



*On California's 1920 Alien Land Law:
The Psychology and Economics of
Racial Discrimination*

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have recently highlighted a critical, but previously neglected, facet of racially discriminatory public policies—such policies may be motivated by either economic or psychological forces. That is, racially discriminatory policy may be the result of self-interest and competition in the face of scarcity or prejudices and affects based on group identities. We test if these motivations were behind the passage of an important, openly discriminatory public policy: California's Alien Land Law of 1920. We find that neither motivation alone accounts for the initiative vote that passed this law; both played a role. Our analysis also illustrates how racially discriminatory policies in the early 20th century fit into the ordinary politics of the day.

EARLY IN THE 20TH CENTURY, the state of California enacted several policies that overtly discriminated against Japanese resident aliens. Supporters of these measures openly hoped that these measures would both discourage further immigration and prevent those Japanese already living in the state from thriving (Hichborn 1913; Ichihashi 1915). This was not the first anti-Asian movement in the United States, as it followed, by several decades, the passage of the federal Chinese Exclusion Act. Recently, Gyory (1998) has provoked a lively scholarly debate over whether the anti-Chinese measures of the mid-19th century, usually understood as originating in blue-collar lobbying based on economic self-interest, should instead be seen as the exploitation of racial prejudice by politicians seeking electoral advantage (Lyman 2000a; Gyory 2000; Lyman 2000b; Yu 2002). We analyze California's anti-Japanese policies to help adjudicate further between top-down and bottom-up explanations of the adoption of racially discriminatory laws.

For most of its history, the United States has had serious internal con-

traditions in its public policies regarding race. The nation was founded on principles of equality, and yet an array of public policies has sanctioned racial discrimination, from slavery to Jim Crow laws to race-based immigration law. Majority rule, of course, opens the possibility that factions will unite behind policies detrimental to particular groups. At a general level, group-based discrimination can be understood as being motivated by either economic or psychological forces. That is, it can follow from self-interest and competition among groups in the face of economic scarcity or from prejudices and affects based on group identities (Sniderman et al. 2000; Oliver and Mendelberg 2000; Alvarez and Bedolla 2004). An analysis of California's anti-Japanese laws may help us distinguish between these two bases of discriminatory public policy. Were these laws promoted by legislators and interest groups trying to handicap Japanese competitors, or were they more or less uniformly supported by white Californians without systematic economic patterns that might betray motives beyond simple racial aversion?

We focus on one particular anti-Japanese measure, the second Alien Land Law, passed as an initiative in 1920. Elsewhere, we have examined the tangled legislative histories of several earlier (1907–15) attempts in the California legislature to pass bills restricting the rights of Japanese residents (Cho and Gaines 2000). That analysis demonstrated that passing such measures was nearly always difficult, with coalitions for and against the anti-Japanese laws shifting dramatically in short periods of time. Thus, we dispelled the impression that anti-Japanese laws were a simple and immediate translation of uniform racial prejudice into policy.

Here, our task in sorting out the forces behind the 1920 initiative is in one sense easier and in another sense harder. It is easier to study direct democracy than the legislative process mainly because our chief interest lies in a single vote, not in a complex parliamentary process subject to strategic maneuvers. A plebiscite ostensibly reveals public sentiment on policy directly. On the other hand, this is a hard case with which to support the argument that there was any more to the anti-Asian laws than simply that Californians of the era were racist and happy to parlay that racism into policy. The Alien Land Law Proposition passed with very strong support in 1920, appearing to offer simple and direct evidence of an overwhelming aversion to Japanese immigrants among California voters. But by exploring the regional variation in this vote and the historical context in which it was cast, we find evidence that support for this proposition was motivated by both racial prejudice and economic competition.

