

Affirmative Action as a Wedge Issue: Prop 209 and The 1996 Presidential Election

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The Republican candidate for President in 1996, Bob Dole, publicly endorsed and campaigned for Proposition 209, the measure that sought to end all state and local government gender and racial based preferences. The purpose of the strategy was to contrast the Republican candidate's opposition to race and gender preferences with the Democratic candidates "mend it, not end it" position in order to win over swing voters and shore up support among the conservative faithful. This paper analyzes the "wedge issue" strategy from both a geopolitical and survey based perspective relying on the GIS mapping of the Statewide Database and a preelection survey that over sampled minorities in different types of neighborhood contexts. We find that although white voters overwhelmingly supported Prop 209, including independent and moderate Democrats, the issue failed to swing their vote from Clinton to Dole because it was less important than other more traditional Presidential issues such as the economy. Nonwhite and the loyal Republicans were more concerned about Prop 209 than others, but their Presidential votes were not in question.

The significance of this ultimately futile strategy is not that race suddenly mattered in 1996-- indeed, there is ample evidence that race has been a very important determinant of American politics since the 1960s (Sundquist, 1983; 382-394). The realignment of southern states out of the Democratic and into the Republican ranks, the most significant political change in the postwar period, was partly caused by southern whites rejecting the "liberal" racial policies of the Democratic party (Carmines and Stimson, 1989). Moreover, party cleavages throughout the US tend to coincide with sharp racial and ethnic divisions. A majority of African-Americans and Latinos perennially identify with and vote for the Democratic party while the Republican vote is predominantly white (Gurin et al., 1989; de la Garza et al., 1992; Tate, 1993; McClain and Stewart, 1995). Rather, Dole's Proposition 209 endorsement was a departure in the sense that it revived a tactic of direct appeal to white resentment that had been considered off limits in American politics since the George Wallace Presidential campaigns.

The purpose of this piece is to examine the evolution, logic and impact of Dole's Proposition 209 tactic in order to illustrate the intermingling of race, immigration and politics in contemporary US politics. California is the most racially and ethnically complex state in the US. Using the mapping resources of the California Statewide Database, we will illustrate the racial and political divisions of California politics and highlight the critical "swing" areas of the state that Dole had hoped to capture with his anti-affirmative action appeal. We will then examine the effectiveness of Dole's-California Prop 209 strategy using a statewide survey of 1498 respondents completed on the eve of the November 1996 election. This survey uniquely over-sampled in racial and ethnic minority neighborhoods in order to provide the most complete picture to date of how the Proposition 209 vote divided California voters along racial and ethnic lines. Our models suggest that the Prop 209 had a statistically significant impact on cross-over voting, but that the net effects were not clearly beneficial for the Dole candidacy in California.

I. Race as a "Wedge" Issue.

It is important to begin with the distinction between using racial divisions as a political strategy on the one hand and as a political tactic on the other. In the parlance of American political consultants, a political strategy consists of three elements: identifying the characteristics of the

voters who can be persuaded, figuring out which issues matter the most to them and crafting a message that favorably contrasts the candidate's positions on those issues with the opponent's (see discussion in Cain, 1991). For instance, a Republican pollster might discover that older white males living in suburban and rural areas are more likely to harbor resentments towards immigrant groups and nonwhite minorities. If so, a winning strategy would try to establish a politically favorable contrast - for instance, by having the Republican candidate take a tougher position on the treatment of immigrants than the Democratic opponent. This gives swing voters a reason to prefer the Republican candidate on an issue that matters to them. The tactical problem is how to implement a racial strategy. Prior to 1996, the usual tactic of mainstream Republican candidates was to take a hard-line position on issues that indirectly related to race such - as tougher sentences for criminals or the reimposition of the death penalty. In a famous television ad in the 1988 Presidential race between the Republican candidate George Bush and the Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis, the Republicans alluded to race by blaming Dukakis for the early prison release of a violent black man, Willie Horton, who subsequently committed a brutal murder. The image of the black criminal in the ad was sufficient to tap the racial fears of key "swing" Democrats and Independents (Miller and Shanks, 1996).

But the fear of alienating moderately conservative swing voters by going too far caused Presidential candidates to avoid making any direct racial attacks and taking strong positions against remedial programs designed to help disadvantaged groups such as women and minorities. This reluctance was very much evident in the early stages of the Dole campaign. Under pressure from conservatives within his party, Dole had quietly endorsed Proposition 209, the so-called California Civil Rights Initiative, but refused to make it a focus of his campaign, even in California where early polls indicated that Proposition 209 would pass by a wide margin. As late as the end of September, Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Jack Kemp had told the press: "We are not going to campaign on a wedge issue. We have endorsed CCRI (i.e. Proposition 209), but as a transition to a new era... We are not going to let this issue tear up California" (Sipchen/Peterson, LA Times, 9/28).

But by the end of October, the Dole campaign had changed tactics. During a four-day trip to California, Dole began to attack President Clinton for "failing to control the nation's borders" and to speak out forcefully on behalf of Proposition 209. Asked to account for the shifting emphasis on immigration and affirmative actions, it was reported that Dole has said - candidly: "They're wedge issues" (Trounstein/Ostrom, San Jose Mercury, 10/28). The next day Bob Dole delivered "his first extensive endorsement" of Proposition 209, "acknowledging that he had changed his mind about the merits of affirmative action programs" and suggesting that President Clinton "would undermine the initiative if reelected." At the same time, the Dole campaign put a lot of money into TV and radio ads in support of Proposition 209.

The term "wedge issue" in American politics refers to issues used by candidates of one party to attract voters who usually support the other party--in effect, driving a wedge between the opposition and its normal supporters. The target groups for the Republicans in 1996 were white male Democrats and Independents. Criticizing the President's immigration policies and supporting Proposition 209 might have been enough to drive California swing voters into the Republican camp. But, it was a risky strategy in the sense that by openly and directly taking on the issues of immigration and affirmative action, the Republicans risked alienating moderate Republicans, potential supporters in the Latino and Asian communities, and women. On the other hand, by October, it had become clear that Dole would have to do something drastic if he had any hope of narrowing the double digit lead that Clinton held over him in the polls. California, with its 54 Electoral College Votes, was a critical state for Dole to win. To understand more about the

interplay between wedge issues like affirmative action and Presidential fortunes, it is necessary to appreciate the geopolitics of California elections more fully.

II. Geopolitics, Race and Strategy

It is commonplace to say that the strategy of a national Presidential campaign is geopolitical. The ultimate winner is chosen by the electoral college and not by popular vote. An important part of a Presidential candidate's strategy is deciding which states he expects to win, which he expects to lose and which are "tossups. The "tossup" states are the ones that receive that most funds, the most visits by the candidate, and the most attention from the press. California has traditionally been a "tossup" state with high opportunity costs; that is to say, given California's size and diversity, it is a big gamble to try to win California when there are other smaller, less expensive states to go after instead. At several points in the 1996 campaign, Dole and his advisors had to decide whether it was better to sink a lot of money and effort into capturing California's 54 electoral college vote (with 270 votes needed to win), or to diversify the risk over a number of medium sized states in the east and Midwest such as Ohio (21 electoral college votes), Michigan (18 electoral college votes), or Pennsylvania (23 electoral college votes). Throughout the summer and early Fall, there was much speculation that Dole would pull out of California, as George Bush had done in 1992, because the lead that Clinton had over Dole did not seem to make the gamble worthwhile. Finally, in October, after a California poll showed a narrowing of Clinton's lead, Dole decided to invest in California and to develop a "wedge issue" tactic.

In addition to national geopolitical considerations, a Presidential campaign in California has a statewide geopolitical dimension. With 19 million potentially eligible voters of very diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and a several separate major media markets, California presents a formidable strategic challenge of its own. It is important to figure out which areas and markets represent the best investments in the sense of getting the most votes per dollar spent. Normally, this is determined by a process of several steps. First, campaigns routinely conduct focus groups and baseline polls to distinguish the swing voters from the loyalists and to identify their issue concerns. Then, they consult past election returns to identify the neighborhoods and sections of the state with the most swing voters where the efficient campaign will target their TV and radio spots, political mailings, voter mobilization and grassroots efforts to contact voters. By focusing campaign resources where they are most likely to be effective, the campaign operates as efficiently as it can, given the limitations of time and money.

A peculiar feature of California politics added another dimension to the quest for political efficiency in 1996. In 1991, the re-drawing of state and Congressional boundaries was done by a panel of three judges when the Governor and legislature failed to come to a compromise. Typically, there is little or no coordination of district boundaries for various offices. A Congressional district might contain one or many parts of state legislative districts. However, the court in 1991 deliberately sought to rationalize the overlap of districts so that each State Senate seat consisted of two Assembly districts, and that there was considerable correspondence between the Congressional and State Senate lines. In effect, this stacked the districts in such a way that there was an incentive to coordinate the campaign efforts at the state legislative, Congressional and Presidential level. From an outsider's perspective, it may seem astounding that such basic cooperation is usually missing in California elections, but in a typical year, in addition to a separate state Presidential campaign organization, there are 52 independent Congressional and 100 state legislative campaign organizations for each party--all of them trying to mobilize and persuade voters virtually by themselves. Organizational chaos;-in essence, is the norm in California elections.

