

A SUMMARY OF VOTING PATTERNS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

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I have been asked to evaluate and comment on the existing empirical evidence of racial bloc voting in Los Angeles County. For the past twelve years I have closely researched and analyzed voting patterns in Los Angeles County, first as a researcher at the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute, then during my Ph.D. work at the University of California, Irvine, and most recently as a Political Science professor at the University of Washington. My recent book, *Ethnic Cues*, focuses specifically on the issue of racially polarized voting for and against Latino candidates, and I have published numerous scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals on the topic of voting patterns in Los Angeles.

Though Los Angeles is often celebrated for its diversity, it has also been the source of considerable social and political contestation, which became especially pronounced in the post-World War II years as the population began changing more rapidly. As racial and ethnic groups settled into new neighborhoods and communities, challenges of equitable political representation soon followed. An overwhelming finding in the academic research, as well as in voting rights lawsuits was that from 1960 – 1990, Whites tended to vote against minority candidates, when given the choice to vote for a White candidate, for almost any political office in Los Angeles. African American and Latino candidates in particular had a very difficult time getting elected, outside majority-minority districts, throughout Los Angeles County.

As a result of being shut out of many contests, group cohesiveness grew among minority voters in Los Angeles. Further, churches and community-based groups in the Black, Latino, and Asian communities pushed hard for equal representation, and promoted the candidacies of fellow co-ethnic candidates. The result of the pent up demand for representation was very high rates of racial block voting in favor of co-ethnic candidates by African American, Latino, and Asian American voters throughout Los Angeles. When a co-ethnic candidate is on the ballot in a contested election, each minority group has shown a strong willingness to support their co-ethnic candidate first and foremost.

As the Latino population has grown throughout Southern California, more and more Latino candidates have run for a variety of local, state, and federal office and clear voting patterns have emerged throughout L.A. County, and specifically in the central and southwest portions of the county. With almost no exceptions, when Latino candidates run

for office, they have received strong and unified support from Latino voters in Los Angeles County. Previous analyses of voting patterns in Los Angeles have demonstrated statistically significant differences in candidate choice, between Latinos and non-Latinos. Based on the social science research I have reviewed and am familiar with, the evidence leads me to believe that Latinos vote as a cohesive political group, and non-Latinos regularly bloc vote against Latino candidates.

In 1997 Johnson, Farrell, Guinn published an article in the *International Migration Review* and found extensive evidence of anti-immigrant, and anti-Latino attitudes in Los Angeles that were in part driven by perceptions of growing Latino political influence and the tradeoff with Black and White political influence. Since Proposition 187 passed in 1994, many studies have documented an increase in anti-Latino discrimination in Los Angeles, resulting in an environment in which Latinos became more unified politically. Cervantes, Khokha, and Murray detail a significant increase in discrimination against Latinos in Los Angeles in the wake of Proposition 187. In a 2005 book published by the University of Virginia Press, Barreto and Woods find evidence that Latinos in Los Angeles County begin to behave more cohesively in the late 1990s following three statewide ballot initiatives that targeted minority and immigrant opportunity.

In a book published in 2007 by the University of California Press, under the direction of the Warren Institute, Abosch, Barreto and Woods review voting patterns across 15 elections from 1994-2003 and find evidence of racially polarized voting in all 15 contests with non-Latinos voting against Latino interests while Latinos vote consistently in favor of Latino candidates.

In a 2005 article published in the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, examining the 2001 Los Angeles mayoral election, Barreto, Villarreal and Woods find overwhelming evidence of racially polarized voting in the Villaraigosa-Hahn election. In a 2009 article in *Sociological Methods and Research* Grofman and Barreto, replicate and extend these findings with new, and cutting edge statistical methods specifically for examining racially polarized voting concerning Latinos. Grofman and Barreto conclude that Latinos vote very heavily in favor of Latino candidates in Los Angeles.

In a 2006 article published in the journal *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Barreto, Guerra, Marks, Nuño, and Woods found extremely strong support for Villaraigosa among Latinos once again. In a 2007 article published in the *American Political Science*

Review, Barreto found very strong and statistically significant differences between Latino and African American voting patterns in Los Angeles elections, which was replicated in a 2010 book by Barreto published by the University of Michigan Press. More recent studies by Barreto and Woods, Barreto and Collingwood, and Barreto and Garcia have all demonstrated strong evidence of racially polarized voting for and against Latino candidates in the 2006, 2008, and 2010 primary elections in Los Angeles. The findings have demonstrated that polarized voting exists countywide throughout Los Angeles, as well as in specific regions such as the city of Los Angeles, the eastern San Gabriel Valley area, northern L.A. County and central/southwest region of L.A. County.

