Anglo Voting on Nativist Ballot Initiatives: The Partisan Impact of Spatial Proximity to the U.S.-Mexico Border*

Regina Branton, Rice University
Gavin Dillingham, Rice University
Johanna Dunaway, Sam Houston State University
Beth Miller, University of Missouri, Kansas City

Objective. In this study, we examine how contextual factors influence voting behavior on nativist ballot initiatives using California’s Propositions 187 and 227. We argue that spatial proximity to the border is associated with voting behavior on nativist initiatives. Methods. To examine the influence of environmental factors on Anglo voting behavior on nativist ballot initiatives, we utilize California Field Polls, U.S. Census data, and spatially referenced data generated using GIS software. Results. The results indicate that spatial proximity to the border is an important component in individual-level voting on nativist initiatives and that the impact of proximity to the border on the vote for Propositions 187 and 227 varies as a function of individual-level partisan affiliation. Conclusions. These findings hold implications for future research regarding the influence of geospatial boundaries and political behavior.

Recent events have placed immigration at the center of the national policy agenda. On October 26, 2006, President Bush signed into law the “Secure Fence Act of 2006,” which authorizes the construction of a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexico border to help decrease illegal immigration. As recently as September 21, 2006, the U.S. House of Representatives passed “The Community Protection Act of 2006,” which, if enacted into law, will allow state and local law enforcement to aid the federal government in the arrest and detention of undocumented persons who cross state lines. This legislation has sparked yet another debate in a series of national debates on the contentious issue of immigration, making the issue increasingly salient to the U.S. public. However, in states along the U.S.-Mexico border,

*Direct correspondence to Regina Branton, Department of Political Science-MS-24, PO Box 1892, Rice University, Houston, TX 77251-1892 (branton@rice.edu). The authors will share all data and coding information with those interested in replicating this study. The authors thank Bob Stein, John Alford, Ken Meier, and the anonymous reviewers. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Politics of Latino Education Conference at the University of Texas–Austin, December 2004.
immigration has traditionally been an issue of central importance. Citizens in these states continually put pressure on local and state leaders to take action in the face of an ever increasing immigrant population. In some states, the availability of the initiative process has allowed the politically mobilized to circumvent representative government in order to establish legislation targeting immigrants.

Although the nation’s foreign-born population has shown marked growth in nontraditional states in the last decade, an overwhelming majority of the foreign-born population remains concentrated in a few border states. In fact, over 40 percent of the nation’s foreign-born population resides in the four states bordering Mexico. Nowhere is evidence of the increasing foreign-born population—and increasing Latino population—more visible than in California. California is home to approximately a third of the nation’s foreign born and home to over a third of the nation’s Latino population. Between 1990 and 2000, the state’s foreign-born population increased by 32 percent and the state’s foreign-born Latino population increased by 42 percent. By 2000, foreign-born Latinos accounted for 44 percent of the state’s total Latino population.

California’s growing population of foreign-born Latinos intensified the debate surrounding immigration policies (DeSipio and de la Garza, 1998; Sierra et al., 2000). The political consequences included a series of ballot initiatives targeting legal and illegal immigrants. In 1994, voters supported Proposition 187, which eliminated access to social services such as non-emergency medical care to undocumented immigrants. In 1998, voters passed Proposition 227, which dismantled California’s bilingual education program.

The use of the initiative process in response to the increasing Latino immigrant population is not a trend that is unique to the State of California. For example, in the 2004 election, Arizona voters passed Proposition 200, denying certain public benefits to illegal immigrants. In 2000, Arizona residents passed Proposition 203, requiring all public schooling to be conducted in English and a mandatory one-year intensive English program for non-English-speaking students. Additionally, Arizona voters passed four immigration-related initiatives in the 2006 election. These trends suggest that the use of ballot initiatives is only likely to increase as the U.S. foreign-born Latino population continues to increase.