The stacking of district lines created "hot spots" throughout the state--i.e. areas where there were close races at the Presidential, Congressional and state legislative level simultaneously. The Democrats, in particular, took advantage of this feature by concentrating their money and effort efficiently in those areas. The Republicans also had swing areas in mind when they devised their "wedge issue" approach. However, the Republicans imposed their strategy only at the top and failed to coordinate a consistent message at all levels of the ticket. As a consequence, as we shall see shortly, the wedge was less effective than it might have been otherwise.

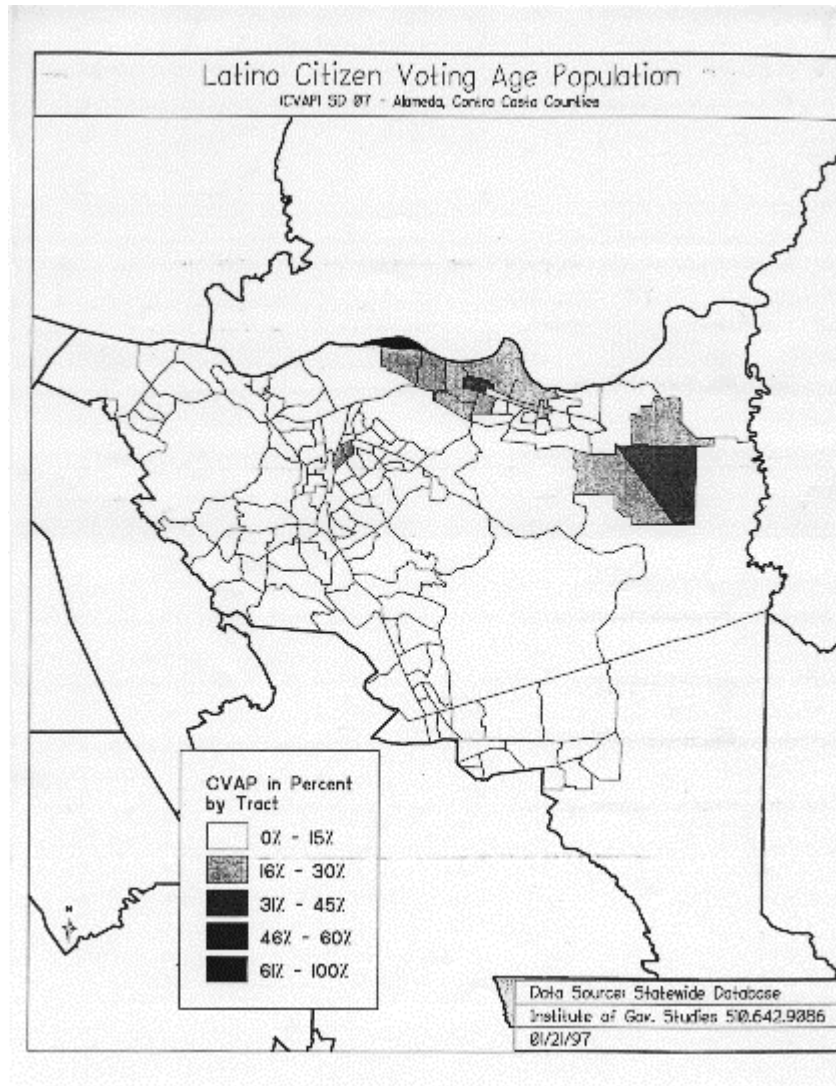
III. Race and Party in Four California Counties

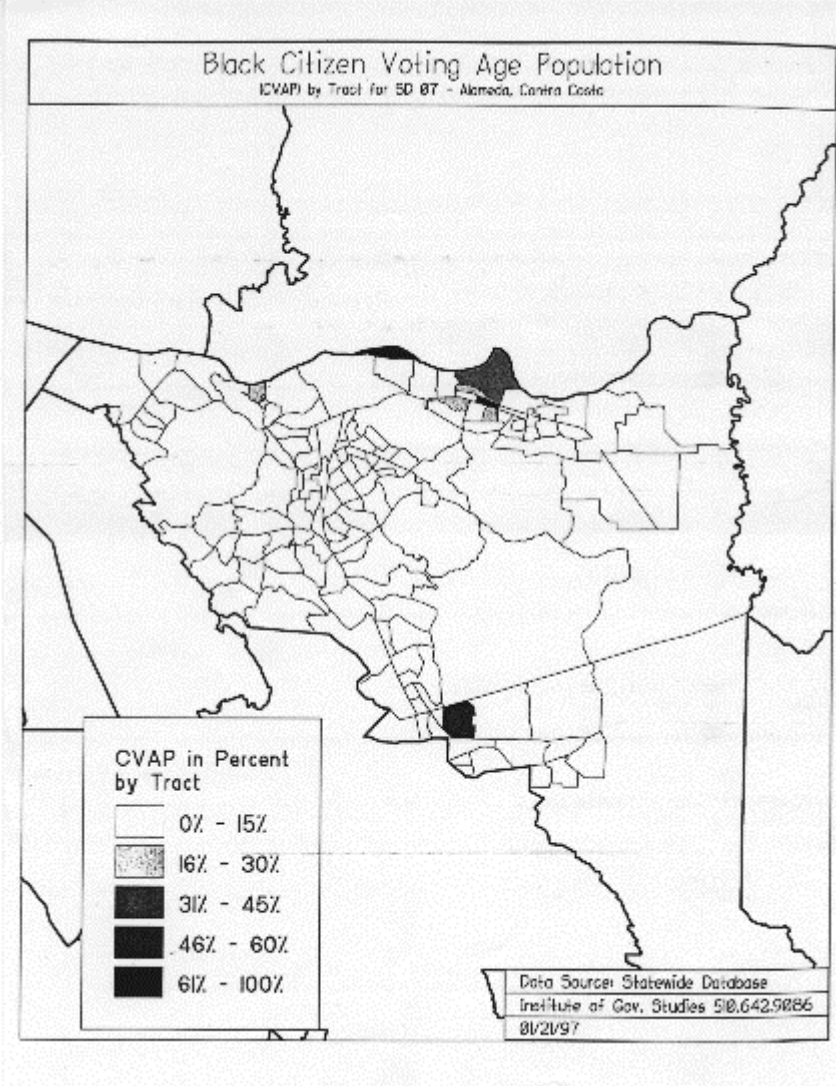
A visual way to understand the interplay of race, partisanship and the identification of critical swing areas is to map demographic and political distributions in a few specific regions of the state. A few facts about California might help readers appreciate the maps more. California is divided for administrative purposes into 58 counties that vary greatly in geographic and demographic size. For instance, San Bernardino with 12.9 million acres is the largest county geographically and San Francisco with 58,000 acres is the smallest (California Almanac, p. 59), and, in terms of population, Los Angeles, with 9.3 million inhabitants is the largest, and Alpine with a mere 1,170 is the smallest. For our mapping analysis, we have chosen four of the so-called "hotspot" areas in different parts of the state. As we said before, these are defined as areas in which there were competitive races in 1996 at the Presidential,-Congressional and state legislative levels simultaneously. The four include two from the northern half of the state and two from the southern. The two from the northern half are: a cluster centered on the California State Senate District 7 located in the Bay area counties of Contra Costa and Alameda, and another centered on the State Senate District 15 in the central coastal area that includes parts of Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito and Santa Clara counties. The two clusters from the southern part of the state are defined by the 27th State Senate District (SD) in the southern section of LA county and by the 39th SD in San Diego county near the Mexican border.

