

## San Diego City Redistricting Part I: Electoral and Political Dynamics

On August 25, 2011, the seven members of the City of San Diego Redistricting Commission adopted new boundary lines for City Council Districts. Over eleven months, the Commission held hearings, examined new U.S. Census demographic data, and took public testimony on how the lines should be redrawn. As a result of the passage of Proposition D in June 2010, a ninth Council seat was also added by the Commission.

The new Council Districts could have a profound impact on future politics and policy making in San Diego. In an effort to shed light on this important change, the National University System Institute for Policy Research (NUSIPR) used GIS and database software to analyze voter data available from the San Diego County Registrar of Voters, the California Secretary of State, U.S. Census Department and California's Employment Development Department. In Part I we will explore implications for the City's political landscape. In Part II we will overlay economic and demographic data on these new boundaries, exploring how these factors may affect policy making over the next decade.

### Executive Summary

- San Diego City Council District elections are likely to become more competitive than in previous years. The number of Council Districts with 5% or smaller gaps in partisan registration has increased from two to four. The partisan profiles of the new Districts also suggest that while Democrats pick up a new "safe" Council seat (District 9), Republicans will pick up an additional competitive District (2) and increase their registration in two others (6 and 7).
- New District boundaries will impact electoral outcomes in San Diego, but not as much as Decline to State voters. For years, independent voters have demonstrated their power at the ballot booth; all three Republican City Councilmembers were elected in districts with less than 50% GOP registration. Independents are likely to become even more important in the years ahead, particularly as more voters statewide are registering as Decline to State than ever before.<sup>1</sup>
- The timing of elections has a profound impact on voter turnout and Election Day results. General presidential elections draw more left-leaning Democratic voters to the polls than primary contests, where conservatives have more sway.

## 1. Voter Registration

Under the new Council Districts, voter registration has changed in small but important ways, potentially shifting the balance of power at San Diego City Hall. Comparing the new Council District registration numbers with those under the old Council District lines makes these changes clear.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1: Voter Registration Figures for New Council Districts

New Districts	Democratic	Decline to State	Republican	3rd Party
1	36.1%	27.6%	32.6%	3.7%
2	35.8%	27.1%	31.2%	5.9%
3	49.0%	27.1%	18.2%	5.7%
4	54.7%	20.8%	20.5%	4.0%
5	28.9%	25.8%	41.4%	3.9%
6	34.0%	27.1%	34.2%	4.7%
7	36.6%	23.5%	35.4%	4.5%
8	50.7%	25.4%	20.1%	3.8%
9	52.0%	22.9%	20.1%	5.0%

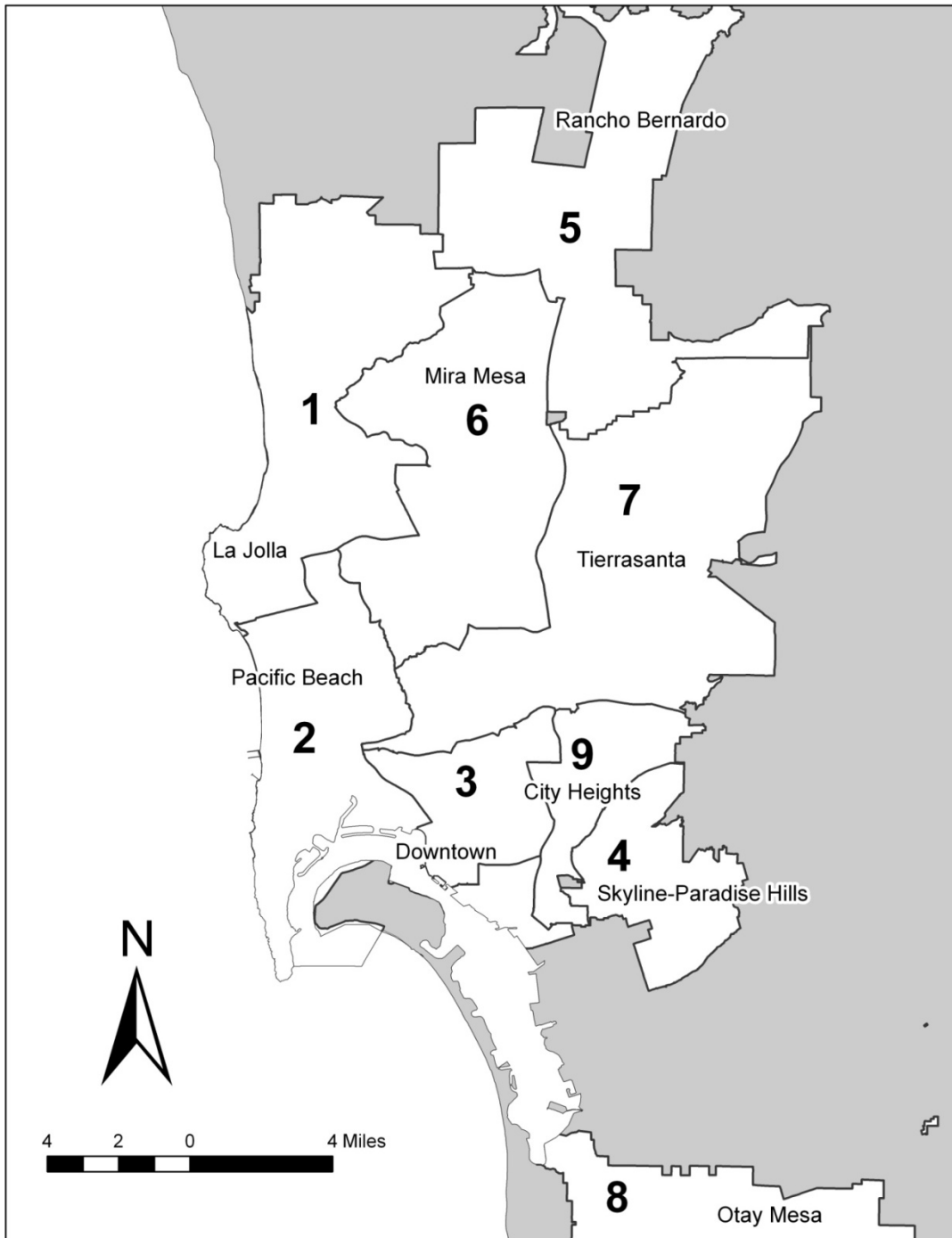
Table 2: Voter Registration Figures for Old Council Districts

