



# FROM AFFIRMATIVE ACTION TO GIG ECONOMY

RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN THE  
SUPPORT FOR CALIFORNIA  
PROPOSITIONS IN THE 2020 ELECTION

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In California, racial and geographic variation in voter preferences in the 2020 election debunked overly generalized claims about “the Asian American vote” or “the Latino vote.” Diverse voting patterns across regions in the state reflect the general diversity of California voters. Collectively, this shows that the politics of voters’ surrounding environments can—and do—influence Asian American and Latino voter preferences, making voter education and mobilization campaigns especially important for statewide contests.

In this report, we compare the level of support for statewide ballot measures across precincts with high densities of Asian, Black, Latino, and white voters in a sample of nine California counties. We analyze presidential vote choice and preferences on all 12 statewide ballot measures.

This report finds:

- 1. There was strong support for the Democratic presidential candidate, Joseph Biden, across counties and racial groups but greater variation on the 12 ballot measures by race and state region. In other words, the national contest shows strong consensus while preferences on policy issues in statewide contests reflect greater political diversity across the state.**
- 2. In this election, voters in high-density Asian American precincts demonstrated more similar preferences on the ballot measures as those in high-density white precincts. In contrast, voters in high-density Latino precincts exhibited a unique pattern of preferences on ballot measures, which often aligned with those of voters in high-density Black precincts.**
- 3. Voters in high-density Asian American and Latino precincts in Bay Area counties took more progressive positions on ballot propositions compared to those in Central and Southern California counties, suggesting that regional factors also play a role.**
- 4. Ballot measures related to criminal justice reform, affirmative action, and rent control were voted down in 2020. On these issues, we find distinct racial group differences demonstrating the challenges of generating widespread cross-racial support for ballot measures.**

## INTRODUCTION

In the 2020 election, California voters took to the ballot box not only the selection of their president and other political representatives, but also 12 different statewide propositions. These ballot measures covered a range of issues, some of which were more politically contentious than others. Widely hailed as a solid blue state, California was expected to vote strongly in favor of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris on the Democratic presidential ticket—and it did. But where did Californians stand on the specific policy questions posed by the ballot measures? In this report we focus on Asian American and Latino voters and ask: on which ballot measures did these two groups of voters hold strong opinions, and on which did each group split its vote? In the end, although Californians resoundingly supported the Biden–Harris presidential ticket, progressive statewide policy proposals lost after campaigns failed to generate the critical cross-racial support needed for passage. The lessons in this report call attention to the continued need for voter education and mobilization, particularly for Asian American and Latino voters in statewide contests.

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this report come from precinct-level vote returns that are reported by each California county's registrar of voters. Due to data limitations, we could not analyze every county in the state. Therefore, we identified a sample of nine counties which were selected to represent different regions across the state and, at the same time, had large enough Asian American and Latino populations to allow us to examine racial differences in voting patterns. We selected Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara counties from the Bay Area; Fresno and Sacramento counties from Central California; and Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties from Southern California.<sup>1</sup> We then merged demographic data from the 2014-18 American Community Survey to voter precinct maps for each county to identify what we define as “high-density” precincts for four demographic groups: Asian Americans, Latinos, whites, and when possible, Blacks.<sup>2</sup> Since racial diversity varies by county, we use different thresholds of the citizen voting age population to define a “high-density” precinct for Asian American, Latino, and Black voters. For high-density white precincts, the threshold is consistent across counties, at 70 percent. Details about the thresholds used in each county are provided in appendix Table A1.<sup>3</sup>

Given the consistency in the threshold for high-density white precincts, the most appropriate way of interpreting the results presented below is to use these precincts as a baseline for the share of support for a given initiative. Then, by looking at the vote share in high-density Asian American or Latino precincts (and when possible, high-density Black precincts), we can see how increasing the size of a racial or ethnic minority group in a precinct changes the level of voter support for that initiative. Therefore, this analysis reflects how **the racial and ethnic makeup of a precinct influences the political preferences among voters in that precinct**. This analysis does not tell us how specific types of individuals voted because voting is ultimately an anonymous process. Therefore, while this analysis allows us to draw important insights for how race matters in elections, we also suggest using caution when making inferences based on the results presented in this report.