Within Los Angeles County, almost no region has experienced more demographic change in the past 20 years than the central and southwest part of the county. From 1990 to 2009 cities like Compton and Inglewood both transitioned from majority-Black to now majority-Latino cities. Similar population changes emerged in the general region from Carson to Wilmington to Lynwood as well as through large segments of central Los Angeles city.

With respect to Black and Latino voting interests, numerous studies have found racial bloc voting, especially during primary contests. In a comprehensive examination of voting patterns in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary election, Ryan Enos finds large differences in Black and Latino voting with Latinos voting overwhelmingly for Clinton and Blacks for Obama. In an on-going lawsuit against the electoral system in the city of Compton, Morgan Kousser analyzes citywide elections for city council and finds very strong evidence of Blacks voting against Latino candidates in every single election, while Latino voters side heavily with the Latino candidates for office.

Most recently, a research article published in May 2011 by the Warren Institute found that during the 2010 Democratic contest for Attorney general, Latinos voted overwhelmingly for Delgadillo and Torrico, while Blacks voted overwhelmingly for Harris.

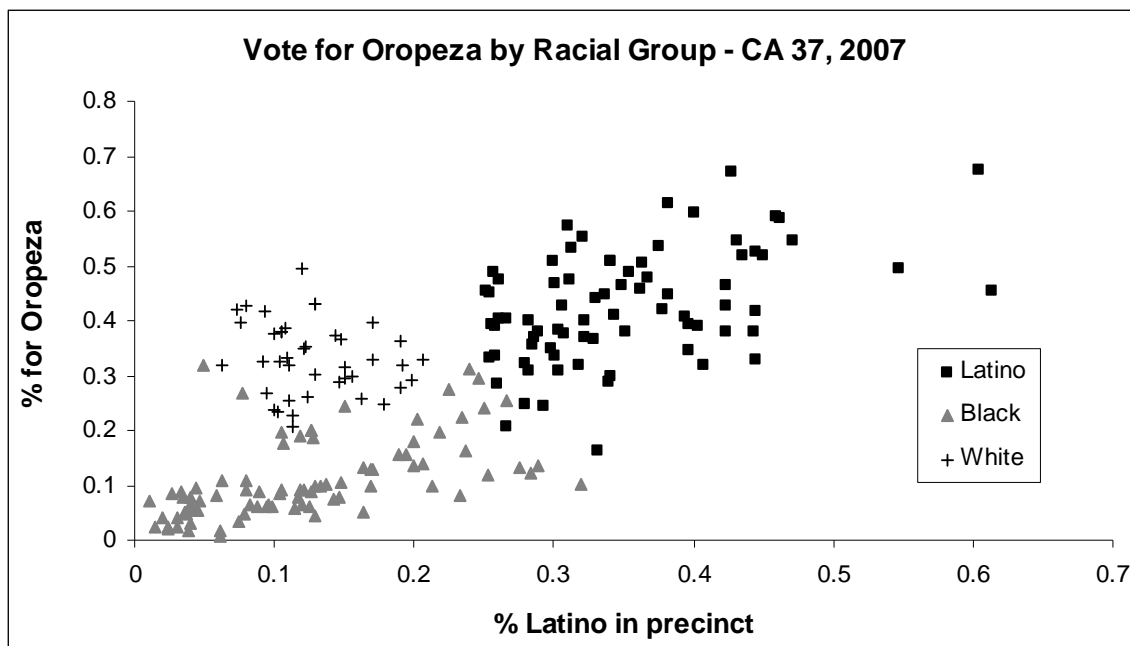
Perhaps one of the clearest examples of primary election differences between Blacks and Latinos took place in a 2007 special election for the 37th congressional district after incumbent Juanita Millender-McDonald passed away. Analysis of the election results shows very clear, and statistically significant evidence of racially polarized voting. Blacks voted almost unanimously for two African American candidates Laura

