Voting Context and Vote Choice: The Impact of Balloting in Churches on Voting for California Proposition 8

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Abstract

The vote on Proposition 8 has been characterized as a largely ideological vote among California voters. Certainly, research suggests that at the individual level, conservatism, Republicanism, religiosity, African-American and Hispanic ethnicity, lower education, and male gender all greatly increased the probability of voting "yes" on the Proposition. Recent research has concluded that the physical location of a voting precinct can also influence voting on an issue by providing environmental cues that activate societal norms that can affect the a citizen's vote on particular issues. At least one author (Rutchick) has concluded that voting in a church can trigger votes in a conservative direction. This research examined the hypothesis that voting at a church (as opposed to a school or other facility) would increase support for the Act over and above other factors affecting the vote. A structural equation model applied to a random sample of California voting precincts weighted by votes cast in the 2008 election suggests that, in California, the linkage between church polling locations and Proposition 8 vote is largely spurious. The direct effects of education, conservatism, ethnicity, race, gender, age, and urbanization affected both the selection of polling location and the aggregate vote on Proposition 8, eliminating the direct and indirect influences of church polling location on the vote. The dominant influence was education, both directly, and acting through precinct conservatism.

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Introduction

On November 4, 2008, California voters passed Proposition 8, invalidating a California Supreme Court decision (In Re Marriage Cases) allowing same-sex marriages in the state. The Proposition itself was ruled unconstitutional by a U.S. Federal District Court in 2010. The U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit, affirmed in 2012 that Proposition 8 was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Research done in the aftermath of the election confirmed that voter partisanship, ideology, religiosity, and ethnicity played central roles in the final 52% to 48% vote (Egan & Sherrill, 2009) (Abrajano, 2010).

The psychological literature on contextual priming suggests that, beyond the standard social, political, and demographic factors noted above, physical and symbolic cues that may not reach the consciousness of the voter may also have a significant, if marginal, effect on voters' decisions. Polling location is one of these effects. Physical distance from the polls, distance from sports stadium sites, and voting in schools have all been significantly associated with turnout, support for stadium bond issues, and support for school bonds and taxes, respectively.

This article tests the proposition that, over and above the standard effects noted above, voting in a church setting may have significantly increased the likelihood that the voter would vote "yes" on Proposition 8 (opposing same-sex marriage). Rutchick (Rutchick, 2010) concluded that such effects existed in South Carolina voting on same-sex marriage bans and reinforced the finding with experimental studies that found similar effects when decision-makers made choices about abortion and similar issues in a church setting.

Applying structural equation modeling to a random sample of precinct-level data weighted for number of votes cast in the 2008 election, I found that the significant positive zero-order effect of church polling location on the "yes" vote for Proposition 8 survived a control for the ideological predisposition of the precinct (as noted by Rutchick) but disappeared when controls for age, gender,

Hispanic ethnicity, African-American race, population density, and education were introduced. The dominant factors explaining the vote were low educational attainment, precinct conservatism, Hispanic ethnicity, rural location, and a high percentage of senior citizen voters.

Background

In response to President Bush's call in his State of the Union Address for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, on February 12, 2004, Mayor Gavin Newsom of San Francisco directed the San Francisco city and county clerk to begin issuing marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples on the grounds that the statutory ban against same-sex marriage enacted by voters in 2000 violated the equal protection clause of the California Constitution (Gordon, 2004). On February 13, 2004, the Proposition 22 Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Campaign for California Families filed suit in the San Francisco Superior Court seeking an immediate injunction on the issuance of the licenses to same-sex couples. On March 11, the California Supreme Court ordered the San Francisco to cease issuing licenses to same-sex couples and apply the marriage license laws as written but in its final decision in August allowed the city to file suit to challenge the constitutionality of the California marriage statutes. The City filed suit challenging the constitutionality of Proposition 22 (popularly known as the Knight Initiative) passed by voters in 2000. The San Francisco Superior Court struck down the statute as violating the California Constitution's equal protection clause. The California Appeals court reversed, reinstating the statute. On May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court by a 4-3 decision again invalidated Proposition 22 on the grounds that it violated the equal protection clause of the California Constitution by defining same-sex marriage (domestic partnership) differently than opposite-sex marriage (marriage) (In re Marriage Cases, 2008).

Opponents of same-sex marriage immediately began a constitutional initiative campaign that quickly gathered enough signatures to make the November 2008 election ballot even before the first same-sex marriage was performed. After the most expensive initiative campaign in California (and perhaps, U.S.) history with more than $100 million spent (California Secretary of State., n.d.), California voters passed Proposition 8 by a margin of 52% to 48% (Calfornia Secretary of State,

2008). Several plaintiffs immediately filed lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of Proposition 8. The California Supreme Court upheld the ballot measure as constitutional but also held that marriages prior to the passage of the proposition were valid (Strauss v. Horton, 2009). The plaintiffs then filed suit in Federal District Court to overturn Proposition 8 as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution. On August 4, 2010, Judge Vaughn Walker of the U.S. District Court of the Northern District of California ruled that Proposition 8 was unconstitutional because it provided no rational basis for distinguishing among same-sex and opposite-sex couples and furthered no state interest in making the distinction (Perry v. Schwarzenegger, 2010). On February 7, 2012, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed Judge Walker's ruling, noting that "Proposition 8 serves no other purpose, and has no effect, other than to lessen the status and dignity of gays and lesbians in California, and to officially reclassify their relationships and families as inferior to those of opposite-sex couples (Perry v. Brown, 2012)."