Old Districts	Democratic	Decline to State	Republican	3rd Party
1	34.4%	27.7%	34.2%	3.8%
2	37.3%	27.6%	29.5%	5.6%
3	52.8%	25.6%	16.0%	5.5%
4	55.7%	20.9%	19.5%	3.9%
5	30.0%	26.8%	39.2%	4.0%
6	37.1%	25.2%	32.4%	5.3%
7	40.5%	21.9%	33.1%	4.5%
8	50.7%	25.8%	19.4%	4.1%

With the addition of Council District 9, which carries a 52% Democratic voter registration majority, the Democrats on the City Council increase their tally of “safe” seats from three to four. Also, District 1 now leans slightly more Democratic (34.4% to 36.1%).

<sup>1</sup> NOTE: voter registration tables were created using voter registration data from March 2011.

Chart 1: New San Diego City Council Districts, 2011



The new districts made some important geographic changes. Three districts remained largely the same: Council District 8, which still includes core areas like Otay Mesa, Barrio Logan and Logan Heights; District 7 remains very similar as well, still containing Tierrasanta, San Carlos and Del Cerro; and District 4 remains centered around the various communities of Southeastern San Diego.

The other districts have seen important boundary shifts. District 6 has been redrawn north and east, away from Clairemont – a neighborhood that district represented for the past 20 years and now is centered on Mira Mesa. District 1, to account for both population gains and the smaller districts resulting from the new 9<sup>th</sup>, no longer represents Rancho Penasquitos. District 2 no longer is the “downtown” council district, losing Centre City and picking up all of the beach communities south of Bird Rock. District 3 no longer represents City Heights, moving west and, most notably, picking up all of downtown. Finally the new 9<sup>th</sup> District represents City Heights, as well as Kensington, Talmadge and the SDSU College Area.

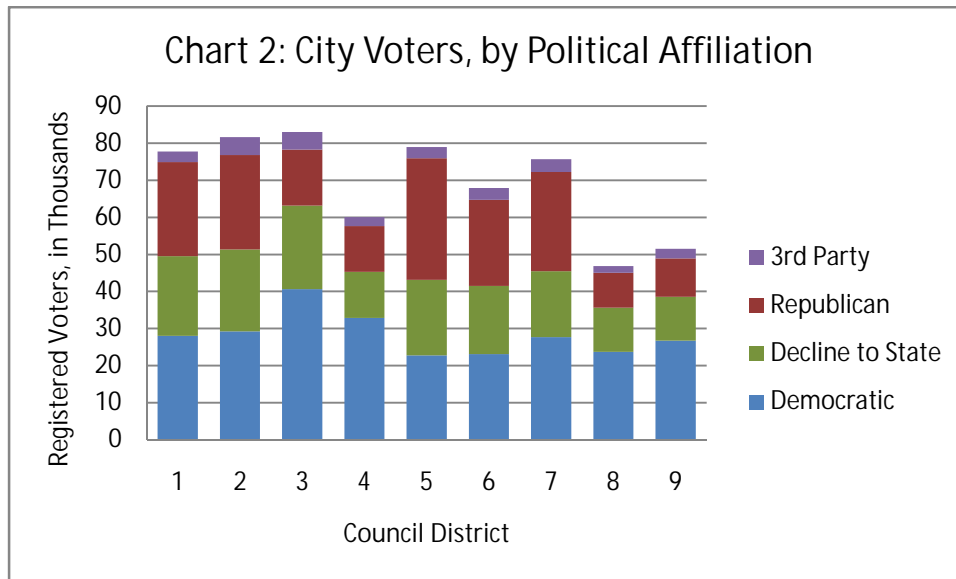
Council districts with 30% or greater Republican voter registration have historically been competitive for GOP-backed candidates. By that benchmark, Republicans gain one additional competitive seat (District 2), and increase their registration edge in two districts (6 and 7).

