

# THE INITIATIVE TO PARTY

## Partisanship and Ballot Initiatives in California

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### ABSTRACT

Previous research on the initiative process tends to underestimate the involvement of political parties in ballot measure contests as well as the impact of partisanship on initiative voting. Focusing on recent ballot contests in California, we find that the two major party organizations in California are actively using ballot initiatives to bolster voter turnout for their candidates, divide the opposition with 'wedge' issues and promote their own party's platform and ideology. This party involvement in initiative contests seems to be paying off, as partisanship is the strongest predictor of votes on ballot measures in California at both the aggregate and individual levels. More generally, our research – which runs counter to the expectations of Populist and Progressive reformers – shines new light on how political parties are shaping not only the process, but also the politics of direct democracy.

Across the United States, voters in the two dozen states currently permitting the 'citizen' initiative are increasingly serving as election-day lawmakers. During the 1990s, Californians directly shaped public policy by casting their votes on nearly 60 questions placed on the ballot by their fellow citizens. As with other initiative states, Californians considered a variety of contentious measures, from the well-publicized battles over social services for illegal immigrants, affirmative action, paycheck protection and gay marriages, to the somewhat less controversial skirmishes over tobacco taxes, animal rights, bilingual education, criminal sentencing, casino gambling and electric utility regulation. In this article we examine the nexus between partisanship and the initiative process in California, a trend-setting state that has seen a record number of measures placed on its ballot in recent years (Schrug, 1998; Tolbert et al., 1998). We attempt to draw attention to the partisan nature of ballot initiative campaigns in the United States by

exploring the role parties play in ballot contests and testing the partisan underpinnings of votes for and against ballot initiatives in California. While it is widely accepted that political parties in the United States have not been major players in most statewide ballot measures, the empirical evidence from California challenges this conventional wisdom. We find not only that political parties are becoming more engaged in ballot initiative campaigns, but that partisanship is one of the best predictors of individual and county level votes on ballot measures.

### **Role of Party Organizations in Ballot Initiative Campaigns**

A century ago, one of the main targets of the Populist and then Progressive reformers in the United States – second only to the handful of special interests that were unduly swaying elected officials – were political parties and party bosses who controlled state legislatures (Munro, 1912: 16–17; Hall, 1921: 121–2; Cronin, 1989: 50–7). The mechanisms of initiative and referendum ‘strictly limited, more or less by design’ the power of political parties, and ‘subverted the traditional electioneering function of the party and provided the opportunity for private (i.e. non-party) organizations to offer advice and conduct campaigns’ (McCuan et al., 1998: 60). In 1892, Nathan Cree, an advocate of direct democracy, noted how direct democracy reforms were largely intended to ‘break the crushing and stifling power of our great party machines, and give freer play to the political ideas, aspirations, opinions and feelings of the people’ (quoted in Cronin, 1989: 46–8). The mechanisms of direct democracy, especially the initiative, would be used by the people to stifle ‘the selfish and the dishonest who would use the government to enrich themselves personally and the class which they represent, the “Boss” and his men who are the curse of the system in America’ (Oberholtzer, 1900: 392–3).

As was the case in the 1910s, American political parties today, unlike those in Europe and other countries (Budge, 2000), rarely sponsor ballot questions. Rather, measures tend to be initiated and financed by groups falling beyond the reach of parties (California Commission, 1992: 68–9). Magleby (1984: 189) finds that ‘parties are excluded from participation in drafting the measures and therefore may not play much of a role in interpreting them to the voters’. Parties do not engage in the initiative process, reasons Magleby (1984: 174), as the success or failure of initiatives rarely translates into ‘any payoff to the electoral fortunes of the party candidates in the election’.

Yet, while often subtle, there is growing evidence that some state and national party organizations are becoming more than bit players in ballot campaigns. The fact that party organizations – whose political power has been emasculated since the Progressive Era by a variety of other institutions,

including the media, interest groups and even maverick candidates – are not visibly involved in most ballot campaigns does not mean they are absent from the initiative process. State party organizations, the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and the National Republican Committee (RNC) are not sitting idle as ballot measures become more prominent features of state policy-making. From a rational actor perspective, this engagement by party organizations seems perfectly logical. As ballot measures become more important vehicles for policy change, it is rational that party organizations will try to selectively use the initiative process as a way to advance their political agendas as well as their candidates for public office. Strategic and financial participation in ballot measure campaigns by parties also has the potential of offsetting their depreciated influence in the legislative arena. Although the initiative process continues to be used primarily by citizen and special interest groups as a means to circumvent partisan state legislatures, party organizations – while not terribly fond of it – clearly appreciate the power of direct democracy.

