Development Ballot Measures, Interest Group Endorsements, and the Political Geography of Growth Preferences

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In response to rapid population and economic growth, many communities have turned to voter initiatives to resolve their land use disputes. We find that despite strong public concern about growth, voters often support measures that allow or encourage new development. We consider the sources of this support by analyzing patterns of voting on a range of prodevelopment ballot initiatives. These initiatives provide a valuable opportunity to understand how economic self-interest, geography, interest group endorsements, and public goods affect citizen support for development policies. We find that interest group endorsements significantly increase public support for new development. These endorsements help voters evaluate the personal impact of complex development proposals and allow voters to behave in ways that reflect a high degree of sophistication.

A s American communities grapple with the complex and often contentious issues created by residential and commercial growth, many localities are turning to direct democracy to resolve their land use disputes. On direct democracy measures, regular citizens rather than elected representatives approve laws and public policies by voting on ballot propositions.[1] A study of the November 2000 election reports that 553 state and local ballot measures concerning growth-related issues were placed before voters in 38 states (Myers and Puentes 2001). These measures covered a vast array of growth, conservation, transportation, and economic development questions.

The motivations for placing growth issues before voters are as varied as the circumstances of the individual communities in which they appear. In recent years, however, a number of regularities have emerged. One such regularity is that antigrowth interests often turn to direct democracy as a way to counterbalance or circumvent what they see as a bias in their local representative institutions. Consistent with a large body of social science research, many slow-growth interests hold that the traditional process of land use regulation results in a "growth machine" where property owners, developers, local businesses, and elected representatives all share strong incentives to promote commercial and residential growth (Molotch 1976).[2] Slow-growth interests reason that current residents have different incentives regarding growth than do elected representatives. They argue that voters will be less tolerant of new development, since they receive few direct benefits and pay substantial costs in the forms of traffic congestion, environmental degradation, loss of open space, strain on infrastructure, invasion of privacy, and depression of existing housing

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[1]Direct democracy includes two types of measures: initiatives, which are drafted by citizens and placed on the ballot by petition, and referendums, which are drafted and approved by the legislature and then placed on the ballot, either automatically or by petition, for voter ratification. In our empirical analysis, we do not differentiate between the two because, given the design of the ballot and voter pamphlet for the measures we analyze, it is extremely difficult for voters to determine whether a given ballot measure is a citizen initiative or city council referendum.

[2]The "growth machine" thesis has spawned large literatures on both sides of the debate. See Jonas and Wilson (1999) for a recent review.

values. Thus, the advocates argue, voters will protect their interests by voting "no" on new development (Fischel 2001) and hence will more effectively limit sprawl than will city hall. These groups then use direct democracy as a tool to block particular developments or to tie the hands of local officials by adopting growth-restricting policies such as growth boundaries and development moratoriums.

Despite the compelling logic of the slow-growth interests, however, the fact of the matter is that direct democracy *does not* necessarily prevent new development.[3] In many communities, progrowth interests have also turned to direct democracy when they face representative institutions that systematically produce policies they oppose. In this case, of course, the nature of perceived bias is antigrowth rather than progrowth. These progrowth interests who turn to the ballot reason that voters will oppose the negative consequences of growth *restrictions*, such as increased densities, limitations on property rights, and increased housing prices, and will support the purported advantages of growth, including job creation and enhanced service provision. Progrowth interests then use the initiative process to weaken existing growth restrictions or to propose particular new developments directly to the voters.

Empirically, we find some evidence in support of both sets of arguments. In a study of voting on local growth-related initiatives and referendums in California, Fulton et al. (2000) find that between 1986 and 2000, voters considered 671 local ballot measures that dealt with land use and development issues. 229 of these measures were coded as progrowth, of which 46% passed. 389 were slow-growth measures, of which 59% passed.[4] In other words, voters were more likely to pass slow-growth measures than progrowth measures, but not overwhelmingly so. Moreover, voters in a given community frequently approve a slow-growth measure one year, and then overwhelmingly adopt a progrowth measure the next, or vice versa. The same study by Fulton et al. reports that 18 counties and 36 cities passed at least one progrowth *and* at least one slow-growth ballot measure between 1986 and 2000. In other words, voters in many communities do not appear to have *strong and consistent* anti- or progrowth preferences, but rather favor growth under some circumstances and oppose growth under others.

This sort of variation is especially surprising in light of the existing literature on citizen growth preferences. Generally speaking, this literature treats growth preferences as fixed. Early studies of local development policy assumed that citizen preferences were systematically and consistently favorable toward new development (Molotch 1976; Peterson 1981). While the focus of these studies was more on policy outcomes and less on preferences *per se*, an important implication of their arguments is that progrowth preferences are induced by either the market (as in Peterson) or by the efforts of the local progrowth political coalition (as in Molotch). More recently, several scholars have explicitly modeled the determinants of growth preferences (Gottdiener and Neiman 1981; Donovan and Neiman 1992; Baldassare and Wilson 1996). These studies treat individual preferences largely as a function of exogenously determined socioeconomic characteristics such as ethnicity, income, and profession.[5] These latter studies produce somewhat mixed results regarding which factors drive growth preferences. Together, however, they do predict that while growth preferences will vary across individuals, these preferences should be relatively stable at both the individual and aggregate levels (since socioeconomic determinants change slowly). In other words, they would not expect the same set of voters in the same locality to sometimes favor growth and to sometimes oppose it.

In this article, we seek to understand the outcomes of recent land use ballot measure contests by identifying the sources of voter support for development propositions. Our approach involves analyzing patterns of voting on a range of prodevelopment ballot measures to uncover the microlevel determinants of macrolevel electoral outcomes. We test a number of alternative hypotheses about the impact of economic self-interest, geography, interest group endorsements, and public goods on voter support for new development. Our study provides a compelling explanation for why voters support some development measures and oppose others. Contrary to the existing literature that focuses on economic self-interest, we show that a baseline economic model that includes only demographic and economic variables explains very little of the variation across voters and propositions. Rather, our expanded model shows that voters support development measures in ways that reflect the primacy of interest group

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[3] This point is consistent with Lewis and Neiman (2002), who find a limited impact of growth-management policies on housing development in California. We note that growth-management policies in general, and those brought about by direct democracy in particular, may alter the frequency, amount, timing, and quality of new development, but testing for these more subtle effects is beyond the scope of our article.