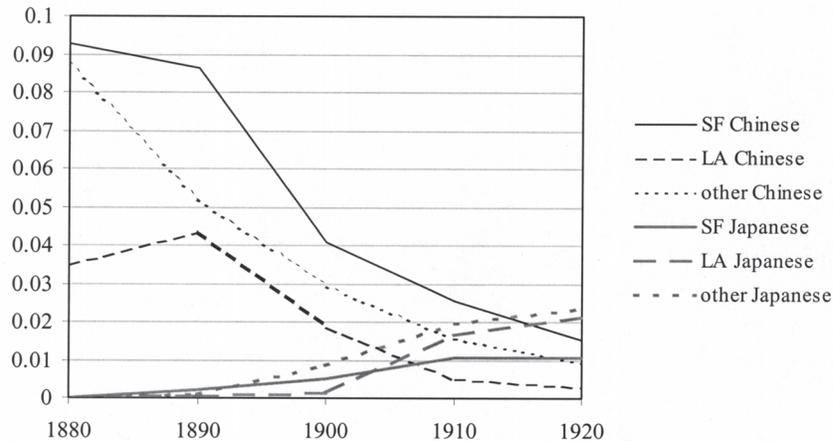
A HISTORY OF ANTI-JAPANESE MEASURES IN CALIFORNIA

The first significant Asian immigration into the United States began around 1848, when the discovery of gold in California drew a surge of settlers, including many Chinese (Daniels 1988). Slightly later, more Chinese laborers came to the American West to build railroads. The large numbers of Chinese immigrants, the nearly complete absence of social interaction between these Chinese and other settlers, and the fierce competition for employment that followed the initial boom years of the mid-19th century all contributed to a rising animosity toward this new, visibly distinct, and culturally novel immigrant group. By the 1870s, California legislators had attempted to pass many pieces of anti-Chinese legislation (Gyory 1998). In the 1880s, this first wave of anti-Asian sentiment culminated in federal legislation, the Chinese Exclusion Act (CEA) of 1882, which effectively shut the door to further Chinese immigration (Gyory 1998).

After the passage of the CEA, the Chinese population in California dwindled, but Japanese immigration increased. Figure 1 illustrates these trends for California's two major cities, Los Angeles (LA) and San Francisco (SF), and the remainder of the state. American entrepreneurs had not lost their desire for inexpensive labor, and so their recruitment efforts shifted to those comparable to the Chinese in poverty (and, thus, incentives to emigrate), but not legally restricted from entry to the United States. In the American West, Japan became the source of most immigrants. But, while the Japanese followed the Chinese precedent in settling mainly in California, their geographical clustering within the state was quite different, as Figure 1 shows. Once the railroads were built, Chinese immigrants tended to inhabit cities, mainly San Francisco. By contrast, the Japanese in California started out residing in the cities, but then relocated to the countryside in the early years of the 20th century. The 1910 United States Census showed that the Japanese in California mainly worked in agriculture and fishing and that most of them lived in southern California. Hence, their economic rivals and allies were somewhat different than those of the Chinese of the 1880s (Buell 1922, 638; Olin 1966, 309).

A second critical difference between Chinese and Japanese immigrants was that, by 1910, Japan had come to be regarded as one of the world's great powers. Following its victories in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05), Japan cast a far longer geopolitical shadow than China ever had. As a result, the United States government—especially the executive branch—did not want domestic agitation against Japanese

Figure 1. California's East Asian Population as Percentages of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and the Rest of the State, 1880–1920.



Source: United States Census reports.

immigrants to sour increasingly important diplomatic relations with Japan (Bailey 1932). Such diplomatic considerations did not weigh heavily on the person in the street or, indeed, on the legislator in Sacramento, and so there was public pressure (largely from California) for national government action to limit Japanese immigration (Buell 1922, 1923b). As a result, in 1907 and 1908, the United States and Japan exchanged a set of six diplomatic notes whose main effect was that Japan would no longer issue passports to laborers, while the United States would allow limited Japanese immigration for the purpose of family reunification (Ichihashi 1915). These actions decreased Japanese immigration into California markedly.

However, merely slowing the rate of new Japanese arrivals was not sufficient to remedy the “Japanese problem” in the eyes of the many Californians who were keen, not only to discourage new immigration, but also to drive away the Japanese already in the state (Hichborn 1909). This public sentiment led to a flurry of legislation in Sacramento, notwithstanding the national government’s diplomatic efforts.¹ In 1907, both the Assembly and the Senate passed several anti-Japanese bills, but none passed both chambers in identical versions. In 1909, numerous discriminatory bills were defeated on roll call votes. An Alien Land Bill was defeated in the Assembly by a wide margin, 28–48; a bill to deny aliens the right to direct corporations was even more soundly defeated, 15–53; a municipal segregation bill went down in a close vote, 39–35 (41 votes, a majority of the membership, being required for

passage). Only one discriminatory measure passed in 1909, as A.14, an Anti-Japanese School Bill, was approved by the Assembly, 46–28. However, it proved a short-lived victory for the supporters of discrimination, as President Roosevelt telegraphed Republican Governor Gillett, “This is the most offensive bill of all, and in my judgment is clearly unconstitutional . . . we should at once have to test it in the courts. Can it not be stopped in the Legislature or by veto?” (Hichborn 1909, 208–9).