The level of initiative activity by parties may be limited to the ‘type’ of initiative that is on the ballot. Classifying recent California initiatives in a four-fold typology, Donovan et al. (1998) find that ‘majoritarian’ ballot measures encourage party participation. Majoritarian ballot contests are those in which the groups promoting and opposing a ballot measure tend to be ‘large and diffuse’, as opposed to narrow economic interests. The authors find that ‘candidates and political parties dominate the campaign discourse’ of majoritarian ballot contests dealing with social and moral questions, as proponents of these measures often ‘welcome the adoption of their issue by other groups, political parties, or politicians’ (Donovan et al., 1998: 94).

Moving beyond majoritarian initiatives, there appear to be three motivating factors why major parties are becoming more involved in the initiative process. First, a party may become involved if a ballot measure has a chance of promoting voter turnout for the party’s own candidates for elected office. Second, a party may become engaged in initiative politics if a proposed measure can serve as a wedge issue against the other party. Third, a party may choose to support (or oppose) a proposition if there is a high level of ideological compatibility between the party’s platform and the proposed measure. Recent developments in California indicate that party officials consider all three of these reasons when determining whether to become directly or indirectly involved with an initiative.

### ***Voter Turnout***

There is a common perception among many journalists and political observers that ballot initiatives stimulate voter interest, and in turn increase turnout on election day (*Congress Daily*, 1998). While earlier research by Everson (1981) and Magleby (1984) shows that the impact of initiatives on

turnout is negligible, Schmidt (1989: 27) finds that: 'Increased citizen participation through ballot measure campaigns has a "spillover effect" on candidate campaigns.' More recent research by M. Smith (2001) and Tolbert et al. (2001) confirms that voter turnout is highest in states that permit initiatives on the ballot, even after controlling for other factors influencing turnout in the American states.

While the question of whether citizen-initiated measures on the ballot increase voter turnout is far from settled, students of the initiative process have observed how candidates as well as elected officials try to use ballot measures to propel their own campaigns and bolster voter turnout for their party. In California, 'embracing and demagoguing hot-button [ballot] issues' by candidates to 'showcase' their credentials dates to the gubernatorial runs of Secretary of State Jerry Brown and Attorney General John Van De Kamp (Schrag, 1998: 226). During the 1990s, two-term governor Pete Wilson championed numerous initiatives, spending upwards of \$2 million from his personal war chest to promote Prop. 187, the 1994 anti-illegal immigration measure, more than \$1 million backing Prop. 226, the 1998 anti-union paycheck protection measure and nearly \$500,000 supporting Prop. 8, his 1998 measure calling for more teacher accountability in public schools (Chavez, 1998: 37; California Secretary of State, 1998b).

Going beyond the endorsements by prominent party members, the two major party organizations in California often take their own public stances on ballot measures. Parties endorse initiatives in an effort to stimulate partisan voter anxiety or excitement about the measures, which they hope will translate into increased across-the-board support for the party. According to one California GOP official, 'get-out-the-vote' ('GOTV') was one of the main reasons why the party supported Prop. 187, as it was very 'popular' and Governor Wilson thought it was a 'good' initiative that would 'help him and the party' (California GOP, 1998). In 1998, the state Republican Party took a formal position on all eight initiatives on the general election ballot. The California Democratic Party also supported or opposed all of the measures, except for Prop. 5, the Indian gaming measure (California Democratic Party, 1998).

### *'Wedge' Issues*

Political parties may also promote ballot initiatives if they appear to split the electoral base of support of the opposing party. In California, the GOP attempted to do this in 1996 when it pushed for the passage of Prop. 209, the California Civil Rights Initiative. The Republican Party provided essential funding to the proponents of the measure in an effort to split Democratic support for President Bill Clinton. Disavowing his long-standing support for affirmative action, Governor Wilson and the California GOP helped save the floundering campaign to end affirmative action with their financial support. Wilson, in a teleconference call with Newt Gingrich,

claimed that Prop. 209 was 'a partisan issue . . . that works strongly to our advantage [and] has every bit the potential to make a critical difference' to defeat Clinton (Schrag, 1998: 226). At Wilson's behest, the California Republican Party contributed \$997,034 to the Yes on Prop. 209 campaign, with the Senate Republican Majority Committee contributing an additional \$90,000 (California Secretary of State, 1996). At the national level, the RNC made 'independent expenditures' to broadcast television ads promoting Prop. 209 (Chavez, 1998: 252).