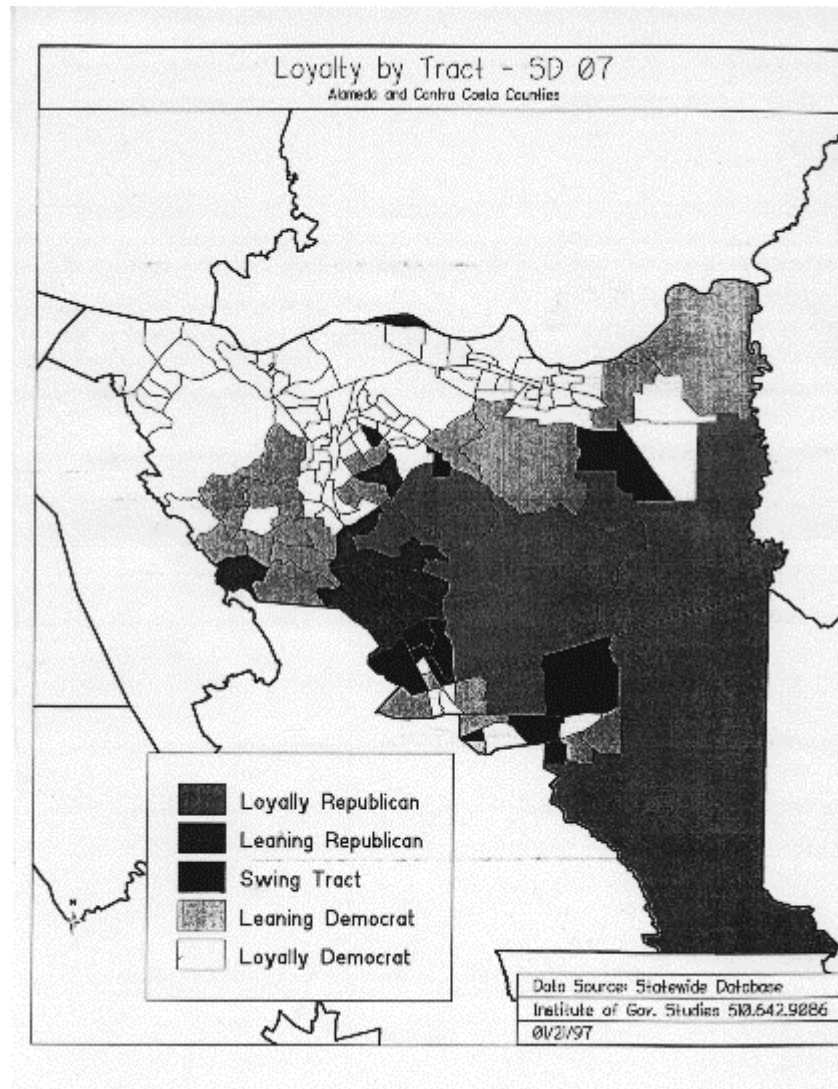
For each cluster, we produce two map types that together demonstrate the interplay of racial and political cleavages. The first map type displays the area's ethnic and racial composition. As a consequence of immigration, California's population is highly diverse and rapidly changing. According to the 1990 census, California's population makeup is 57% White, 25% Latino and 7% Black and 9% Asian. Currently at 32 million residents, the state is projected by some to grow to over 60 million by the year 2040 (California Department of Finance, Population Research Unit, Report 93-P-1,1993), and soon, California will be the only majority nonwhite state on the mainland US. However, the translation of demographic size into political strength is not a simple one in US politics. There is a large and politically important discrepancy between the ethnic and racial composition of the population and the electorate. Exit polls suggest that the California electorate in the 1996 Presidential election was 79% white, 10% Latino, 6% black and 4% Asian. This huge gap is caused by a number of factors including high rates of non-citizenship among the Latinos and Asians, low rates of education and home ownership among Latinos and blacks, a disproportionately young Latino population with many children who are not yet old enough to vote and a cultural reluctance among immigrants to give up their former citizenship (Uhlener, Cain and Kiewiet, 1989). Hence, when viewing these maps, one should bear in mind that the minority areas tend to have smaller numbers of voters than the white areas.

The second sort of map classifies areas by their propensity to vote for the Democratic or Republican ticket. Prior to 1996, there were six major statewide races in California, including two Gubernatorial (1990 and 1994), one Presidential (1992) and three US senate (1992, 1994). A very simple measure of their comparative loyalty takes the sum of the number of times each precinct area voted for the Democratic or Republican candidate. Thus, if a given precinct cast more votes

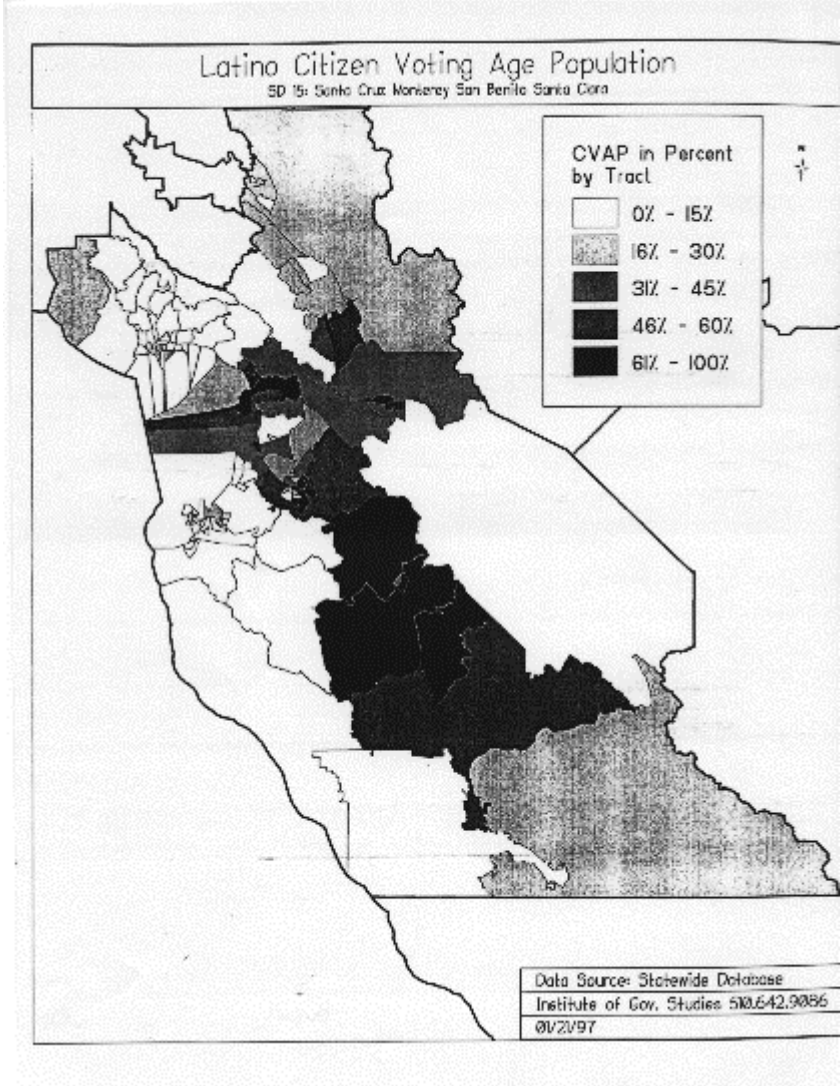
for the Democratic over the Republican candidate in five instances and the Republican over the Democratic candidate once, it would receive a score of five. By our calculations, thirty-two percent of all the precincts in the entire state preferred the Democratic candidate in all six races, and twenty-seven percent preferred the Republicans in all instances. That means that forty-one percent of the precincts swung to the other party's candidate at least once and a quarter did so at least twice. Seven percent voted half of the time for the candidate of one party and half for the other. By comparing the first with the second map, the reader can infer the racial and ethnic composition of the loyal (i.e. areas that consistently voted for the candidates of one party) and swing areas (i.e. areas that vacillated back and forth between the two major parties).