We first conduct an analysis of vote choice for president. This analysis provides a baseline understanding for the partisan leanings found in our targeted nine counties when deciding national contests. We then turn to an analysis of voting on statewide ballot measures. Because there were so many propositions, we sorted them by topic to help ease interpretation of our analysis. There were six topics: 1) Housing/Property; 2) Criminal Justice; 3) Affirmative Action; 4) Business; 5) Voting Rights; 6) Health Care.

## FINDINGS

### PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

To begin our analysis, we analyze the vote for president. Table 1 presents the vote share for Biden across the nine counties we analyzed, with results reported for each of the four types of high-density precincts. When comparing across the three regions of the state, we find that the vote share for Biden was highest in the Bay Area. Moreover, there was less variation in presidential vote choice across high-density white and non-white precincts in the Bay Area compared to Central and Southern California. In the Bay Area counties, Biden won strong support in high-density white precincts and the Democratic vote share did not vary much compared to high-density Asian American, Latino, and Black precincts. In contrast, counties in Central and Southern California show a different pattern. In all the counties we analyzed in these two regions—with the exception of Los Angeles County—high-density white precincts were split in their support for Biden and for Donald Trump. In contrast, we find that in Sacramento, Fresno, Los Angeles, and San Diego counties, increasing the size of Asian American, Latino, or Black voters in a precinct results in a higher vote share for Biden. However, in Orange County, high-density Latino precincts showed strong support for Biden whereas high-density Asian American precincts leaned towards Trump.

This analysis of presidential vote shows much stronger support for Democrats in the Bay Area relative to Central and Southern California. Moreover, this analysis suggests that in the Bay Area, race played less of a role in partisan preferences for president. In contrast, there was greater racial variation in Central and Southern California, where voters in high-density white precincts split their support between the Democratic and Republican ticket while those in high-density Latino and Black precincts strongly voted Democratic. Voters in high-density Asian American precincts lean Democratic with the exception of Orange County.

**Table 1. Vote Share for Biden in Four Types of High-density Precincts across Nine California Counties**

	% BIDEN VOTE SHARE			
	HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:			
	Asian American	Latino	White	Black
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>				
Alameda	74	79	83	91
San Francisco	77	89	90	87
San Mateo	77	83	79	--
Santa Clara	68	73	75	--
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>				
Fresno	56	59	52	70
Sacramento	69	73	53	78
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>				
Los Angeles	64	77	69	89
Orange	49	74	47	--
San Diego	61	70	55	72

Source: Authors' analysis of precinct-level data provided by county election authorities.

## STATEWIDE BALLOT MEASURES ON HOUSING AND PROPERTY ISSUES (PROPOSITIONS 15, 19 AND 21)

Housing is a core policy issue often decided on California's statewide ballot. With the rising costs of living and the explosive growth of property values across the state, attention to this policy area will likely increase over time. In 2020, two ballot measures—Propositions 15 and 19—both attempted to change the longstanding protections that maintain the low property taxes established by Proposition 13 in 1978. The third 2020 ballot measure included in this category is Proposition 21, which addressed rent control policies.

Below is a summary of each ballot measure:

- **Proposition 15** (Tax on Commercial and Industrial Properties for Education and Local Government Funding) proposed a constitutional amendment that would allow the state to increase taxes on large commercial and industrial properties, except those zoned as commercial agriculture, by taxing them based on their market value rather than their purchase price. Proposition 15 was **defeated** with about 52 percent of the vote in opposition (8,885,052 votes).
- **Proposition 19** (Property Tax Transfers, Exemptions, and Revenue for Wildfire Agencies and Counties Amendment) proposed a constitutional amendment changing the tax rate determination for different types of property transfers. This set of changes included a) allowing eligible homeowners to transfer their tax assessments anywhere within the state and to a more expensive home with an upward adjustment; b) increasing from one to three the number of times that individuals who are over the age of 55, severely disabled, or whose homes were destroyed by wildfire or disaster can transfer their tax assessments to a replacement residence of any value, anywhere in the state; c) requiring inherited homes that are not used as principal residences to be reassessed at market value when being transferred; and d) allocating additional state revenues and savings resulting from the ballot measure to wildfire protection services and local governments for taxation-related changes. Proposition 19 was **approved** with 51.1 percent of the vote (8,545,393 votes).
- **Proposition 21** (Local Rent Control Initiative) proposed a state statute that would allow local governments to enact rent control on housing first occupied more than 15 years ago, apart from landlords who owned up to two homes with distinct titles or subdivided interests. Proposition 21 was **defeated** with 59.9 percent of the vote (10,094,634 votes).