Through various means, party organizations are likely to continue exploiting 'wedge' initiatives when it is to their partisan advantage. As evidence of this, the RNC in 1996 transferred more than \$4.5 million to Grover Norquist's 'non-partisan' organization, Americans for Tax Reform, for the explicit purpose of promoting conservative ballot measures in California, Colorado and Oregon (Levin, 1997; Smith, 1998b). This practice of using non-partisan 'educational' organizations as flow-through entities is beginning to occur in other initiative states (D. Smith, 2001).

### *Ideological Compatibility*

Not surprisingly, party organizations have become directly involved in ballot initiatives for ideological reasons. The two state parties in California have lent their financial support to committees sponsoring or opposing ballot measures consistent with their platforms. In 1998 the California Republican Party anted up \$175,878 to the proponents of Prop. 8, Governor Wilson's public education 'reform' swan song after Wilson came to the party and said: 'I'd like you to kick in some money' for the campaign (California GOP, 1998). On the flip side, the Democratic State Central Committee of California contributed \$21,000 to the group opposing Prop. 8, \$13,046 to the group opposing Prop. 226 and over \$25,000 fighting Prop. 9, a 1998 measure that would have recaptured costs from the utility industry (California Secretary of State, 1998a).

More recently, though, Republican and Democratic Party officials have found that they are actually able to *raise* funds for their parties by taking positions on a range of ballot measures. In particular, the parties have 'netted money from proposition campaigns' by endorsing measures opposed by narrow special interests (California GOP, 1998). The Republican state party in 1998 sent out over 13 million pieces of direct mail. Before several of the mailings, party officials approached the issue committees, explained to them what the party's official position was regarding their ballot measures, and asked, 'Would you like to buy some support . . . at cut rates . . . in our mailing?' The committees opposing the regulation of electric utilities (Prop. 9) and the tobacco tax for early childhood programs (Prop. 10) both placed ads in the Republican mailers and 'donated' money to the party to 'offset' the cost of mailing. According to a state GOP official, this is 'a relatively new practice' for the party (California GOP, 1998).

More notably, the state Democratic Party found that by *not* taking an official stance on a measure, it could raise funds for the organization. In 1998, the Democratic Party endorsed all eight issues for general election, *except* for Prop. 5, the Indian gaming measure. Attending the meeting were 'tons of Indians and union' members, voicing their respective support and opposition to Prop. 5 (California Democratic Party, 1998). The chairman of the party refused to allow a vote on the measure by the 300-member executive board because it was potentially a divisive issue for two core constituents of the party. Because the party did not vote to endorse or oppose the measure, the non-vote was largely viewed as a 'victory by the Indians', which led several Indian tribes to contribute money to the state party (California Democratic Party, 1998). The party also officially opposed Prop. 9, the measure sponsored by progressive groups to recapture costs on electricity suppliers, and Prop. 8, Governor Wilson's public education reform measure. In return, the party received substantial contributions from several utility companies and the California Teachers' Association (California Secretary of State, 1998a).

It is clear that during the 1990s state party organizations in California became heavily involved in the promotion and opposition of ballot measures. Contrary to the expectations of several scholars, state (and even national) party organizations in the United States are entangled in the complex web of direct democracy. The organizations are not as impotent nor as irrelevant in the initiative process as might seem at first glance. As they turn to the initiative to regain their strength, it is becoming evident that initiatives are not 'beyond party politics', as Donovan and Bowler (1998: 3) maintain. In both direct and indirect ways, parties in California are utilizing the initiative process to increase the turnout of their electoral base on election day, drive a wedge into their opposition's constituency, and promote the ideological points of their platforms.

### **Electoral Payoff for Political Parties: Voting Behavior on Ballot Initiatives**

While there is compelling evidence that parties are becoming more involved in ballot contests, is this heightened involvement translating into electoral payoff for parties? In other words, do citizens vote along party lines on ballot measures? Previous empirical evidence is decidedly mixed. Research by Magleby (1984) shows that voters tend to support or oppose propositions independent of their partisan leanings. Other scholars have reinforced the non-partisan voting behavior on ballot initiatives. Gerber and Lupia (1995: 290), for example, assume in their formal modeling of direct legislation elections that 'partisan cues are usually absent' in direct legislation elections, as 'campaigns are typically run by organizations that have different incentives than traditional political parties'. But research by Citrin et al.

