Twitter Thread by Ezra Klein

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In much of SF, you can’t walk 20 feet without seeing a sign declaring that Black lives matter and no human being is illegal. Those signs sit in yards zoned for single families, in communities that organize against the new housing that would bring those values closer to reality.

Poorer families — disproportionately nonwhite and immigrant — are pushed into long commutes, overcrowded housing and homelessness. Those inequalities have turned deadly during the pandemic.

And it's not just SF:

The median price for a home in California is more than $700,000. As Bloomberg reported in 2019, the state has four of the nation's five most expensive housing markets and a quarter of the nation's homeless residents. The root of the crisis is simple: It's very, very hard to build homes in California. When he ran for governor in 2018, Gavin Newsom promised the construction of 3.5 million housing units by 2025. Newsom won, but California has built fewer than 100,000 homes each year since. In Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti persuaded Angelenos to pass a new sales tax to address the city's homelessness crisis, but the program has fallen far behind schedule, in part because homeowners fought the placing of shelters in their communities.

Some of this reflects the difficulty of wielding power in a state where authority is often fractured and decentralized. But that does not explain all of it. Watching SB50, State Senator Scott Wiener's ambitious bill to allow dense construction near mass transit, fail has become an annual political ritual. Last year, Toni Atkins, the Democratic State Senate leader, sponsored a modest bill to allow duplexes on single-family lots. It passed the Senate, and then passed the Assembly in slightly amended form, and then died because it was sent back to the Senate with only three minutes left in the legislative session. All this in a state racked by a history — and a present — of housing racism.

"What we see at times is people with a Bernie Sanders sign and a 'Black Lives Matter' sign in their window, but they're opposing an affordable housing project or an apartment complex down the street," @Scott_Wiener told me.

There is a danger — not just in California, but everywhere — that politics becomes an aesthetic rather than a program.

It's a danger on the right, where Donald Trump modeled a presidency that cared more about retweets and owning the libs than passing bills.

It’s also a danger on the left, where the symbols of progressivism are often preferred to the sacrifices and risks those ideals demand.

California, as the biggest state in the nation, and one where Democrats hold total control of the government, carries a special burden. If progressivism cannot work here, why should the country believe it can work anywhere else?

More here: https://t.co/5ipDXQhgKQ

One thing I do want to draw out, though. This isn't all just a question of public opinion. As I argue in the piece, old governance structures and misused laws end up empowering organized incumbents over everyone else.

I remember sitting in an SF city meeting, watching a long line of people testify against a 5G tower. Most people in the community didn't care about the 5G tower, so they didn't show up. That happens on everything. When those meetings have a lot of power, paralysis results.

I'm writing about CA, because it's where I live. But this is a much broader problem. This piece on why New York keeps failing to fix Penn Station is one of the best pieces of the last few years, and a window into the split soul of progressive governance. https://t.co/JSARYsoSv9