The result has been to create a greater number of competitive districts when compared to the 2000 map. Under the prior council district maps, only Council Districts 1 and 6 saw Democratic and Republican voter registration within 5% or less of each other. Under the 2010 plan, four seats (1, 2, 6 and 7) have Democrats and Republicans within 5% points. We believe that this means San Diego will see multiple contested races each electoral cycle, and it is likely that incumbents in these seats WILL see spirited challenges.

The registration statistics also suggest that the partisan divide will continue. It is difficult to see a clear way for Republicans to pick up six council seats so as to be positioned to override a Mayoral veto. While somewhat more feasible, Democrats would have to win two of the four competitive seats to achieve a six person working super majority. Divided councils are likely to be the norm over the next decade – and successful policymaking requires building coalitions that transcend partisan divides.

## 2. Representation and Participation

As a condition of the city redistricting process, Council Districts were created achieving an equal balance in population sizes (with minor deviation). However, the number of registered voters in each District varies significantly. The total number of registered voters ranges from more than 80,000 (Districts 2 and 3) to under 50,000 (District 8).



Furthermore, since not every registered voter consistently casts their ballot each Election Day, the actual voting electorate also varies. Despite their small numbers, likely or “high-propensity” voters can profoundly influence the outcome of an election when overall turnout is low, such as during primary contests or special elections. High-propensity voters tend to be older, Caucasian, Republican and ideologically more conservative than the average California voter.<sup>2</sup>

One way to measure the number of high-propensity voters in each district is to identify the voters who are registered as permanent vote-by-mail (PVBM) voters. Under California law, registered voters can sign up to automatically receive ballots in the mail for each election cycle. In the City of San Diego, PVBM figures vary widely by district. The council district with the highest number of PVBM voters (District 5) has more than twice the total of the lowest tally (District 8).

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent analysis on low-propensity and high-propensity California voters, see: The Public Policy Institute of California. “Just the Facts: California’s Likely Voters.” August 2011. Accessed October 1st, 2011. <[http://www.ppic.org/main/publication\\_show.asp?i=255](http://www.ppic.org/main/publication_show.asp?i=255)>.

Table 3: Permanent Vote-By-Mail Voters, by Council District

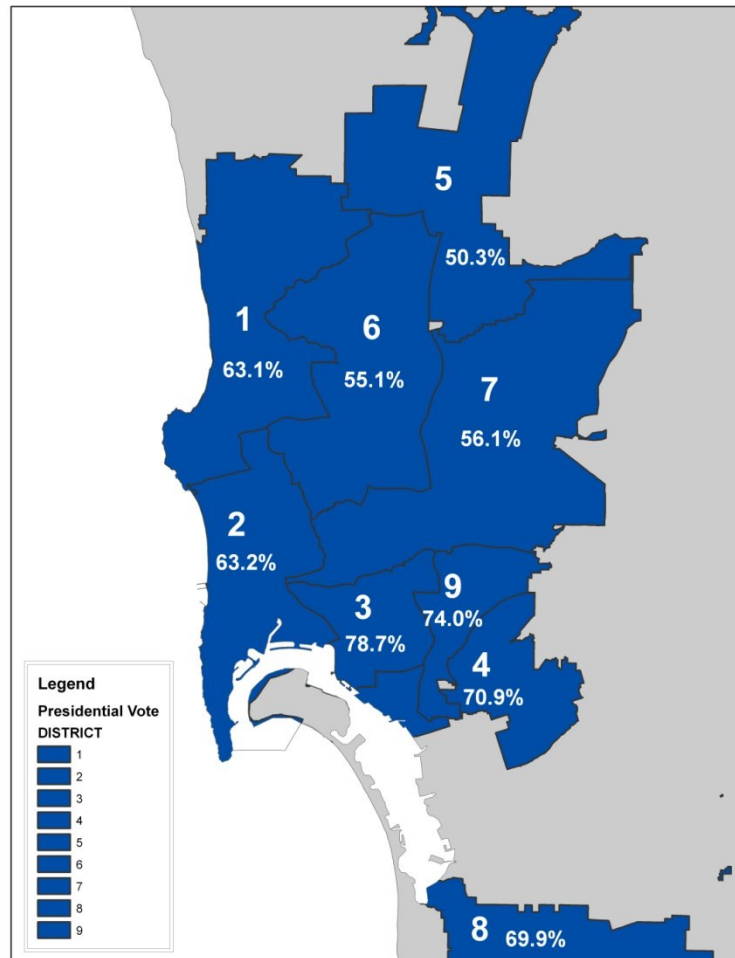
DISTRICT	PVBM
1	36,944
2	35,604
3	34,539
4	25,920
5	39,014
6	29,647
7	34,049
8	16,720
9	22,607