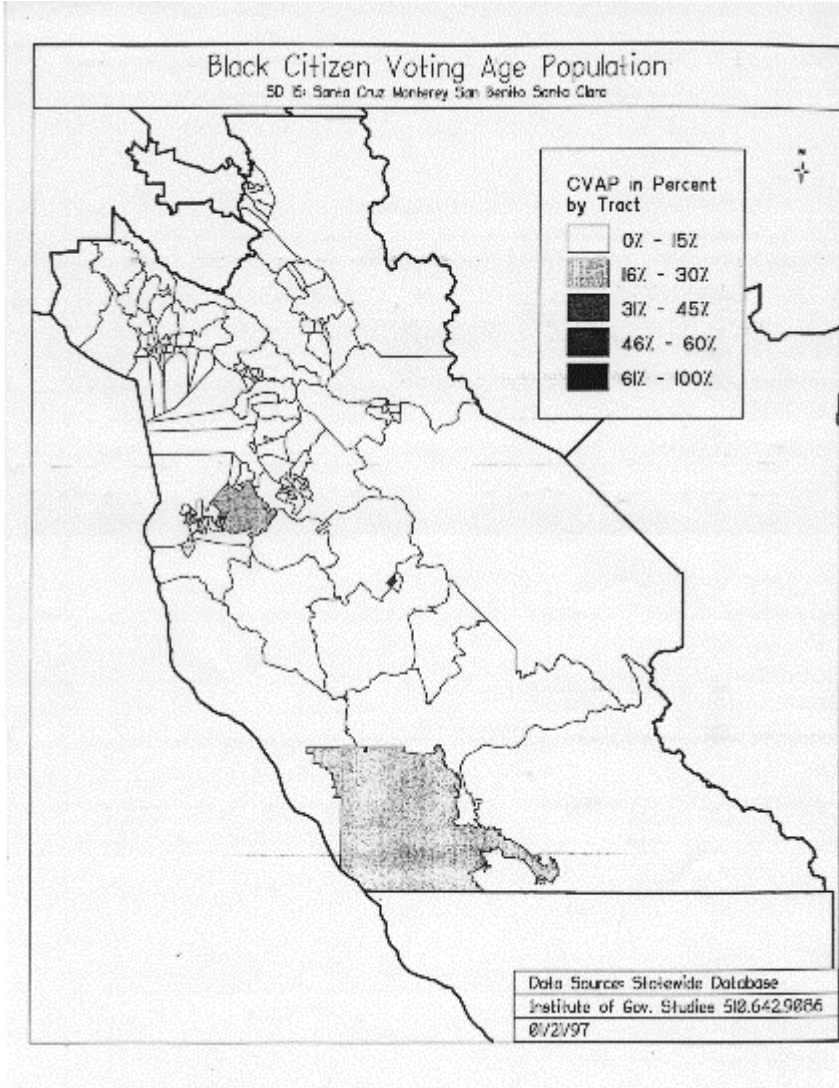


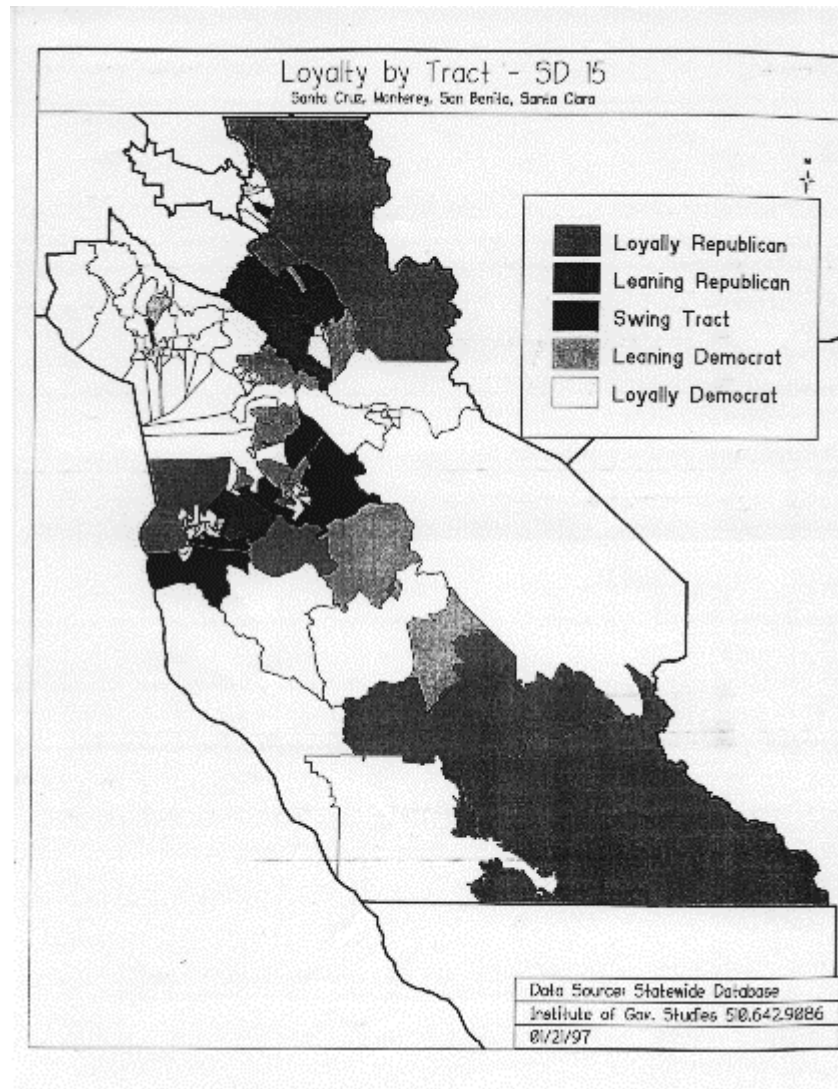




The first of our critical-contested areas is the Contra Costa and Alameda area defined by State Senate District 7. This seat contains two marginal Assembly districts, the 11th and the 15th, and a marginal Congressional district, the 10th, which attracted a great deal of national publicity. Three of these races ended up in virtual ties, with the outcome in doubt for days as election officials counted and recounted the ballots. Both Presidential candidates visited the area, and there was a great deal of money invested in TV and radio buys. The area itself is predominantly white. There is a concentration of Latinos in the northern and eastern portions of the district (i.e. Pittsburg, Antioch and Brentwood), and scattered pockets of blacks in Pittsburg to the north, Pinole to the west and Dublin to the south. As the loyalty map shows, the most Democratic areas are in the northern part of the district from Pinole to west to Pittsburg and Mtioch to the east. The most Republican areas are in predominantly white, affluent southern portions of the district. The swing areas are also in predominantly white suburban neighborhoods, especially in the center and southwestern of the district. The large numbers of swing voter tracts in the district clearly demonstrates why this area had so many close races at all levels.