For Proposition 15, we find that the majority of voters in high-density Black and Latino precincts supported the measure across the three regions, while support in high-density Asian and white precincts varied considerably across regions. In the Bay Area, voters in all four types of high-density precincts voted in favor of the measure although the level of support was higher in high-density Latino and Black precincts relative to high-density Asian American and white precincts. In Central and Southern California counties, high-density white precincts provided the lowest level of support for the measure, with the exception of Los Angeles County, where voters in high-density white precincts supported the measure. Similarly, voters in high-density Asian American precincts also opposed the measure, but not at the same level as voters in high-density white precincts. In contrast, voters in high-density Latino and Black precincts in Central and Southern California counties generally voted in favor of the measure, with the exception of those in high-density Latino precincts in Fresno County and in high-density Black precincts in San Diego County.

## From Affirmative Action to Gig Economy

For Proposition 19, we also find that voters in high-density Latino and Black precincts were more likely to support the measure relative to those in high-density Asian American and white precincts. Although support in Bay Area counties was relatively higher than in Central and Southern California counties, the difference in support for this measure across regions is smaller compared to the regional differences found in other ballot measures. In addition, voter support was more evenly split in high-density white precincts across all counties.

The results for Proposition 21 show clear racial variation on the issue of rent control. We find that voters in high-density Latino precincts and high-density Black precincts were most supportive across the state, with an average vote share in support of about 53 percent and 52 percent respectively. In contrast, an average of 41 percent of high-density Asian American precincts and 36 percent of high-density white precincts voted in favor of the measure. There were large regional differences in support for Proposition 21 with Bay Area voters being more supportive of the measure compared to those in Central and Southern California. But even in the Bay Area, we consistently find stronger support in high-density Latino and Black precincts compared to high-density Asian American and white precincts.

**Table 2. Vote Share for Housing Propositions (Props. 15, 19, and 21) in Four Types of High-density Precincts across Nine California Counties**

	% YES ON PROPOSITION 15				% YES ON PROPOSITION 19				% YES ON PROPOSITION 21			
	HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:				HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:				HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:			
	Asian American	Latino	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	White	Black
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>												
Alameda	56	63	68	71	55	60	55	65	39	57	44	61
San Francisco	62	78	72	74	54	67	60	69	46	68	49	56
San Mateo	61	68	56	--	59	62	54	--	49	62	35	--
Santa Clara	55	61	51	--	55	60	51	--	44	54	32	--
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>												
Fresno	43	45	40	50	50	51	48	58	32	33	30	37
Sacramento	53	54	39	59	57	56	46	67	43	45	29	50
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>												
Los Angeles	47	58	51	62	45	56	44	63	39	55	46	58
Orange	49	57	31	--	49	56	42	--	39	52	25	--
San Diego	48	54	38	49	56	61	49	61	41	50	31	46

Source: Authors' analysis of precinct-level data provided by county election authorities.



## STATEWIDE BALLOT MEASURES ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE ISSUES (PROPOSITIONS 20 AND 25)

With the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, criminal justice policy and policing has received increased national attention. Like housing, the policy issue of criminal justice often comes up for vote by ballot measure. While the two 2020 propositions reflected two different positions on criminal justice policy, both were defeated by voters.