Given the continuing importance of these initiatives in immigration politics, we think it is important to consider how contextual factors influence voting behavior on nativist ballot initiatives. The current research focuses predominantly on ethnic context (e.g., Tolbert and Hero, 1996, 1998), while ignoring if (and how) the geographic location in which an individual resides influences his or her political behavior. In this study, we address this

---

1The term nativist ballot initiatives refers to policies that promote native preferences over immigrant preferences.
gap in the literature by examining the impact of spatial proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border on Anglo voting behavior on California’s Propositions 187 and 227. We propose that individuals residing more proximal to the border are more likely to support nativist ballot initiatives than individuals residing further removed from the border. Additionally, we argue that the impact of distance to the border on Anglo voting behavior on Propositions 187 and 227 varies as a function of partisan affiliation.

Ethnic Context and Nativist Ballot Initiatives

Two lines of research inform our understanding of the relationship between racial and/or ethnic context and Anglo racial attitudes: intergroup contact and intergroup conflict. The intergroup contact literature argues that increased interracial contact is associated with more positive attitudes about other races (e.g., Jackman and Crane, 1986; Sigelman and Welch, 1993). According to this argument, as the presence of a minority group increases, Anglo contact with members of the minority group also increases. This heightened intergroup contact counteracts preestablished negative stereotypes, leading to increased levels of racial tolerance and increased support for policies benefiting minority groups (e.g., Locksley, Hepburn, and Ortiz, 1982). Alternatively, the intergroup conflict perspective argues that as the size of a minority population increases, prejudicial attitudes likewise increase (e.g., Bobo, 1988; Glaser, 1994). Increased exposure to a minority group leads to an increased perception of threat or competition for social or economic resources. Heightened threat or competition between groups leads to increased levels of prejudice and decreased levels of support for policies benefiting minority groups.

A growing body of research examines the importance of ethnic context for voting behavior on nativist ballot initiatives, offering mixed results (Citrin et al., 1990; Tolbert and Hero, 1996, 1998, 2001; Valenty and Sylvia, 2004). Citrin et al. (1990) suggest that ethnic context is not related to individual-level support for the English-language initiative in California. Alternatively, Tolbert and Hero (1996, 1998, 2001) find that the presence of a large Latino population and the absence of Latinos are associated with heightened county-level support for nativist ballot initiatives. Finally, Valenty and Sylvia (2004) find that ethnic context is positively related to aggregate-level voting on Proposition 187, indicating that as the ethnic population increases, the likelihood of supporting the initiative also increases. In sum, the extant research offers a mixed view of the relationship between ethnic context and voting on nativist ballot initiatives.

The discrepant findings regarding the relationship between ethnic context and voting behavior on nativist ballot initiatives may be generated by the tendency to overlook the importance of spatial proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border. Alvarez and Butterfield (2000) reveal a possible relationship...
between proximity to the border and voting behavior on California’s Proposition 187. They account for proximity to the border with a series of dummy variables indicating whether a respondent resides in the City of Los Angeles, a Los Angeles suburb, other locations in southern California, the Central Valley, or northern California. Given recent technological advances, it is now possible to develop a more refined measure of spatial proximity to the border, thus offering an opportunity to gain a clearer understanding of the importance of proximity to the border for voting behavior on nativist initiatives.

Border Proximity and Nativist Ballot Initiatives

In what follows, we develop an argument outlining the nature of the relationship between distance to the border and individual-level voting behavior on nativist ballot initiatives. First, we expect that spatial proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border is associated with increased support for nativist initiatives. In other words, Anglos residing close to the border are more likely to support initiatives targeting immigrants than Anglos further removed from the border. This expectation is based on the idea that Anglos residing closer to the border are more likely to confront issues surrounding the border on a daily basis (Books and Prysby, 1991).

Anglos living spatially proximate to the border are continuously exposed to environmental cues and local media coverage concerning border and immigration-related issues. Books and Prysby (1991) and Cornelius (1982) argue that environmental cues increase perceptions of threat and competition, leading to heightened ethnic tension and nativist attitudes toward immigrants. Further, Books and Prysby (1991) contend that individuals residing at a greater distance from the border may not receive the first-hand images relevant to immigration, thus making the border and border-related issues less salient in everyday life. In other words, because such border-proximate cues further enhance perceptions of threat, close proximity to the border leads to increases in majority group support for nativist ballot initiatives.