### 3. Past Electoral Behavior

According to the most recent registration figures from the San Diego City Clerk's Office, registered Democrats comprise the largest group of city voters (40.5%), followed by Republicans (28.2%) and Decline to State voters (26.45).<sup>3</sup> The plurality of Democratic voters tilts the result of partisan contests, but not in every Council District.

While only three of the new council districts have an outright majority of registered Democratic voters, every district had a majority of voters casting their ballots for Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election. Examining votes for the two major candidates, 63.7% of city voters supported Obama, and 36.3% of voters supported McCain. District 3 was the most supportive of Obama (78.7%), while District 5 was the least supportive (50.3%).

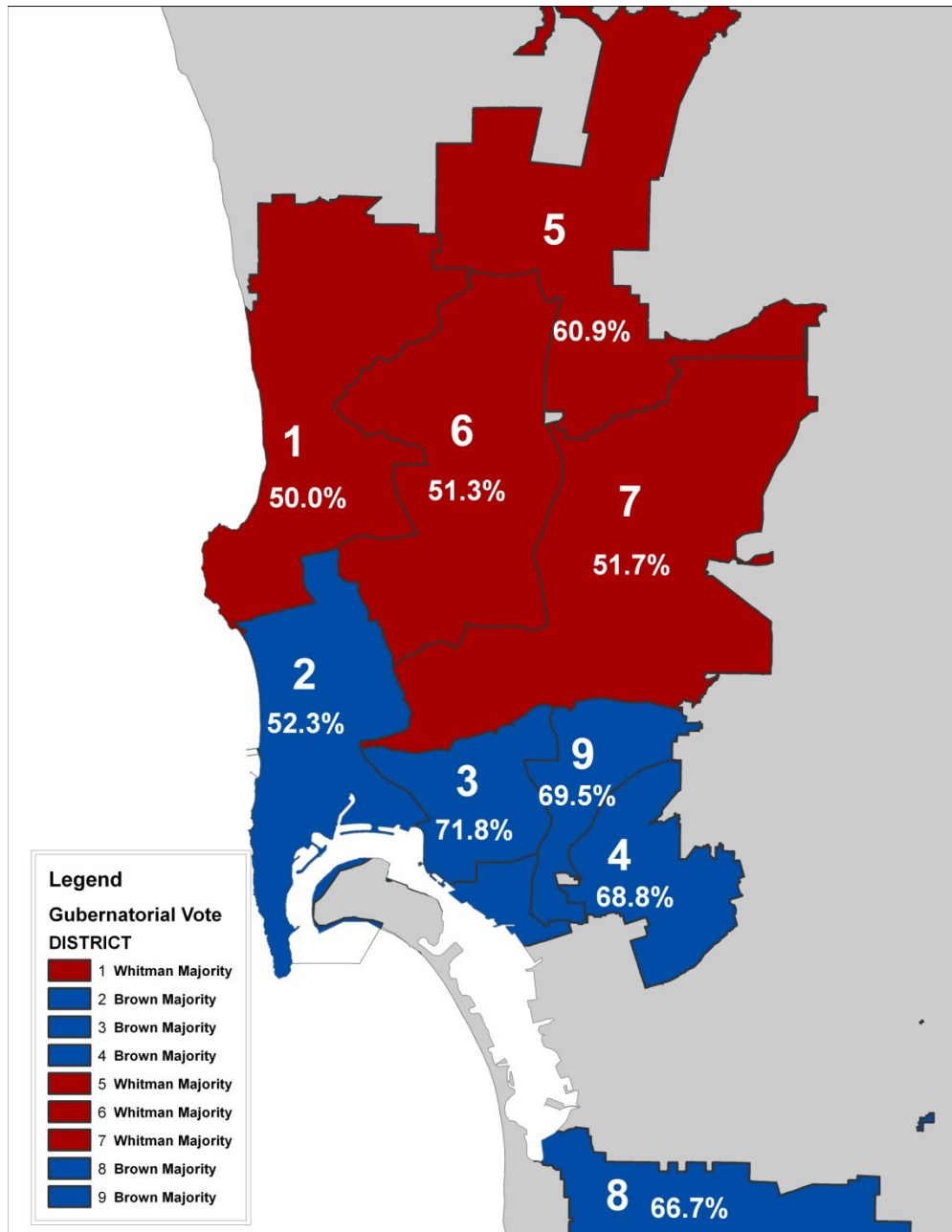
Chart 3: Percentage Vote for Obama, by Council District