(1990: 546) demonstrates that support for an 'official English' initiative in California in 1986 was 'strongly related to party and ideology'. Registered Republicans were 27 percent more likely to vote for the measure than registered Democrats. Similarly, Bones and Benedict (1975: 350) find that although 'Washington parties take stands on few propositions', some initiatives – specifically those dealing with 'welfare, taxes, and government reform' – have partisan support.

With respect to voting behavior on ballot questions, there is growing evidence that political parties provide important cues for voters in many ballot measure elections. Recent empirical research finds that voters are capable of making rational decisions in direct democracy elections, even with limited information (Lupia, 1992, 1994; Bowler and Donovan, 1994, 1998). These scholars find that voters can make decisions consistent with their policy preferences in initiative elections by relying on available voter cues – such as the support or opposition by political parties, elected officials, political elites, interest groups and the media. Voters with higher education rely on more varied and diverse sources of information and thus are capable of making the most rational decisions. But even lower income and education voters are capable of making informed decisions in initiative elections with very minimal information by relying on voter cues. Bowler and Donovan (1998: 140) find that with governance-related ballot measures, such as term limits for elected officials, partisan voters are particularly able to 'respond to their party's interest over the course of an initiative campaign'.

### **Data, Measurement and Overview of the Analysis**

To answer the question of party influence on voting behavior in ballot initiative contests, we examine ballot initiatives in California between 1994 and 1998. California, the nation's largest and most diverse state, provides a useful test case given the large number and importance of recent direct democracy elections in the state (Bowler and Donovan, 1994; Donovan and Snipp, 1994; Tolbert and Hero, 1996; Bowler et al., 1998; Schrag, 1998; Smith, 1998a). Historically, California has been a leader in use of the initiative process, with more initiatives qualifying for the ballot in California than in any other state besides Oregon over the last century (Tolbert et al., 1998). The dramatic rise in the use and importance of ballot initiatives in the last three decades has altered the democratic process, with candidates and state and national parties increasingly compelled to debate divisive issues during ballot campaigns (Chavez, 1998; Schrag, 1998).

To explore the role of political parties in initiative elections, we use both aggregate and survey data. Since we are interested in the political context in which voters make choices, we draw on the vast amount of aggregate data available to measure political, economic and social context. Aggregate county level data allow us to examine patterns of political party registration

and county level voting on a series of ballot measures. The survey data allow us to examine the relationship between self-identified political party affiliation and voter preferences at the individual level. While previous research on state politics and policy has relied on aggregate data or survey data, we gain theoretical leverage by combining these two levels of analysis.

### **Aggregate Data: Impact of Party on County Level Voting for California Initiatives**

Counties provide a useful unit of analysis of partisan behavior on ballot measures since they are administrative arms of the state government. In California, counties are also the direct providers of social services with significant discretion over public policy. Historically, counties represent important political jurisdictions and voting blocks in California legislative politics. From 1930 to 1968, the California Senate was apportioned geographically by roughly one-county, one-vote. Counties have thus historically played an important role in California politics, comparable to the identity of states in the US Senate. Today, California counties remain remarkably cohesive in their partisan composition. While studying counties has limitations, we believe it provides a useful lens with which to analyze the impact of party politics in the initiative process.<sup>1</sup>

We analyze county level voting patterns for the 13 statewide ballot initiatives appearing on the June 1998 primary and November 1998 general election ballots in California (referendums placed on the ballot by the legislature are excluded). A range of substantive policy issues were on the ballot – from political reform (term limits, political donations by unions), tax policy and bond issues, environmental policy and animal rights legislation, to social policy, such as ending bilingual education in the public schools and child development. In each model, the dependent variable is the popular vote for the ballot initiatives at the county level. We examine whether support for the ballot initiatives is related to political party composition, measured by percent registered Republicans (1998) at the county level. The models control for two competing explanations for policy adoptions. Economic conditions have been found to be important in initiative voting on tax and bond issues (Bowler and Donovan, 1994). Prevailing economic conditions are measured by 1998 county unemployment rates. Research by Hero (1998) and by Key (1949) illustrates the importance of considering racial/ethnic diversity in explaining public policy decisions. In measuring the racial/ethnic composition of a county, two indices are created at the county level: one measuring minority diversity and one measuring white ethnic diversity (Hero and Tolbert, 1996).<sup>2</sup>

A statistically significant relationship between Republican Party affiliation and the vote for the 11 of the 13 initiatives is found using bivariate correlations (data not shown). Based on these correlations, in 85 percent of the



