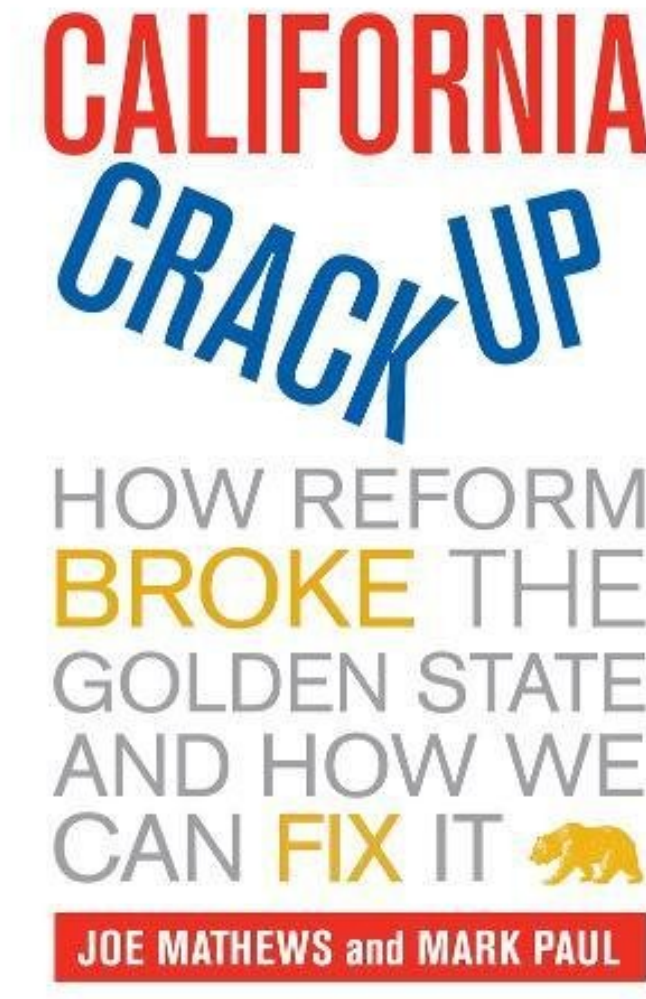


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California Crackup: How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It

Joe Mathews, Mark Paul

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Joe Mathews, Mark Paul : California Crackup: How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised California Crackup: How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It:

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating background solutions - how do we get there?By Joyce BenderCalifornia Crackup is the first non-fiction work since Seabiscuit to successfully lure me away from my evening

novel. It's a real-life mystery thriller that unravels the twisted skein of California's political mess in clear, fast-paced writing. Even better, the mystery has a believable solution - fixes presented are ideas proven to work in other places instead of misty, untried fantasies. It's illuminating reading not just for Californians, but for everyone who wants more responsive, effective democracy. Like sheep to the slaughter, other states are blithely heading down the same slippery slope with no clue what's in store. Neither the root causes or the solutions are obvious. One problem: there's not even the briefest map to help readers have a part in turning this plan into reality - a puzzling deficiency given the voluminous footnotes on everything else.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Must-Read for understanding California's political quagmire
By Gary Delsohn
You have to read "California Crackup" by Joe Mathews and Mark Paul to know how the wonderful state of California became so thoroughly broken. If a temperate climate and spectacular natural beauty were not enough, California is also a world-changer in everything from the arts to tech. But our government seems all but useless much of the time. Read this fast-paced and eneteraining little book and you'll understand why. To fix something you first need to know how it was broken. Crackup is an essential addition to our literaure about California by two outstanding journalists. Sadly, my major take away from the book is that a weakened media and an ill-informed and unrealistic public are just as much to blame for California's troubles as the people we send to Sacramento. It's true: we get the government we deserve. Excellent piece of writing, reporting and analysis, as well as fun to read.

14 of 16 people found the following review helpful. You know it's broken, don't you?
By Jerry Schwarz
A few months ago, although it seems like years, I was standing on corners soliciting signatures on a petition to have an initiative to call a California constitutional convention. My catch phrase was "help fix California's government". When people walked past (as most did of course) I would say "you know it's broken" Only one person ever said no it isn't, but many laughed because what I said was so obvious. My explanation of what was broken was similar to the authors'. I described it as "a vicious cycle". The authors describe this as follows, "The public distrusts the legislature and their elected officials. So voters, preferring to trust themselves, make major policy decisions via ballot initiative. These decisions because of the requirement that initiatives not be changed by legislators alone, further tie the hands of lawmakers. The frustrated lawmakers find it difficult to solve pressing problems, further fueling the public frustration that produces more initiatives and more hand-tying. This vicious cycle produces anger, more budgeting at the ballot box and poor governance."

The first part of the book contains a description of how California government reached its present condition. Especially valuable is the discussion of a number of initiatives that have contributed to creating California's dysfunction. Prop 13 and prop 98 are probably the best known, but if you care about California you also should know about prop 4 (the Gann initiative), prop 4(term limits), prop 63 (mental health) and many others discussed in this book. I found the description of the initiative that created the California lottery particularly instructive. Not because the initiative had a significant impact but because it perfectly encapsulates what is wrong with the process. Firstly it was a purely commercial activity. The original sponsor of the initiative was a company whose business is to collect signatures, financial backing came from a company that administers state lotteries. Both were working for themselves, not for California. Secondly, the result was to create a state lottery that "effectively -- and forever -- stripped state law makers of the power to make policy choices about how to manage the lottery, use the funds it generates, or adjust to changes in the market ..."

In the second part of the book the authors present details of what a revised constitution that fixed California's government might look like. The organizing idea, which I haven't seen before, is that in California the legislative authority resides in a combination of the elected legislature and direct democracy. Currently they don't work well together (the vicious cycle) but reform can't get rid of either. Reform must combine them into a consistent whole in which they work together. The authors present in detail what this might look like. For example, they propose a unicameral legislature based on a form of proportional representation. And they propose one of my favorite ideas, electing state wide officers via instant runoff voting. If you want to see all the details of their proposals you'll have to get the book. There is one significant issue that the authors don't address satisfactorily. Namely, how can we ever get a constitutional revision along these lines? They suggest that ultimately the legislature will recognize that a revision is needed and create either a revision commission or a constitutional convention. Personally I don't think this is realistic. But I don't blame the authors. They have done their job. They've presented a detailed plan that if enacted would have a good chance of fixing California government. The future of California may depend on some influential political actors picking up the ideas in this book.

Is California beyond repair? A sizable number of Golden State citizens have concluded that it is. Incessant budget crises plus a government paralyzed by partisan gridlock have led to demands for reform, even a constitutional convention. But what, exactly, is wrong and how can we fix it? In California Crackup, Joe Mathews and Mark Paul provide clear and informed answers. Their fast-paced and often humorous narrative deftly exposes the constitutional origins of our current political and economic problems and furnishes a uniquely California fix: innovative solutions that allow Californians to debate their choices, settle on the best ones, hold elected officials accountable for results, and choose anew if something doesn't work.

"Neither [Jerry] Brown or [Meg] Whitman, as they attempt to blaze a trail to the governor's mansion, have suggested

anything as sweeping as the proposals in California Crackup." --Troy Senik in the Wall Street Journal "A terrific book...that offers not only a clear diagnosis, but also a serious prescription... The clarity of their writing and the cogency of their argument put to shame the current campaign for governor."