Subsequently, despite grumbling over presidential interference in state politics and gubernatorial meddling in legislative matters, A.14 was defeated on reconsideration in the Assembly, 37–41, nine Republicans and one Democrat having switched sides. After that, a relatively modest Senate motion to give “the people an opportunity to express themselves at the polls on the Japanese question” (S.492) was also easily defeated. In the next legislative session, by a vote of 29–3, the Senate passed a bill holding that “no alien who is not eligible to citizenship” could hold property in the state (Hichborn 1911, 342), but that bill died in the Judiciary Committee of the Assembly. Other anti-Japanese bills were set aside, again following executive intervention by the governor and the president.

In the 1912 California gubernatorial and state legislative campaigns, anti-Japanese policies figured prominently in the Democratic platform and stump speeches, while the Progressives and old-line Republicans were silent on the issue (Hichborn 1913; Buell 1923a). Thus, with the Democrats gaining seats in both California legislative chambers and winning the presidency that year, the odds of passing anti-Japanese legislation seemed greatly improved. Only one prominent business opposed such measures—the Panama-Pacific International Exposition Company, a temporary conglomerate created to organize a world’s fair in San Francisco. The organizers anticipated substantial financial participation by Japan, so they were very anxious not to offend these potential investors (Hichborn 1913). After much political infighting in Sacramento, and more national government intervention for the sake of international relations, the 1913 California state legislature passed an Alien Land Law that restricted Japanese ownership and use of land in the state (Hichborn 1913).

However, despite the considerable drama that went into its passage, the 1913 Alien Land Law turned out to be toothless: “the law was immediately, openly, and widely evaded, and the Japanese continued to acquire ownership rights and unrestricted leaseholds” (Higgs 1978, 216). The law’s ineffectiveness became evident quickly, but frustration with its evasion was dampened by the First World War, which saw Japan and the United States allied against Germany. But, by 1919, this frustration and anti-Japanese sentiment led to the qualification of an initiative for the 1920 general election, Proposition 1,

a new Alien Land Law that was designed to plug the loopholes in its legislatively passed predecessor:

Proposition 1: Permits acquisition and transfer of real property by aliens eligible to citizenship, to same extent as citizens except as otherwise provided by law; permits other aliens, and companies, associations and corporations in which they hold majority interest, to acquire and transfer real property only as prescribed by treaty, but prohibiting appointment thereof as guardians of estates of minors consisting wholly or partially of real property or shares in such corporations; provides for escheats in certain cases; requires reports of property holdings to facilitate enforcement of act; prescribes penalties and repeals conflicting acts.

Effectively, the law would apply almost exclusively to Japanese immigrants (Buell 1923b), although the 1920 California *Voter's Guide's* "Argument in Favor of Proposed Alien Land Law" juxtaposed "Orientals" and "Japanese" in its explanation:

Its primary purpose is to prohibit Orientals who cannot become American citizens from controlling our rich agricultural lands. . . . Orientals, and more particularly Japanese, [have] commenced to secure control of agricultural lands in California (California 1920).

The actual impact of this proposition, once it was passed and implemented, has been debated (Daniels 1962; Suzuki 2000). For example, the provision prohibiting adult alien guardians was designed to plug a well-used loophole in the 1913 Alien Land Act, but it was eventually ruled to be an unconstitutional infringement of the rights of American citizens (the children born of alien parents in the United States), protected by the Fourteenth Amendment and by a settled jurisprudence of guardianship (McGovney 1947, 29). But what is important for our analysis is not whether or how the new law worked, but how and why voters passed it in the first place. It is unlikely that many voters expected judicial intervention to undercut the new, tougher law. Why did California voters approve this blatantly racially discriminatory law? To begin to answer this question, we turn first to the literature on racial discrimination.