Below is a summary of each ballot measure:

- **Proposition 20** (Criminal Sentencing, Parole, and DNA Collection Initiative) proposed a state statute that would make multiple changes to rules on parole: a) adding certain crimes to a list of violent felonies for which early parole is restricted; b) recategorizing certain types of theft and fraud to be charged as misdemeanors or felonies; and c) requiring DNA collection for certain misdemeanors. Proposition 20 was **defeated** with 61.7 percent opposing (10,293,563 votes).
- **Proposition 25** (Replace Cash Bail with Risk Assessments Referendum) proposed a veto referendum to uphold Senate Bill 10 which would have replaced cash bail with risk assessments for detained suspects awaiting their trials. Proposition 25 was **defeated** with 56.4 percent opposing (9,356,096 votes).

Our analysis of vote share on Proposition 20 across nine counties indicates clear regional differences with precincts in Central California most likely to support the measure in comparison to precincts in Southern California and the Bay Area. In the Bay Area, voters in high-density white and Black precincts were not very supportive of the measure. In Alameda, San Francisco, and San Mateo counties, high-density white precinct support was lower than that of high-density Asian American or Latino precincts. The racial variation is not as clear in other regions, although in Los Angeles County support for the measure was strongest in high-density Asian American precincts.

For Proposition 25, we again find greater regional rather than racial variation. We find the highest levels of support in the Bay Area and the lowest levels in Central California, with Southern California in between. Overall, we find a higher share of support among high-density Latino and Black precincts compared to high-density Asian American and white precincts. However, these differences in support were not large.

Table 3. Vote Share for Criminal Justice Propositions (Props. 20 and 25) in Four Types of High-density Precincts across Nine California Counties

	% YES ON PROPOSITION 20				% YES ON PROPOSITION 25			
	HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:				HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:			
	Asian American	Latino	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	White	Black
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>								
Alameda	40	32	24	24	50	54	62	60
San Francisco	39	20	23	28	48	52	62	62
San Mateo	39	30	28	--	52	58	57	--
Santa Clara	41	38	33	--	50	52	53	--
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>								
Fresno	49	48	51	45	35	35	33	38
Sacramento	39	33	43	31	46	49	38	53
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>								
Los Angeles	43	35	33	24	41	46	46	53
Orange	43	36	44	--	41	47	35	--
San Diego	38	37	40	33	45	45	40	45

Source: Authors' analysis of precinct-level data provided by county election authorities.

### STATEWIDE BALLOT MEASURE ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION (PROPOSITION 16)

In 1996, Californians passed Proposition 209, which “prohibited the government and public institutions from discriminating against or granting preferential treatment to individuals or groups on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in public employment, education, or contracting.”<sup>4</sup> On the 2020 ballot, Proposition 16 sought to reverse Proposition 209 by reinstating affirmative action in the public sector.

Below is a summary of the ballot measure:

- **Proposition 16** (Repeal Proposition 209 Affirmative Action Amendment) proposed a constitutional amendment that would repeal Proposition 209, which was passed in 1996, and allow government and public institutions to consider factors such as race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in their decision-making processes for public employment, education, or contracting. Proposition 16 was **defeated** with 57.2 percent of votes in opposition (9,655,024 votes).

We find clear racial variation in support of Proposition 16. On average, the vote support for Proposition 16 was 54 percent in high-density Latino precincts and 64 percent in high-density Black precincts in the counties that we analyzed. In contrast, voters in high-density Asian American and white precincts were more likely to oppose the measure, averaging 54 percent and 56 percent against it, respectively. We find variation among the three regions, with the Bay Area having the highest levels of support for Proposition 16 compared to counties in Central and Southern California.

The variation in support for Proposition 16 between regions speaks to the important role political geography continues to play in state politics. There exists a general pattern of racial variation across all regions and we find that voters in high-density Asian American and white precincts more likely oppose Proposition 16, while voters in high-density Latino and Black precincts show higher rates of support. At the same time, we find that voters in both high-density Asian American and Latino precincts in the Bay Area counties were more likely to support Proposition 16 compared to those in high-density Asian American and Latino precincts in Southern California counties. Thus, on the issue of affirmative action, the political culture where Asian American and Latino voters live appears to impact how they vote on policy issues.