Obviously, the most symbolic cues are the chain-link fences and the concrete and steel walls dividing the United States and Mexico. Simply commuting to work can highlight the role the border plays in one’s everyday life. Highways close to the border are often dotted with yellow signs that depict a family running with the warning “Prohibido.”2 The strong presence of border patrol in areas closer to the border may also reinforce one’s awareness of the border. These agents are posted at numerous stationary checkpoints along the border (and a few inland checkpoints) and on mobile units patrolling areas near the border, on land and in water.

---

2These signs appear on I-5 and the 905 to alert motorists of individuals evading the border crossing.
Furthermore, as the communications research notes, events occurring “close to home” receive more coverage than events occurring further away (Adams, 1986; Bendix and Liebler, 1999; Martin, 1988; Molotch and Lester, 1975). Additionally, local television and newspapers are notorious for following the crime news script, which is characterized by a disproportionate emphasis on violent crime and the tendency to focus on nonwhites as the perpetrators (Gilliam et al., 1996; Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000). These patterns are reflected in the volume and nature of media coverage closer to the border. English-language media outlets closer to the border routinely offer more coverage of issues such as illegal immigrants, the negative economic implications of immigration, border-related crime, and drug trafficking across the border than do media outlets further removed from the border (Rodriguez, 1999).3

This increased exposure to environmental cues and media coverage not only heightens the salience of immigration-related issues close to the border, but also enhances perceptions of threat by emphasizing the negative aspects associated with immigration. As the intergroup conflict literature would suggest, such perceived threat might lead to negative attitudes toward other groups and policies favoring those groups. Given the above discussion, we put forward:

\[ \text{H1: Generally, Anglos living spatially proximate to the border are more likely to support nativist ballot initiatives than Anglos living further removed from the border.} \]

Proximity, Partisanship, and Nativist Initiatives

To examine the importance of border proximity, we utilize two nativist ballot initiatives that focus on different aspects of immigration: California’s Propositions 187 and 227. Proposition 187 sought to deny publicly funded social services to illegal immigrants, while Proposition 227 eliminated California’s existing bilingual education program. These two initiatives are important as they speak to a larger trend in nativist ballot initiatives. For example, Proposition 227 sparked similar ballot initiatives in Arizona, Massachusetts, and Colorado; Proposition 187 was later followed by a similar initiative on the 2004 ballot in Arizona. If the immigrant population continues to grow as projected, the public will likely face additional ballot propositions that deal with immigration-related issues.

Our basic argument, as outlined in H1, is that spatial proximity to the border enhances the propensity of Anglos to support nativist initiatives; however, we propose that this relationship is moderated by partisan affiliation. To develop this argument, we begin by offering expectations about

---

3The information conveyed by the media closer to the border often focuses on the negative implications, while overlooking the benefits of immigration. This is revealed by our content analysis of more than 1,500 stories from 93 California newspapers for a 12-month period.
the relationship between partisan affiliation and voting on Proposition 227 and 187. Despite the fact that ballot initiatives lack partisan labels, research highlights the influence of individual-level partisan identification on voting behavior on a variety of ballot initiatives (e.g. Bowler and Donovan, 1998; Branton, 2003; Karp, 1998; Smith and Tolbert, 2001).

In line with this evidence, we argue that individual-level partisan affiliation is associated with Anglo voting behavior on Propositions 187 and 227. More specifically, we expect that Republicans are more likely to support both these initiatives than are Democrats, regardless of proximity to the border. First, Republicans, in general, are less likely to support spending on social services and welfare than are Democrats (Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Gilens, 1999; Goren, 2004; Jacoby and Schneider, 2001). Second, Republicans, in general, are more supportive of stricter immigration policies and harsher punishments for illegal immigrants than are Democrats (Citrin, Reingold, and Green, 1990; Citrin et al., 1997; Frendreis and Tatalovich, 1997; Hood and Morris, 1997).\footnote{See also (http://nationaljournal.com/members/polltrack/2006/issues/06immigration.htm) for a demonstration of poll data on the partisan divide over immigration.} Considered concurrently, it seems reasonable to expect that Republicans would be less supportive of social spending for illegal immigrants.