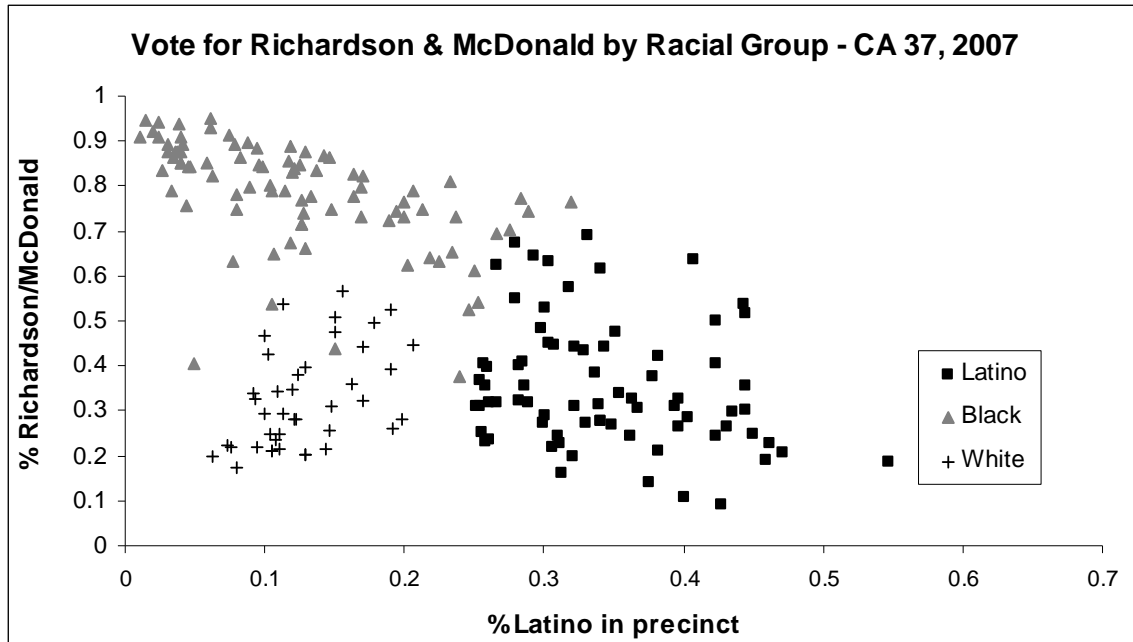
Richardson and Valerie McDonald, and gave almost no votes at all to the Latino candidate Jenny Oropeza. In contrast, Latino voters in the district voted very heavily for Oropeza, and cast very few votes for the two major Black candidates in the contest.

Goodman’s Ecological Regression

Vote estimates from 2007 CA-37 special election – primary

Latino vote for Oropeza	82.6%
Latino vote for Richardson	10.8%
Latino vote for McDonald	4.3%
Black vote for Richardson	75.4%
Black vote for McDonald	17.2%
Black vote for Oropeza	5.3%





One important consideration is that elections analysts must consider primary elections, or non-partisan countywide or citywide contests where partisanship is effectively neutralized. Because of the strong Democratic partisan leanings of Black and Latino, and even most White voters in Los Angeles County, partisan general elections provide almost no clues as to whether or not racially polarized voting exists. The importance and relevance of primary elections is a longstanding and well known fact in studies of racially polarized voting, and even pre-dates the Voting Rights Act itself. In 1944 the Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Allright* that it was illegal for the Democratic Party in the South to hold “all-White primaries.” Prior to 1944, Blacks were prohibited from voting in primary elections, but allowed to vote in general elections, because Democratic candidates were assured to win in vast majority of the Democratic-leaning South, in the November general election. Thus, the Supreme Court held that the only contests in which voters could effectively influence the outcome, and vote for or against their preferred candidate was the primary.

In the case of Los Angeles, any districts drawn for the State Assembly, State Senate, or U.S. House of Representatives with large Latino or Black populations are certain to be Democratic in their partisanship. Thus, the election that will ultimately select the ultimate representative is the Democratic primary election, and for this reason primary elections provide the best and most reliable evidence to discern whether or not racially polarized voting exists, and why general elections provide almost no value at all.

Further, we should focus our attention on potentially competitive primary elections. In elections where a very well known incumbent barely draws a primary challenger, it is unrealistic to expect the unknown, unfunded challenger to draw any votes away from an established incumbent.

Finally, we should remember to keep a lookout for outlier elections or single anecdotes. When assessing racially polarized voting the best strategy is to examine a wide swath of elections over a number of years and look for consistent patterns. If 15 years and 40 elections all point to a consistent pattern of racial bloc voting, evidence of one single election to the contrary tells us very little about actual trends. In a nation that holds literally thousands of elections every year, we can always find an instance or two of unusual voting patterns, however when looking for the objective and true voting patterns in any region or jurisdiction we should discount such outliers in favor of the more consistent and generalizable findings.