THEORIES OF DISCRIMINATION AND CALIFORNIA'S ANTI-JAPANESE MEASURES

We begin our explanation of voting on the 1920 Alien Land Law initiative with an examination of the underlying motivations for racial discrimination. The scholarly literature traditionally characterizes these motivations as be-

ing based on either psychology or economics, rooted in either subjective or objective sources of intergroup conflict (Tajfel 1981; Sniderman et al. 2000). Much of this work is rooted in the study of whites' attitudes and behavior toward blacks in the United States. Key (1949) was an early observer of the effect of ecological factors (e.g., the regional racial mix), as distinct from individual-level factors (e.g., the race of a given individual), on white attitudes toward blacks in the American South. Scholars have since confirmed his "political threat" thesis in other venues (Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Carsey 1995; Voss and Miller 2001). Others have enriched our understanding of intergroup hostility by examining the role of economic and physical duress (Bettelheim and Janowitz 1964; Sales 1973; Feldman and Stenner 1997). Numerous studies have explored how economic competition breeds group-based affect (Green, Strolovitch, and Wong 1998). In summary, the roots of racial prejudice appear to defy simplistic accounts and to vary quite dramatically with context.

In an innovative study, Sniderman et al. (2000) brought together the two underlying motives—cognitive and materialistic—to explore their interrelationships. They conducted survey experiments in Italy, an excellent choice of venue given its long-standing regional animosities and a recent surge in two streams of immigrants—blacks from Africa and whites from Eastern Europe—that together create a laboratory for pulling apart racial tension, "insider" and "outsider" affect, and economic competition.

We also examine the motivations for racial prejudice outside the American-blacks-and-whites context that has characterized so much of the literature. There is no reason to believe that black-white relations are unique and an examination of the process in another context can deepen our understanding of the contours of racial prejudice. Whereas black-white relations already had a long history in the United States by the early 20th century, conflict between whites and East Asians was still fairly novel, although not brand new, since Californians in the early 20th century had a strong collective memory of the very recent "Chinese problem," addressed by successful agitation for a nationwide ban on their immigration.

The currently accepted explanation for the success of California's anti-Japanese measures is a nearly uniform psychological-sociological racial prejudice in the white population (Daniels 1988; Gyory 1998). Some contemporary accounts emphasized economic arguments for or (mainly) against permitting Japanese aliens land-use rights (Hichborn 1913; Ichihashi 1915), but historians of American Asian immigration policy have overwhelmingly emphasized racial animosity (Miller 1969). This is roughly true even of Gyory's (1998) path-breaking revisionist work on the Chinese Exclusion Act. By

careful process-tracing and content analysis of public documents, he builds a case that blue-collar workers, who stood to gain economically from restricting Chinese immigration, did not provide the impetus for the exclusion:

Historians have identified three forces behind the Chinese Exclusion Act: pressure from workers, politicians, and others in California, where most Chinese had settled; a racist atmosphere that pervaded the nation in the nineteenth century; and persistent support and lobbying by the national labor movement. As evidence will show, the first two forces were important but not decisive. The third was nonexistent; contrary to the claims of numerous scholars, most workers evinced little interest in Chinese exclusion. (Gyory 1998, 1)

Thus, Gyory concurs with others that pressure for anti-Asian policy from California crossed class lines. His argument undercutting the most prominent economic explanation for Chinese exclusion thus includes the important caveat that in asserting that organized labor was not anti-Asian, he excludes California. In short, anti-Chinese racism was widespread among Californians in the late 19th century, and anti-Japanese racism in the early 20th century was equally prevalent.

Californians were generally hostile to East Asian settlers in this period, and racial attitudes were, by modern standards, stark. With the exception of a few church groups, no one was framing either of the major Asian immigration debates in the themes of common humanity or the benefits of diversity (Cho and Gaines 2000). But our analysis of legislative voting on the first wave of anti-Japanese measures suggests a more complicated debate than is consistent with the simple explanation that all Californians hated Asians. The parties shifted positions over time, and legislative coalitions were sometimes more geographic than partisan, suggesting that economic forces were at play. We turn, then, to the election data on Proposition 1 in search of systematic variance in its support levels across the state to help us identify the focus behind its passage.

