Williams started. See the next page for the sources.

The information on bills considered by Governor Pat Brown (1959–66) was assembled by the research librarians of the California State Library using the Senate and Assembly final histories publications.

Historical information on the party majority in the Senate and Assembly is in Appendix O of the 2016 Partisan Composition of the California Legislature published by the Office of the Chief Clerk of the California Assembly.

Sources

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Revised October 1, 2020, by Sara Noceto, Paul Jacobs, and Traja Rosenthal, Senate Office of Research, with the assistance of Sam Miller, assistant legislative deputy to Governor Gavin Newsom.