1998 California initiative contests, political party affiliation is associated with county level voting patterns. A series of Ordinary Least Squares regressions is used to estimate the impact of Republican Party affiliation on the county level vote on the 1998 ballot initiatives. Tables 1 and 2 suggest that political party matters in direct democracy elections across a range of policy issues. *The data show that political party affiliation is associated with the vote for 77 percent of the initiatives appearing on the 1998 California ballot, even after controlling for unemployment rates and county level racial/ethnic composition.* There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between political party affiliation and the vote for 10 of the 13 initiatives. Based on these findings, we conclude that at the aggregate level political party appears to be strongly related to the popular vote for a series of policies decided at the ballot box in California.<sup>3</sup>

Of the 10 propositions in which political party is a statistically significant predictor of the popular vote, the regression coefficient for registered Republicans is positive in four cases and negative in six cases. Thus, 60 percent of the initiative contests in which party affiliation is important are 'liberal' policies and 40 percent are 'conservative' policies. These findings emphasize the equally partisan nature of citizen-initiated measures placed on the ballot, which runs contrary to some of the more popular literature on direct democracy (Schrag, 1998). As expected, Republican party affiliation at the county level is positively related to the vote for a call for a limit on school district spending for administrative costs (Prop. 223), a proposed US Constitutional Amendment to limit congressional terms (Prop. 225), limiting the political contributions of unions (Prop. 226), and ending bilingual education programs in the public schools (Prop. 227). Also as expected, the percentage of registered Republicans is negatively related to the county level vote for an animal rights ban on the use of traps and poisons (Prop. 4), permitting gaming on Indian reservations (Prop. 5), tax credits to encourage air-emission reductions (Prop. 7), prohibiting the assessment of taxes, bonds and surcharges to pay the costs of nuclear power plants borne by electric companies (Prop. 9), an additional tobacco surtax for state and county childhood development programs (Prop. 10) and authorizing local governments to enter into sales tax revenue sharing agreements with local jurisdictions (Prop. 11).

### **Survey Data: Political Party Affiliation and Initiative Voting Behavior**

Is political party affiliation an important cue for voting on ballot initiatives at the individual level? Are political parties endorsing or even funding state ballot measures that are ideologically consistent with their party platform to increase turnout of partisan voters? Survey data are used to measure the importance of political party affiliation on support for a series of ballot

**Table 1.** Impact of political party on vote for California ballot initiatives  
1998 June Primary

Regressors	Proposition 223: Spending limits on administration in public schools		Proposition 224: State-funded design and engineering services		Proposition 225: Proposed U.S. Constitutional amendment to limit Congressional terms		Proposition 226: Limiting political contributions by unions without permission from employees		Proposition 227: Ending bilingual education in public schools	
	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability
Intercept	<b>33.443</b> (9.483)	<b>.001</b>	<b>49.985</b> (8.950)	<b>.000</b>	<b>38.733</b> (5.889)	<b>.000</b>	<b>19.981</b> (5.320)	<b>.000</b>	<b>42.353</b> (8.380)	<b>.000</b>
Percent registered Republican	<b>.202</b> (.099)	<b>.048</b>	.063 (.090)	.489	<b>.490</b> (.060)	<b>.000</b>	<b>.723</b> (.054)	<b>.000</b>	<b>.748</b> (.085)	<b>.000</b>
Unemployment rate, 1998	-.174 (.170)	.310	.116 (.154)	.454	<b>.317</b> (.101)	<b>.003</b>	.181 (.092)	.053	<b>.306</b> (.144)	<b>.039</b>
Index of minority diversity	10.319 (5.791)	.080	-8.402 (5.266)	.117	-6.756 (3.465)	.056	-2.380 (3.130)	.451	<b>-16.186</b> (4.930)	<b>.002</b>
Index of white ethnic diversity	.016 (.306)	.958	-.624 (.279)	.029	-.095 (.183)	.608	.085 (.166)	.610	-.117 (.261)	.656
S.E. of regression	4.683		4.258		2.80		2.531		3.987	
F statistic	1.897	.125	4.246	.005	40.646	.000	73.793	.000	48.767	.000
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.06</b>		<b>.19</b>		<b>.74</b>		<b>.84</b>		<b>.77</b>	
N	58		58		58		58		58	

Source: US Census Bureau, available: [ww.census.gov](http://ww.census.gov), and California Secretary of State, available [www.ss.ca.gov/elections\\_elections.htm](http://www.ss.ca.gov/elections_elections.htm). Unstandardized regression co-efficients shown, standard errors in parentheses.

initiatives and candidates on the ballot in two consecutive (1994 and 1996) California general elections.<sup>4</sup> Survey data are used to measure Democratic Party affiliation, controlling for personal economic conditions, race/ethnicity, income, education and gender.<sup>5</sup> These data are from the Voter News Service Exit Poll of California voters conducted in November 1994 and 1996. The dependent variable in the statistical models is binary and coded 1 for a 'yes' vote for the candidate or issue.