[4] The remaining 53 measures were coded as "neutral," neither pronor slow-growth.

[5] Many of these analyses also treat preferences as a function of growth rates, hypothesizing that individuals who reside in cities which have recently experienced rapid increases in population are more likely have antigrowth sentiments.

endorsements on electoral choice. Above and beyond economic considerations, when key interest groups took positions on these development measures, voters behaved in highly rational and sophisticated ways.[6] This degree of voter sophistication is especially remarkable, given the low levels of overall knowledge that citizens report about local government affairs in general and about ballot measures in particular (Bowler and Donovan 1998).

Additionally, our analysis shows that citizens' growth preferences are far more complex than they have generally been portrayed in the urban politics and urban economics literatures. We find that these preferences are nonseparable or dependent.[7] In other words, the way a voter feels about growth is largely (perhaps, primarily) dependent upon a number of other issues or factors such as interest group cues, the geographic location of the development, features of the development itself, and the provision of public goods. Thus, preferences are not simply a function of socioeconomic factors, the market, or interest group strength, but rather a complex combination of these.

Finally, our analysis provides a unique test of what is perhaps the leading model of local politics. This view, as articulated in Peterson's *City Limits* (1981), argues that social, economic, and political forces that are exogenous to a local community largely drive local public policy outcomes. We provide evidence that is directly contrary to this view. Specifically, we find strong evidence that the decisions and strategies of local political actors (in this case developers and interest groups) also play a significant, and possibly more important, role in shaping local land use policy outcomes. In other words, local politics matters.

In the following section, we describe the experience of one community—San Diego, California—that has used direct democracy as an important part of its land use policy process for many years. This community provides the setting for our main analysis of voting on development propositions. We then discuss the major theoretical approaches that inform our analysis. Based on these theories, we develop a number of hypotheses about voter decisions on development propositions. We test these hypotheses with data from recent development measures. We discuss the generalizability of our findings and extend a subset of our analysis to a larger sample of cases. We conclude by considering the implications of this research for our understanding of the importance of self-interest, geography,

interest group endorsements, and public goods on citizen preferences for development.

The Setting: San Diego, California

We analyze voting on prodevelopment ballot measures in the city of San Diego, California. In 1985, San Diego voters passed a ballot initiative, Proposition A, which required voter approval for all development in the city's "future urbanizing areas" or FUA (Caves 1992).[8] Prop A was placed on the ballot by slow-growth interests using the acronym PLAN (Prevent Los Angelization Now). Its stated purpose was to drastically slow residential development (McMenamy 1999; Weisberg 1987). The reasoning of Prop A's proponents mirrors that of many growth-control advocates across the country who have turned to direct democracy: current residents will protect their individual economic self-interest and vote against all or most new development. Prop A passed with 56% voter support. And for 10 years, Prop A's proponents seemed to have achieved their goal of halting growth: only three measures to approve new development in the FUA were placed on the ballot in the decade after Prop A, and only one passed.

Since 1996, however, property owners and developers have been much more successful in obtaining voter approval for their development projects. Between 1996 and 1998, seven of nine measures required by Prop A passed.[9] Several of the successful developments were enormous projects, involving hundreds of acres and thousands of new housing units. Thus, contrary to the predictions of Prop A's proponents, San Diego voters have voted in favor of new development (at least in recent years), and the city's direct democracy requirement has apparently failed to prevent development.

San Diego in many ways provides an ideal setting for understanding voting on development propositions. First, San Diego is typical of many communities that have experienced rapid growth in recent years. San Diego residents increasingly view the consequences of growth as an important public problem and regard local government as incapable of dealing effectively with these problems

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[6]This level of sophistication is largely enabled by the institutional context of California elections, particularly the structure of the ballot and voters' pamphlets. The format of California election materials is discussed later.

[7]Lacy (2001) defines nonseparable preferences as preferences that are contingent upon the outcome of other issues.

[8]The city's general plan and progress guide designates three planning areas: urbanized, planned urbanizing, and future urbanizing. The future urbanizing areas contain regions of the city currently reserved for agricultural uses and open space and accounts for most of the city's useable, undeveloped land. See Calavita (1992), also City of San Diego (1993).

[9]No measures appeared on the 2000, 2001, or 2002 ballots, the last elections at the time of this writing.

(Baldassare 2000). San Diego voters passed the overtly antigrowth Proposition A, over the opposition of the city's political elite. To the extent that these concerns about growth translate into policy preferences, we would expect voters in San Diego (and similar places) to oppose most proposals for new development. The fact that a majority of voters have supported eight of the 12 prodevelopment measures required by Prop A suggests that important factors besides simple economic self-interest are driving voter choice. Second, progrowth interests in San Diego have made frequent use of the ballot to try to build in the FUA. These measures exhibit significant variation on a number of potentially important variables, such as the size, character, and location of the development; the number and types of interest group endorsements they received; and the benefits provided by developers. They therefore allow us to isolate the impact of numerous factors on support for new development. Third, data are available which merge vote returns, demographic information, voter registration, and geography by precinct for nine of the San Diego ballot measures. We employ these data in a statistical analysis of the determinants of support for prodevelopment measures. Fourth, by limiting our study to a single city, there are fewer potentially mediating influences to control for such as variations in political institutions, economic conditions, public preferences, and natural and geographic characteristics. That said, however, we contend that our results from San Diego have important implications for our understanding of land use politics in other communities as well, particularly where citizens have adopted similar requirements for voter approval for future development (Gerber and Phillips 2003).[10] To test the robustness of our results to other environments, we replicate a subset of our analyses on a larger sample of cities.

Theories and Hypotheses

Our analysis builds upon a number of literatures in the areas of voter behavior, information, interest group endorsements, and the dynamics of ballot proposition elections.