Extant research also indicates that voters use information cues typically available to guide their decision making (e.g., Bowler and Donovan, 1998; Lupia, 1994). In the case of both propositions, elite endorsements served as an information beacon for voters. Supporters of Proposition 187 included Republican elites such as Governor Pete Wilson, the state Republican Party, and the state attorney general; likewise, supporters of Proposition 227 included prominent Republican figures such as Governor Pete Wilson, Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan, and the state Republican Party. The availability of these cues enabled voters to act in a manner consistent with their partisan preferences. In fact, several recent works reveal a significant relationship between partisanship and voting on Proposition 187 and Proposition 227, with Republicans favoring these propositions more than Democrats (Branton, 2003; Smith and Tolbert, 2001; Tolbert and Hero, 2001). Based on this, we offer the following hypothesis regarding the relationship between partisan identification and Anglo voting on both Proposition 187 and Proposition 227.

\[ H_2: \text{Generally speaking, Republicans are more likely to support Proposition 187 and Proposition 227 than are Democrats.} \]

Having established the general expectations regarding the importance of partisanship, we turn now to the proposed conditional relationship between partisanship and spatial proximity to the border. As noted in $H_2$, we expect that Democrats are more likely to oppose both initiatives when compared to Republicans. However, we argue that support among Democrats varies as a
function of spatial proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border. The perceived threat posed by residing more proximal to the border increases the likelihood that Democrats will support such nativist initiatives when compared to Democrats living further removed from the border. In other words, even though, in general, Democrats are less likely to support restrictive immigration policies, Democrats more proximal to the border are more likely to support the nativist initiatives due to relevance of border and immigration concerns. Although Democrats living at a greater distance from the border may oppose nativist ballot initiatives on principle, Democrats closer to the border are more likely to be susceptible to perceptions of threat. As such, we expect the probability of a Democrat supporting these initiatives to decline as distance to the border increases.

Alternatively, given that Republicans support restrictive social spending and immigrant-related policies in general, it is reasonable to expect that Republicans are predisposed to support these initiatives regardless of proximity to the border. Stated simply, proximity to the border cannot influence Republicans to adopt a position they may already hold. Therefore, we expect the influence of proximity to the border among Republicans to be marginal at best.

H₃: The influence of spatial proximity to the border on support for Propositions 187 and 227 should have an impact on Democrats, but little to no effect on Republicans.

Data and Analysis

To examine the influence of environmental factors on Anglo voting behavior on nativist ballot initiatives, we utilize California Field Polls, U.S. Census data, and spatially referenced data generated using GIS software. The Field Polls were chosen because they queried respondents on how they intended to vote on each proposition and included zipcode of residence for each respondent. Census data are used to measure levels of ethnic context. GIS software is used to compile a measure of spatial proximity to the border of Mexico. The survey data and the aggregate-level data are merged to account for each respondent’s contextual environment.

The dependent variables, an Anglo respondent’s position on Proposition 227 or Proposition 187, are coded as dichotomous variables with 1 rep-
resenting support for the proposition and 0 representing opposition to the proposition. Anglo voting behavior is treated as a function of two sets of independent variables: environmental- and individual-level attributes.

The principal independent variable of interest is the aggregate measure of spatial proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border. Spatial proximity to the border (DISTANCE) is measured by the mileage from each California zipcode to the border of Mexico. To obtain estimates of spatial distance, we used GIS to calculate the distance from the longitudinal and latitudinal center of each zipcode to the U.S.-Mexico border. The actual observed value of distance to the border ranges from 3 miles to 708 miles.

