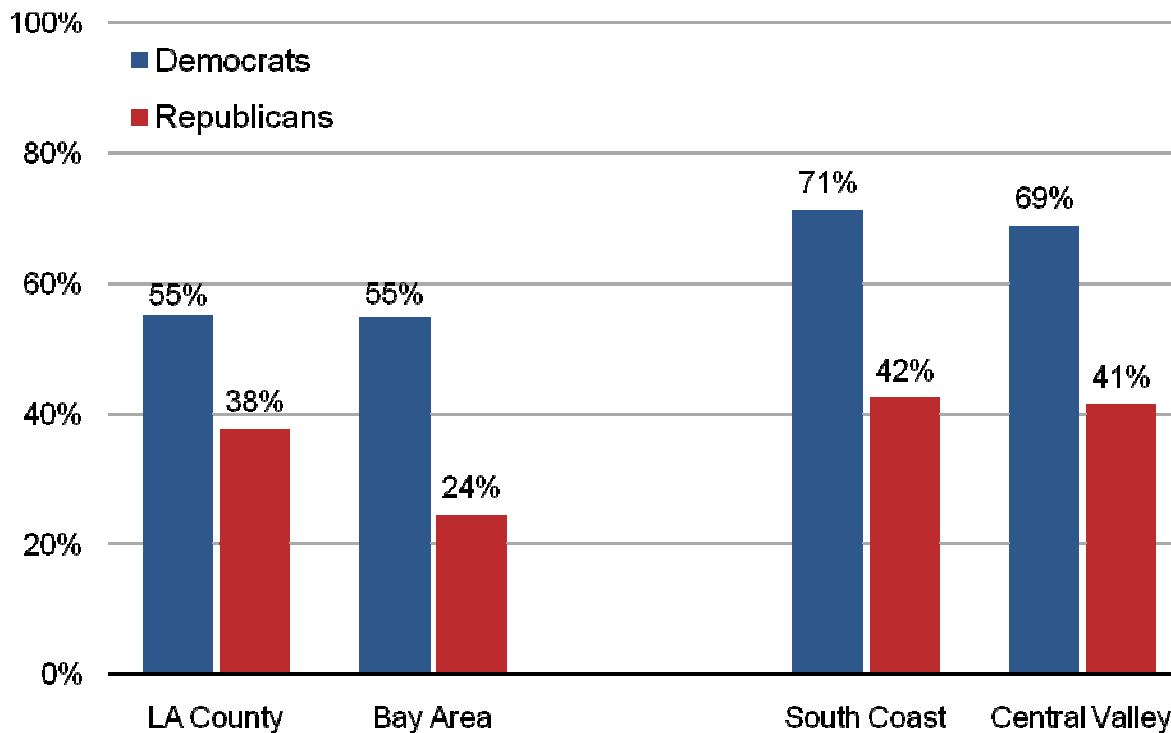


Summary: A Stanford University poll finds that Californian political reformers may find support in unlikely places, as the traditional Democratic strongholds of the Bay Area and Los Angeles County are less supportive of reducing the 2/3rd requirement for passing the budget than the Republican Central Valley and South Coast. Local political conditions appear to mediate voter interest in reforming the 2/3rd requirement for passing the state budget. Democrats statewide are more likely to support the elimination of the 2/3rd rule than Republicans, but the local political context greatly affects the level of support. Democrats living in heavily Democratic areas, like the LA County and Bay Area are less supportive of the proposed reform than their co-partisans living in the Republican dominated South Coast and Central Valley areas.

The partisan divide is only part of the story

Overall, Democrats support reducing the requirement for passing the budget to a simple majority (59%), while Republican are opposed to the proposed change with only 41% supporting the idea. So how come the Bay Area and LA County are less supportive of the reform proposal than the Republican parts of the state? It’s because the partisan divide only tells part of the story. Local political conditions appear to mediate the level of support for the reform. Democrats living in the Democratic strongholds of the Bay Area and LA County show limited support (55%) for reducing the requirement to pass a budget to a simple majority, while Democrats in the Central Valley (71%) and the South Coast (69%) overwhelmingly support the proposed changes. Republicans across the state are opposed to change, but are even more opposed in the Bay Area and LA County (24% and 38%, respectively) than in the South Coast and Central Valley (42% and 41%).

Partisan Support for Eliminating the 2/3rds Budget Requirement



Why the differences in levels of support across the different regions?

We posit that the local political context affects opinion about potential state level reforms. Voters can either be local winners (their party is in control of local government) or local losers (the other party is in control of local government). In the Bay Area and LA County, Democrats are often the local winners and Republicans are the local losers. Conversely, in the Republican dominated South Coast and Central Valley, Republicans generally are local winners and the Democrats are local losers. Depending on which category the voters are in, their support levels are systematically affected. Partisans who find themselves exposed to the policies of the other party locally are more polarized in their opinions about changing the 2/3rd rule.

Democrats in the Republican strongholds of the Central Valley and South Coast are losers at the local level; as such they directly experience Republican policies in local government. The familiarity of Republican policies increases the salience of the costs incurred for having Republicans so influential in the budgetary process (relative to Democrats in the Bay Area and LA). Similarly, the Democratic strongholds of the Bay Area and LA County create a situation where Republicans are local losers. As the minority party in these areas, the Republicans' direct exposure to Democratic simple majority rule at the local level intensifies their opposition to the proposed reform (relative to Republicans who are local winners in the Central Valley and South Coast).

So what does this mean for reform efforts?

Reformers may find less opposition in the Republican dominated areas than they might anticipate. Additionally, the Democratic areas of the state may need more convincing than one might suspect.

The Bill Lane Center for the American West poll of 1,000 Californians was conducted in August 2008 by YouGovPolimetrix, an internet polling firm based in Palo Alto, CA. The survey was conducted in preparation for planning "Getting to Reform: Avenues to Constitutional Change in California," a conference October 14 in Sacramento, sponsored by the Bill Lane Center for the American West at Stanford University, the Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, and the Center for California Studies, California State University, Sacramento. See: <http://igs.berkeley.edu/events/reform2010.html>

YouGovPolimetrix recruits individuals into their pool of poll respondents, obtains relevant demographic information about each individual, and creates a sample of respondents that is representative of the population of interest.

The Bill Lane Center for the American West at Stanford University is dedicated to advancing scholarly and public understanding of the past, present, and future of western North America. The Center supports research, teaching, and reporting about western land and life in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.