



Fact Sheet: Addressing Weaknesses in California's Recall System

Contact: LittleHoover@lhc.ca.gov

The attempted recall of Governor Gavin Newsom, which produced California's second gubernatorial recall election in less than 20 years, focused attention on the recall process and on whether that system requires reform. As California's independent oversight agency, the Little Hoover Commission launched a study in 2021-2022 to consider whether the state's system for recalling state office-holders should be changed, and if so, how.

The Commission concluded that the recall system should be retained, both because it is substantively valuable—voters should be able to fire an elected official mid-term—and because it is overwhelmingly popular with voters.

Yet substantial changes are needed in California's recall process. Current recall procedures breed the possibility of an undemocratic outcome, since they allow a replacement candidate to win office while receiving fewer votes than the incumbent. There is also concern that the recall is subject to potential overuse or abuse.

In its 2022 report, [Reforming the Recall](#), the Commission recommends that California make two key changes to its recall system:

- Adjust the signature requirement for recalling statewide office-holders from 12 percent of the vote in the last election for the office to 10 percent of registered voters, thereby increasing the number of signatures necessary to initiate a recall election and creating a more stable signature threshold.

- Replace the existing two-part recall ballot with a “snap” special election in which the official targeted for recall is placed on the ballot with all replacement candidates. This would ensure that no official is recalled and replaced by a successor who receives fewer votes.

The Commission also identified several smaller, procedural changes that would give elections officials more time to administer elections and provide greater clarity around the recall process:

- Extend the timeframe for conducting recall elections to no less than 88 days and no more than 125 days from certification of the recall petition as sufficient.
- Prohibit the initiation of recall proceedings against state office-holders during the first 90 days and the last six months of their term in office.
- Review recall replacement procedures to determine which nomination standard is most appropriate for replacement candidates, and establish in statute which one ought to be used.

These steps will strengthen the recall system by improving administration of the recall and better balancing voters' right to recall officials with protection for electoral integrity and democratic principles.

ADDITIONAL IMPLEMENTATION

- [SCA 3 \(Allen\), 2020](#): Would have eliminated the first recall ballot question and automatically placed the official subject to recall on the ballot as a candidate for the office.

Last updated: January 2023