The model also includes three additional aggregate-level measures: ethnic context, socioeconomic climate, and political environment. Ethnic context (LATINO) is measured as the percentage of the Latino population within each zipcode. The observed values of the ethnic context measure range from 3 to 93 percent. Several works note the influence of socioeconomic context on racial attitudes and voting behavior on nativist ballot propositions (Tolbert and Hero, 1996, 1998). As such, we control for socioeconomic context with a measure of the percentage of COLLEGE-EDUCATED individuals at the zip-code level. Partisan context (PRESIDENT VOTE) is measured by the Republican Party’s vote share in the prior presidential election at the county level. This measure is included to control for the influence of the partisan composition of the area on one’s voting behavior (Campbell, 1987; MacKuen and Brown, 1987).

The model also includes several individual-level control variables: a respondent’s partisan affiliation, AGE (measured in actual years), SEX (coded 1 if the respondent is female), ideology, and education. Partisan affiliation is

---

8We use zipcode as the geographic unit of interest because it offers the most precise measure the data afford of how far one resides from the border. We also estimate each model using county as the geographic unit of interest. The estimates for Propositions 187 and 227 were significant and consistent.

9We calculate this measure using four crossing points along the border from west to east: Tijuana, Tecate, Mexicali, and Vicente. The shortest distance is used to represent our measure of distance to the border.

10The average distance to the border is 280 miles and the median is 223 miles in the Proposition 187 data set. The average distance to the border is 284 miles and the median is 267 miles in the Proposition 227 data set.

11We estimated the models using both percent Latino and percent foreign born. The results using percent foreign born and percent Latino are consistent.

12The mean value of ethnic context is 21 percent and the median is 16 in the Proposition 187 data set. The mean value of ethnic context is 23 percent and the median is 16 in the Proposition 227 data set. Ethnic context and proximity to the border of Mexico is correlated at 0.26 in the Proposition 187 data set; and at 0.34 in the Proposition 227 data set.

13Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) find education to be a very reliable indicator of aggregate-level socioeconomic status.

14Unlike the other contextual measures, partisan context is observed at the county level as it is not available at the zip-code level.

15The models were estimated both with and without socioeconomic context and partisan context. The inclusion of these variables did not have a substantive (or statistical) impact on the relationship between the proximity to the border and voting behavior on either initiative.
measured using two binary variables: **DEMOCRAT** and **INDEPENDENT**. Here, Republican serves as the baseline category to which Democrat and Independent are compared. Ideology is measured by two binary variables: **LIBERAL** and **MODERATE**. Conservative serves as the baseline category for ideology. Education is measured by **COLLEGE**, which is coded 1 if a respondent has a college degree and 0 if not.

**Voting Behavior on Proposition 187 and Proposition 227**

As noted, the dependent variables, Anglo vote choice on Proposition 187 and 227, are both binary response variables. As such, logistic regression is used to estimate these models. The logit coefficients and corresponding standard errors are presented in Table 1.

As outlined, we hypothesize that the “effect” of spatial proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border on Anglo voting behavior on Propositions 187 and 227 is “conditioned” by individual-level partisan affiliation. To assess this proposed relationship, the model includes a statistical interaction between Democrat and spatial proximity to the border. The interaction is as follows:

\[ Y = B_1(\text{distance}) + B_2(\text{Democrat}) + B_3(\text{distance} \times \text{Democrat}), \]  

where \( \text{distance} \) represents distance to the border, \( \text{Democrat} \) represents individual-level Democratic partisan affiliation, and \( \text{distance} \times \text{Democrat} \) represents the multiplicative term between the two variables. The relationship between distance to the border and Democratic voting behavior is represented by: \( (B_2(1) + [(B_1 + B_3) \times (\text{Distance})]) \), while the relationship between distance to the border and Republican voting behavior is represented by: \( (B_1 \times \text{Distance}) \).

The three variables under the heading “Conditional Relationship” in Table 1 represent the interaction in Equation (1). The statistically significant interaction between Distance and Democrat in both models confirms \( H_3 \), indicating that Democratic voting behavior on Proposition 187 and Proposition 227 varies as a function of spatial proximity to the border.