We begin with the assumption that voters seek to behave in a manner that is consistent with their economic self-interest. In its most general application, this assump-

[10]These requirements are widespread. Myers and Puentes (2001), for example, identify the use of local land use ballot measures in 38 states, many of which come about due to preexisting voter requirements; Staley (2001) describes their use in many Ohio municipalities.

tion means that voters assess the expected costs and benefits of the electoral alternatives they face and choose the one that produces the highest expected net benefit. In the context of voting on development proposals, the assumption of economic voting means that voters will support new development if it makes them better off, in terms of the set of factors they value, than the status quo (i.e., no new development). Note that this assumption does not require that voters consider only economic factors when they assess their electoral alternatives. Quality of life issues, aesthetics, etc., may all play into a voter's assessment. Nor does it require that they evaluate all possible policy alternatives, but rather only those placed before them on the ballot. Our assumption does require that voters can evaluate costs and benefits on a common metric, and that they can compare the sets of costs and benefits associated with alternative public policy options. This assumption of economic self-interest motivates much of the existing literature on citizen growth preferences.

The assumption of economic voting provides a baseline model for understanding voting behavior in the absence of other influences. We develop our theory of the political geography of growth preferences to consider some of these other influences below.

Geography and Support for New Development

Voting on land use initiatives introduces an element that is typically absent in other electoral contexts: geography. Many land use policies—and particularly policies that propose new development projects—are geographically specific in the sense that they designate particular uses for specific parcels of real property. As such, the costs of those policies may fall upon people differently depending on where they live or work in relation to the proposed development. Specifically, we assume that the costs of a given development are inversely related to distance from the development. In general, most of the negative externalities from growth, such as crowding, traffic, noise, loss of open space, etc., will be felt most strongly by people who live closest to the proposed development. Clearly, there will be some negative externalities that affect the entire community (including, perhaps, lower residential property values). However, these costs will also be felt by voters closest to the development, and in fact are likely to affect them disproportionately. By contrast, we assume that the benefits accruing from a proposed development are constant across the city. These benefits may include, for example, job creation, increased tax revenue, more efficient delivery of municipal services, and

an increase in the supply of housing. Such benefits are not limited to geographically specific areas, but are positive externalities that are enjoyed by all residents in a similar manner.[11]

Combining our basic economic voting logic with these assumptions about the geographic distribution of the costs and benefits from new development, we hypothesize that the farther a voter is located from the proposed development, the more likely he or she is to vote for the proposal, ceteris paribus. We state this expected relationship formally as hypothesis 1.

Distance Hypothesis (H_1): Support for prodevelopment measures will increase as distance from the proposed development increases.

Endorsements and Support for New Development

Critics of the economic voting hypothesis note the high information demands that this behavior imposes upon voters—they must be able to assess and compare the numerous costs and benefits of public policy alternatives. Voting on ballot propositions imposes even greater hurdles. Ballot propositions lack two of the most important pieces of information that voters rely on in candidate elections: partisanship and past experience (Popkin 1991). This means that voters in ballot measure elections must rely, perhaps to an even greater extent than their counterparts in candidate elections, on information provided during the campaigns. This is especially true in the case of local ballot propositions such as the development measures brought about by San Diego's Proposition A. Unlike statewide measures where proponents and opponents often spend millions of dollars in their campaigns to persuade voters, proponents and opponents of local measures rarely spend more than a few thousand dollars in their campaigns (see Gerber and Lupia 1999 on the effects of campaign spending in statewide direct legislation campaigns). Thus, reliable campaign information about the content of local ballot measures is likely to be sparse.

Fortunately for voters in California (and about a dozen other states), the format of the state's official elec-

tion materials potentially reduces these informational burdens. Each registered voter in California is mailed two official ballot pamphlets (one from the state containing information on statewide ballot measures, a second from the county describing local races and measures). The county ballot pamphlets contain the text of each proposition, a brief summary, the County Council or City Attorney's impartial analysis, and arguments for and against the measure signed by endorsing individuals or organizations. From the voter's perspective, these signed arguments are potentially powerful and efficient voting cues. They can help voters link their interests on measures about which they have little substantive information, with those of well-known groups (Lupia 1992, 1994; Bowler and Donovan 1998).[12]

Clearly, however, we would not expect all endorsements to have the same effect on voters. For each local California ballot proposition, the ballot pamphlet may contain a supporting argument, rebuttal to the supporting argument, opposing argument, and rebuttal to the opposing argument, each signed by up to four individuals. Signers may or may not be well-known civic figures, and usually include elected representatives, interest group officials, business owners, and concerned residents.[13]

The literature on political persuasion shows that two factors contribute to the persuasiveness of interest group endorsements: a perception that the endorser is knowledgeable and a perception that the endorser and the citizen share common interests (Lupia and McCubbins 1998; Lupia 2002).[14] We would therefore expect endorsements

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[11]Additionally, those benefits that are geographically specific, such as increases in the value of commercial property around a new development, are not likely to enter into the cost-benefit calculus of many voters since only a very small minority of the voting population owns commercial property. Thus, we do not expect potential increases in commercial property values to have a noticeable effect on voting patterns, even when those returns are disaggregated to the precinct level.

[12]Bowler and Donovan report the results of surveys asking people which of several information sources they use to make decisions on statewide ballot measures. They show that voters report relying heavily on these endorsements.

[13]The California Elections Code dictates procedures for submitting supporting and opposing arguments (West 1989). These procedures apply equally to statewide and local measures. For measures qualified by initiative, the official sponsors are allowed the first opportunity to write and obtain signatures for the supporting arguments. If the sponsors do not submit an argument, the Secretary of State or Registrar of Voters follows a prescribed hierarchy. For measures placed on the ballot by a legislative body, the legislature is allowed the first opportunity to submit the supporting argument. Again, if they do not submit an argument, the election officials follow the prescribed hierarchy. For opposing arguments, the hierarchy for both initiatives and referendums is: 1) Legislative Body; 2) Member of Legislative Body; 3) Bona Fide group (e.g., Chamber of Commerce; Labor Council); 4) Individual Citizen eligible to vote in election.

