



What California Should Consider if it Wants to Leave the United States

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“Should California leave the United States and become a free and independent country?” That question may appear on the state’s November 2028 ballot if organizers of the [Calexit: California Independence Plebiscite of 2025](#) gather 546,651 valid signatures. The measure would not enact secession; instead, it would initiate a statewide vote to gauge public sentiment and, if approved, create an independent, nonpartisan commission to evaluate California’s viability as a sovereign nation.

While secession may seem unlikely, the initiative arises from deep and widespread disillusionment with national governance. As polarization intensifies, understanding what motivates proposals like Calexit, and how the state could responsibly study such an idea, matters for all who care about California’s future governance and its relationship to the union.

A Growing Divide Between California and the Nation

Americans’ confidence in the federal government is at a historic low. [Only 1 in 5 Americans trust the government in Washington](#) to do what is right most of the time. Nearly two-thirds (64%) believe the country’s political system is too divided to solve national problems according to a [Times/Siena poll](#). That poll also exposes deep regional fissures in the United States. For example, 61% of respondents in the West disapprove of the way Donald Trump has handled immigration, compared to 51% in the Midwest and 44% in the South. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) has amplified this point, arguing for “a national divorce” of red states and blue states.

California’s residents often see themselves as charting a different path. A [CBS News poll](#) found that 63% of Californians feel former President Donald Trump treats their state worse than others. At the time when Trump was being inaugurated, a majority of Californians (73%) said they [view California as a “nation-state”](#) distinct in culture and policy and 61% believe [California would be better off if it peacefully seceded](#).

[Scaled secession](#) through smaller, targeted actions is already happening across the nation. Cities and states increasingly choose which federal laws to enforce, establishing sanctuary policies on immigration or firearms. Several states have legalized marijuana or protected gender-affirming care despite federal positions to the contrary. In this context, [California’s moves to resist federal directives](#), such as its legislation countering Trump-era immigration crackdowns and its collaboration with Oregon and Washington to form the [West Coast Health Alliance](#), represent a growing regional autonomy. These trends do not amount to secession, but they reveal a slow drift toward decentralized governance and competing centers of authority. Calexit reflects that tension made explicit.

How the Calexit Initiative Would Work

Under [Article II, Section 8](#) of the California Constitution, citizens can propose statutes or constitutional amendments by initiative, independent of the Governor or Legislature. Calexit: The California Independence Plebiscite uses that power to ask a symbolic but consequential question. The [organizers of Calexit](#) received [clearance from the Secretary of State](#) to begin collecting petition signatures this year. If certified, it would have two effects:

1. **A statewide vote on independence.** Voters would answer, “Should California leave the United States and become a free and independent country?”
2. **Creation of an Independent Commission on Independence.** The commission would assess California’s economic, legal, and diplomatic viability as a sovereign nation and report findings to the Legislature and the public.

Even if a majority voted “yes,” the measure would not immediately alter the state’s relationship with the United States. Instead, it would signal a “vote of no confidence” in federal governance and authorize the commission to study next steps. The proposed commission is not merely procedural; it represents California’s opportunity to deliberate on one of the most profound constitutional questions any state has ever faced. The proposal envisions a diverse, nonpartisan body composed of experts in government, law, public administration, business, civil rights, and academia. Estimated costs include \$10 million to hold the election and establish the commission, plus \$2 million annually for its operations.

Why an Independent Commission Makes Sense

History and [comparative research](#) suggest that when societies confront questions of sovereignty, independence, or major constitutional reorganization, evidence-based, inclusive deliberation is crucial. Independent commissions can provide that forum. A well-structured commission would yield valuable insights into California’s fiscal relationship with the federal government, the costs of separation, and potential independent governance models. To be credible and effective, such a commission should:

- **Represent California’s full diversity.** Appoint members from across geographic regions and political affiliations, including tribal, business, and community leaders.
- **Ensure transparency and public participation.** Hold open hearings and make all analyses publicly accessible.
- **Focus on pragmatic outcomes.** Examine governance, trade, immigration, defense, and treaty implications with the goal of clarifying, not advocating for, a path forward.
- **Report within a defined timeframe.** Produce interim findings within one year and final recommendations within two, allowing lawmakers and voters to deliberate on an informed basis.

The idea of California leaving the United States is both provocative and deeply consequential. Dismissing it outright risks overlooking legitimate concerns about governance, representation, and federal dysfunction. A transparent, scholarly, and democratic inquiry offers a responsible alternative to partisan rhetoric or unilateral action. California has long served as a laboratory of democracy. By approaching the independence question through deliberation and public accountability, the state can model how divided societies explore contentious ideas without resorting to conflict. Now is the time to study, with clarity and care, what a peaceful path to separation might entail.