

# Colorful cast in governors' races; crime remains the election issue

By JOHN KING  
AP Political Writer

Crime is far and away the dominant issue in this year's 36 elections for governor, a crowded lineup that features contests in the eight largest states, no shortage of embattled incumbents and a handful of intriguing independents.

Beyond that, the races feature some of the most colorful personalities in American politics, including New York Gov. Mario Cuomo and Texas Gov. Ann Richards. And three children of prominent politicians — Kathleen Brown of California and Jeb and George W. Bush, in Florida and Texas, respectively, are looking to carve out niches of their own.

While the Labor Day weekend opens a nine-week sprint to Election Day, it can hardly be considered the kickoff for these campaigns, most of which have been at full intensity levels throughout the summer.

At stake is control of the governor's office in 18 of the 25 most populous states, giving these races special importance at the White House because of their importance in 1996 presidential politics.

This year's statehouse contests also could factor

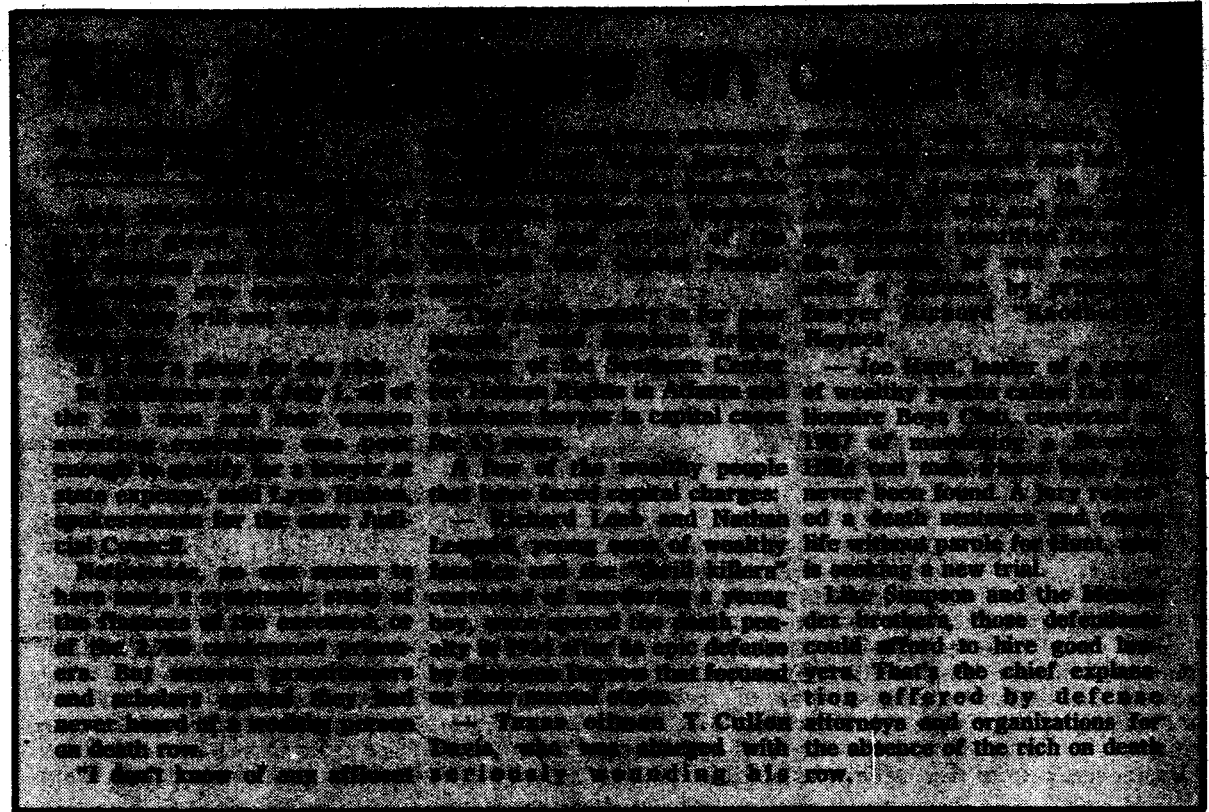
into 1996 in another way: The impressive Republican gubernatorial class of 1990 faces its first re-election test, and several in this group are considered prospects for a future GOP national ticket.

Democrats now hold 29 governors' offices; the GOP has 20. Connecticut has an independent governor. That seat is up this year, as are 21 held by Democrats and 14 by Republicans.

Independent candidacies are major factors in at least five states: Maine, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Connecticut. In Maine, independent Angus King is given decent odds at winning.

From a policy standpoint, the sharp campaign debates over crime, welfare reform, taxes and school spending and standards foreshadow the themes, particularly in the areas of spending and law enforcement, likely to dominate state politics in the next year.

Immigration is also a major issue in several states, especially California and Florida, as governors of both parties demand that the federal government pay the high prison, school and health care costs states incur for illegal immigrants.



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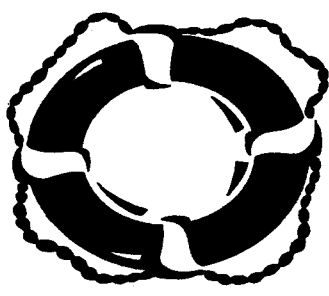


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