Separate logistic regression models are used to model voter support for two ballot initiatives – Prop. 186 (universal health care) and Prop. 187 (ending social services for illegal immigrants) – and one candidate election (the vote for Governor Wilson) in 1994. Separate models are also used to analyze the vote for two ballot initiatives – Prop. 209 (ending affirmative action) and Prop. 215 (legalization of medical marijuana) – as well as one candidate race (the vote for President Clinton) in 1996. By analyzing voting in two consecutive elections, we are able to examine the impact of party affiliation over time, not just in a presidential or off-year election. By comparing across initiative and candidate races we gain a better understanding of the role of political parties in shaping voter preferences across election types. By comparing across a series of diverse (liberal and conservative) ballot initiatives we examine the impact of political party across a sample of public policies.

In our examination of California ballot initiatives, we find that *political party affiliation appears to be the most salient predictor of voting behavior in direct democracy elections*, as well as the candidate races studied here (see Table 3). The data suggest that voters use political party endorsements or opposition of ballot measures in casting votes in the initiative contests. In every candidate and issue election, self-reported Democratic Party affiliation is a statistically significant predictor of individual level voting behavior. Individuals with Democratic partisanship were considerably more likely to vote for universal health care, legalization of medical and President Clinton, and were less likely to vote for ending affirmative action programs, ending social services for illegal immigrants, or candidate Governor Wilson, even after controlling for other factors. The consistency in the saliency of political party as a predictor of voter choice across candidate and issue elections provides evidence that partisanship and voting behavior on ballot measures are increasingly intertwined.

## Conclusion

The fact that partisanship is a strong predictor of the vote on initiatives in California at both the aggregate and individual levels should not come as a surprise. As direct democracy spreads around the world, political parties must confront how to continue to be relevant when people make policy decisions themselves rather than through the normal representative means.

**Table 2.** Impact of political party on vote for California ballot initiatives  
1998 November general election

<i>Regressors</i>	<i>Proposition 4: Ban use of specified traps and animal poisons</i>		<i>Proposition 5: Tribal-state gaming compact/tribal casinos</i>		<i>Proposition 6: Prohibition on slaughter of horses and sale of horsemeat</i>		<i>Proposition 7: Air quality improvement tax credits. Environmental protection</i>	
	$\beta$ ( <i>Standard error</i> )	<i>Probability</i>	$\beta$ ( <i>Standard error</i> )	<i>Probability</i>	$\beta$ ( <i>Standard error</i> )	<i>Probability</i>	$\beta$ ( <i>Standard error</i> )	<i>Probability</i>
Intercept	<b>84.164</b> (11.398)	<b>.000</b>	<b>80.203</b> (11.791)	<b>.000</b>	<b>59.313</b> (9.968)	<b>.00</b>	<b>61.190</b> (9.710)	<b>.000</b>
Percent registered Republican	-.514 (.115)	<b>.000</b>	-.38 (.119)	<b>.006</b>	-.007 (.101)	.943	-.418 (.098)	<b>.000</b>
Unemployment rate, 1998	-1.292 (.196)	.527	-.517 (.203)	.014	-.753 (.172)	<b>.000</b>	-.831 (.167)	<b>.000</b>
Index of minority diversity	<b>9.699</b> (6.706)	<b>.00</b>	<b>14.670</b> (6.937)	<b>.039</b>	<b>16.321</b> (5.865)	<b>.007</b>	<b>14.201</b> (5.713)	<b>.016</b>
Index of white ethnic diversity	-.463 (.355)	.938	-.836 (.367)	<b>.027</b>	-.348 (.310)	.267	-.411 (.302)	.180
S.E. of regression	5.422		5.609		4.742		4.619	
F statistic	29.084	.000	13.724	.000	11.526	.000	25.327	.000
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.66</b>		<b>.47</b>		<b>.43</b>		<b>.63</b>	
N	58		58		58		58	

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**Table 2.** (Continued)