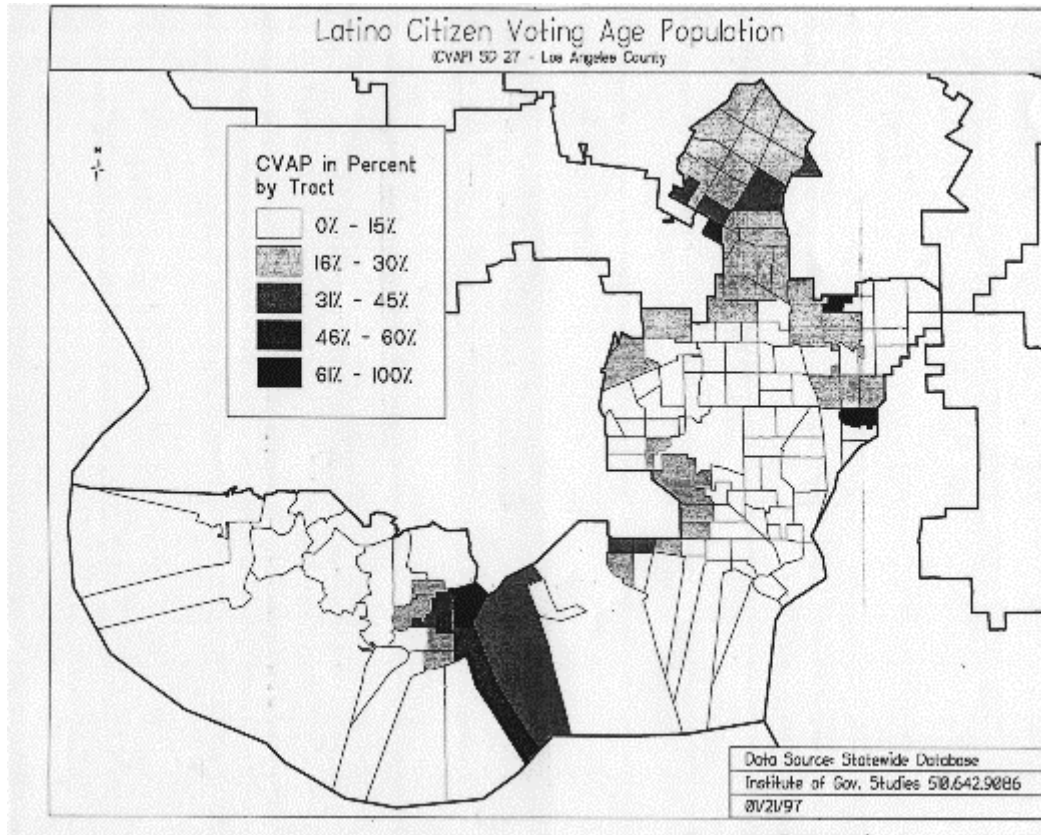


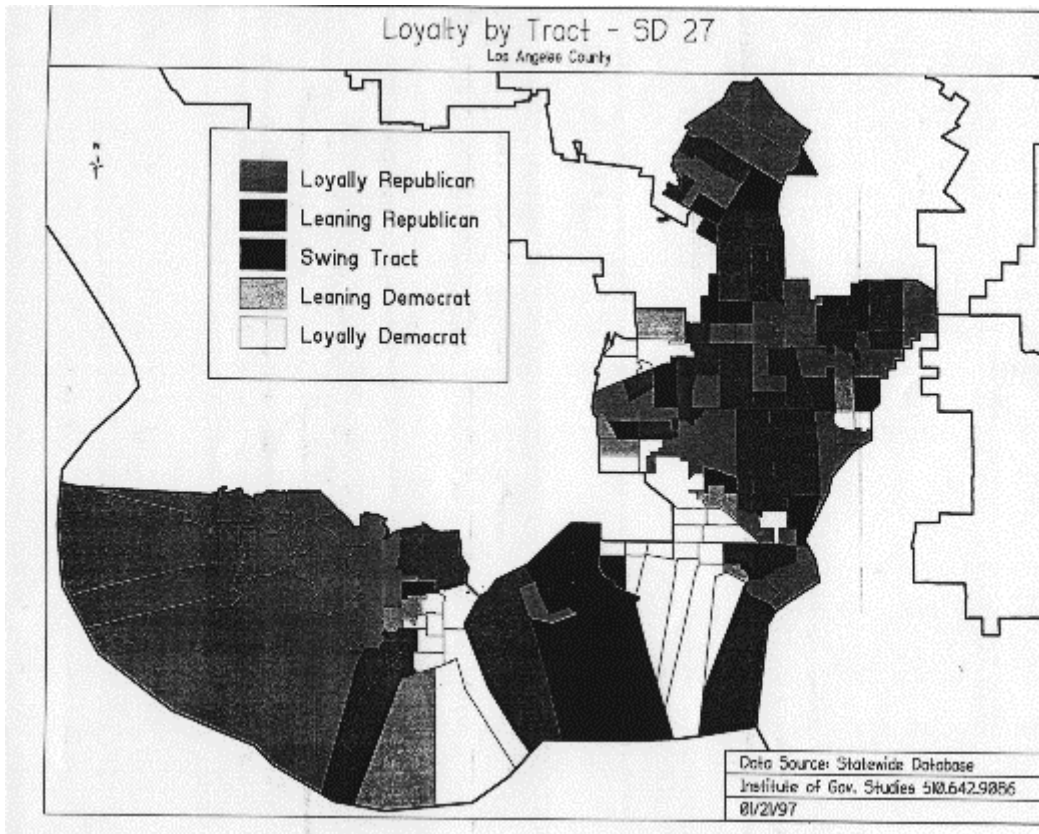
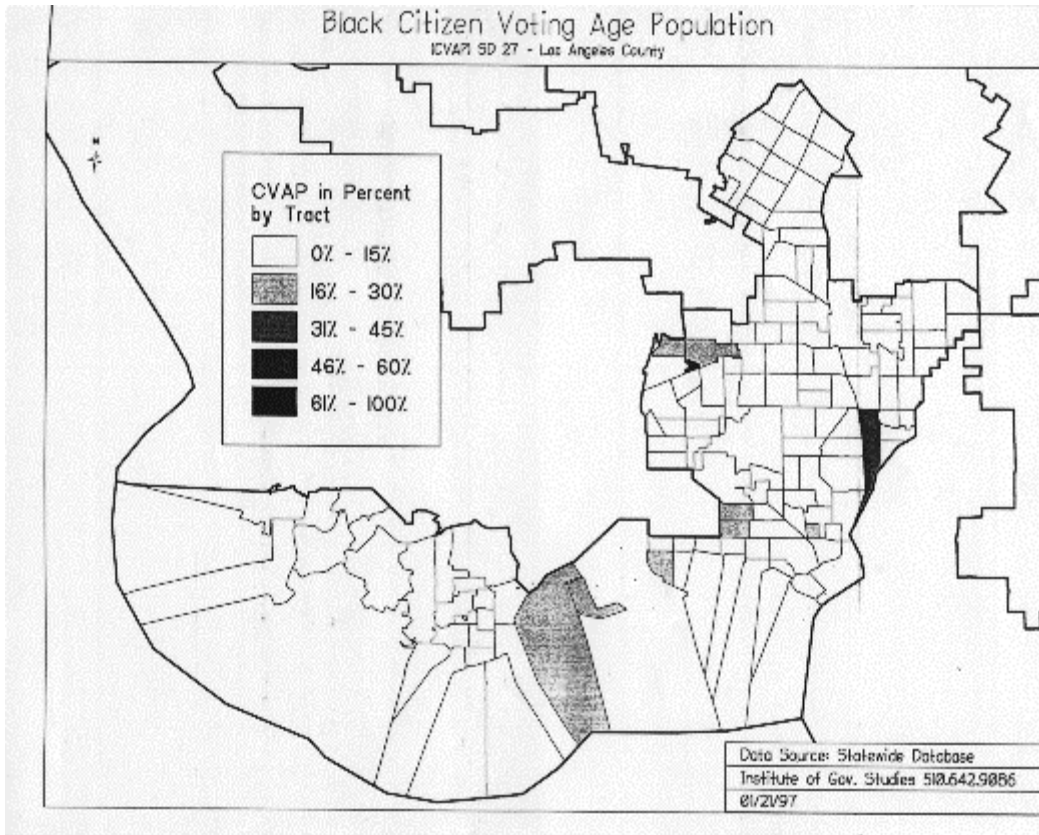




Since the late 1980's, California's coastal areas have been quite competitive. In 1996, the congressional race in this region was safely Democratic, but all three state legislative races were competitive, and Dole needed to do well here if he was to have a chance of winning in California. Two major reasons for this area's political moderation are that environmental issues tend to matter to voters on the coast (thereby uniting Democrats and Republicans - against very conservative candidates), and also that the coastal Republicans are more secular than their inland counterparts and hence less influenced by the religious right. There are a few small concentrations of blacks (e.g. near Salinas in the district's center and King city in the south), but the district is primarily Latino and white. The central section of the district is an important agricultural region called the Salinas Valley that attracts many Latino farm workers. The predominantly white areas run along the coast from Scotts Valley in the north to Carmel in the south, as well as the San Benito and Santa Clara county portions to the east. With the exception of a few highly affluent areas around Carmel Valley and Monterey, most of the liberal, pro-environmental, coastal regions have voted solidly Democratic in the nineties. The Republican areas are predominantly white, but many of the swing areas, especially in the Salinas Valley portion, contain mixtures of Latinos and whites, unlike the pattern we saw earlier in Contra Costa.

Given that Latinos generally support the Democratic party in California by a two to one margin, the marginality of these areas may seem surprising. However, the reasons for this may be, first, that the white agribusiness vote in the same areas is fairly conservative, thus serving to offset the more liberal Latino vote in these areas, and second, that the large discrepancy between the Latino share of the population and its share of the electorate among farm workers serves to dilute Latino influence.