<sup>3</sup> Office of the San Diego City Clerk. "Voter Registration in the City of San Diego." October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011. Accessed October 6, 2011. <<http://www.sandiego.gov/city-clerk/pdf/voterstats.pdf>>.

In 2010, partisan behavior differences were more pronounced. Despite the lack of a registered Republican voter majority in any council district, four districts voted in the majority for Republican candidate Meg Whitman for California state governor. Still, 55.0% supported Brown over Whitman (45.0%) citywide.

Chart 4: Percentage Vote for Whitman vs. Brown, by Council District





This map particularly points out the difficulty EITHER Republicans or Democrats will face in assembling a Six Councilmember supermajority. Four seats look decidedly Democratic and three look decidedly Republican. To try to reach the magic number six one expects that voters on the coast will be highly sought after.

We think that also means that “beach” issues are going to be critical. Leaders on both parties would be wise to beef up on understanding topics such as storm water runoff, paid parking at the beach, booze bans, and financing structure parking in the Village of La Jolla. These issues do not fit easily into partisan boxes but are likely to remain critical flashpoints in the two districts that matter the most in determining whether or not partisans will gain a working supermajority on the City Council.

This is especially true since statewide exit polls from the 2008 and 2010 elections suggest that the District-by-District differences in partisan voter choices can be partly attributed to Independent voters, who overwhelmingly favored Barack Obama for President, but split slightly in favor of Meg Whitman for Governor.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the voter universe for gubernatorial elections is decidedly smaller than for presidential contests. In 2010, 380,936 City of San Diego voters cast their ballot for a gubernatorial candidate; in 2008, 536,521 votes were cast for a presidential candidate.

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<sup>4</sup> According to CNN exit polls, California Independent voters favored Obama over McCain 64% to 31% and Whitman over Brown 47% to 42%. Source: CNN Election Center Exit Polls for California Governor 2010 <<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#CAG00p1>> and California President 2008 <<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#CAP00p1>>.

#### 4. Mayoral Elections

In 2005, 265,573 San Diego City voters cast their ballot in the primary special election for Mayor of San Diego. NUSIPR overlaid the results of that election on the new Council District boundaries.

Councilwoman Donna Frye received heavy support from the new districts which are inland and south of Interstate Highway 8 (3, 4, 8 and 9), while Mayor Jerry Sanders and businessman Steve Francis split the majority of votes in four districts (1, 5, 6 and 7). Notably, with important implications for the 2012 race, council districts 1, 6 and 7 were the most evenly split – likely indicating where next year’s Mayoral races will be won (and lost).

Table 4: Percentage Vote for San Diego City Mayor, July 2005

DISTRICT	Other	Sanders	Francis	Frye
1	7.0%	28.1%	26.3%	38.6%
2	6.8%	27.5%	20.1%	45.6%
3	4.9%	20.0%	13.5%	61.7%
4	4.3%	22.6%	24.4%	48.6%
5	6.9%	31.8%	31.3%	30.0%
6	6.1%	26.4%	28.3%	39.2%
7	6.7%	30.0%	24.4%	38.9%
8	5.9%	22.1%	24.5%	47.5%
9	5.3%	24.5%	18.9%	51.2%
Citywide	6.3%	27.0%	23.5%	43.1%

In the general 2005 mayoral city election, Sanders defeated Frye in every district north of Interstate Highway 8 (1, 5, 6 and 7), while Frye dominated in the south (3, 4, 8 and 9).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> NOTE: due to technical limitations in the available software from the Registrar of Voters, approximately 36,672 absentee votes (11.1% of the total vote) could not be tabulated under a council district. These votes skew marginally higher for Jerry Sanders than the total vote (58.7% for Sanders vs. 53.6% for Sanders overall).