[14]Lupia and McCubbins demonstrate that persuasion can occur absent the perception of common interests as long as there exists the possibility of outside verification, penalties for lying, or the exertion of costly effort by the speaker. However, the perception of knowledge must always be present. Similarly, Calvert (1985) derives the conditions under which decision makers can utilize information from biased sources.

from individuals who voters perceive as knowledgeable and as having clearly identifiable interests on development issues to more significantly affect voter choice. Based on our examination of the ballot pamphlets for the 12 San Diego development initiatives required by Proposition A, we identify endorsements from two such types of interest groups: community planning boards and environmental organizations.[15]

The first types of endorsement we consider are those by community planning boards. In San Diego, local community organizations participate actively in the traditional land use process. Members of these planning boards are elected in local elections, for terms ranging from two to four years. The boards make nonbinding recommendations to the city planning commission or city council on some or most land use decisions. To voters, endorsements from these boards convey expertise on land use issues as a result of the board's close involvement in the process. They also convey a commonality of interests with current residents who live in their communities, since board members are elected by those residents.

The second type of endorsement we consider includes those by environmental organizations. These organizations are actively involved in a wide range of policy debates and so convey to voters knowledge of environmental and other land use issues. They may also convey commonality of interests with conservationist voters. On the 12 San Diego measures, a number of organizations that claimed to be environmentalists took positions on the issues. Some were well-known national organizations; others were not. To include only those endorsements that most voters would recognize and consider reliable sources of information, we consider only endorsements by the local chapter of the Sierra Club in our analyses below.

We state our preliminary expectations about the effects of these endorsements as hypothesis 2.

Endorsement Hypothesis (H₂): Supporting endorsements from environmental and planning organizations will increase overall support for development measures. Opposing endorsements from environmental and planning organizations will decrease overall support for development measures.

[15]We have excluded the endorsements of individual citizens and relatively unknown groups from our analyses since these do not meet any of the conditions necessary for persuasion. We have also excluded the endorsements of elected city officials and the League of Women Voters due to limited degrees of freedom and specific patterns of endorsements that preclude independent analyses of their effects. The community planning board and environmental endorsements that we do include were by far the most prevalent across the ballot measures we study.

The Interaction between Endorsements and Geography

Not only do we expect geography to affect underlying support for or opposition to new development, but we also expect the impact of interest group endorsements to vary by geography as well. First, consider the relationship between community planning board endorsements, geography, and support for development initiatives. For voters within the planning area, an endorsement by their planning board signals that their neighborhood is being represented in the planning process and is being compensated (perhaps by way of local public goods or mitigations) in the planned development. For this set of voters, the planning board endorsement satisfies both the perceived knowledge condition and the perceived commonality of interest condition for persuasion. We can think about this endorsement, then, as increasing the expected benefits from the proposed development for voters within the endorsing planning area. By contrast, for voters in remote parts of the city, a planning board's endorsement may meet the condition of knowledge, but is almost certain not to convey strong commonality of interests. Given the electoral dependence of community planning boards on voters within their geographic boundaries, we expect these boards to represent the highly localized interests of their immediate communities. We therefore expect the value of a board's endorsement to diminish sharply as one moves outside the endorsing board's planning area.[16]

Given these assumptions, our model predicts that a planning board endorsement is most likely to change the votes of the residents that live within the jurisdiction of the endorsing group. We represent this hypothesized relationship between geography, community planning board endorsements, and support for development initiatives in hypothesis 3.

Planning Board Hypothesis (H₃): Supporting planning board endorsements will further increase support for

[16]We expect the effect of the endorsement to diminish with distance because of the decreased salience of the cue, not because distant residents are unaware of the endorsement, since all voters in the city of San Diego receive ballot pamphlets that publish the endorsements for and against these ballot measures. A plausible alternative assumption is that while the primary effect of the planning board's endorsement will be on the people residing within the planning area, the endorsement will also affect the cost-benefit assessment of those in surrounding areas as well. The extent that people in neighboring areas respond to a given board's endorsement will depend on factors such as the nature of the development (i.e., how severe are the costs to neighboring areas), the kinds of mitigations offered in return for the endorsement (i.e., whether they benefit people in neighboring areas), the reputation of the board (i.e., how broad or narrow are their interests), and the amount of conflict between neighboring boards.

prodevelopment measures in the immediate planning area. Opposing planning board endorsements will further decrease support for prodevelopment measures in the planning area. The effect of planning board endorsements will be inversely related to distance.

Now consider the effect of environmental endorsements. In contrast to planning board endorsements, which are by their nature highly localized, endorsements by the Sierra Club (or other reputable environmental organizations) will have meaning to voters across the city, regardless of their proximity to the proposed development. Environmental organizations may consider the interests of the entire city, rather than just the interests of the area surrounding the development. The kinds of benefits they demand in return for their endorsements are therefore likely to be less concentrated in the areas immediately surrounding the development (we consider the nature of these benefits in more detail below). In other words, a Sierra Club endorsement satisfies both conditions of persuasion for conservationist voters, and these voters may live anywhere in the city.[17] We represent this hypothesized relationship between geography, environmental endorsements, and support for development initiatives in hypothesis 4.

Environmental Hypothesis (H4): Supporting environmental endorsements will increase support for prodevelopment measures. Opposing environmental endorsements will decrease support. These effects will be unrelated to distance from the development.

Endorsements and Public Goods

Based on content analysis of the San Diego development initiatives and interviews with actors directly involved in drafting and qualifying a number of the measures, we observe that in return for the interest group endorsements, developers often provided a range of public goods. Some of these public goods were clearly designed to procure the environmentalists' endorsements, particularly open space set-asides and conservation measures, as well as environ-

mentally friendly construction practices and landscaping. Others were clearly designed to procure the community planning groups' endorsements, such as new schools, senior centers, transit centers, street improvements, and financing for the completion of a major new highway project. However, it should be noted that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the provision of public goods and endorsements. Five of the propositions that offered public goods failed to receive the endorsement of either a local planning board or an environmental organization or received a mixed endorsement (i.e., some "yes" and some "no" endorsements). Whether these public goods were provided explicitly to obtain the interest groups' endorsements or more implicitly to make development more acceptable to current residents is beyond the scope of this inquiry (but see Gerber and Phillips 2003). The point is that these public goods (when they were offered) were part of the propositions voters were asked to consider and may have affected these voters' decisions.

Since most of the goods provided in the San Diego development proposals are local public goods, in the sense that they provide the greatest benefit to people who live or work close to them, we expect that if support for development projects is affected by these goods, then support will be greatest in the area immediately surrounding the public goods. We represent this hypothesized relationship between geography, local public goods, and support for development initiatives in hypothesis 5.