16The use of individual- and aggregate-level data can present problems due to serial dependence within clusters (zipcode) and heteroscedasticity across clusters (Steenbergen and Jones, 2002). We utilize the Huber/White/sandwich estimation (White, 1980), which adjusts the variance-covariance matrix.

17To control for possible regional effects, these models are estimated including a series of dummy variables denoting if a respondent resides in San Diego County, Orange County, Los Angeles County, or San Francisco County. This has no statistical impact on the interaction between Democrat and distance.

18The interaction between Independent and distance did not approach statistical significance; thus, the models do not include the interaction between Independent and distance. This nonfinding may be due to the fact that independents can hold a vast array of political preferences ranging from the liberal-leaning Green Party to the conservative-minded American First Party. Thus the impact of proximity to the border may differ among independents.
Substantively, this suggests that Democrats residing closer to the border are more likely to support both propositions when compared to Democrats residing further removed from the border. As noted above, because Republican is the baseline category for partisan affiliation, the impact of spatial proximity to the border on Republican voting behavior is based only on the distance indicator. In H3, we propose that the impact of proximity to the border on voting behavior would be marginal at best for Republicans when

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covariates</th>
<th>Prop. 187</th>
<th>Prop. 227</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Attributes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.010</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.131</td>
<td>-0.248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.196)</td>
<td>(0.233)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>-0.289</td>
<td>-0.671**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.205)</td>
<td>(0.250)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>-2.13***</td>
<td>-1.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.346)</td>
<td>(0.400)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>-0.755**</td>
<td>-0.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.248)</td>
<td>(0.288)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
<td>-0.997*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.316)</td>
<td>(0.404)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditional Relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>-0.065</td>
<td>-0.572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.408)</td>
<td>(0.445)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance*Democrat</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.003*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Attributes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic context</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
<td>(0.009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisan context</td>
<td>0.023</td>
<td>0.025*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College educated</td>
<td>-0.022**</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.008)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.26*</td>
<td>0.359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.990)</td>
<td>(0.957)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald Chi²</td>
<td>110.19***</td>
<td>99.68***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% correctly predicted</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>71.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% PRE</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001.

NOTE: The data are taken from the October 1994 and the May 1998 California Poll, 2000 U.S. Census data, and spatially referenced data generated using GIS. Coefficient estimates are based on logit estimates. Huber/White standard errors are presented in parentheses.
compared to Democrats; however, both estimates indicate that Republican voting behavior on these initiatives does not vary as a function of proximity to the border.

To better understand the conditional effect of spatial proximity to the border and partisanship, we provide graphical illustrations in Figures 1 and 2. These figures illustrate the conditional relationships found in Table 1 by plotting the predicted probabilities for both models. In both instances, the relationship between proximity to the border and Anglo voting behavior is conditioned on whether the individual is a Democrat or Republican.

Figure 1 plots the probability of supporting Proposition 187 for a moderate Anglo male of average age who resides in an area with an average-sized Latino population, has a mean-level college education, and an average level of support for the Republican presidential candidate. Based on this scenario, we calculate the predicted probabilities for a Democrat and a Republican, while allowing spatial distance to the border to vary from the minimum to the maximum value on the distance variable. The solid line reflects the predicted probability for a Democrat and the dashed line reflects the probability for a Republican.

Figure 1 demonstrates that Democrats residing proximal to the border are more likely to support Proposition 187 than Democrats further removed from the border. More specifically, the probability of support among Democrats drops dramatically from 0.64 for those closest to the border to 0.31 for those most removed from the border of Mexico. The figure also

---

19 The following equation was used to generate the predicted probabilities for a Democrat: $\Pr(Y = 1) = (\exp(a + B_i x_i + [B_{Dem}] * 1 + [(B_{distance} + B_{Dem + distance}) * (Distance)]) / 1 + (\exp(a + B_i x_i + [B_{Dem}] * 1 + [(B_{distance} + B_{Dem + distance}) * (Distance)]))$. 