Table 5: Percentage Vote for San Diego City Mayor, November 2005

DISTRICT	Frye	Sanders
1	44.10%	55.90%
2	49.30%	50.70%
3	62.40%	37.60%
4	51.80%	48.20%
5	31.70%	68.30%
6	41.70%	58.30%
7	40.20%	59.80%
8	52.80%	47.20%
9	58.70%	41.30%
Citywide	46.80%	53.20%

This has profound implications for governance as many of the issues confronting San Diego have both a partisan and a geographic dimension – such as infrastructure investments, downtown redevelopment and gentrification, how to provide community-level services, and balancing new models of delivering neighborhood services with demands from public employees. In some instances these geographic and partisan issues do not align. For instance, while communities north of Interstate 8 may skew more Republican, they also have more miles of roadway to maintain, larger community facilities, and higher levels of traffic congestion that is more costly to solve. Communities south of 8 may skew more Democratic, but they also bear the brunt of negative impacts in investments in job-(often unionized) creating infrastructure like the airport or the maritime industry.

## 5. Taxes

Since at least 2004, financial issues have taken center stage at San Diego City Hall. Due to a historic economic downturn and massive liabilities wrung up by the city retiree pension system, numerous city services have been cutback or altogether eliminated. Dozens of municipal fees have been increased to shore up revenue. Some have called for higher city taxes to solve the problem.

In 2010, San Diego City voters voted on Proposition D, a local ballot measure that would have increased the city sales tax rate by ½ a cent. On Election Day, every district voted in opposition. However, in November 2008, 2/3rds of city voters approved Proposition A, a county ballot measure that, if adopted, would have established a new parcel tax for regional fire protection services. Curiously, even the most anti-tax districts in 2010 (5, 6, and 7) gave Prop. A overwhelming support.

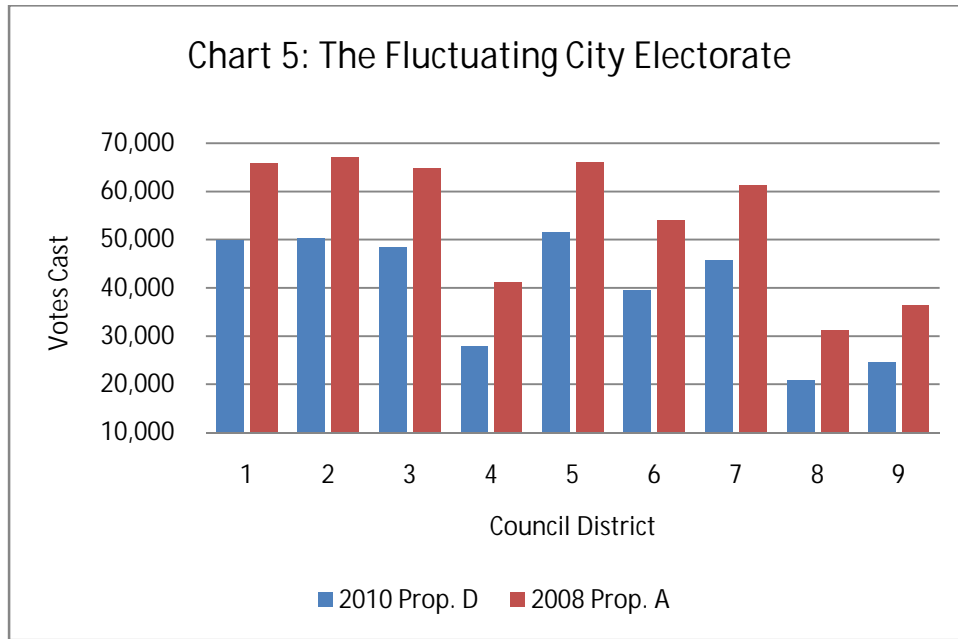
Table 6: Percentage Vote for 2010 Prop. D and 2008 Prop. A, by Council District

DISTRICT	Prop D NO	Prop D YES	Prop A NO	Prop A YES
1	61.0%	39.0%	33.2%	66.8%
2	61.9%	38.1%	37.7%	62.3%
3	50.8%	49.2%	31.1%	68.9%
4	61.8%	38.2%	28.6%	71.4%
5	69.5%	30.5%	34.1%	65.9%
6	66.7%	33.3%	35.7%	64.3%
7	65.4%	34.6%	35.5%	64.5%
8	62.3%	37.7%	28.9%	71.1%
9	54.6%	45.4%	29.1%	70.9%
Citywide	61.9%	38.1%	33.3%	66.7%

There are many factors that likely contributed to this phenomenon. Polls found in 2008 that Democrats were more motivated than Republicans to show up to the voting booth and cast ballots for a new president; in 2010, Republican voters were energized nationwide to send an Election Day rebuke to the Obama Administration. In addition, Prop. A did not have a funded, organized “NO” campaign, whereas Prop. D opponents spent more than \$320,000 to defeat the measure.<sup>6</sup> Another critical difference between these two elections was voter turnout. In 2008, 488,565 total votes were cast on Prop. A, while only 359,176 votes were cast for Prop. D.