Voting Patterns on Proposition 8

Voting on Proposition 8 followed familiar patterns in California politics. California counties and precincts have displayed clear patterns of ideological voting. Latterman (Latterman, n.d.) has analyzed political precinct data from the UC Berkeley Statewide Database (University of California, Berkeley, 2009) and concluded that California counties vary dramatically in their political ideology with San Francisco City and County being the most liberal county in California (at 72% on the California Political Precinct Index) and Modoc being the most conservative county (at 28%). These voting patterns help explain voting on a variety of issues including the ideological match between Assembly members and their districts, parental notification, the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections in California, and Proposition 8 (Latterman, 2009). Thorson, Van Vechten, and Webster (Thorson, Van Vechten, & Webster, 2010) have assessed the increasing difficulty that the California legislature has had in passing an on-time and balanced budget. They trace the increasingly late budgets to an interaction of the supermajority (2/3) budget requirement, ideological polarization in the California legislature, increased partisanship and ideological homogeneity within parties, and much slower economic growth. Combined with the increasingly close ideological match between voters in

electoral districts and their elected representatives (Latterman, 2009), the ideological disparities across California counties and their impact on the voting for propositions are increasingly apparent.

These differences were especially obvious during the Proposition 8 initiative campaign to overturn the California Supreme Court decision on Proposition 22 (In re Marriage Cases, 2008). Using survey and voting data, Egan and Sherrill (Egan & Sherrill, 2009, p. 9) concluded that males, older voters, more religious individuals, Republicans, and conservatives were all more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8. In addition, African-Americans and Hispanics also had a significantly greater probability of voting for Proposition 8, all other factors being equal (Ghavami & Johnson, 2011). Egan and Sherrill's model accurately predicted 75% of votes. Abrajano (Abrajano, 2010) reexamined the question using several different surveys and reached similar conclusions, although she noted that African-American attitudes on Proposition 8 were more cohesive than Hispanic attitudes. Moreover, her turnout analysis concluded that had turnout levels in 2000 been the same in 2008, Proposition 8 would still have passed.

Contextual Priming in Proposition 8

The social, political, and demographic factors identified above (partisanship, ideology, ethnicity, religiosity, gender, and age) clearly had a powerful influence on the final vote on Proposition 8. Beyond the overt social, psychological, and demographic factors influencing the vote, the issue of same-sex marriage also activates deep emotional and non-conscious psychological triggers because marriage enjoys "the cultural aura of being the ultimate method by which to legalize an intimate relationship" (Willetts, 2011, p. 146). In short, the debate over same-sex marriage would seem to be an ideal arena to test the effects of contextual priming.

"Priming is the activation of knowledge stored in long-term memory following exposure to a stimulus" (Althaus & Kim, 2006, p. 961). One of the central effects of priming is *activation*, the likelihood that the trigger will access knowledge stored in short- or long-term memory for use to make judgments (Althaus & Kim, 2006) (Higgins, 1996). However, for the knowledge to play a central role in judgment, the stimulus must be relevant to stored knowledge and to the task at hand (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003)(Jonas, Schimel, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2002).

The study of priming in political research has focused primarily on political campaign effects (especially, issue framing and candidate image), presidential approval, and the effects of political symbols. Druckman used exit polls and candidate interviews during the 2000 Minnesota U.S. Senate campaign to demonstrate that voters who were exposed and attentive to the issue and candidate primes in the media used those primes to make their decision at the polls significantly more than voters who were not exposed or were not attentive to the primes (Druckman, 2004). Donovan, Tolbert, and Smith concluded that the inclusion of propositions banning same-sex marriage increased the probability that voters would use marriage as a prime in presidential candidate evaluations (Donovan, Tolbert, & Smith, 2008). Althaus and Kim (Althaus & Kim, 2006) concluded that both short-term priming and cumulative priming on support for President Bush's intervention in the Gulf War influenced President Bush's overall job approval. However, the effects appeared only when the respondents believed that information to be relevant to their assessment of how well the President was doing his job. Kim (Kim, 2005) extended this research concluding that attentive individuals weigh positive and negative primes in making their judgments. Two sets of researchers concluded exposure to national symbols such as the flag shifted political thoughts and behavior in a more nationalistic direction (Hassin, Ferguson, Shidlovski, & Gross, 2007) (Kemmelmeier & Winter, 2008).

Symbols, issues, and images are not the only significant primes in politics. Physical objects and physical location also play an important role in shaping social and political thoughts and behavior. For example, one study has concluded that exposure to physical objects associated with a business environment (such as conference tables or briefcases) increased decision-makers awareness of competition as a concept, prompted decision-makers to evaluate ambiguous situations as less cooperative, and increased the amount of money subjects retained in competitive games (Kay, Wheeler, Bargh, & Ross, 2004). The effects were strongest when the situations were ambiguous or lacking a strong value context.

One component of physical environment in politics considered only sporadically by elected officials is polling location. The selection processes vary from state to state; however, in California,

polling locations are selected by the county registrar of voters. In 43 counties, the registrar's function is combined with several other offices, the most common being county clerk and county recorder. In 15 counties, the registrar is separate. In short, elected officials select polling locations in most counties in California. Typically, the locations selected are public buildings; however, the range of locations includes schools, churches, residences, private businesses, and fire houses, among others.

Although most registrars would argue that their selection of polling locations has little impact on the vote, the research literature suggests otherwise. Several research studies have concluded that distance of the voter from the polling location or the changing or consolidation of polling locations from one election to the next has reduced voting turnout (Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2003) (Brady & McNulty, 2005) (Dyck & Gimpel, 2005) (Haspel & Knotts, 2005) (McNulty, Dowling, & Ariotti, 2009). Proximity and distance also affect the direction of the vote. Coates and Humphreys suggest that for bond elections for sports stadia, proximity of the voting precinct to the proposed site of the stadium increased support for the bond issue compared to voting precincts further away from the proposed site or closer to the old stadium (Coates & Humphreys, 2006).