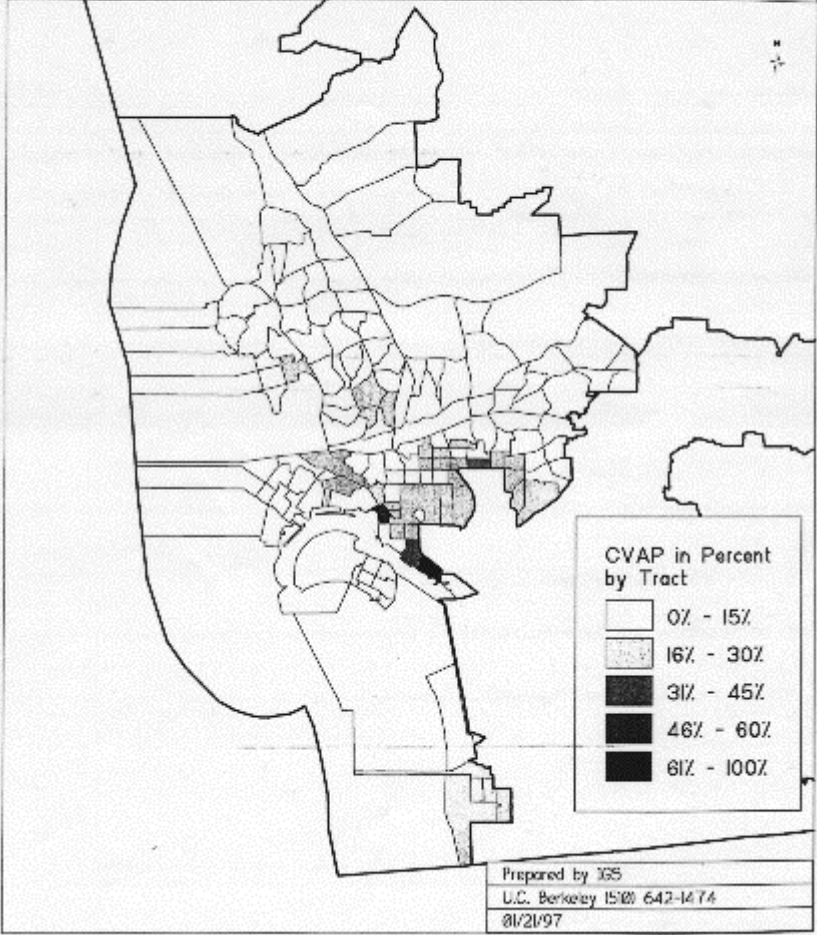


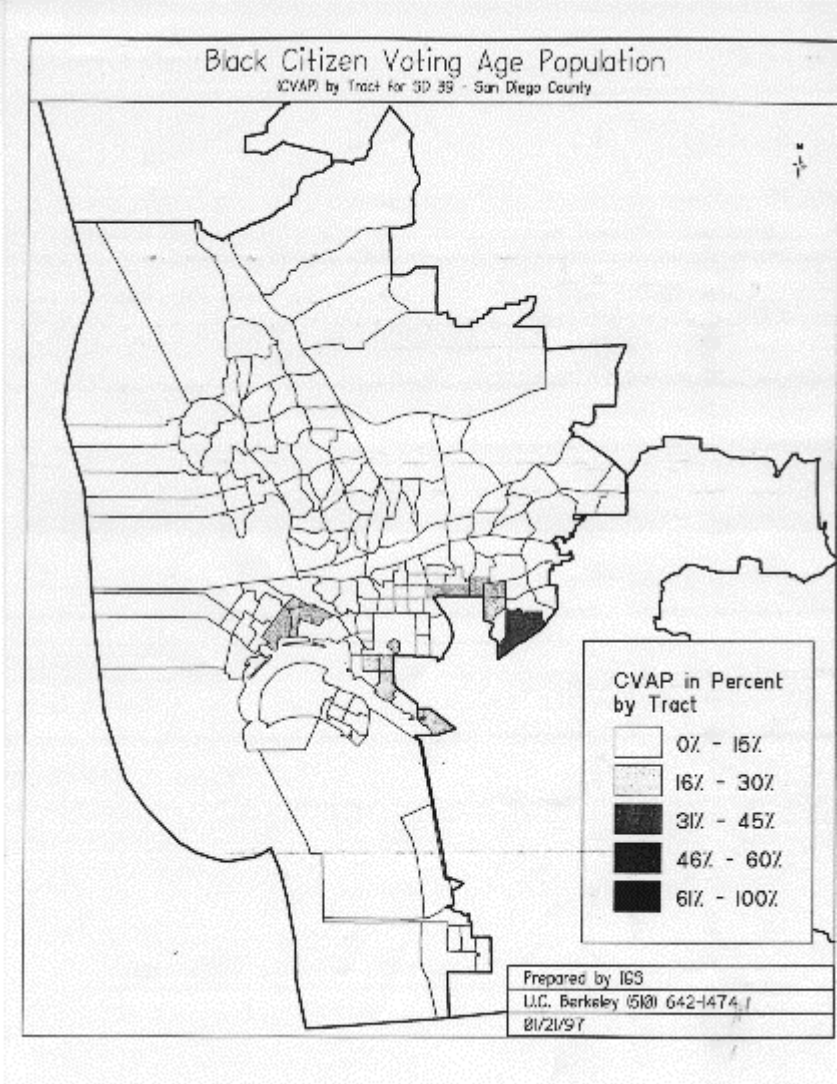
Los Angeles county, with a population of 9,352,200, is California's largest and politically most important county. It is also the most racially diverse county in the state with a 38% Latino; 10% black and 10% Asian population. The inner core of LA city contains the largest share of black and Latino voters, and given their high loyalty to the Democratic party, the outcome in those areas is never in question at any level in the November elections. But there were two highly competitive suburban areas in LA county during the 1996 election. One was a northern section of the county centered on the cities of Pasadena, Glendale and Burbank, and the other a southern portion ranging from Palos Verdes to Long Beach, Bellflower and Downey. This area includes Senate District 27, Assembly districts 54 and 56, and Congressional district 36, one of the most closely watched Congressional districts in the country.

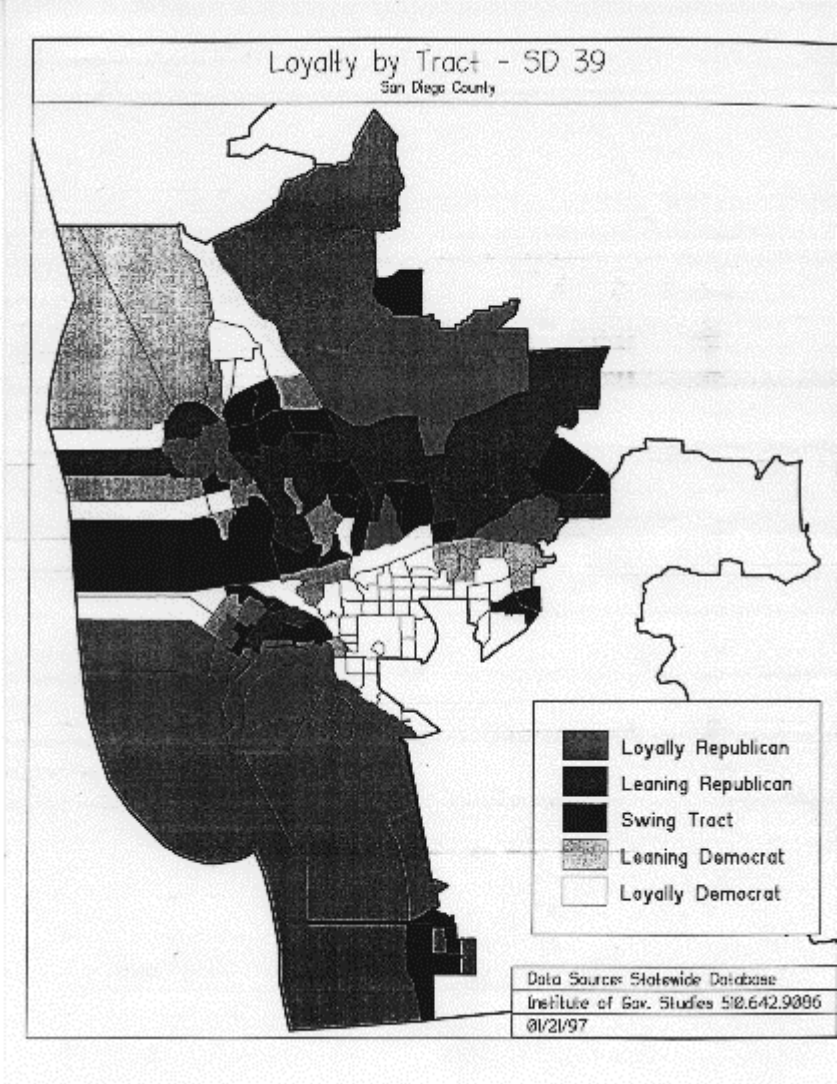
The greatest concentrations of black and Latino population are in the San Pedro and LA Harbor areas in the southern portion of the district, the west side of Long Beach City and the communities of Bellflower, Lakewood and Downey to the north. These are also the areas of highest Democratic loyalty, as we might expect. The affluent, predominantly white communities of Palos Verdes, Rolling Hills, and Rancho Palos Verdes at the western end of the seat have consistently voted Republican in the nineties. Most of the swing areas coincide with the less affluent, majority white areas of Long Beach and the northern communities. Given the history of racial turmoil in LA county and the dramatic impact that immigration has had on the whole area, there was reason to believe that if a wedge issue strategy was going to work anywhere, it would work here.

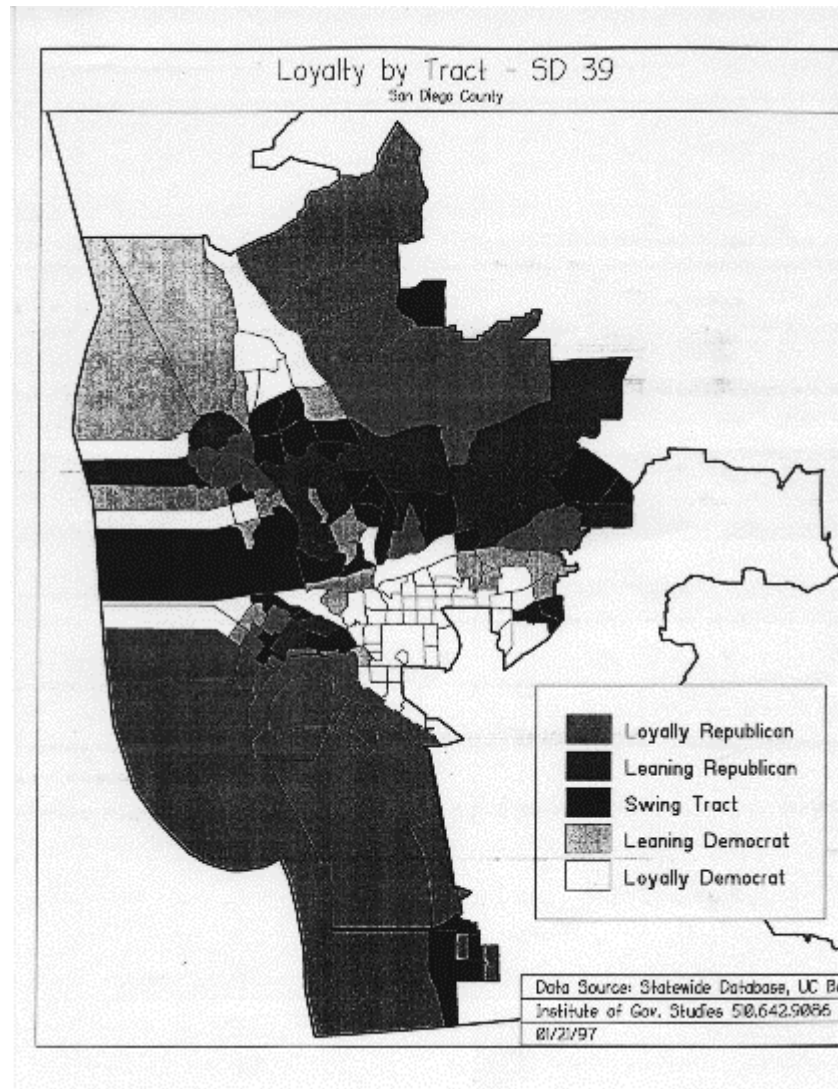
Latino Citizen Voting Age Population

ICVAP by Tract for SD 39 - San Diego County









The last of our hotspot areas is in San Diego county. Like LA, San Diego is a large and racially diverse county. Because of its proximity to Mexico, it has been heavily affected by undocumented immigration during the last decade, and therefore, sentiments on immigration and race here are quite strong. Like LA, the heaviest concentrations of Latinos and blacks are found in the downtown areas of San Diego city while the suburbs are predominantly white. Also, as we have seen in the other parts of the state, the most loyally Democratic areas correspond to the densest minority population census tracts whereas the swing and loyal Republican areas are majority white. The largest cluster of swing tracts can be found in the La Jolla/University of California area. This part of San Diego has a tradition of electing independent candidates and not voting along traditional party lines. Democrats, for instance, have been able to win in districts in which Republicans have a decided advantage in registrations in San Diego, but nowhere else in the state.

