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how often do governors say no?

A HISTORY OF ACTIONS FROM 1967-2019

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)

- > In 1979 and 1980, the Legislature overrode the governor's veto of two bills and eight items in the budget bill. Before these overrides, the governor's veto had been overridden on only two occasions since 1973. The Legislature has not overridden a governor's veto since 1980.
- > This year, his first year in office, Governor Newsom vetoed 16.51% of bills, a similar rate to Governor Brown's in his last year in office.
- > Governor Newsom considered 1,042 bills, and signed 870 into law.
- > In 1982, Governor Brown vetoed just 30 of the 1,674 bills he considered, setting the record for the lowest number of vetoes and the lowest veto rate (1.8%).
- > Governor Pat Brown considered 9,383 bills during his two terms in office (1959–66). He vetoed (including "pocket vetoes") 671 bills, or about 7.2%.¹
- > The five years with the highest number of chaptered bills were all with Republican governors (1971, 1984, 1967, 1990, 1988). Four of the five years with the highest number of vetoed bills (1990, 2008, 1988, 2000, 1998) were with Republican governors (the exception was Governor Davis in 2000).
- > Governor Deukmejian holds the record for the most bills vetoed in a year, 436 (1990); Governor Schwarzenegger is next with 414 vetoes (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).
- > Of the last five past governors, three vetoed the most bills of their tenures, both by percentage and absolute number, in their final year in office (Brown in 2018, Wilson in 1998, and Deukmejian in 1990).
- > Veto rates in the first year after a transition to a new administration have varied considerably in recent decades. From the Reagan administration through the start of Governor Brown's third term in 2011, the average first-year veto rate for new administrations was 13.8%.
- > From 1967–2019, the lowest first-year veto rate for a new administration was under Governor Reagan in 1967 (4.59%), while Governor Schwarzenegger had the highest first-year veto rate following a transition at 24.58% in 2004.

¹ From 1849 until the voters passed Proposition 1A (1966), governors could stop bills from becoming law by holding onto them. Proposition 1A ended the use of the so-called "pocket veto" by amending the California Constitution. If the governor neither signs nor vetoes a bill, the bill becomes law and is considered "chaptered."

GOVERNORS TOPPING THE CHARTS: 1967–2019

Most Chaptered Bills			Fewest Chaptered Bills		
1,821	1971	Reagan	652	2009	Schwarzenegger
1,760	1984	Deukmejian	729	2005	Schwarzenegger
1,725	1967	Reagan	733	2010	Schwarzenegger
1,707	1990	Deukmejian	745	2011	Brown
1,647	1988	Deukmejian	750	2007	Schwarzenegger
1,644	1982	Brown	763	2008	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	58	2003	Davis
351	1998	Wilson	60	1979	Brown
336	1992	Wilson	61	1968	Reagan

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	870	2011	Brown
2,063	1984	Deukmejian	893	2009	Schwarzenegger
2,019	1988	Deukmejian	896	2013	Brown
1,975	1971	Reagan	941	2015	Brown
1,839	1986	Deukmejian	961	2005	Schwarzenegger
1,831	1985	Deukmejian	964	2007	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: 1967–2019

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

CHAPTERED AND VETOED BILLS: 1967–2019

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

CHAPTERED AND VETOED BILLS: 1967-2019



Notes

For nearly all the years from 1967 through 2019, 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 doesn’t 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.

Sources

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