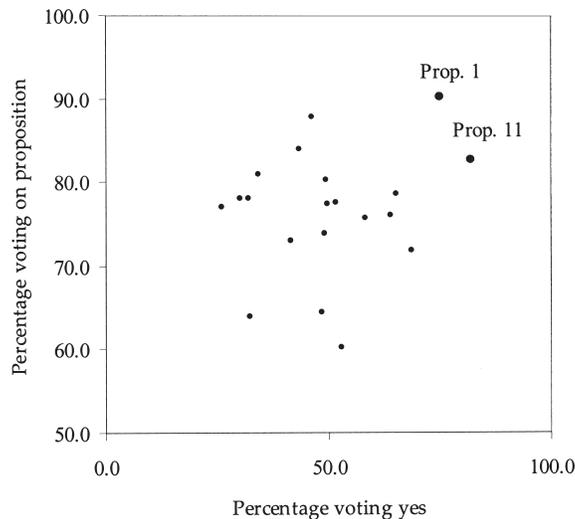
ANALYSIS OF THE 1920 CALIFORNIA ELECTION RESULTS

Figure 2 shows that the two measures targeting aliens, Proposition 1 (the Alien Land Law) and Proposition 11 (the Alien Poll Tax), were the most popular of the 20 ballot measures presented to Californian voters on the November 1920 ballot. They garnered 75 percent and 82 percent support, respectively. Furthermore, since the least supported proposition in 1920 (Proposition 20, which would have exempted various forms of real estate from tax) won 26 percent approval, the two anti-alien measures had the most lopsided outcomes. They were also among the only six measures that year

on which majorities in every county voted the same way. Figure 2 also demonstrates that these discriminatory propositions had above-average participation rates. Many voters abstain on some of the contests on a long ballot, and in California, propositions often generate comparatively low levels of voting (Gaines and Lewkowicz 2003). But in 1920, over 90 percent of all ballots included a vote on the Alien Land Law, making it the least ignored proposition, nearly as salient to voters as the races for president (96 percent participation) and the United States Senate (93 percent participation). Proposition 11's 83 percent participation rate was fourth highest among the propositions, and about 20 percentage points above the rate for the most ignored ballot item that year, Proposition 15 (a measure that changed the requirements for forming irrigation districts).

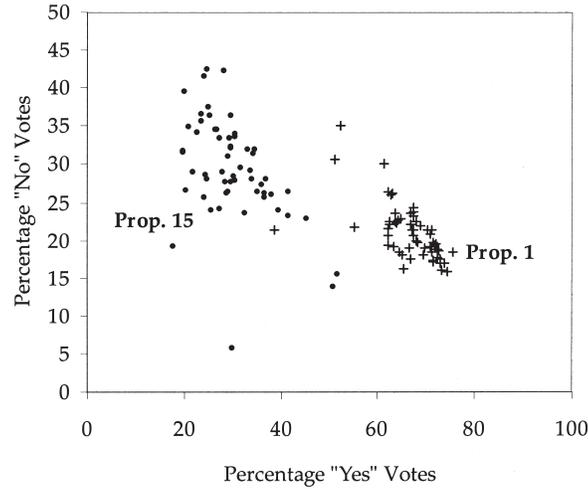
Thus, support for these discriminatory policies was strong and widespread. But, how uniform was this support across the state? For propositions from this era, the only available substate tabulation of vote is by county. In Figure 3, we plot each county based on its proportions voting yes and no on Proposition 1 and Proposition 15. The figure gives a sense of the spread across the counties in support and participation levels for those measures. The cluster for Proposition 1, on the Alien Land Law, is plainly tighter than that for Proposition 15, on irrigation districts, suggesting a more uniform reaction across the state. To quantify this spread, Table 1 reports the standard devia-

Figure 2. Voting on and Support for 20 California Ballot Propositions, 1920



Source: Jordan 1920.

Figure 3. Dispersion of California Counties on Support for Two 1920 Propositions



Source: Jordan 1920.

Notes: The proportion abstaining is the remainder when the x and y coordinates are subtracted from one.

Table 1. County-Level Dispersion in Proposition Support, California's 1920 Election

Proposition	Std Dev (Y_1) $Y_1 = \text{yes}/(\text{yes} + \text{no})$	Std Dev (Y_2) $Y_2 = \text{yes}/\text{total}$	$r(Y_1, Y_2)$
1. Alien Land Law	0.041	0.043	0.862
2. Prohibition Enforcement	0.125	0.103	0.951
3. Salaries of Justices	0.042	0.037	0.924
4. Initiative Signatures	0.055	0.047	0.830
5. Create Chiropractic Board	0.099	0.088	0.888
6. Prohibit Compulsory Vaccination	0.062	0.051	0.879
7. Prohibit Vivisection	0.082	0.068	0.930
8. Regulate Poison Sales	0.071	0.076	0.890
9. Highway Bonds	0.077	0.073	0.959
10. Constitutional Convention	0.078	0.045	0.941
11. Alien Poll Tax	0.046	0.043	0.796
12. State University Tax	0.149	0.103	0.944
13. Community Property	0.042	0.037	0.897
14. Insurance Act	0.068	0.047	0.699
15. Irrigation Districts	0.177	0.088	0.909
16. School System	0.067	0.051	0.905
17. Absent Voters	0.103	0.068	0.916
18. Orphanage Tax Exemption	0.076	0.076	0.901
19. State Aid to Institutions	0.097	0.073	0.926
20. Land Values Taxation	0.040	0.029	0.964