In sum, a perusal of four critical areas of California shows that in general: 1. nonwhite areas have consistently voted for the Democratic party; 2. loyal Republican areas and swing areas are typically majority white; 3. And thus, a racial strategy aimed at white voters in competitive areas could have reaped rewards at the Presidential, congressional and state legislative levels in 1996.

IV. The Effect of the Wedge Issue Strategy.

How effective was the Dole campaign's wedge issue strategy in California? In order to answer this question, we turn to a survey designed and administered during the week prior to November 4. This study of 1498 registered California voters was uniquely designed to over-sample minority respondents and to collect information about the ethnic and racial composition of the neighborhoods they live in. The logic behind over-sampling racial and ethnic minorities is that a truly random survey of California voters will typically contain too few minority respondents to allow generalizations about them with statistical confidence. By purposely interviewing more of them than a random sample would dictate (i.e. over-sampling), we are able to look more closely at the behavior and attitudes of California's black, Latino and Asian voters. This is particularly relevant in 1996, as we shall demonstrate shortly, because both the Presidential and Prop 209 contests were strongly polarized along racial and ethnic lines.

The other important feature of this study was its attention to neighborhood context. As our maps illustrated, the racial mixture in California is highly localized. In many portions of the state, whites live in virtually all-white neighborhoods (e.g. the rural mountainous counties, or affluent white suburbs in southern California). In certain urban areas, such as Los Angeles, Oakland and San Diego, there are densely settled and varying mixtures of different racial and ethnic groups. We identified and sampled in nine of the most frequent configurations. Hence, we can distinguish between blacks who live in majority black areas from Blacks in non-majority blacks areas, Latinos in majority Latino areas from Latinos in non-majority Latino areas, etc. (footnote all the categories). If political attitudes, including those having to do with the 1996 Presidential race and the Proposition 209 vote, are at least partially determined by the racial and ethnic context that one resides in, it should be measurable with our study design.

The first piece of evidence that we have on whether Prop 209 had an impact on the California Presidential race comes from a question that asked voters directly whether they would change their vote for President based on whether a candidate had endorsed or opposed Proposition 209. Altogether only 18% of the respondents said that they would, 74% indicated that they would not, and 8% said that they did not know. Looking at the breakdown by racial grouping, white voters, ironically, were the least likely to base their vote on Proposition 209 (i.e. 12%). Blacks, by comparison, were the most likely to say that it would affect their vote (i.e. 23%), and they overwhelmingly opposed Proposition 209 by a 4 to 1 margin. In other words, instead of being more important to the white voters the Republicans hoped to win over, Proposition 209 mattered more to minority voters in their thinking about the Presidential vote.

Table 1 breaks down their responses further by race and context. It shows some small but interesting variations across different racial contexts. For instance, whites in majority nonwhite areas were more inclined than whites in majority white areas to say that a candidate's position on Prop 209 would affect their vote choice. Asians and blacks living in majority minority areas were also more inclined than their counterparts to say that Prop 209 would affect their vote. Latinos and Asians living in majority white area were the least likely to say so. This suggests an additional problem for the wedge issue strategy: not only were whites less likely to say that it would affect their Presidential vote, but whites in white areas, which are the swing suburban and rural areas of California, were the least likely of all groups to say that it would affect their vote.

Finally, we can look at this question from a slightly different perspective by controlling for party and race/ethnicity simultaneously (see Table 2). For the Republicans, the aim of the strategy was to pull Democrats and Independents over to their candidate while preventing defections from

their own ranks . Hence, the critical cross-over voting categories are white-Democrats and Independents (i.e. DCU). -Once again, however, we see that Prop 209 was less important to the swing voters in their thinking about the Presidency than to the various nonwhite voters. Asian decline-to-state voters, another albeit smaller swing voter category, also indicated a lower level of Prop 209 influence.

Hence, we have three indications that Prop 209 might run into problems as a "wedge issue." First, it seems to have figured into the voter calculus of nonwhites more than whites. Second, it was more important in nonwhite areas than in the targeted majority white neighborhoods. And third, even the critical subcategories of white voters--i.e. white Democrats and independents--indicated a level of potential influence that was less than for other voter subcategories.

Another, more conventional way to look at this same issue is to look at the cross tabulation of Prop 209 vote and Presidential choice controlling for party registration. If Prop 209 proved to be a successful wedge issue, then we might expect that registered Democrats who intended to vote for Prop 209 would be more likely to cross-over and vote for Dole. As Table 3 shows, there is some evidence of this in the sense that Dole got only 3% of the registered Democrats who voted against Prop 209 and 11% of those who voted for it. That is the good news for Dole. The bad news is that among registered Republicans, Clinton got 18% of those who were pro-209 and 42% of those who were anti-209. And among independents, Dole got 12% of the pro-209 voters and 3% of the anti-209 vote. In short, the data are consistent with the possibility that Prop 209 may have been a net loser for Dole rather than an effective wedge. Of course, the data are also consistent with the possibility that some larger force was driving the whole vote choice, and that Prop 209 had little or nothing to do with the patterns of cross-over voting.

To deal with the latter problem we will need to do a more rigorous, multivariate test. But sticking with the simple cross-tabular analysis for a moment, we can test for the additional effect that the immigration issue might have had on the California Presidential vote. Prop 209 was labeled by some as the "son of 187." As discussed elsewhere, there seem to be strong links and similarities between the two issues (Citrin, et al., 1997). Prop 187, a measure that would have denied state benefits to undocumented, had been on the California ballot in 1994, and tougher immigration policies had been on the Republican platform in 1996. Thus, it might be of interest to see what the combined effect of these two measures was on the cross-over voting rate. This is displayed in Table 4.

A word of caution is in order. Because the Prop 187 item requires voters to recall a choice they made two years earlier, it is quite possibly inaccurate and biased (e.g. it may reflect more what they think of Prop 187 now than what they thought then). Also, there were quite a number of non-responses to the item, cutting our sample size considerably. Still, the results of looking at both measures, the intended Presidential vote and party registration are revealing. Clinton support drops by approximately twenty points among the 18% of registered Democrats who voted yes on both Props 187 and 209, but Dole support only increases by 12 points from one end of the continuum to the other. Among registered Republicans, Dole support drops significantly among those who voted no on either Prop 209 or 187, and even more dramatically among those who voted no on both measures. Among independents, there is some suggestion in the data pattern that immigration was a better issue for Dole than affirmative action.

However, as we indicated, it is possible that the simple tabular analysis is misleading and that other factors account for the patterns that we observe. Accordingly, we need to test for the effect of Prop 209 in a model that controls for other potential explanations. The model we estimate has

three basic components. First, there is a measure for party registration (1 =Dem; 0=else). Secondly, there are dummy terms measuring retrospective personal financial and state economic judgments coded as dummies. Thirdly, there are measures for voting yes on Prop 209, yes on Prop 187 and an interactive term for both. We also include a term for gender since that has been a factor in previous elections. Negative signs indicate support for Clinton and positive signs show an intended vote for Dole. The results of these estimation are shown in Table 5. The column headings indicate which samples the estimations used and the row headings the variables included in the equation. The coefficients are logistic.

The equations indicate several findings. First, support for or opposition to Prop 209 did influence the vote probabilities even when party and economic judgments are controlled for. Moreover, the signs indicate that pro-209 support increased the prospect of voting for Dole and opposition to Prop 209 increased the likelihood of voting for Clinton. Also, support for Prop 187 mattered, especially for nonwhites. But how much did it matter? The data suggests the effect was marginal. Undoing the logic arithmetic, the model predicts that a registered California Democrat who believed that the state's economy had improved and who voted against both Prop 187 and 209 had a 2% chance of voting for Dole in 1996. If we change that Democrat's vote to yes on Prop 209, it increases the odds to 6%. If we add in a yes vote on Prop 187, we get to 15%. This confirms what we saw in Table 4: the wedge value was marginal for the Republicans at best.