Some research also suggests that type of precinct has an impact on the votes that citizens cast. Berger, Meredith, and Wheeler analyze a school sales tax election in Arizona and inferred that citizens who voted in schools were significantly more likely to support sales tax increases than citizens who voted at other locations (Berger, Meredith, & Wheeler, 2008).

Given the centrality of religiosity to support or opposition to same-sex marriage, the conclusion that voting in churches as opposed to voting in other locations might have a significant effect on the likelihood of voting to ban same-sex marriages seems reasonable. Research by political psychologist Abraham Rutchick supports this supposition (Rutchick, 2010). Rutchick uses voting results in two elections, a field experiment, and a laboratory experiment to demonstrate that the priming cues of voting in a church are very precise in their effects: Voting in churches generated greater support for a conservative candidate and for a ban on same-sex marriage that did voting in other locations, controlling for partisanship. In two experiments, Rutchick also demonstrated that

subjects were less inclined to award insurance damages to individuals claiming medical injury from an abortion pill versus a workers' compensation claim when assessing damages in a church setting versus an academic setting. Exposure to ecclesiastical images was also more likely to generate lower awards for the abortion pill insurance claims than for the workers' compensation claims, but only for Christian subjects.

Hypotheses

The priming research suggests the following central hypothesis for this research on voting on Proposition 8:

Hypothesis 1: Voters were more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8 if they cast their vote in a church polling location than if they cast their vote in another type of polling location or by mail, all other things being equal.

The previous research also suggests that the following control hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Voters were more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8 in conservative and Republican political jurisdictions than in more liberal and Democratic political jurisdictions.

Hypothesis 3: Voters were more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8 in more rural political jurisdictions than in more urban political jurisdictions.

Hypothesis 4: Voters were more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8 in less highly educated jurisdictions than in more highly educated political jurisdictions.

Hypothesis 5: Voters were more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8 in political jurisdictions with a greater African-American population than in jurisdictions with a lower African-American population.

Hypothesis 6: Voters were more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8 in political jurisdictions with a larger Hispanic and Latino population than in jurisdictions with a smaller Hispanic and Latino population.

Hypothesis 7: Voters were more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8 in political jurisdictions with an older population than in jurisdictions with a younger population.

Hypothesis 8: Voters were more likely to vote "yes" on Proposition 8 in political jurisdictions with a more male population than in jurisdictions with a more female population.

Data and Methods

Sampling

The data set for this analysis of the Proposition 8 vote draws from the precinct-level data in the University of California, Berkeley, Statewide Database (University of California, Berkeley, 2009). This data includes all voting returns for the elections from 1992 to 2010 down to the level of the nearly 22,000 physical voting precincts in the state of California and the more than 17,000 mail ballot or vote by mail precincts. As noted above, this is the data set used by Latterman to develop the California Political Precinct Index (Latterman, A First Look at the California Political Precinct Index, n.d.). Information on California voting precinct locations was available from multiple sources including SmartVoter (League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, 2011), California eVoter (Political Technologies LLC, 2010), individual county elections websites, and 2008 county statements of the vote for the November 4, 2008 election. In addition, information could be obtained by public records requests to the 58 Registrars of Voters in California.

This analysis used a 4 percent random sample of the 38,644 voting precincts that cast ballots in November 2008 (zero-vote precincts were excluded). The sample included 1,527 precincts from 55 of the 58 counties in California. Slightly more 37% of these precincts were mail ballot or vote by mail precincts. To recover as closely as possible the final voting percentage for the 2008 election, the analysis used a case weight reflecting the total number of votes cast in each precinct. This vote weight set the effective number of precincts in the sample at 1,520. Using the methods noted above, I obtained polling place locations from 44 counties for 1,255 (1,322 in the unweighted sample) of the precincts in the sample, a weighted 83% response rate. The unweighted response rate was 87%. To verify the accuracy of the obtained sample, I compared the percentage of physical precincts (as opposed to mail precincts), the average total vote per precinct, the precinct

conservatism scale, the percentage yes vote on Proposition 8, and the percentage under-vote on Proposition 8, all critical variables in the subsequent analysis. The results appear in Table 1.

The sample means for conservatism, Proposition 8 vote, and under-vote were similar to the population means for all precincts. They varied by less than 2 percent. The average vote per precinct was 6.7 percent lower in the sample than in the population. The sample had nearly 6 percentage points more mail ballot precincts than the total for all precincts. The effects of these differences were minimal given the weighting of the sample and separate analyses run for voting and mail precincts. One potential source of bias was the slight over-representation of Los Angeles County precincts (31% in the sample versus 25% in the population). However, the closeness of the means for conservatism, Proposition 8 vote, and under-vote suggest that this source of bias had minimal impact.

Table 1. Comparison of All California Precincts and Sample Precincts on Key Variables

Comparison of Population and Sample Precincts				
Variable	Population Mean	Pop. Std. Deviation	Sample Mean	Sample Std. Deviation
Type of precinct (% Mail)	34.9%	47.7%	40.6%	49.1%
Average Total Vote	494.0	223.0	461.0	193.7
Conservatism Scale	48.1%	8.4%	47.4%	8.6%
Proposition 8 Yes %	52.2%	16.1%	52.3%	16.2%
Undervote Proposition 8 Adjusted	2.5%	2.4%	2.6%	1.7%
Valid N (listwise)	38644		1255	

Dependent Variable: Percentage "Yes" on Proposition 8

The ultimate dependent variable in this analysis was the percentage of the voters in each precinct who voted "yes" on Proposition 8 based on the total number of votes cast in each precinct. Excluding precincts with 20 or fewer votes, the "Yes" percentage ranged from 5% to 94%.[1]

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[1] The exclusion of precincts with fewer than 20 votes was only used for the descriptive discussion. The elimination had little impact on the sample size. It reduced the weighted number of precincts from 1,520 to 1,519.