Note: All items were weighted by total ballots cast per county. Racially discriminatory propositions in bold.

tions for each of the 20 1920 propositions. It shows values for two measures of support, one that ignores abstentions (Y_1) and one that combines abstentions and opposition (Y_2), plus the correlations between these two measures, which are high for each proposition.

Table 1 shows that the Alien Land Law proposition was among the most uniformly supported measures in 1920, having, along with four other measures, the lowest (weighted) standard deviation in county-level support, whether or not abstentions are included. This limited variance in the only available substate aggregation of votes for Proposition 1 means, again, that the Alien Land Law proposition is a genuinely hard case for testing the hypothesis that rational economic motives competed with psychological prejudice motives in generating its support.

How did the county-level voting patterns for these 20 propositions compare? Table 2 presents weighted pairwise Pearson correlation coefficients for the whole set of 1920 propositions, using Y_1 from Table 1, the support measure that ignores abstentions. Surprisingly, support levels for the two anti-alien measures, Propositions 1 and 11, are barely correlated. This lack of county-level correlation may be quite revealing about the role of race in proposition voting. While the Alien Land Law proposition was crafted to target Asian aliens, in a manner that only the extremely politically unaware citizens could have missed, the alien poll tax measure was ostensibly race-neutral:

Proposition 11: Requires the Legislature to provide for the levy of an annual poll tax, and the collection thereof by assessors, of not less than four dollars on every alien male inhabitant of this state over twenty-one and under sixty years of age, except paupers, idiots and insane persons, such tax to be paid into county school fund in county where collected.

Contemporary accounts offer no suggestion that California voters in 1920 had any reason to believe that the implementation of such a poll tax would be racially skewed. Thus, the lack of correlation between Proposition 1 and Proposition 11 at the county level suggests that a single economic threat is not motivating support for these measures and, perhaps, that a specifically racial animus was driving voting on Proposition 1. This interpretation is also consistent with Olin's (1966) identification of the paradox that the 1913 California state legislature not only passed the original anti-Japanese Alien Land Law, but that it also created the first commission charged with investigating the conditions of immigrants and recommending policies to alleviate their poverty. Their concern was evidently for European immigrants and not their Japanese counterparts, whose ability to earn a living those same legislators were curtailing. So perhaps the 1920 electorate was similarly in-

Table 2. Weighted Correlations between County-Level Support for Propositions in California's 1920 Election

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Alien Land Law	-0.463	0.055	-0.182	-0.464	0.422	-0.404	0.371	0.051	-0.548	0.034	-0.410	-0.617	-0.458	-0.271	-0.574	-0.455	-0.640	-0.557	-0.367
2. Prohibition Enforcement		-0.237	-0.172	0.499	0.548	0.414	-0.671	-0.311	-0.673	0.450	0.067	0.821	0.070	0.631	0.510	0.712	0.642	0.803	-0.114
3. Salaries of Justices			-0.048	-0.013	-0.135	-0.014	0.493	0.011	0.234	-0.580	0.301	-0.054	0.302	0.283	0.234	0.043	-0.169	0.166	0.363
4. Initiative Signatures				0.369	0.298	0.352	0.138	0.308	-0.038	0.164	0.526	-0.236	0.522	-0.312	0.218	-0.473	-0.019	-0.199	0.311
5. Create Chiropractic Board					0.829	0.881	-0.568	-0.265	0.354	0.196	0.435	0.342	0.345	0.362	0.495	0.371	0.520	0.587	0.378
6. Prohibit Compulsory Vaccination						0.874	-0.613	-0.181	0.400	0.380	0.432	0.391	0.279	0.278	0.605	0.288	0.406	0.519	0.346
7. Prohibit Vivisection							-0.564	-0.155	0.385	0.220	0.547	0.297	0.459	0.314	0.524	0.258	0.392	0.470	0.453
8. Regulate Poison Sales								0.451	-0.266	-0.464	0.068	-0.495	0.152	-0.218	-0.217	-0.548	-0.591	-0.535	0.192
9. Highway Bonds								0.020	0.155	0.293	0.317	-0.225	0.317	-0.225	0.089	-0.420	-0.142	-0.330	0.270
10. Constitutional Convention									0.138	0.547	0.815	0.598	0.699	0.707	0.527	0.573	0.756	0.756	0.308
11. Alien Poll Tax										-0.018	0.177	-0.055	-0.046	0.223	0.037	0.295	0.097	-0.203	
12. State University Tax										0.292	0.809	0.245	0.666	-0.107	0.196	0.206	0.699		
13. Community Property											0.267	0.655	0.571	0.699	0.666	0.794	0.128		
14. Insurance Act												0.313	0.502	-0.086	0.209	0.213	0.568		
15. Irrigation Districts													0.440	0.654	0.502	0.748	0.159		
16. School Systems														0.360	0.533	0.629	0.581		
17. Absent Voters															0.771	0.871	0.004		
18. Orphanage Tax Exemption																0.784	0.151		
19. State Aid to Institutions																			0.171
20. Land Values Taxation																			