The lower support for Proposition 16 found in high-density Asian American and Latino precincts in Southern California raises questions about the kind of political organizing that occurred in the region. Our analysis suggests that voters in high-density Asian American precincts in Southern California were more likely to oppose Proposition 16. But even in high-density Latino precincts in Southern California, we find that voters were split on the issue, with the exception of those in Los Angeles County. We conducted additional analyses and found that as the density of Asian Americans increased, so did the level of opposition to Proposition 16. This means that voters in a precinct that was 40 percent Asian American were more supportive of Proposition 16 compared to those in a precinct that was over 70 percent Asian American. In contrast, increasing the density of Latinos in a precinct does not result in a major change in the rate of support for Proposition 16. Voters in a precinct that was 40 percent Latino supported Proposition 16 at a similar level as those in a precinct that was over 70 percent Latino.

**Table 4. Vote Share for Affirmative Action Proposition (Prop. 16) in Four Types of High-density Precincts across Nine California Counties**

	% YES ON PROPOSITION 16			
	HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:			
	Asian American	Latino	White	Black
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>				
Alameda	45	59	61	77
San Francisco	55	75	66	74
San Mateo	56	63	50	--
Santa Clara	46	55	44	--
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>				
Fresno	36	36	33	46
Sacramento	51	49	31	59
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>				
Los Angeles	40	55	48	72
Orange	40	49	28	--
San Diego	44	50	34	57

Source: Authors' analysis of precinct-level data provided by county election authorities.

### STATEWIDE BALLOT MEASURES ON BUSINESS (PROPOSITIONS 22 AND 24)

Two measures on the 2020 ballot addressed issues related to business. These measures addressed concerns regarding labor and privacy law posed by recent technological advancements and increased use of the internet.

Below is a summary of each ballot measure:

- **Proposition 22** (App-Based Drivers as Contractors and Labor Policies Initiative) proposed a state statute which would define app-based transportation drivers as independent contractors and would adopt labor and wage policies specific to app-based drivers and companies. Proposition 22 was **approved** with 58.6 percent of voters supporting it (9,957,858 votes).
- **Proposition 24** (Consumer Personal Information Law and Agency Initiative) proposed a state statute that would expand state consumer data privacy laws by allowing consumers to direct businesses to not share personal information. It also proposed removing the time period granted to businesses to address privacy violations before being penalized and creating the Privacy Protection Agency to enforce these data privacy laws. Proposition 24 was **approved** with 56.2 percent of the vote (9,384,125 votes).

Proposition 22 was one of the most well-funded ballot measure campaigns in California history, with most of that money spent to mobilize support for the measure.<sup>5</sup> The proposition was bankrolled by large companies such as Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash, and faced opposition from major labor organizations including the Service Employee International Union, United Food and Commercial Workers, and Teamsters.<sup>6</sup>

The unprecedented levels of campaign expenditures by the side promoting Proposition 22 likely heavily influenced voting patterns on this ballot measure. Our analysis of vote shares across nine counties indicates some variation by racial group density, however this variation is minimal. As a general pattern, voters in high-density Asian American precincts were more supportive of the measure compared to voters in high-density Latino precincts. There appears to be more regional, rather than racial, variation in support for this measure; voters in Central and Southern California supported the measure at higher rates than those in the Bay Area. Interestingly, we found the weakest support for Proposition 22 in high-density Latino precincts in San Francisco County.

On Proposition 24 we find little variation when comparing between high-density Asian American and Latino precincts. However, in half of the counties we analyzed, voters in high-density white precincts generally opposed Proposition 24. We also find less regional variation in support of Proposition 24 compared to voting patterns on other ballot measures. The one distinctive county appears to be San Francisco County in which voters in high-density Latino and white precincts opposed the proposition, while voters in high-density Asian American and Black precincts supported it.