Independent Variables - Demographic

Urban-Rural. The analysis used population density from the County and City Databook as a measure of the urban-rural scale across the counties (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Because the raw variable was skewed, the log to the base 10 of population density was used. San Francisco's population density was almost five times as large as the density of the next densest county, Orange County. The logged population density ranged from 0.3 for Modoc, Inyo, and Alpine Counties to 4.23 for San Francisco. The density variable was applied to all precincts from each county that were in the sample.

Percentage African-American. The analysis used percentage African-American from the County and City Databook as a measure of racial variation across counties. The Statewide Database does not break down voters by African-American race. The variable ranged from 0.3% in Sierra County to 15.3% in Solano County. The African-American percentage was applied to all precincts from each county.

Percentage Hispanic or Latino. The analysis used percentage of Hispanic or Latino voters per precinct from the Statewide Database. Each registration precinct reported Hispanic or Latino voters. For mail precincts that could not be matched with a corresponding registration precinct, the county-wide Hispanic voter percentage was substituted. Excluding precincts with fewer than 20 votes, the Hispanic voter percentage ranged from 0% to 94%.

Percentage Female. The study used percentage female voters per precinct from the Statewide Database as a measure of gender. For mail precincts that could not be matched with a corresponding registration precinct, the county-wide female voter percentage was substituted. Excluding precincts with fewer than 20 votes, the female voter percentage varied from 29% to 68%.

Age. The inquiry used percentage of the precinct's voters that were age 65 and over to represent age. Excluding precincts with fewer than 20 votes, the 65 and over percentage ranged from 0% to 91%.

Education. The analysis used percentage of the county population age 25 or older with a high school education (applied to all precincts) as a measure of county educational level. The

variable ranged from 11.5% for precincts in Lassen and Kings County to 53.9% or precincts in Marin County.

Intervening Variable – County Conservatism and Partisanship

As noted above, California counties display clear patterns of partisan and ideological voting. More importantly, the two concepts overlap statistically in the California politics. The ideological and partisan leanings of the county's voting population should explain much of the variation in voting across counties on Proposition 8. Not having immediate access to the most recent version of the Latterman California Political Precinct Index, I calculated a variation based on key voting statistics from the California 2008 Statement of the Vote and the Statewide Database. Using factor and reliability analysis, I identified eight key propositions and candidate votes that formed a conservatism scale with a Chronbach's alpha of 0.927 (a reliability statistic measuring internal consistency): a "no" vote on Proposition 2 (setting standards for the confinement of farm animals), a "yes" vote on Proposition 4 (parental notification before termination of a minor's pregnancy), a "no" vote on Proposition 5 (sentencing, parole, and rehabilitation reform for nonviolent drug offenses), a "yes" vote on Proposition 6 (police and law enforcement funding and stricter criminal penalties), a "yes" vote on Proposition 9 (criminal justice, victim's rights, and parole changes), a vote for John McCain for President, a vote for the Republican congressional candidate, and a vote for the Republican Assembly candidate. I averaged across the eight variables and normed the variable to run from 0% for the most liberal precincts to 100% for the most conservative precincts. Excluding precincts with fewer than 20 votes, precinct conservatism varied from 28% to 70%.

Intervening Variable – Physical Precinct versus Vote by Mail or Mail Ballot

Beginning in the 1970s, the state of California made it increasingly easy to vote absentee or vote by mail. In the 2008 election, two counties (Sierra and Alpine) voted entirely by mail. Clearly, the greater the percentage of a county's voters that vote by mail, the less likely it will be that voting in a church setting will have an impact on Proposition 8 voting. Nearly 42% of California's population voted by mail in 2008 (Calfornia Secretary of State, 2008, p. 3). The percentage of vote

by mail precincts in the sample was 41% compared to 35% across all California precincts (see Table 1).

Intervening Variable – Church Polling Location versus Other Locations

The next intervening variable was the location of precinct polling locations in churches. I identified these locations from multiple sources including SmartVoter (League of Women Voters of California Education Fund, 2011), California eVoter (Political Technologies LLC, 2010), individual county elections websites, 2008 county statements of the vote for the November 4, 2008 election, and communications with the 58 County Registrars of Voters. To some degree, these data overlapped the percentage of citizens voting by mail since many counties solved the administrative problem of accounting for absentee ballots by creating separate voting precincts for the polling places and the absentee voters in a precinct. The percentage of physical polling locations that were in churches was 26%. The percentage of all precincts in the sample that were in churches was 16%.

Intervening Variable – Intensity of Engagement (% Undervote)

The final intervening variable was the undervote for Proposition 8. This represented the arithmetic percentage difference between the total vote cast in a precinct and the total vote ("Yes" and "No") cast for Proposition 8 in each precinct. This variable served a surrogate for the intensity of engagement in each precinct. The closer was the total vote on Proposition 8 to the total vote cast in the precinct (the smaller the undervote), the greater was the intensity of opinion in the precinct. Conversely, the more often did voters in a precinct skip Proposition 8 on the ballot, the weaker the intensity of opinion was on the issue. The undervote ranged from 0% to 62% (the next highest value was 12%).