Public Goods Hypothesis (H5): The provision of local public goods will increase support for development. This effect will decrease with distance from the public good.

Of course, in most cases, it is impossible to isolate the impact of public goods on voting decisions from the impact of the endorsements themselves. This is a general problem in the study of interest group endorsements: typically, we cannot disentangle the impact of an endorsement from the content of the policy (or development, or candidate) the group is endorsing. Interestingly, the San Diego development measures provide some leverage for disentangling these factors. In one of the nine cases we consider in the following regression analyses, the proposed development and the public good are located in different parts of the city. This geographic separation allows us to test the independent effect of each factor. If endorsements influence vote decisions, distance to the endorsing planning group should matter. If the public goods are important, distance to the public good should matter.

[17]It is possible, of course, that we might observe some geographic pattern in how people respond to environmental endorsements, especially when people with proenvironmental preferences cluster in specific geographic areas. One might find, for example, that residents of more affluent regions hold more postmaterialist values and hence place a greater importance on protecting the environment. Or, people who live in coastal or rural areas might have a greater sensitivity to environmental issues. The important point is that this support is not a direct consequence of proximity to the proposed development.

We test our five hypotheses against the null hypothesis:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Support for development measures will be unrelated to political geography, interest group endorsements, and the provision of public goods.

Research Design

Our research design involves analyzing the relationship between economic self-interest, geography, interest group endorsements, public goods provision, and patterns of voter support for a number of development initiatives. We conduct a multivariate analysis at the precinct level for a subset of the San Diego measures, which due to data availability includes the nine measures that appeared on the 1996 (primary and general) and 1998 general election ballots.[18] Appendix A describes major provisions of each of these measures, as well as the endorsements each received and the public goods provided.

Voting on Development Measures

Geography, Endorsements, and Support: Testing H_1–H_4

To provide a rigorous test of hypotheses 1 through 4, we conduct multivariate analyses of support for the nine San Diego measures considered in 1996 and 1998. In the multivariate analyses, the dependent variable is the percent of the vote in precinct i in favor of proposition j. Table 1 reports the OLS regression coefficients for several specifications of this model. To account for the possible heteroskedasticity introduced by analyzing vote returns from the same precincts on several measures, we report robust standard errors. Descriptive statistics and data sources are reported in Appendix B.

Model 1 presents our baseline model. The independent variables include a set of precinct-level characteristics—percent registered Democrat, percent Latino/a, percent homeowner, and median home price—which are designed to capture the aggregate economic interests of the precinct. Although we do not have formal predictions about the effects of each of these variables, we believe that *Democratic%* captures the strength of environmental preferences in a precinct (with more

[18]Ballot measures from earlier years have been excluded from our quantitative analysis because electronic files of the geographic locations of voting precincts were not available. This prevented us from constructing the distance measurements that are a central part of our analysis.

TABLE 1 Effects of Population Characteristics, Distance, and Endorsements on Precinct-level Support for Development Measures, San Diego, CA, 1996–1998

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Democratic%	−.16	−.10	−.17	−.19
	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)
Latino/a%	.06	.16	.03	.03
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Homeowner%	−.01	−.003	−.01	−.01
	(.007)	(.007)	(.004)	(.004)
Median Home Price	.00001	$9.99e^{-6}$	.00001	.00001
	$(2.71e^{-6})$	$(2.69e^{-6})$	(.00002)	$(1.24e^{-6})$
Acres	.0007	.0006	.0001	.00002
	(.00002)	(.00002)	(.00002)	(.00009)
Commercial	7.84	7.41	−2.23	−2.43
	(.51)	(.50)	(.38)	(.33)
Spending For	$9.54e^{-6}$	$8.81e^{-6}$	−.00001	−.00001
	$(4.14e^{-7})$	$(4.24e^{-7})$	$(4.38e^{-7})$	$(4.07e^{-7})$
Spending Against	$-2.38e^{-6}$	$-8.86e^{-7}$	$9.86e^{-6}$	.00001
	$(6.97e^{-7})$	$(7.60e^{-7})$	$(8.28e^{-7})$	$(7.55e^{-7})$
Distance		−.50	.09	.24
		(.04)	(.02)	(.05)
Board Yes			18.13	25.16
			(.56)	(.91)
Board No			−9.97	−15.04
			(.40)	(.61)
Local Board Yes				1.82
				(.49)
Local Board No				−10.20
				(.77)
Board Yes * Distance				−.50
				(.06)
Board No * Distance				.49
				(.04)
Envr Yes			6.83	6.94
			(.43)	(.66)
Envr Yes * Distance				−.03
				(.05)
Constant	48.60	50.64	45.80	42.99
	(1.12)	(1.12)	(.87)	(1.00)
Adjusted R^2	.20	.22	.78	.80

Robust standard errors in parentheses. All estimates are significant at $p < .05$ except *Homeowner* in models 1 and 2; *Spending Against* in model 2; and *Envr Yes * Distance* in model 4. N = 6,046 in all models.

Democrats indicating more support for environmental protection); *Latino/a%* captures the potential economic/occupational impact of new development (with more Latinos indicating lower income and higher unemployment and therefore a stronger preference for economic

development);[19] *Homeowner%* captures concern over property values (with more homeowners meaning an increased reluctance to vote for a development which may decrease the values of residential property);[20] and *Median Home Price* serves as a proxy for income (with higher-valued homes indicating higher incomes).

We also include two variables to capture differences in the content of the proposed developments. *Acres* measures total acreage of the proposed development (as a measure of the development's size), and *Commercial* is a dummy variable scored one if the proposed development contained any new commercial buildings and scored zero if it contained only residential buildings. These two variables are intended to capture cross-proposal differences in the effect of a measure's content on voter support; as such, they take on the same value for all precincts for a given measure. Again, our theoretical framework does not generate explicit hypotheses about the effects of these variables. They are included strictly as controls. Finally, our baseline model includes variables measuring the total campaign contributions for and against each measure (as proxies for campaign spending).