**Table 5. Vote Share for Business Propositions (Props. 22 and 24) in Four Types of High-density Precincts across Nine California Counties**

	% YES ON PROPOSITION 22				% YES ON PROPOSITION 24			
	HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:				HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:			
	Asian American	Latino	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	White	Black
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>								
Alameda	54	49	40	45	63	67	49	66
San Francisco	44	28	43	46	55	42	46	63
San Mateo	50	47	50	--	66	65	53	--
Santa Clara	55	53	57	--	62	66	52	--
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>								
Fresno	63	62	66	61	57	54	52	60
Sacramento	60	55	66	55	65	61	48	69
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>								
Los Angeles	59	54	54	55	59	63	56	73
Orange	64	56	71	--	60	65	48	--
San Diego	61	60	67	62	61	67	52	69

Source: Authors' analysis of precinct-level data provided by county election authorities.

**STATEWIDE BALLOT MEASURES ON VOTING RIGHTS (PROPOSITIONS 17 AND 18)**

Two ballot measures in 2020 proposed to expand voting rights for two different groups: people on parole and 17-year-olds in primary elections if they will be eligible to vote in the general election.

Below is a summary of each ballot measure:

- **Proposition 17** (Voting Rights Restoration for Persons on Parole Amendment) proposed to adopt a constitutional amendment to allow individuals on parole for felony convictions to vote. Proposition 17 was **approved** with 58.6 percent of the vote (9,985,065 votes).
- **Proposition 18** (Primary Voting for 17-Year-Olds Amendment) proposed a constitutional amendment to allow 17-year-olds who would turn 18 by the time of the next general election to vote in the primary and special elections. Proposition 18 was **defeated** with about 56 percent of voters opposing (9,577,238 votes).

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While voters were overall supportive of Proposition 17, we find clear racial variation in the level of support. Vote support for Proposition 17 was, on average, the lowest in high-density Asian American precincts and strongest in high-density Black precincts. In terms of regional variation, support for the measure was the highest in the Bay Area and lowest in Central California. Interestingly, in Central California, increasing the size of the Asian American, Latino or Black population in a precinct resulted in higher levels of support for the measure. Overall, we find the lowest levels of support for the measure in high-density white precincts in Orange County. These patterns suggest that voters of color were more likely to support Proposition 17 than white voters.

Though Proposition 18 did not pass, we find voting patterns similar to those found for Proposition 17, with high-density Asian American precincts and white precincts having the lowest rate of support overall. Voters in precincts with high Latino density overall supported Proposition 18 but the levels of support appear stronger in high-density Black precincts. As with Proposition 17, we find that this measure received a higher level of support in the Bay Area.

**Table 6. Vote Share for Voting Rights Propositions (Props. 17 and 18) in Four Types of High-density Precincts across Nine California Counties**

	% YES ON PROPOSITION 17				% YES ON PROPOSITION 18			
	HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:				HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:			
	Asian American	Latino	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	White	Black
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>								
Alameda	62	72	77	89	49	59	62	75
San Francisco	66	86	84	86	53	75	67	71
San Mateo	65	78	69	--	52	60	52	--
Santa Clara	61	68	65	--	46	52	47	--
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>								
Fresno	50	51	47	63	36	36	32	46
Sacramento	64	68	49	58	49	52	35	59
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>								
Los Angeles	52	69	65	86	41	55	52	69
Orange	51	65	44	--	37	50	30	--
San Diego	59	64	52	71	43	48	37	52

Source: Authors' analysis of precinct-level data provided by county election authorities.

## STATEWIDE BALLOT MEASURES ON HEALTH CARE ISSUES (PROPOSITIONS 14 AND 23)

Two ballot measures addressed funding and management related to health care.

Below is a summary of each ballot measure:

- **Proposition 14** (Stem Cell Research Institute Bond Initiative) proposed a state statute which would authorize \$5.5 billion in state general obligation bonds to support the state's stem cell research institute. Proposition 14 was **approved** with about 51.1 percent of the vote (8,588,156 votes).
- **Proposition 23** (Dialysis Clinic Requirements Initiative) proposed a state statute requiring dialysis clinics to a) have an on-site physician during patient treatments, b) report data on dialysis-related infections, c) obtain consent from the state health department before closing a clinic, and d) not discriminate against patients based on payment source. Proposition 23 was **defeated** with 63.4 percent of voters in opposition (10,683,606 votes).