Analyses

The analysis used structural equation modeling of the correlation matrix for the variables above weighted by 2008 election vote. The central analysis examined the effects of the independent, control, and intervening variables on the % "yes" vote by county on Proposition 8. The analysis also modeled the intermediate effects as well. To some degree, the independent, control, and
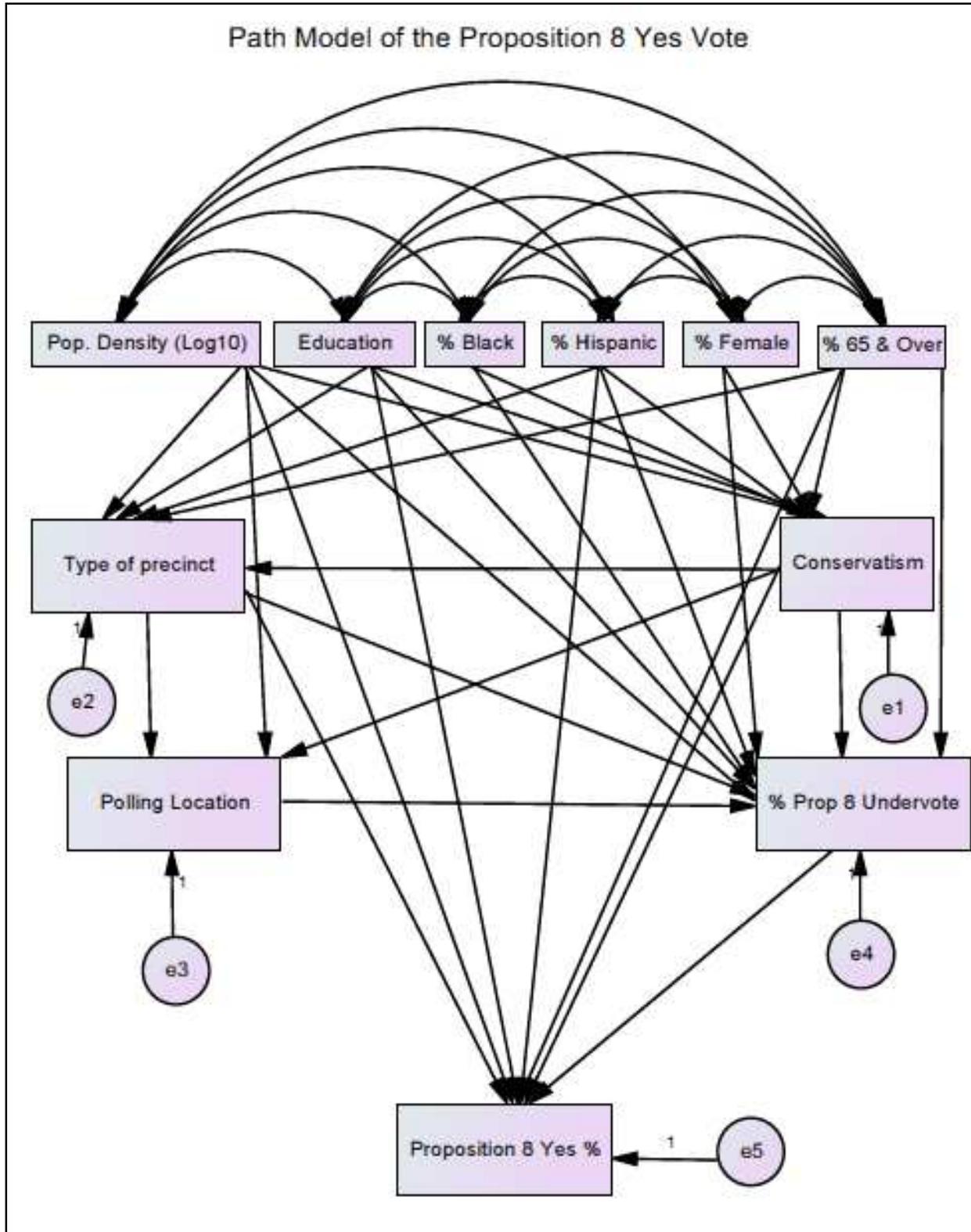
Figure 1. The Impact of Sociodemographic Factors, Ideology, Ballot Type, Church Voting Location, and Intensity of Engagement on the "Yes" Vote for Proposition 8

intervening variables had considerable multicollinearity. To resolve this problem, I identified stable,

reduced models with standard multiple regression and applied structural equation modeling to the full model using AMOS. In the final model, conservatism was directly explained by all six of the exogenous variables, the presence of vote by mail precincts was explained by five of the seven earlier variables, church polling locations were explained by three of the eight prior variables, undervote was explained by all nine of the previous variables, and vote on Proposition 8 was explained by seven of the 10 previous variables. The reduced, initial path model appears in Figure 1.

Limitations

The research on contextual priming focuses on individual level decisions. Data from individual surveys might provide the most accurate information; however, information asking voters to recall past votes and voting locations introduces the possibility of recall error. The data for this study aggregated the individual voting decisions at the precinct level. Thus, the individual case reflected the aggregate voting decisions on Proposition 8 within voting precincts. The number of cases per precinct ranged from 1 to 1,286 voters. Thus, the possibility for ecological errors exists.

In addition, the data in the analysis are limited by the use of county-level data on population density, education, and percentage African-American. In addition, unmatched voting precincts (mostly vote-by-mail) received aggregate county information for percentage of Hispanic voters, female voters, and voters 65 and over. Aggregation effects tend to suppress the value of the obtained coefficient, leading to Type 1 errors. Moreover, undervotes may occur for other reasons than lack of intensity opinion. To the extent, that these other factors contribute to undervote, the final estimates will be reduced.

Results

Zero-Order Analysis

Before the introduction of endogenous and control variables, the zero-order regression clearly suggested that church polling location had a slightly postive impact on "Yes" votes on Proposition 8 (p=0.071). Church polling location explained only about 0.3% of the variation in Proposition 8 voting across precincts. However, each additional church location increased the "Yes" vote in a precinct by 2.3%. That is, precincts with their polling locations in churches had

greater support for Proposition 8 than precincts in other polling locations. The effect increased when controls for precinct conservatism and undervote were introduced. The explained variance increased to 18% and the effect of an additional church voting location increased the "Yes" Vote by 4%. This conclusion replicated Rutchick's (Rutchick, 2010) findings in South Carolina.