<i>Regressors</i>	<i>Proposition 8: Permanent class size reduction public schools</i>		<i>Proposition 9: Electric utilities assessment. Bonds</i>		<i>Proposition 10: State and county early childhood development programs. Tobacco surtax</i>		<i>Proposition 11: Local sales and use taxes – revenue sharing</i>	
	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability	$\beta$ (Standard error)	Probability
Intercept	33.189 (6.665)	.000	<b>47.806</b> (7.699)	<b>.000</b>	<b>68.998</b> (9.994)	<b>.000</b>	<b>63.340</b> (8.037)	<b>.000</b>
Percent registered Republican	.074 (.067)	.279	–.440 (.078)	<b>.000</b>	–.512 (.101)	<b>.000</b>	–.238 (.081)	<b>.005</b>
Unemployment rate, 1998	.055 (.115)	.637	–.219 (.133)	.104	–.986 (.172)	<b>.000</b>	–.841 (.168)	<b>.000</b>
Index of minority diversity	<b>9.014</b> (3.921)	<b>.025</b>	–7.244 (4.529)	.116	<b>14.675</b> (5.880)	<b>.016</b>	7.508 (4.728)	.118
Index of white ethnic diversity	–.264 (.207)	.209	.077 (.240)	.748	–.169 (.311)	.589	–.071 (.250)	.777
S.E. of regression	3.170		3.663		4.755		3.823	
F statistic	6.340	.000	13.423	.000	33.175	.000	22.546	.000
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.27</b>		<b>.47</b>		<b>.69</b>		<b>.60</b>	
N	58		58		58		58	

Source: US Census Bureau, available: [ww.census.gov](http://ww.census.gov), and California Secretary of State, available [ww.ss.ca.gov/elections\\_elections.htm](http://ww.ss.ca.gov/elections_elections.htm). Unstandardized regression co-efficients shown, standard errors in parenthesis.

**Table 3.** Individual level data

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>California 1994 election</i>			<i>California 1996 election</i>		
	<i>Proposition 187 Illegal immigration</i>	<i>Proposition 186 Health care</i>	<i>Vote for Governor Wilson (R)</i>	<i>Proposition 209 Affirmative action</i>	<i>Proposition 215 Medical marijuana</i>	<i>Vote for President Clinton (D)</i>
<b>Democratic</b>	<b>-1.18* (.11)</b>	<b>1.11* (.12)</b>	<b>-2.77* (.12)</b>	<b>-1.36* (.10)</b>	<b>1.00* (.11)</b>	<b>2.65* (.12)</b>
Black	-.33 (.20)	.10 (.20)	-1.5 (.25)	-1.49* (.21)	.16 (.22)	1.44* (.25)
Latino	-1.32* (.20)	.21 (.19)	-1.28* (.20)	-.87* (.15)	-.17 (.16)	.61* (.17)
Asian	-.43 (.28)	.41 (.29)	-.90* (.29)	-.63* (.23)	-.88* (.25)	.19 (.25)
Education	-.36* (.06)	.21* (.06)	-.41* (.06)	-.16* (.05)	.17* (.05)	.10* (.05)
Personal income	.03 (.04)	-.22* (.05)	.11* (.05)	.14* (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.21* (.04)
Age/older	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.13* (.04)	.10* (.03)	-.19* (.03)	.001 (.04)
Male	.27* (.11)	.006 (.12)	.42* (.12)	.17 (.09)	.04 (.11)	-.16 (.11)
Personal finances worse	.13* (.04)	-.02 (.04)	.09* (.04)	.14* (.03)	-.07 (.03)	-.31* (.04)
Constant	1.32* (.31)	-1.31* (.32)	1.65* (.33)	.08 (.26)	.62* (.29)	.27 (.29)
Model Chi-square	263.173*	142.145*	993.731*	455.11*	153.68*	973.022*
-2 log likelihood	1917.76	1814.348	1866.403	2426.105	1952.984	2008.773
% cases correctly predicted	68.23	68.99	80.94	70.18	66.46	79.30
N	1577	1548	2067	2079	1580	2169

Data from voter News Service exit poll of California voters conducted after the 1994 and 1996 November elections. Coefficients are maximum likelihood estimates, standard errors in parentheses. \* significance at  $p < .01$  or less.

Empirical analysis presented in this paper suggests that in one place where use of direct democracy is quite advanced – California – parties are still relevant for voter decision-making.