On Proposition 14 we find that support was on average the lowest in high-density white precincts across the nine counties, while the vote share in support was strongest in high-density Latino precincts. We found different patterns of racial variation across counties and across regions. In San Francisco County, vote support varied slightly across high-density Asian American, Latino and white precincts, but in Alameda, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, support was stronger in high-density Latino precincts compared to high-density Asian American and white precincts. In Fresno County we find little racial variation but in Sacramento County there was strong support for the measure in high-density Asian American, Latino, and Black precincts compared to white precincts. In Los Angeles and Orange counties, there was stronger support for the measure in high-density Latino and black precincts compared to that in high-density Asian American and white precincts, but in San Diego County, there was strong support in high-density Asian American, Latino, and Black precincts.

For Proposition 23, we find low levels of support across all three regions and little variation across high-density Asian American, Latino, white, and Black precincts. One distinctive finding is that there appears to be support for the measure in high-density Latino precincts in San Francisco County.

## From Affirmative Action to Gig Economy

**Table 7. Vote Share for Health Care Propositions (Props. 14 and 23) in Four Types of High-density Precincts across Nine California Counties**

	% YES ON PROPOSITION 14				% YES ON PROPOSITION 23			
	HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:				HIGH-DENSITY PRECINCT TYPE:			
	Asian American	Latino	White	Black	Asian American	Latino	White	Black
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>								
Alameda	57	64	58	70	41	48	39	52
San Francisco	53	51	56	66	46	58	42	49
San Mateo	61	64	55	--	44	47	32	--
Santa Clara	55	62	52	--	43	48	30	--
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>								
Fresno	48	49	46	58	36	36	33	41
Sacramento	59	59	45	65	42	40	27	45
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>								
Los Angeles	48	60	49	67	38	47	36	48
Orange	49	60	40	--	42	47	26	--
San Diego	55	61	48	61	40	46	30	41

Source: Authors' analysis of precinct-level data provided by county election authorities.



## CONCLUSION

This analysis of voting on statewide propositions on the 2020 California ballot demonstrates important variation by race but also variation across regions in the state. Looking forward to future elections, we offer the following insights:

- **Clear variation exists by region. Voters in high-density Asian American and Latino precincts in the Bay Area appeared to hold more progressive positions on the ballot measure issues relative to those in Central and Southern California. The politics of a region play an influential role in Asian American and Latino political preferences.**
- **Voters of color can influence election outcomes, especially when white voters are split in their preferences. The two measures relating to property taxes (Propositions 15 and 19) were decided by a slim margin, likely due to a split vote among white voters and an outcome decided by voters of color.**
- **Coalition voting between two racial groups can also decide the election outcome. For this election, voters in high-density Asian American precincts demonstrated similar preferences as those in high-density white precincts. This suggests that when one racial minority group votes with white voters, they affect the level of competitiveness in an election. Further, when looking at the issue of affirmative action, split support found in Latino precincts along with opposition in Asian American precincts influenced the outcome on Proposition 16.**
- **Campaigns and other political messaging strongly mediate the role race plays in the vote. Well-funded measures such as Yes on Proposition 22 on the gig economy enabled significant advertising across the state, which leveled out differences across racial groups.**

Overall, this analysis offers evidence that Asian American and Latino preferences can make a difference in California politics. At the same time, we find that well-funded campaigns can generate cross-racial support across the state and that there is distinct variation in the voting patterns of high-density Asian American and Latino precincts between the Bay Area and Central and Southern California. This suggests that there is not a homogenous “Asian American vote” or “Latino vote” consistently found across the state. Collectively, this analysis shows that the preferences of Asian American and Latino voters can be influenced by external factors found in their surrounding environments. Voter education and mobilization campaigns, as well as the distinct political climates found across the state, will continue to play an influential role in the preferences of Asian American and Latino voters in statewide contests.