Explaining Proposition 8 (Full Model)

Model Fit

The final model with standardized coefficients appears in Figure 2. The model had a very good fit to the data. The chi-square minimum (CMIN) was 8.038 with a degrees of freedom of 10 (p=0.625), suggesting that the reduced model did not generate results significantly different than the saturated model. The CMIN/df was 0.804, indicating that deleting paths did not significantly reduce the fit. The adjusted goodness of fit index (AFGI) was 0.992, indicating a strong absolute fit. Among the measures of relative fit (compared to the saturated and independence models), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 1.000 and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.000. All of these measures suggested that the reduced model in Figure 2 reflected the data very well. The full fit statistics appear in Table 2.
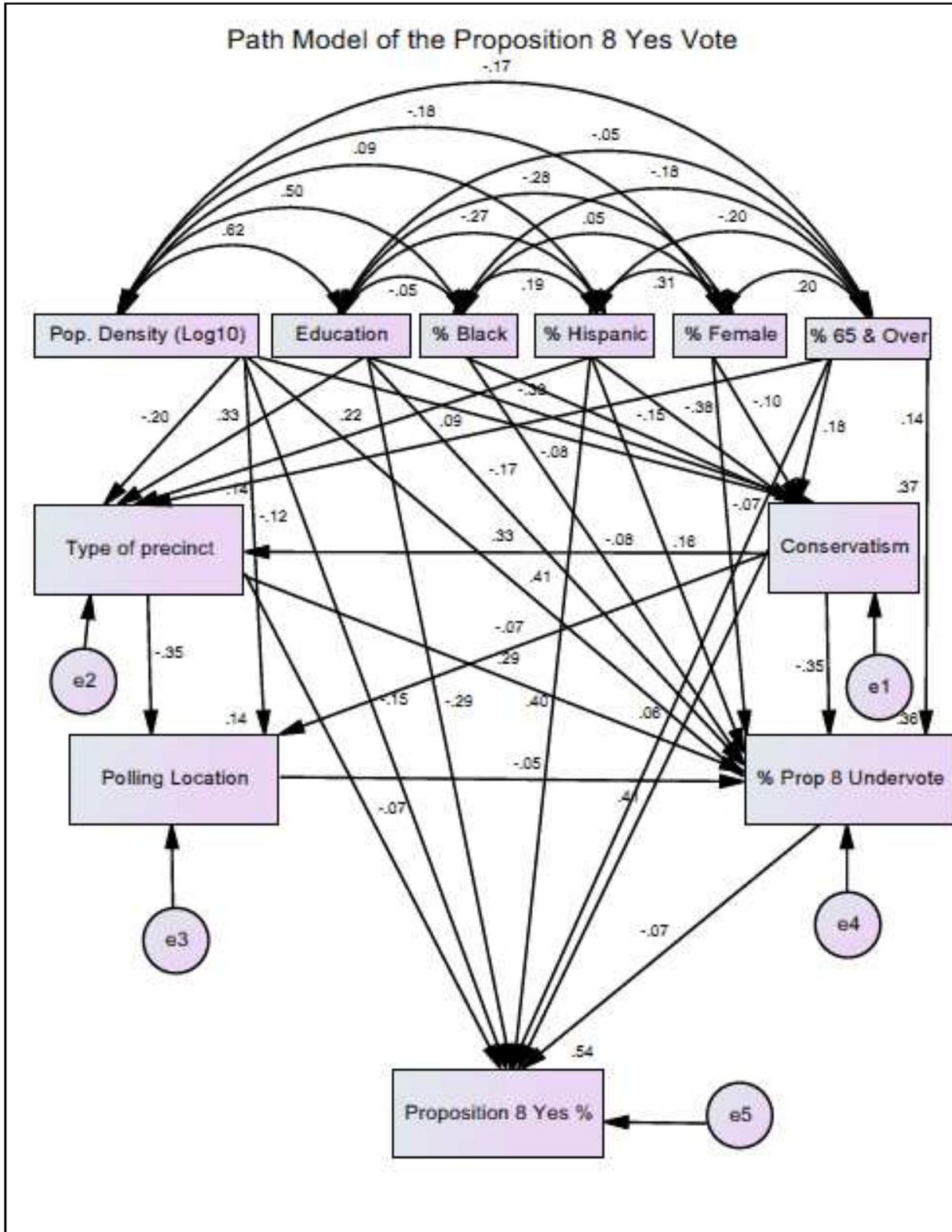
Figure 2. Explaining the Proposition 8 Vote - Final Path Model

Table 2. Model Fit Statistics for the Proposition 8 Path Model

Proposition 8 - Final Path Model				
Model Fit Statistics	**Chi-Square Fit**			
Model	**CMIN**	**DF**	**P**	**CMIN/DF**
Default model	8.038	10	0.625	0.804
Saturated model	.000	0		
Independence model	4541.146	55	.000	82.566
	Absolute Fit			
Model	**RMR**	**GFI**	**AGFI**	**PGFI**
Default model	0.106	0.999	0.992	0.151
Saturated model	.000	1.000		
Independence model	21.183	0.614	0.537	0.512
	Baseline Comparisons			
Model	**CFI**	**RMSEA**	**PCLOSE**	**AIC**
Default model	1.000	0.000	1.000	120.038
Saturated model	1.000			132.000
Independence model	0.000	0.255	0.000	4563.146

Of the 30 individual, unstandardized direct path coefficients reported in Table 3, 22 had probabilities less than 0.001, three had probabilities less than 0.005, one had a probability less than 0.01, three had probabilities less than 0.05, and only one had a probability less than 0.10. The full models explained 37% of the variation in precinct conservatism, 14% of the variation in mail ballot percentages, 14% of the variation in church voting location, 36% of the intensity of engagement (undervote), and 54% of the variation in the "Yes" vote on Proposition 8.