Consistent with our baseline economic voting assumption, we find that support for development is lower in precincts with more Democrats and homeowners, and is higher in precincts with more Latinos and higher home prices. Support is higher for larger developments and for those that contain commercial buildings. Support increases with spending for the measure and decreases with spending against. However, with an adjusted R^2 of .20, this first model explains little of the variation in voter support and is undoubtedly severely underspecified.

Model 2 adds a variable, *Distance*, measuring the straight-line distance between the center of each precinct and the proposed development. Contrary to the prediction of our Distance Hypothesis (H_1), we find a significant *negative* relationship between distance and support. In other words, the closer a precinct is located to a proposed development, the greater the support. Once we control for other factors in models 3 and 4, however, this effect is reversed, with distance exhibiting a significant and positive relationship to voter support. Effects of the demographic and control variables remain largely unchanged.

Model 3 adds a series of dummy variables measuring whether the proposition received supporting and opposing interest group endorsements. This model produces strong support for our Endorsement Hypothesis (H_2). We find that "vote yes" endorsements from community planning boards (*BoardYes*) and the Sierra Club (*EnvrYes*) have a strong positive effect on public support while "vote

no" endorsements have a strong negative effect. Because the particular pattern of endorsements across the nine initiatives results in perfect multicollinearity when we include indicators for all four types of endorsements, we are limited to including at most three of these dummies (we have excluded the dummy for Sierra Club opposition). Additional analyses (not reported here) show that the signs on the included dummy variables remain the same, regardless of which endorsement is omitted. Interestingly, however, the signs of the spending variables reverse with the inclusion of the endorsement dummies, implying that the first two models are plagued by severe specification bias.[21] Further, the sign on *Distance* is now positive and significant, as hypothesized. The addition of the endorsement dummies dramatically increases the explanatory power of the model, raising the adjusted R^2 from .22 to .78. We interpret this increase as an initial indication that interest group endorsements are a primary determinant of voter choice.

Model 4 adds terms to test our hypotheses about the effects of interest group endorsements on geographic patterns of support. As described in our Planning Board Hypothesis (H_3), we hypothesize that community planning board endorsements will primarily influence voters in precincts within a given planning area. To capture this hypothesized effect, we add in model 4 a dummy variable, *LocalBoardYes*, scored one for precincts within a planning area that formally supported a measure. We add a second dummy variable, *LocalBoardNo*, scored one for precincts within a planning area that formally opposed the measure. We expect the effect of the first dummy variable to be positive and the second to be negative. We also include interaction terms between community board endorsements and distance to the proposed development to test for the effect of these endorsements outside the immediate planning area.

Model 4 provides strong support for H_3. The effect of living in a planning area that formally supports a proposed development is positive and significant. The effect of living in a planning area that opposes a proposed development is negative and significant. We also find that the effects of planning board endorsements fall off sharply as distance from the development increases (as evidenced by the negative sign on *BoardYes* ∗ *Distance* and the positive sign on *BoardNo* ∗ *Distance*). These results clearly indicate that there is a geographic pattern to the effect of planning board endorsements.

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[19]US Census (2000).

[20]See Fischel (2001).

[21]These results are consistent with findings from Congressional elections that reveal a negative relationship between incumbent spending and vote share (see Jacobson 1978, 1980; Green and Krasno 1988). As in those studies, we speculate that high spending occurs in the closest races, i.e., it is a result, and not a cause, of (expected) vote share.

To capture the hypothesized (non)effect of geography on environmental endorsements, we include our dummy variable for all precincts when a measure received an environmental endorsement (and scored zero for all precincts when it did not). We interact this dummy variable with our measure of each precinct's distance to the proposed development. As we state in our Environmental Hypothesis, we expect the environmental endorsement to affect voters in all areas of the city. Hence, we hypothesize that there will be no additional marginal impact of geography on the effect of the environmental endorsement.

Our results strongly support our Environment Hypothesis (H_4) as well. We find that the effect of a supporting environmental endorsement remains positive and significant, indicating an overall increase in support for the development. The interaction between an environmental endorsement and distance is small and insignificant. In other words, the overall positive impact of the environmental endorsement is not affected as distance from the development increases.

In sum, the regression results in models 3 and 4 provide strong support for all of our hypotheses concerning the effects of distance and endorsements on support for development initiatives. The results clearly indicate that positive endorsements from planning boards and environmental organizations increase public support for development projects, and that negative endorsements reduce support. In terms of geography, they illustrate that, ceteris paribus, there are geographic patterns to the impact of some endorsements. We find that the effect of a community planning board's negative or positive endorsement decreases with distance. We also find that environmental endorsements influence voter support for the development across the city, regardless of proximity to the development. Additionally, geography alone, once we control for the presence of interest group endorsements, significantly affects support for development, with voters who live farther away from the proposed development more likely to vote "yes" than voters who live closer.

Public Goods and Support: Testing H_5

We hypothesize that the provision of local public goods increases support for development initiatives and does so primarily in the areas that are located geographically closest to the good. However, this is a difficult hypothesis to test for three reasons. First, all but one of the initiatives that are included in our data analysis offered public goods—making it virtually impossible to include a public good dummy variable in our analyses.[22] Second, for

all but one of the initiatives, the public good being offered is not separable from the location of the proposed development (i.e., both are located in very close proximity). This makes the effect of the public good difficult to separate empirically from the effect of a planning board endorsement (when one was offered). Third, many of the initiatives under consideration offered "bundles" of public goods. Thus, we are unable to isolate the independent effect of each individual good due to the lack of variation in the bundles offered across measures.

