

REMAPPING A NATION WITHOUT STATES:

PERSONALIZED FULL REPRESENTATION FOR CALIFORNIA'S 21ST CENTURY

MARK PAUL AND MICAH WEINBERG

California is a state of many distinct regions. To give citizens a voice on regional issues and to reinvigorate California's Legislature, the state's central institution of self-government, we propose Personalized Full Representation for the 21st Century (PFR21), a system of representation by means of regionally based legislative elections that will allow the state's citizens to set the agenda for their regions and for the state as a whole. By reshaping the stage on which legislative politics is played out, California can make state government more attentive to regional issues and give its citizens a means of holding elected officials accountable for addressing regional problems. PFR21 would break the partisan stranglehold on California's legislative outcomes and put the state at the forefront of political and policy innovation.

Although proportional representation is common in electoral systems around the world and was adopted by many U.S. cities in the early 20th century, it is currently not used for legislative elections in any state. PFR21 is a big idea, representing a major change for California and the possibility of electoral reform throughout the country. It would require constitutional revision (the

first since the 1960s), possibly a constitutional convention (the first since 1878). Big ideas are hard to bring to fruition. However, given the recent history of reform efforts in California, it is clear that incremental change is inadequate to the tasks of reinvigorating the Legislature, improving governance, and reviving public confidence in the state's republican institutions.

How PFR21 Works

In this new system, the seats in a 360-member unicameral legislature would be apportioned among California's eight regions according to their respective populations. Within each region, half the seats would be elected by district, the other half by proportional representation. For example, the Central Coast would have 11 legislators, the San Diego Border region 36.

Californians would cast two votes for Legislature on Election Day, choosing: 1) an individual to represent their district, and 2) a party to represent their region. One vote for a neighbor to represent you, one vote for the party to lead your region.

Under this system, the individual who wins the plurality of votes in each district election would be elected to the Legislature, as under the current system. Since there are more districts, there is a more personal connection between legislators and those they represent.

The remaining regional seats would be filled in order from ranked party lists of candidates. Party lists help maximize ethnic and gender representation as well as increase skills and knowledge within the Legislature.

Each party would receive seats in proportion to the “party list” votes it received. A party would need to reach a threshold of five percent to win seats under this system. More parties mean more choice for the citizens of California’s regions.

Individual district candidates could be included on the regional party lists. If they win their districts, party list apportionment would skip to the next candidate on the list. This innovative system will improve representation on the regional level and reinvigorate California’s Legislature.

Figure 1: California’s Political Regions