Note: Weighting was by total vote cast, and support was measured by Y_1 (see Table 1). Bold indicates statistical significance $p < 0.05$

clined to regard Proposition 1 as a racial matter and Proposition 11 as a distinct white immigration matter. In any event, both measures imposed costs on non-natives and both were very popular, but their county-level patterns of support were largely distinct.

The remaining coefficients in Table 2 show that support for some of the propositions were highly correlated, while a few seem to have had a logic of their own, the distribution of their support being essentially unrelated to those of the others. For instance, only two other propositions were correlated with Proposition 11 to a statistically significant degree. While no measure had a statistically significant, positive correlation with the Alien Land Law, seven of the measures were negatively related to its support to a statistically significant degree. Indeed, these correlations suggest that there was a fair amount of structure, or clustering, in proposition voting in this election. The fact that Proposition 1 support was correlated with support for several other measures suggests that it may not have been a truly anomalous issue, after all.

To understand support for the Alien Land Law initiative better, one needs a fuller sense of the policy domain in California politics in the early decades of the 20th century. What kinds of issues were related in the minds of elites and in the minds of voters? The results in Table 1 are difficult to interpret because of the sheer volume of numbers characterizing only bivariate relationships. What is needed is an estimate of the dimensionality of the policy landscape of the day. We generate such an estimate by exploiting the rich data created by direct democracy. Because Californian voters make policy choices on a large number of issues by casting votes on ballot propositions, we have some information about the relationships among public preferences even in an era that predates public opinion polls by decades.

We use factor analysis to develop a parsimonious depiction of the information gathered from the large number of plebiscites on the California ballot from 1904 to 1920. Generally, a factor analysis seeks to reduce the complexity of a large set of variables by identifying commonalities in the clustering of observations (Harman 1976). The idea is to explain the correlation among many variables with a few underlying (but unobservable) dimensions. One aspect of the output is the number of dimensions (factors) that are required to account for a large share of the overall variance among the cases of raw input variables (here, the individual proposition returns, by county). A second aspect of the output is the extent to which the input variables load on each of the factors and how these variables cluster together on them. The interpretation of factor loadings is easiest when each variable loads highly on only one factor and when all the factor loadings are either large (in absolute value) or near zero, with few intermediate values. In that case,

the variables can be partitioned into disjoint sets, each of which is associated with one factor, with perhaps some odd variables left over that do not fit neatly into the overall structure. We used the varimax method of orthogonal rotation, which seeks axes with a few large loadings and as many near-zero loadings as possible (Harman 1976, 290–1).

We pooled the ballot measures into three periods having roughly the same number of ballot items: 1904–10, 1912–15, and 1916–20.² We are most interested in the last period, since it included the Alien Land Law and Alien Poll Tax votes, but comparison with the preceding years will give us a sense for the stability of the California policy landscape of the day. Our assessment of California legislative voting in the first two decades of the 20th century was that politics was chaotic, with coalitions shifting dramatically and rapidly (Cho and Gaines 2000). By factor analyzing these ballot measure votes, we can see whether mass politics was equally volatile.