Despite these difficulties, we are able to conduct a preliminary empirical test of our Public Goods Hypothesis (H_5). This analysis is limited to the one measure where the good (48 acres of open space) was located an appreciable distance from the proposed development. For this measure (Proposition N of 1998), we calculate the straight-line distance from each precinct to the location of the public good. We then include this measure, as well as our original distance measure between voting precinct and the proposed development, in a model of public support for the proposition. Because we are only looking at one proposition, we are unable to include the endorsement variables used in Table 1. However, since this development received a positive endorsement from one of the community planning boards, we create a dummy variable (*LocalBoardYes*) coded one for precincts located within the jurisdiction of the planning board and zero for those that lie outside. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

The analysis supports our expectations. The variable measuring the distance from precinct i to the public good is negative and significant, meaning that the greater the distance from the good, the lower voter support is. We take this as preliminary evidence that public goods influence vote choice since voters close to the good are more likely to vote for the proposed development. By contrast, the effect of distance to the development is positive (as predicted by our Distance Hypothesis, H_1)—the farther the precinct is from the development, the higher is voter support. Interestingly, the effect of being within the planning area of an endorsing community planning board is insignificant in the more fully specified model (model 6). That is, the independent effect of the endorsement is no longer significant once we separate its marginal impact from that of the public good. However, for several reasons, we caution against treating this as strong evidence that the provision of public goods, rather than interest group endorsements, is driving voter choice. First, since this analysis is limited to one initiative, there is little variation in support among our observations that are coded one on *LocalBoardYes*. Second, we are unable to capture the effect of the environmental endorsement, which this measure received. Finally, when we expand our data set (in the following section) to include more California communities and a

[22]The initiative that did not offer a public good (Proposition D of 1996) received voter approval while two that offered public goods (Propositions F and G of 1996) were voted down.

TABLE 2   **Effects of Public Goods on Precinct-level Support for Development Measures, San Diego, CA, Proposition N, 1998**

Independent Variables	Model 5	Model 6
Public Good * Distance	−1.18	−.28
	(.09)	(.11)
Distance	.46	.29
	(.11)	(.11)
Local Board Yes		1.14
		(1.49)
Democratic%		−.20
		(.03)
Latino/a%		−.18
		(.02)
Homeowner%		−.01
		(.009)
Median Home Price		.00003
		$(2.83e^{-6})$
Constant	80.31	76.03
	(.68)	(1.31)
Adjusted R^2	.34	.59

Standard errors in parentheses. All estimates are significant at p < .05 except *Local Board Yes* in model 6. N = 679 in all models.

greater number of ballot measures, we find strong evidence that endorsements have a significant effect on outcomes independent of the existence of public goods.[23] These caveats aside, we believe these results indicate that public goods do have an independent effect on voters' electoral decisions, but perhaps not so much that the endorsements themselves no longer matter.

Generalizability

The results of our empirical tests provide strong evidence of the primacy of interest group endorsements in explaining voter choice on local development initiatives. Electoral support for these initiatives increases significantly with positive endorsements from environmental or planning groups and drops significantly with negative endorsements. This finding stands in stark contrast to the more traditional research in urban politics that treats support for progrowth policies as a function of relatively fixed demographic and economic variables. Given the novelty of our results, skeptical readers may question the generaliz-

ability of our findings, especially since our analyses are limited to a single city and a relatively short time period. In this section we speak to these concerns.

We test for generalizability by expanding our quantitative analysis to include development measures that have been placed on the ballot in a number of other California communities. These communities, like San Diego, all have requirements that certain types of development receive voter approval. In total, we consider 29 prodevelopment propositions in eight communities of varying size, political orientations, and geographic locations. These propositions appeared on ballots over a number of years (1986–2000), providing us with observations during both economic recessions and expansions. Unfortunately, the absence of precinct-level data prevents us from exactly replicating the precinct-level analysis, particularly in testing our hypotheses about the effect of distance from the proposed development or public goods.[24] However, the available data still allow us to test several of the other key hypotheses, particularly regarding the relationship between endorsements, public goods, and voter support.

Table 3 reports the results of five OLS regression analyses. As in the San Diego sample, these results show that interest group endorsements and public goods each have a significant, independent effect on a ballot measure's electoral success. In each model, the dependent variable is the measure's city-wide (or county-wide) vote share.[25] The independent variables are dummy variables indicating whether public goods were provided and whether the measure received interest group endorsements. We see that the provision of public goods is positively and significantly related to vote share in all of the models. The effects of interest group endorsements are as hypothesized as well. In models 7–10, a measure's vote share is positively and significantly related to whether it received Sierra Club or community group support, and is negatively and significantly related to whether it received opposition from either group. In model 11, we again control for the provision of public goods and include three of the four endorsement dummy variables, which produce consistent results.[26]

While these results cannot be interpreted as a direct confirmation of all of our hypotheses (since they do not

[23]Also, we note anecdotally that three of the initiatives that offered public goods since 1986 have failed whereas no measure that received the endorsement of both a planning board and an environmental organization failed.

[24]Electronic, geo-coded, precinct-level voting data are not available for most of the communities over this longer time period.

[25]Four were county-wide measures; 25 were city-wide.

[26]When the fourth dummy variable is included, all of the endorsement coefficients are insignificant due to the high degree of collinearity between the independent variables. However, when we drop any one of the endorsement dummies from the model (in this case *BoardYes*), the signs on the remaining coefficients stay the same and several of the effects again become significant.

TABLE 3 Effect of Interest Group Endorsements on Vote Margin, California Development Initiatives 1986–2000 (N = 29)

Independent Variable	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Public Good	.15	.14	.14	.17	.13
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)
Envr Yes	.13				.10
	(.06)				(.06)
Board Yes		.13			
		(.06)			
Envr No			−.14		−.07
			(.05)		(.06)
Board No				−.14	−.10
				(.05)	(.06)
Constant	.33	.33	.42	.40	.41
	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)	(.05)
Adjusted R^2	.35	.35	.38	.39	.47

Standard errors in parentheses. All estimates are significant at $p < .05$ except for Envr Yes, Envr No, and Board No in Model 12. However, both Envr Yes and Board No are significant at $p < .10$.

employ precinct-level data that allows us to operationalize our distance variables), they are nevertheless strongly consistent with our findings regarding endorsements and public goods. In both the detailed San Diego regressions and this larger N analysis, the presence of positive endorsements is robustly associated with higher passage rates for prodevelopment ballot propositions while the absence of such endorsements is associated with lower passage rates. Negative endorsements are associated with lower passage rates for prodevelopment ballot propositions. These effects are independent of the provision of public goods.

Discussion

The results of our empirical tests provide strong evidence of the primacy of interest group endorsements in explaining voter choice on local development initiatives. Traditionally, research in urban politics and urban economics has considered support for progrowth policies to be a function of demographic and local economic variables. However, as our first model shows, these variables account for very little of the variation in voter support. In fact, this model has an adjusted R^2 of just .20. By contrast, when we account for the effect of endorsements by environmental organizations and community planning boards, the explanatory power of our model increases dramatically (to .80 in the fully specified model 4).

