The Effect on Minority Voter Turnout by Distance from the Polling Place

Executive Summary

Voters in the 2002 General Election in Los Angeles County were tagged with both their polling place in the 2002G election and their proposed precinct for the October 7th recall election. Turnout probabilities were calculated for each voter based both on his or her distance from the voter's G02 polling place and his or her ethnicity. These probabilities by distance and ethnicity were then applied to each voter based on the voter's distance from the polling places proposed for the October 7th election. The expected turnout for the October 7th election was calculated for each ethnicity. For Los Angeles County, this resulted in a drop-off of approximately 10,000 more minority voters than Anglo voters that would be expected for the October 7th election.

Procedure

It is generally considered by political scientists that voting decreases as the cost of voting increases. One obvious cost is the distance the voter lives from the polling place, as (particularly voters without a car), this increases the length of time it takes to get to the polling. Also, in areas with high crime rates or gang activity, the physical risk of voting also increases with distance.

To examine the effect of distance from polling place on turnout, voters registered as of the close of registration for the 2002G election for Los Angeles County were classified by their distance from their polling place and to their race/ethnicity (by surname matching or through census data). The following table, then, gives turnout racial/ethnic category as a function of distance from polling place.

Table 1

	Distance from Polling Place							
	< 0.25 mile		.25-.50 mile		.50-.75 mile		> 0.75 mile	
Ethnicity/ Race	Percent Not Voting	Number of voters	Percent Not Voting	Number of voters	Percent Not Voting	Number of voters	Percent Not Voting	Number of voters
Black	58.06	202,736	59.83	168,455	59.09	48,863	59.04	18,362
Other	55.9	24,290	56.06	21,715	55.25	7,385	54.19	3,799
White	49.94	584,414	50.19	535,654	50.33	198,194	49.41	118,791
Latino	58.49	342,096	59.94	327,775	60.69	105,388	62.35	50,240
Jewish	42.64	67,447	42.87	59,868	43.01	22,197	41.23	13,283
Korean	68.31	15,354	70.12	13,068	70.5	4,736	69.39	2,427
Japanese	47.56	14,286	49.09	12,258	49.78	4,016	49.56	1,913
Chinese	65.07	36,953	66.52	34,980	68.37	12,414	69.49	7,804
Indian	65.35	7,229	65.84	6,795	66.92	2,597	65.84	1,446
Vietnamese	68.18	11,673	70.19	11,308	67.65	3,508	68.78	2,021
Filipino	58.08	20,928	59.92	19,848	61.17	6,276	61.81	3,142

There is indeed a pattern of decrease voting for non-Anglos (Jewish is included as Anglo) as distance from the polling place increases. To come up with a projection of non-voting in the recall election using distance from the recall polling places, the following was done. First, for a voter in a particular G02 voting precinct of a particular racial/ethnic category and distance from a precinct, the probability of drop-off was calculated as the proportion of that type of voter voting, if the number of that type was ten or greater. If the number was less than ten, the overall proportions above were used. This was done because drop-off as a function of distance can vary markedly and a local measure gave the most accurate reflection of drop-off as a function of distance given that there were enough voters in that distance/ethnic category to obtain a reasonable estimate of that drop-off.

Using these probabilities, it is possible to calculate the distance from the proposed recall polling places and then obtain a projection of whether individuals would vote as a function of distance. Note that for any particular voter a recall precinct may be either closer, further, or the same distance as their 2002G polling place. Thus a voter may be more likely, less likely, or just as likely to vote as a function of distance. The projected turnout by racial/ethnic category is then given in the following table:

Table 2

Neighborhood adjusted projected turnout				
Ethnicity/ Race	Reg Voters	R03 No Vote	G02 No Vote	Decrease
Black	438,416	261,356	258,219	3,237
Other	57,188	32,462	31,890	572
White	1,437,053	721,381	719,122	2,259
Latino	825,499	497,470	491,847	5,623
Jewish	162,795	67,902	69,450	-1,548
Korean	35,585	24,958	24,674	284
Japanese	32,473	15,839	15,759	80
Chinese	92,151	62,783	61,224	559
Indian	18,067	11,997	11,888	109
Vietnamese	28,510	19,726	19,659	67
Filipino	50,194	30,115	29,829	286

Table 3

Non-Anglo decrease	10,817
Anglo decrease	711
Net	10,106

Overall, then, there is a net loss in minority drop-off (non-Anglo, non-Jewish surname) of approximately 10,000 voters for LA County. As Los Angeles is approximately one-quarter of the

voting population in the state this would project to, other things being equal (they aren't), an approximate net loss of 40,000 minority as compared to non-minority voters statewide, or approximately the projected number of votes lost through the use of punch-card ballots. Numerous statewide races have been decided by fewer than this number of votes, so this number is substantively significant.

This is a conservative estimate of the actual drop-off which would occur due to the consolidation of polling places, as it is based on voters actual behavior as a function of distance in the previous election. Several factors which would tend to decrease turnout are also ignored. First, in the 2002 General election there were almost no voters further than a mile from their polling place, so it was not possible to get a projection of turnout behavior for distances a mile or greater without fitting a statistical model, yet an appreciable number of voters are more than a mile from their recall polling place. Since the proportion from the last category of distance from the 2002G election (greater then 3/4 mile) was used for voters who are more than a mile from their recall polling place, that usage would overstate turnout in the recall election.

Second, there is no attempt to model the behavior of voters when changing polling places--since there are only about one-third as many polling places in the recall election as in the 2002G election, most voters will have to switch voting precincts. Third, Anglo voters vote absentee at a greater rate and so increased distance and switching of polling places will not have the same effect on them as it will on minorities. For all of these reasons the effects on minority voters of the precinct consolidations for the recall are almost certainly much greater than described herein, so this estimate might be taken as a floor on the effects on turnout on precinct consolidation in the recall.

Some technical notes: Not all of the polling places in the 2002G election were used, but 4,660 out of 4,923 were (the rest could be added without undue difficulty). Note all of the voters were used either (3,656,276 out of 3,882,589). Adding the rest of these would be more difficult and it would be nearly impossible to add all of them (these problems have to do with locating the latitude and longitude of these voters to get distances). All ethnicities were done using surname matching on registered voter names except the Black/Anglo/other categories--these were created by applying the proportions of the underlying population on those voters who were not surname matched.

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