V. So Why Wasn't Prop-209 a More Effective-Wedge Issue?

In the end, Proposition 209 failed to help Bob Dole win California's 54 electoral college votes. Why? As we noted before, in order for a wedge issue to succeed, three conditions must obtain: contrast, agreement and salience. The first condition, contrast, is met when there is a difference between the opposing candidates on a given issue. Sometimes contrast is based on the stated positions of the candidates, but in other instances, the important contrast is not what the candidates say, but what they have done in the past, or their credibility with respect to promises about future actions. The second condition, agreement, requires that one of the contrasting positions on a given issue be closer to the preferred viewpoint of the swing voting group. Being closer on an issue implies that it is in the swing group's interest to support your candidacy. The third condition, salience, is defined as the issue's importance to voters. Contrast and agreement serve no electoral purpose if voters care little about the matter in dispute. Hence, a wedge issue strategy can only succeed if it is sufficiently important to cause voters to deviate from their normal party choice.

Based on this analysis, an issue that contrasted the positions of the Democratic and Republican candidates, that appealed to the interests of the white voters in the swing areas of the state, and that was salient enough for them to put aside other issues and concerns should have succeeded. So what was missing? Lack of contrast between the candidates' positions was certainly not the problem. Early in the campaign, the incumbent Democratic President announced that while some affirmative action programs might need review and fixing, he would not renounce them categorically. Hence, Clinton opposed any measures such as Proposition-209-that-ruled-out all programs that gave preferences and benefits based on race and gender. Dole, on the other hand, clearly supported Proposition 209 and, as we discussed earlier, chose to devote resources in October to making this a centerpiece of his campaign in California. By any reasonable definition, there was sufficient contrast between the Democratic and Republican candidate for it to have mattered. Assuming then that there was sufficient contrast between the two candidates, the next condition is that of agreement: did Proposition 209 appeal to the interest and preferences of the predominantly white swing voters in California. Our data suggests that in a certain sense it did.

When voters were asked whether they planned to support Proposition 209, the intended vote was sharply divided by racial grouping. Whites favored Proposition 209 by 51% in favor versus 36% opposed with 13% undecided. By comparison, the Latinos in our sample were 27% in favor, 57% opposed and 16% undecided; blacks were 18% in favor, 66% opposed and 16% undecided; and Asians were 31% in favor, 53% opposed and 16% undecided.

The poll also gives us a glimpse into the reasons behind white support for this measure. White voters were on average more likely to think that other racial and ethnic groups did not need the protections affirmative action offered. For instance, whereas 91% of blacks felt that blacks needed the protections affirmative action programs provided, only 47% of the white respondents felt the same way. There was a similar gap with respect to the need for affirmative action programs that assist Latinos and Asians. Whites were also much more likely than nonwhites to claim to know of instances in which someone got a job or promotion they did not deserve as a result of affirmative action: 35% of whites as compared to 14% of blacks; 26% of Latinos and 21% of Asians. In short, whites were more likely to feel that affirmative action programs were unnecessary and that they unfairly advantaged protected groups over others.

The problem, however, for the Republicans was that the sentiment for Prop 209 was much stronger among white Republicans than white Democrats and Independents, the groups they needed to win over in order to carry the state. White Republicans favored Prop 209 68% to 19% but white Independents narrowly favored it 45% to 38% and white Democrats opposed it by 37% to 49%. White Democrats and Independents were also much more likely than white Republicans to think that affirmative action programs were still necessary and much less likely to claim to know of instances in which someone got a job or promotion they did not deserve. This means that instead of being an effective wedge issue, Prop 209 turned out to be most popular with the Republican rank and file. In addition, as we saw in the previous section, nonwhites felt strongly about Prop 209 (and were better organized and mobilized than they had been for Prop 187) and were more likely to change their Presidential vote because of the issue than white voters. Moreover, our estimations suggest that the effect on the vote was marginal for Prop 209 alone. Only Democrats who agreed with the Republicans on both affirmative action and immigration had a significant likelihood of voting for Dole. Hence, the second condition was not entirely met. The third condition, being an issue of high importance, was also problematic.

Prop 209 was a state issue being used to try to influence a federal race. Voters might quite rationally compartmentalize the two judgments. Moreover, as we know from much voting behavior research; -there is a tendency for pocketbook issues to crowd out other issues in Presidential races (Lewis-Beck, 1988; Lewis-Beck and Rice, 1992; Tufte, 198; Markus, 1992). The LA Times exit poll conducted the day after the election asked respondents, "Which one issue mattered the most in deciding your vote for president?"

There was a considerable difference between the responses of the Clinton, Dole and Perot supporters, but in no case was affirmative action mentioned as one of the top seven issues. Those who voted for Clinton mentioned in order of importance the state of the economy (26%), Medicare (19%) and education (17%) as their top three issues, and the Dole voters put taxes (28%), the state of the economy (18%) and the federal deficit (13%) at the top of their list. These responses are very much consistent with the conventional wisdom about US Presidential elections; namely, incumbent Presidents who run for reelection when economic conditions are favorable are rewarded by voters and those who run when conditions are bad or deteriorating are punished. This was clearly the case in 1996. Affirmative action was less important to California voters than the improvement of the California economy during Bill Clinton's term of office.

To return then to why Prop 209 did not win California for Bob Dole, we can point to two factors. First, the issue was not as important to voters as the economy. Secondly, Prop 209 appealed more to ideologically conservative Republicans than to moderate independent and Democratic voters who make up the swing voters of the state. Nonetheless, the fact that the vote for Prop 209 split so cleanly along racial lines suggests that the fault lines of future political battles may increasingly be racial. For a state that has witnessed racial riots and heightened anti-immigrant tension, this is not a welcomed development.

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TABLE 1: Race/Ethnicity and Effect of Prop 209 on Presidential Vote

	Blacks in majority Black	Blacks in other	Latinos in majority Latino	Latinos in majority Minority	Latinos in majority White	Asians in majority Minority	Asians in majority Minority	Whites in majority Minority	Whites in majority White
Would change vote	19% (22)	29% (24)	21% (32)	21% (38)	17% (27)	24% (38)	15% (23)	16% (34)	9% (26)
Would not change vote	72% (84)	67% (56)	69% (104)	70% (127)	75% (120)	69% (111)	71% (109)	76% (169)	83% (230)
DK	9% (10)	5% (4)	9% (14)	9% (17)	9% (17)	7% (11)	14% (21)	7% (15)	7% (20)
<i>n</i>	116	84	150	182	161	160	153	218	276

TABLE 2: Change in Presidential Vote by Race/Ethnicity and Party Registration

	Yes	No	DK
Latino:			
Dem	19% (60)	73% (235)	8% (26)
Rep	17% (15)	70% (60)	13% (11)
DCL	26% (15)	70% (40)	4% (2)
Other	24% (7)	55% (16)	21% (6)
Asian:			
Dem	25% (30)	64% (78)	11% (13)
Rep	18% (17)	73% (70)	9% (9)
DCL	11% (8)	80% (61)	9% (7)
Other	33% (6)	50% (9)	17% (3)
Black:			
Dem	22% (38)	70% (118)	8% (13)
Rep	33% (2)	67% (4)	0% (0)
DCL	36% (4)	64% (7)	0% (0)
Other	14% (2)	79% (11)	7% (1)
White:			
Dem	13% (30)	78% (178)	8% (19)
Rep	10% (20)	84% (162)	6% (12)
DCL	15% (6)	78% (31)	8% (3)
Other	12% (4)	85% (28)	3% (1)
<i>n</i>	264	1108	126

TABLE 3: Prop 209 and Presidential Vote in 1996

	Yes Prop 209	No Prop 209	DK
Registered Democrats:			
Bill Clinton	71	83	71
Bob Dole	11	3	4
Other/DK	12	14	25
<i>n</i>	219	493	127
Registered Republicans:			
Bill Clinton	18	42	31
Bob Dole	69	36	40
Other/DK	13	22	29
<i>n</i>	206	125	52
Independents/ Minor Party:			
Bill Clinton	58	76	68
Bob Dole	12	3	11
Other/DK	30	21	21
<i>n</i>	43	58	19

TABLE 4: Prop 209, Prop 187 and 1996 Presidential Vote

	Yes 209 Yes 187	Yes 209 No 187	No 209 Yes 187	No 209 No 187
Registered Democrats:				
Bill Clinton	62	84	80	86
Bob Dole	14	6	5	2
Other/DK	24	10	15	12
<i>n</i>	81	49	78	233
Registered Republicans:				
Bill Clinton	12	30	36	40
Bob Dole	79	47	50	3
Other/DK	9	23	14	29
<i>n</i>	122	30	28	45
Independents/ Minor Party:				
Bill Clinton	47	37	46	77
Bob Dole	16	25	31	3
Other/DK	37	38	23	20
<i>n</i>	19	8	13	30