In fact, there is growing evidence that party organizations are becoming major players in initiative campaigns, and the partisan impact on initiative voting is likely only to lead to further party involvement in the process of direct democracy. This is ironic, as the initiative process in particular was originally viewed by Populist and Progressive reformers as a tool by which to circumvent established political parties and party bosses. But the motivation for party officials to participate in ballot contests is clear: partisanship is a significant variable in ballot initiative elections, and parties are reaping electoral rewards for their involvement in ballot contests. As seen in California, party organizations use the initiative to increase turnout of their membership, split their opposition by supporting wedge issues and promote their ideology.

While our analysis focuses on partisanship and initiative voting in one state, California, previous research on the initiative process suggests that our findings are generalizable to other states. We find that political party affiliation is a prominent explanation for variations in the county level vote across diverse policy measures. Furthermore, political party affiliation is the best explanatory variable for individual voting decisions in initiative and candidate elections alike. Recent research finds that party affiliation is a primary explanation for the county level vote for a range of ballot initiatives in Washington (Grummel, 2000a, 2000b) and California (Gerber et al., 2000). Earlier studies demonstrate that political party registration is a prominent explanation for county level voting on Official English initiatives in California, Colorado and Florida (Hero, 1998) and individual level voting in California (Citrin et al., 1990). Party affiliation is a primary explanation for voter support for legislative term limits in California and Washington (Donovan and Snipp, 1994). Opposition by partisan political elites is significant in explaining the initial defeat of a legislative term limit initiative in Washington (Karp, 1998) and for the shifts in attitudes on anti-gay initiatives in California, Colorado and Idaho (Donovan and Bowler, 1997). Our findings are also bolstered by the recent research documenting the importance of voting cues in direct democracy elections (Lupia, 1992, 1994; Bowler and Donovan, 1998), as political parties too are assisting voters to make rational decisions with minimal information.

More broadly, our research raises important questions about the relationship between direct democracy politics and representative forms of government. As parties increase their involvement in the initiative process, and with partisanship as a significant predictor of voter preference on initiatives, the politics (if not the process) of direct democracy may be more like the legislative process than we currently acknowledge. As Chavez (1998) suggests in her study of Prop. 209, initiative politics and political parties appear to be becoming increasingly interdependent. A symbiotic

relationship between political parties and initiative sponsors (interest groups) may be emerging, as parties are using ballot measures to promote their policies, hurt their opposition and increase turnout for their candidates, and, in turn, ballot committees are relying on partisan support (particularly endorsements and financial and in-kind contributions) for their measures at the polls. It seems reasonable to expect that this relationship exists in other states and nations permitting direct democracy, which we leave for others to investigate.

### Notes

- 1 A primary weakness of using aggregate level data is that California counties are extremely unequal in size, ranging in population from 1118 residents in Alpine county to approximately 9.3 million in Los Angeles county, with a mean county population of 558,329 (1990). If party were more related to initiative voting in the less populated counties than Los Angeles and San Francisco, this could skew the results. The use of survey data, in addition to the aggregate data, mitigates against this problem.
- 2 Following Hero and Tolbert (1996), an index (Sullivan, 1973) of county minority diversity was created from 1990 census data on the percentage Latino, black, white and Asian in each of California's 58 counties. The index is a measure of a county's racial/ethnic population. The index was computed with the following formula:

$$\text{Minority diversity} = 1 - [(\text{proportion Latino})^2 + (\text{proportion black})^2 + (\text{proportion white})^2 + (\text{proportion Asian})^2].$$

The index of county white ethnic diversity was created by adding the percentage of Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian and Irish reported in the 1990 census. Ethnic affiliation is a self-reported category. There was significant variation in the index of white ethnic diversity across California counties.

- 3 We also examined county level voting on the 10 initiatives appearing on the 1994 California general election ballot. Party affiliation (percent registered Republicans) was a statistically significant predictor of variations in the county level vote for 8 of the 10 initiatives, even after controlling for unemployment rates and level of racial/ethnic diversity. Political party affiliation was associated with the county level vote for 80 percent of the initiatives on the 1994 California ballot.
- 4 While party affiliation reported in surveys is highly suggestive of actual partisanship, measurement error is always a possibility. Future research exploring the relationship between the strength of party affiliation and initiative voting could increase the validity of the results.
- 5 The survey included one question that we use to test whether economic conditions affected vote choice; the respondent was asked to rate his/her financial situation compared to one year ago. Those who responded 'poor' were coded 5, those responding 'the same' were coded 3 and those responding 'better' were coded 1. Dummy variables (0/1) were used to measure race/ethnicity of the respondent and gender. Income was measured by total family income and education by an ordinal scale or the highest degree received.



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Paper submitted 1 April 2000; accepted for publication 23 September 2000.