**APPENDIX**

**Table A1: Characteristics of high-density Asian American, Latino, white, and Black precincts**

	ASIAN AMERICAN			LATINO		
	Threshold	Precinct n	Total ballots cast	Threshold	Precinct n	Total ballots cast
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>						
Alameda	50	165	241,617	60	6	10,938
San Francisco	50	110	83,386	40	5	3,574
San Mateo	50	65	38,720	60	7	1,846
Santa Clara	50	62	114,510	40	21	24,468
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>						
Fresno	30	17	8,205	60	73	47,587
Sacramento	40	8	8,517	40	3	4,039
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>						
Los Angeles	50	132	109,941	60	698	5,855,354
Orange	50	77	76,447	60	62	63,293
San Diego	40	9	34,689	60	38	76,828

	WHITE			BLACK		
	Threshold	Precinct n	Total ballots cast	Threshold	Precinct n	Total ballots cast
<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>						
Alameda	70	111	298,782	40	72	131,898
San Francisco	70	86	65,255	40	7	3,788
San Mateo	70	230	92,516	--	--	--
Santa Clara	70	31	41,289	--	--	--
<b>CENTRAL CA COUNTIES</b>						
Fresno	70	20	9,913	30	6	2,595
Sacramento	70	193	234,762	30	7	3,624
<b>SOUTHERN CA COUNTIES</b>						
Los Angeles	70	348	451,919	40	227	198,884
Orange	70	447	410,997	--	--	--
San Diego	70	410	518,979	30	5	10,026

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> We obtained county-specific 2020 general election data from the following sites: Alameda County, “Election Information,” accessed December 2, 2020, [available online](#); Fresno County, “Election Results,” accessed December 3, 2020, [available online](#); Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, “Election Results,” accessed December 1, 2020, [available online](#); Orange County, “Official Election Results,” accessed December 2, 2020, [available online](#); Sacramento County, “Official 2020 General Election,” accessed December 3, 2020, [available online](#); San Diego County Registrar of Voters, “Official Final Election Results,” accessed December 3, 2020, [available online](#); City and County of San Francisco Department of Elections, “November 3, 2020 Election Results – Detailed Report,” accessed December 2, 2020, [available online](#); Office of Mark Church, Assessor-County-Clerk-Recorder & Chief Elections Officer for the County of San Mateo, “November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election – Official Results,” access December 4, 2020, [available online](#); Santa Clara County, “November 3, 2020 Presidential General Election – Vote Centers Reporting,” accessed December 2, 2020, [available online](#).

<sup>2</sup> We obtained county-specific 2020 general election precinct boundaries maps from the following sites: Alameda County Data Sharing Initiative, “Consolidated Precincts – November 3, 2020 General Election,” [available online](#); Statewide Database, “2020 Primary Election Geographic Data - Fresno County,” [available online](#); Los Angeles Geo Hub, “Precincts,” [available online](#); Orange County’s 2020 general election precinct boundaries map was obtained from the GIS Supervisor of the Orange County Registrar of Voters; Sacramento County Open Data, “Consolidated Precincts 2020/11 General,” [available online](#); County of San Diego, “San Diego Geographic Information Source,” [available online](#); City and County of San Francisco, “Maps,” [available online](#); County of San Mateo County Information Services, “GIS Data Download,” [available online](#); Statewide Database, “2020 Primary Election Geographic Data - Santa Clara County,” [available online](#).

<sup>3</sup> Our target thresholds to determine “high density” were the following: 50 percent or greater for Asian American; 60 percent or greater for Latino; and 40 percent or greater for Black. However, in some counties the size of the Asian American, Latino, or Black populations were not large enough resulting in too few or zero precincts reaching this population threshold. In those cases, we lowered the thresholds in increments of 10 percent. In every case, we used an absolute minimum threshold of 30 percent to determine high density.

<sup>4</sup> Ballotpedia, “California Proposition 209, Affirmative Action Initiative (1996),” [available online](#).

<sup>5</sup> California Secretary of State, Dr. Shirley N. Weber, “Proposition 22 – Changes Employment Classification Rules for App-Based Transportation and Delivery Drivers. Initiative Statute,” [available online](#).

<sup>6</sup> George Skelton, “It’s no wonder hundreds of millions have been spent on Prop 22. A lot is at stake,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 16, 2020, [available online](#).

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