Table 3. Unstandardized, Direct Path Coefficients for the Proposition 8 Path Model

Dependent	Independent	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P Label
ConsRepScale <---	Education	-0.309	0.034	-9.045	***
ConsRepScale <---	LogPopDensity	-1.067	0.584	-1.826	0.068
ConsRepScale <---	africanamerican	-0.369	0.077	-4.783	***
ConsRepScale <---	PctHispanic	--.170	0.012	-14.331	***
ConsRepScale <---	PctFemale	-0.255	0.065	-3.948	***
ConsRepScale <---	Pct65Over	.160	0.021	7.449	***
precincttype <---	Education	0.018	0.002	8.892	***
precincttype <---	ConsRepScale	0.019	0.002	10.257	***
precincttype <---	PctHispanic	0.006	0.001	6.879	***
precincttype <---	LogPopDensity	-0.161	0.029	-5.462	***
precincttype <---	Pct65Over	0.005	0.001	3.227	0.001
location <---	precincttype	-0.259	.020	-12.894	***
location <---	ConsRepScale	-0.003	0.001	-2.424	0.015
location <---	LogPopDensity	-0.074	0.017	-4.315	***
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	location	-0.226	0.115	-1.963	0.050
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	ConsRepScale	--.070	0.006	--11.750	***
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	PctHispanic	0.014	0.003	5.281	***
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	Pct65Over	0.024	0.004	5.485	***
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	precincttype	1.023	.090	11.353	***
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	Education	-0.032	0.007	-4.451	***
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	africanamerican	-0.038	0.016	-2.409	0.016
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	LogPopDensity	1.171	0.119	9.843	***
UndervoteProp8Adj <---	PctFemale	-0.036	0.013	-2.748	0.006
Prop8YesPct <---	Pct65Over	0.095	0.034	2.781	0.005
Prop8YesPct <---	precincttype	-2.289	0.722	--3.170	0.002
Prop8YesPct <---	ConsRepScale	.770	0.049	15.770	***
Prop8YesPct <---	UndervoteProp8Adj	-0.629	0.224	-2.805	0.005
Prop8YesPct <---	LogPopDensity	--3.920	0.755	-5.191	***
Prop8YesPct <---	Education	--.520	.050	-10.401	***
Prop8YesPct <---	PctHispanic	0.331	.020	16.324	***
***p<0.001					

Explaining Precinct Conservatism

As noted above, the model explained precinct conservatism moderately well (37%). As can be seen in Table 3 above, all six of the exogenous variables had a significant effect on precinct conservatism. The standardized total effects (entirely direct) appear in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of the Exogenous Variables on Precinct Conservatism

Precinct Conservatism	Age 65 and Over	Pct. Female	Pct. Hispanic	Pct. African-American	Urban Density	Education
Total Effect	0.181	-0.100	-0.385	-0.149	-0.075	-0.332
Direct Effect	0.181	-0.100	-0.385	-0.149	-0.075	-0.332
Indirect Effect	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

In general, election precincts with fewer Hispanic voters, less highly educated voters, older voters, fewer African-American citizens, more male voters, and lower population density were more conservative than other precincts. The effects of ethnicity and education were particularly strong.

Explaining Mail Ballot Precinct Designations

The full path model explained the designation of mail ballot or vote by mail precincts only weakly (14%). Table 5 reports the total, direct, and indirect effects of the sociodemographic variables and precinct conservatism on the designation of mail precincts.

Table 5. The Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of the Exogenous Variables and Precinct Conservatism on Mail Ballot Precinct Designations

Mail Ballot	Age 65 and Over	Pct. Female	Pct. Hispanic	Pct. African-American	Urban Density	Education	Precinct Conservatism
Total Effect	0.149	-0.033	0.094	-0.049	-0.223	0.223	0.332
Direct Effect	0.089	0.000	0.222	0.000	-0.198	0.333	0.332
Indirect Effect	0.060	-0.033	-0.128	-0.049	-0.025	-0.110	0.000

Clearly, the designation of mail ballot precincts in California is not neutral. In general, mail balloting appeared more frequently in conservative precincts, highly educated counties, rural counties, and precincts with more older voters. Male gender, Hispanic ethnicity, and fewer African-American citizens had more limited effects. The effects of education, rural location, and older voting population reflected many of the reasons that voting by mail developed in California. The conservatism of mail ballot precincts underscored common expectations about absentee ballots and vote by mail voters, that is, that they are somewhat more conservative than other voters (Alvarez, Levin, & Sinclair, 2011).

Explaining the Selection of Church Polling Locations

The model explained the selection of church polling locations only weakly (14%). Table 6 reports the effects of the model on church polling location.

Table 6. The Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of the Exogenous Variables, Precinct Conservatism, and Mail Ballots on Church Polling Locations.

Church Location	Age 65 and Over	Pct. Female	Pct. Hispanic	Pct. African-American	Urban Density	Education	Precinct Conservatism	Mail Ballot
Total Effect	-0.065	0.019	-0.006	0.028	-0.040	-0.055	-0.188	-0.351
Direct Effect	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	-0.124	0.000	-0.071	-0.351
Indirect Effect	-0.065	0.019	-0.006	0.028	0.084	-0.055	-0.117	0.000

Only the mail ballot precinct variable (especially since church polling places are a subset of all physical voting precincts) and precinct conservatism had a substantial effect on the selection of church polling locations. More liberal precincts were more likely to vote in a church, all other things being equal. Precincts with fewer older voters, lower educational attainment, and more rural locations had slightly greater probabilities of having church voting locations.

Explaining Intensity of Engagement (Undervote)

The model explained the undervote (intensity of engagement) moderately well (36%). Table 7 reports the total, direct, and indirect effects on the Proposition 8 undervote.