One may ask whether these results simply reflect a spurious relationship between voter information, interest group endorsements, and voter behavior. In other words, it may be possible that interest group endorsements simply replicate information that voters already possess. We believe this is unlikely for a number of reasons. First, in the San Diego analyses, we have controlled for a number of variables that ought to influence the preferences of voters and their incentives to collect relevant information, including the size, type, and location of the development, as well as the provision of public goods. Even when we control for these factors, there is still a robust and statistically significant relationship between interest group endorsements and vote choice. These results hold in the larger sample as well. Additionally, our findings regarding the primacy of interest group endorsements are consistent with previous scholarship regarding citizen information and interest group endorsements in direct legislation elections (Lupia 1994; Bowler and Donovan 1998).

In addition to demonstrating that interest group endorsements explain much of the variation in voter choice, our San Diego results also reveal a strong geographic pattern to the impact of these endorsements. We find that the effects of community planning board endorsements—both supporting and opposing—decrease sharply as distance from the development increases. By contrast, the effect of an environmental endorsement is constant across the city.

We also find preliminary evidence that the provision of public goods influences voter choice. At least on the one measure we considered, the effect of a community planning board endorsement no longer significantly increases voter support for new development once we control for the separate effect of the public good. As hypothesized, we also find that public goods influence voters in a geographically discernable pattern—those closest to the public good are more likely to vote for the proposed development than those located farther from the good.

In general, these findings point to a degree of sophistication among voters in local elections that may surprise many political scientists. It appears that voters are able to deduce their interests, based upon their geographic location, from the information readily available to them. From their revealed behavior, voters appear quite knowledgeable about the local planning process and whose interests are represented by various actors in that process. Even further, we find that voters not only follow the cues provided to them, but do so in a highly selective and rational way. Thus, we believe our study provides evidence of highly sophisticated voters.

Finally, our analysis provides evidence that contrasts sharply with the dominant model of urban policymaking

as developed by Peterson (1981). We find that the outcomes of development ballot measures are shaped largely by the strategic decisions of local developers and interest groups as opposed to strictly exogenous economic forces. Overall, our results indicate that local politics plays a crucial role in shaping policy outcomes and therefore ought to be included in models of local decision making.

Implications

Voting on ballot propositions provides a valuable opportunity to study the sources of citizen support for development policies and to understand the importance of such factors as self-interest, geography, interest group endorsements, and public goods on that support. Ballot propositions make the politics of development more transparent than the traditional planning process. From the perspective of understanding the behavior of policymakers, we can directly observe what actors are involved in shaping policy and what are their positions. From the perspective of understanding the preferences and choices of regular citizens, we can observe who supports and opposes a given policy and why.

In addition, we believe that the insights gained in this study have important implications for development policy in many communities, whether or not they rely on direct democracy to resolve their land use disputes. In San Diego and other communities that require voter approval for new development, interest group endorsements and local public goods are necessary for obtaining majority voter support. In other places where growth issues are contentious, political actors may feel compelled to compensate current residents for the costs of development, even if this support is not formally necessary. Our results show that by forming coalitions with local interest groups and involving them in the local planning process, governments and developers can build support for new development. This is not to say, however, that voter requirements are necessarily a panacea for development conflicts facing many communities. Much more research is necessary to assess the impact of these institutions on, for example, housing prices, resource consumption, and wealth distribution in a community.[27]

[27]See Gerber and Phillips (2003) for a preliminary examination of these issues.

Appendix A
San Diego Development Propositions, 1996–1998

Measure	Provisions	Endorsements	Opposition	Public Goods
C 1996	Construction of two hotels	Planning groups, Sierra Club	None	$12.6 million for open space
D 1996	Designate naval training Center, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, and Airport as urbanized (allowing commercial development)	None	None	None
E 1996	72 acre residential development	Planning group	None	Open space and equestrian trails
F 1996	13 acre residential development	None	Planning group	14 acre wildlife corridor
G 1996	33 acre commercial development	None	Planning group, Sierra Club	Roads and 21 acres of wetland restoration
H 1996	1,134 acre residential development	Planning group, Sierra Club	Planning group	250 acres of open space, funds for SR-56, and schools
K 1998	1,410 acre residential development	Planning group, Sierra Club	Planning groups	280 acres of open space, funds for SR-56, schools, and fire stations
M 1998	2,102 acre residential development	Planning group, Sierra Club	None	150 acres of open space, funds for SR-56, schools, and police and fire stations
N 1998	Land transfer/30 acres of commercial development	Planning group, Sierra Club	None	48 acres of open space

Appendix B
Descriptive Statistics and Data Sources

Independent Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Source
%Yes	51.97	14.69	San Diego County Registrar of Voters, 1996 and 1998
Democratic%	40.12	10.36	1990 US Census/UC Berkeley Statewide Database
Latino/a%	11.20	11.95	1990 US Census/UC Berkeley Statewide Database
Homeowner%	55.38	26.99	1990 US Census/UC Berkeley Statewide Database
Median Home Price	178,317	97,500	1990 US Census/UC Berkeley Statewide Database
Acres	2,922	6,787	San Diego County Ballot Pamphlet, 1996 and 1998
Commercial	.44	.50	San Diego County Ballot Pamphlet, 1996 and 1998
Spending For	$290,264	$407,866	San Diego City Clerk, *Ballot Measure Committee Summary Page* (various)
Spending Against	$64,120	$160,377	San Diego City Clerk, *Ballot Measure Committee Summary Page* (various)
Distance	11.47	5.37	Calculated Using ArcView GIS Software
Board Yes	.77	.42	San Diego County Ballot Pamphlet, 1996 and 1998
Board No	.45	.50	San Diego County Ballot Pamphlet, 1996 and 1998
Envr Yes	.66	.47	San Diego County Ballot Pamphlet, 1996 and 1998
Envr No	.23	.42	San Diego County Ballot Pamphlet, 1996 and 1998
PublicGood * Distance	13.18	5.24	Calculated Using ArcView GIS Software

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