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<sup>6</sup> Gustafson, Craig. “Who funded the pro and con Proposition D campaigns?” San Diego Union-Tribune December 4, 2010.



Infrequent or “low-propensity” voters, which tend to only cast ballots during presidential election cycles, are more likely to be ethnic minorities, Democrats, Independents, and under 35 years of age. These sub-voter groups are all more supportive of tax increases than the average state voter. Arguably, election results in the City of San Diego are partly determined by when you ask voters to cast their ballots.

But at least on the surface, the fates of Prop. A and Prop. D and the lack of variation among Council Districts are telling. With regard to Proposition D, only Districts 3 and 9 seem like outliers, the other seven districts finding between 61% and 69% opposed. There is even less variation on Prop. A, with just 9% difference in support between the nine districts. This suggests a more nuanced view of the San Diego electorate than the meme that Democrats in the community will always support taxes (they do not) and Republicans will, in lock step oppose them.

## 6. Same-Sex Marriage & Abortion

We do find variation between the new districts in respect to social issues. Two state ballot measures from the November 2008 ballot provide a good opportunity to sift through the views of the city electorate. NUSIPR examined the votes on Proposition 4, which would have required parental notification prior to a minor's abortion, and Proposition 8, which eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry. On Election Day, four districts voted in favor of Prop. 8, and five voted in favor of Prop. 4. These "YES" districts tended to have larger numbers of registered Republican voters (5, 6, and 7), or larger numbers of voting aged Latino residents (4 and 8), both which skew more socially conservative than the average California voter.

Table 7: Percentage Vote for Prop. 4 and Prop. 8, by Council District

DISTRICT	Prop 4 NO	Prop 4 YES	Prop 8 NO	Prop 8 YES
1	59.8%	40.2%	61.7%	38.3%
2	60.1%	39.9%	62.5%	37.5%
3	68.0%	32.0%	74.3%	25.7%
4	38.9%	61.1%	34.8%	65.2%
5	45.3%	54.7%	45.6%	54.4%
6	47.0%	53.0%	46.4%	53.6%
7	49.8%	50.2%	50.9%	49.1%
8	36.7%	63.3%	36.1%	63.9%
9	54.5%	45.5%	56.1%	43.9%
Citywide	52.8%	47.2%	54.1%	45.9%

Though positions on social issues rarely become a matter of debate at San Diego City Hall, they are relevant to special interest groups, and determinative to the choices of single-issue voters on Election Day.

## 7. Medical Marijuana

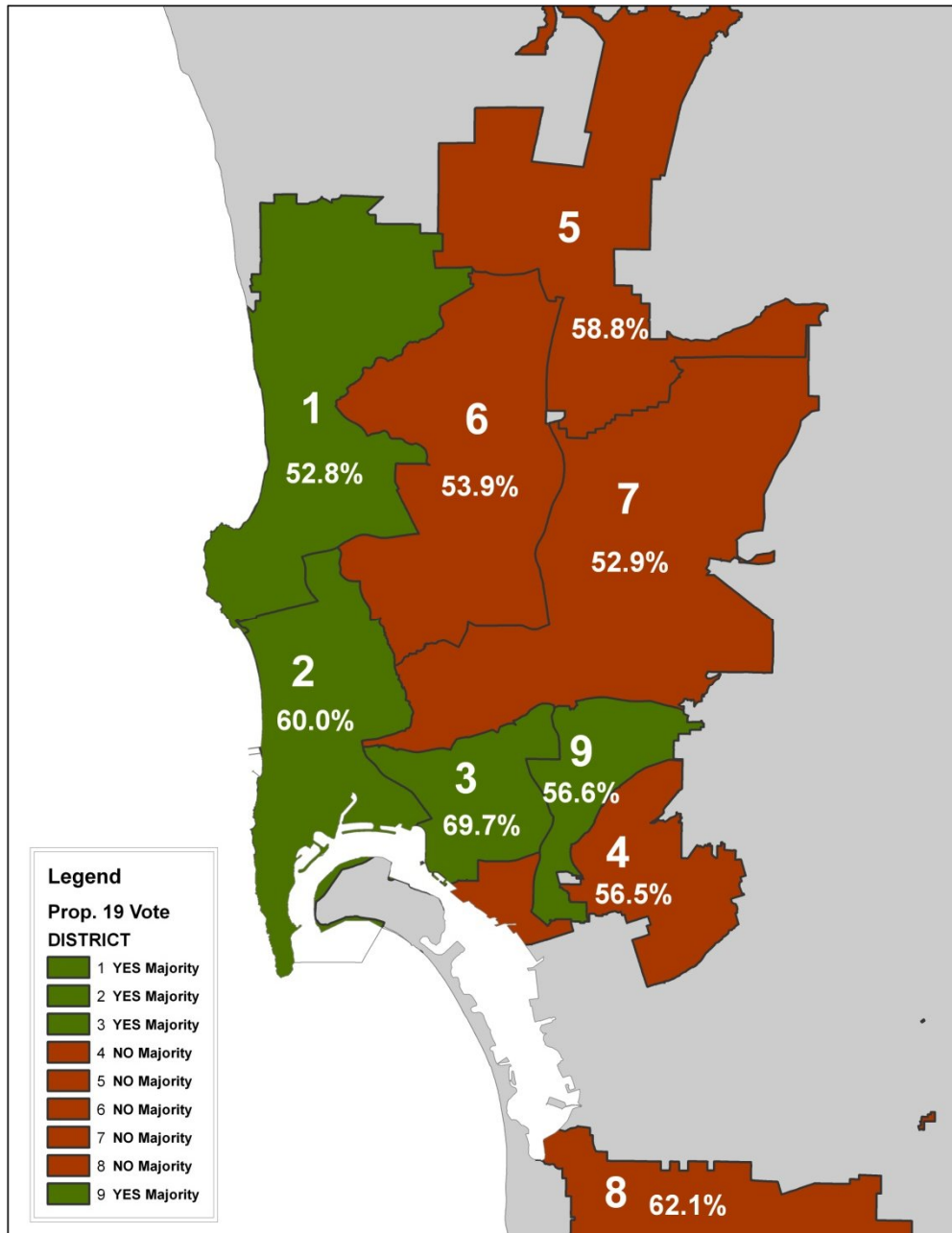
Over the last few years, the rancor at City Hall over medical marijuana has only grown louder. An ordinance drafted by a City Council task force to regulate cannabis dispensaries, and approved by the City Council, was rescinded in July 2011 after medical marijuana supporters were successful in gathering enough voter signatures to force a repeal or a citywide vote of the legislation. In September 2011, the City Attorney's Office filed civil actions against a dozen dispensaries for allegedly violating city zoning law. Marijuana advocates claim that local law enforcement has been heavy-handed and unfair in the treatment of dispensaries and cannabis patients; opponents argue that the state medical marijuana law is abused, and dispensary owners are little more than drug dealers that bring crime and quality of life problems to neighborhoods.