Table 7. The Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of the Exogenous Variables, Precinct Conservatism, Mail Ballots, and Church Polling Locations on Undervote (Intensity of Engagement)

Undervote	Age 65 and Over	Pct. Female	Pct. Hispanic	Pct. African-American	Urban Density	Education	Precinct Conservatism	Mail Ballot	Church
Total Effect	0.122	-0.047	0.320	-0.040	0.377	0.010	-0.242	0.311	-0.048
Direct Effect	0.138	-0.071	0.157	-0.076	0.414	-0.174	-0.349	0.294	-0.048
Indirect Effect	-0.016	0.024	0.162	0.036	-0.037	0.184	0.107	0.017	0.000

In general, urban precincts, Hispanic precincts, mail ballot precincts, liberal precincts, and precincts with more older voters had a greater undervote on Proposition 8. In terms of intensity of engagement (the inverse of the undervote), voters in rural precincts, non-Hispanic precincts,

precincts with physical voting locations, and conservative precincts all displayed a much greater intensity of engagement on the Proposition. Over and above these effects, church balloting precincts also had a slightly higher intensity of engagement.

Explaining the "Yes" Vote on Proposition 8

The model explained the "Yes" vote on Proposition 8 very well (54%). Table 8 reports the total, direct, and indirect effects of all variables in the model (sociodemographic, conservatism, mail balloting, church polling locations, and undervote) on the Proposition 8 vote.

Table 8. The Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of the Full Model on the Proposition 8 Vote

Proposition 8	Age 65 and Over	Pct. Female	Pct. Hispanic	Pct. African-American	Urban Density
Total Effect	0.112	-0.035	0.212	-0.054	-0.186
Direct Effect	0.057	0.000	0.396	0.000	-0.146
Indirect Effect	0.055	-0.035	-0.184	-0.054	-0.040

Proposition 8	Education	Precinct Conservatism	Mail Ballot	Church	Under-Vote
Total Effect	-0.446	0.399	-0.090	0.003	-0.066
Direct Effect	-0.295	0.406	-0.069	0.000	-0.066
Indirect Effect	-0.151	-0.007	-0.021	0.003	0.000

The primary factor influencing the vote on Proposition 8 was educational attainment. The greater the educational attainment levels in the county (the percentage of the population 25 and over with a high school education), the more likely was the precinct to vote "No" on Proposition 8. Similarly, precincts with a conservative voting pattern voted "Yes" with much greater frequency. Of equal significance, despite the general liberalism of Hispanic voters (see Table 4 above), Hispanic voters had very strong support for Proposition 8. The total effect of a large Hispanic vote was a larger "Yes" vote on the proposition. Voters in rural counties also had much greater support for the proposition as did precincts with larger percentages of older voters. Mail ballot precincts had slightly higher "No" votes (despite being more conservative). Intensity of engagement (the inverse of the undervote) had the net effect of increasing the "Yes" vote.

Despite the strong influence of church voting location on the "Yes" vote in preliminary regression analyses, the full path model clearly suggested that the church polling location effects were largely spurious. The total standardized effect of church polling location was 0.003. The factors increasing the use of mail ballots apparently mitigated the effects of church polling locations on the final vote.

Discussion

The central hypothesis of the paper is not supported. Initial analyses replicated Rutchick's analysis of South Carolina voting on same-sex marriage, that is, church voting location increased opposition to same-sex marriage. The effect held even when controlling for precinct conservatism and intensity of engagement. However, the full model largely eliminated these effects. At the precinct level (weighted for number of votes cast), contextual priming at church voting locations did not appear to operate during the Proposition 8 vote in 2008. The selection of mail ballot precincts and church polling locations was clearly not neutral. The locations reflected patterns of precinct ideology, county educational attainment, and urban-rural political distinctions. Nevertheless, the net effect of these differences on the final Proposition 8 vote was small.

By contrast, key demographic variables and county conservatism played a central role in the voting on Proposition 8. Education both directly, and mediated through county conservatism, played the dominant role in determining the vote variation across electoral precincts. Precincts with low levels of educational attainment had very conservative and Republican patterns of voting across propositions and candidates, especially Proposition 8. However, several other variables had marginal but significant influences on the vote. When adjusting for educational attainment and conservatism among other factors, more rural counties had higher conservatism scores, which led to higher "yes" votes on the proposition. Finally, the percentage of Hispanic voters and the percentage of voters 65 and older moderately increased the "Yes" vote. The effects of other variables were more marginal.

Conclusions

This research tested the impact of contextual priming on California Proposition 8, the constitutional initiative in 2008 banning same-sex marriage. Previous literature on the vote focused on the direct factors including ideology, education, race and ethnicity, gender, and religiosity. Ideology was consistently the dominant factor.

By contrast, the literature on contextual priming suggested that symbols and physical locations might have at least a marginal effect on the vote choices made by voters on issues with high symbolic content. Some literature has noted the importance of polling location on turnout and voting. Distance from polling location affected turnout in several studies. Proximity to the proposed location of a sports stadium increased "yes" voting on stadium bond issues. Voting in schools versus other locations increased approval rates for school tax referenda. Most relevantly for this study, voting in a church as a polling location increased the likelihood of voting to ban same-sex marriage, even controlling for ideology and partisanship.

This research tested the impact of church polling locations on the "yes" vote for Proposition 8, adjusting for the more direct influences. The model used precinct-level data to directly test the theory. The analysis used a random sample of California voting precincts weighted by number of votes cast to test the model.

The final structural equation model suggested that the hypothesized linkages between polling location and Proposition 8 vote that existed at the zero-order level did not exist in the full model. Education, county conservatism, urbanization, age, and ethnicity affected both decisions; however, the selection of polling location had no effect on the aggregate precinct-level vote. In the end, however, at the precinct level, the outcome of the Proposition 8 vote was determined not by religious variables but largely by educational attainment filtered through ideology.

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