---
illustrates that Republican support for Proposition 187 does not vary as
distance to the border changes. Finally, the figure indicates that as distance
to the border increases, the gap in support among Democrats and Repub-
licans increases. This means not only that Democratic support for the ini-
tiative declines as distance to the border increases, but that the Democrats
are less likely to support Proposition 187 than Republicans, confirming H2.

Figure 2 plots the probability of supporting Proposition 227, using the
same scenario outlined above. This figure also demonstrates that Democrats
residing more proximal to the border are more likely to support Proposition
227 than are Democrats further removed from the border. The probability
of support among Democrats drops from 0.46 for those closest to the border
to 0.08 for those most removed from the U.S.-Mexico border. The figure
also illustrates, consistent with Proposition 187, that Republican support for
Proposition 227 does not vary as distance to the border changes. Finally, the
figure indicates there is a gap in support among Democrats and Republicans,
which increases as proximity to the border increases. As distance to the
border increases, the gap between Democrat and Republican support for
Proposition 227 increases from 0.15 for those most proximal to the border
to 0.53 for those most removed from the border, confirming H2. Figures 1
and 2 demonstrate the complex nature of the importance of proximity to the
border with respect to Anglo partisan affiliation.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of the Latino population has spawned an ever-increas-
ing debate regarding immigration-related issues. The subject of immigration
has been particularly intense in California (DeSipio and de la Garza, 1998; Sierra et al., 2000). Much of the debate has been driven by fear that low-skilled, uneducated immigrants are streaming into the United States, taking jobs from legal residents, and placing tremendous pressure on an already strained social services system. This has resulted in a series of ballot initiatives that have explicitly targeted legal and illegal immigrants. Two examples of these nativist initiatives are California’s Proposition 227, which successfully dismantled California’s bilingual education program, and Proposition 187, which sought to deny publicly funded social services to illegal immigrants.

This project examined Anglo voting on Proposition 227 and Proposition 187 with particular interest in the influence of contextual factors on Anglo voting behavior. This study extends the existing research by examining voting behavior as a function of spatial proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border. Although the nation as a whole is becoming increasingly more ethnically diverse, this study suggests that proximity to the border retains a unique political importance. The results offer considerable evidence that geographical boundaries matter in the determination of Anglo voting on nativist ballot initiatives. Substantively, the results suggest that Anglo Democrats living closer to the Mexico border are more likely to support nativist initiatives than Anglo Democrats living further removed from the border. This finding supports the assertion of Books and Prysby (1991) that international borders are important geopolitical boundaries.

Finally, although this geospatial factor is important, it is only part of the story. The findings strongly suggest that the influence of proximity to the border on Anglo voting behavior is dependent on partisan predisposition. Republicans, regardless of context or proximity to the border, are consistently more likely to support nativist ballot initiatives. In contrast, Anglo Democrats are influenced by this geopolitical factor. Democrats living in close proximity to the border demonstrate support for Proposition 227 and Proposition 187. However, as distance to the border increases, there is a considerable change in voting behavior among Anglo Democrats. Democrats living further removed from the border are far more likely to oppose these measures than are Democrats living in areas that are near the border. Although Democrats typically have more favorable attitudes toward social-service-type policies and immigrant-related issues than Republicans, the results demonstrate that proximity to the border can trump these attitudes.

These findings hold implications for future research regarding context and political behavior. First, this area of research can be extended by considering not only the influence of ethnic context, but also the importance of geospatial attributes. Indeed, given that our results lend no evidence to the idea that ethnic context is associated with Anglo voting on nativist initiatives and the broader literature renders mixed results regarding the impact of ethnic context, it seems important to consider the influence of other contextual features in ballot elections. Second, a natural extension of this line of
research would be to examine the structure of attitudes across racial and ethnic groups, not just Anglo political behavior. Are ethnic context and spatial context associated with political attitudes and behavior among non-whites? Finally, future research may explore whether the influence of spatial context is consistent across border states.

REFERENCES


Copyright of Social Science Quarterly (Blackwell Publishing Limited) is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.