Where the public stands on the hot topic of medical marijuana depends on where you ask in San Diego. To assess voter views, NUSIPR examined the local votes cast for Proposition 19, a state measure on the November 2008 ballot which would have legalized the possession and cultivation of marijuana under California law. While the majority (51.7%) of San Diego city voters supported Prop. 19, five council districts had a majority of voters cast their ballots in opposition. Statewide polling found that among sub-voter groups, Asians, Latinos, Republicans, conservatives, and voters 65 years and older were strongly opposed to the passage of Prop. 19.<sup>7</sup> These findings correlate with the partisan and demographic voter profiles of Districts 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

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<sup>7</sup> Field Research Corporation. "Tabulations From a Survey of California Likely Voters in the November General Election for Prop. 19 (Marijuana Legalization), Prop. 23 (Suspending AB32, the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Law), and Prop. 25 (Majority Vote for State Budgets). October 31, 2010. Tables 53-55.

Chart 6: Percentage Vote For & Against Prop. 19, by Council District





## 8. Alcohol Beach Ban

Another controversial topic that splits San Diegans is whether alcohol consumption should be banned from parks, beaches and bays. Despite early attempts to restrict and regulate consumption, loopholes have been exploited in recent years, leading to large “floatopia” alcohol parties in Mission Bay. In 2008, city voters took a position on Proposition D, which banned alcohol consumption at city beaches, Mission Bay Park and coastal parks. While the majority of city voters passed Prop. D (52.5%), three districts with large populations of young adults rejected the measure (2, 3 and 9). Interestingly, we would note that the two coastal districts were split. Given the likely competitive nature of seats in Districts 1 and 2, this issue is one that likely all political leaders hope stays buried rather than create divisions and pit partisan cohesion against local preferences.

Table 8: Percentage Vote for Prop. D, by Council District

DISTRICT	Prop D NO	Prop D YES
1	45.1%	54.9%
2	54.3%	45.7%
3	54.5%	45.5%
4	44.1%	55.9%
5	41.6%	58.4%
6	45.9%	54.1%
7	46.3%	53.7%
8	40.8%	59.2%
9	50.8%	49.2%
Citywide	47.5%	52.5%

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<sup>1</sup> In February 2003, Decline to State voters accounted for 15.3% of statewide voters. In February 2011, they accounted for 20.4%. Source: California Secretary of State. “Odd-Numbered Year Report of Registration.” February 10, 2011. Accessed October 6, 2011. <<http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/ror/ror-pages/ror-odd-year-11/hist-reg-stats.pdf>>.