Table 3 shows some results of this analysis, the cumulative variance explained by the first five factors extracted from the relevant propositions. Given how much changed in California over the 20th century, it is surprising to see that our results on the dimensionality of the state's politics from 1904–20 look quite similar to Snyder's (1996) analysis of proposition voting in the 1970s and 1980s. A one-dimensional model of these politics is probably too simple, accounting for only about half of the variance in county-level voting patterns. But a model having only two factors provides high explanatory power, accounting for between two-thirds and three-fourths of the variance. Furthermore, the additional contributions of each subsequent factor beyond two are rather small.

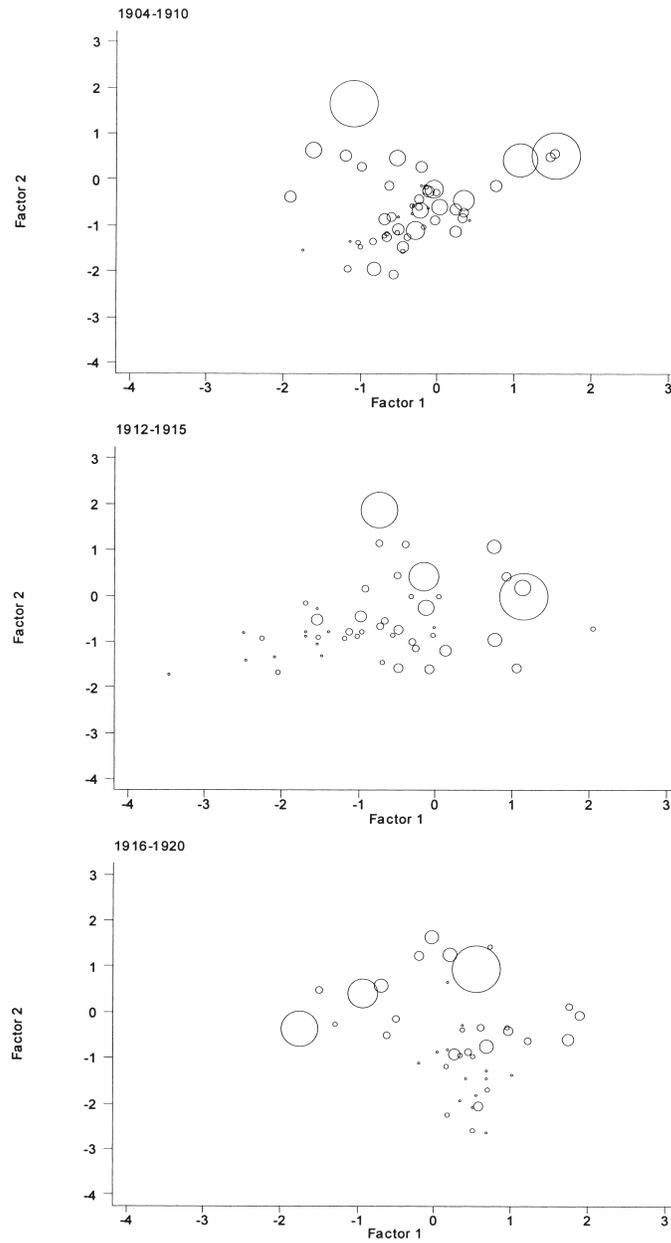
Figure 4 plots California's counties in the two-dimensional policy spaces defined by this factor analysis of ballot measure voting for each of these periods. The county markers on these graphs are proportional to their sizes, measured as the total number of ballots cast over the period. In the first two

Table 3. Factor Analysis of Voting on California's Ballot Measures, 1904–20

Years (number of elections)	Ballot Measures	Cumulative Percentage of Variance Explained by Factors				
		1	2	3	4	5
1904–10 (4)	50 (5)	0.504	0.775	0.827	0.876	0.900
1912–15 (3)	67 (7)	0.443	0.711	0.781	0.838	0.870
1916–20 (3)	52 (13)	0.495	0.647	0.735	0.780	0.837

Note: The figures in parentheses under "Ballot Measures" are the number of propositions in which majorities in all counties voted the same way. These non-controversial measures can hamper estimation (Snyder 1996) but we opted to include them since our models did a good job of accounting for variance with relatively few factors even with these lopsided measures included.

Figure 4. County-Level Ballot Measure Factor Scores for Three Early 20th Century Periods



Note: Counties are plotted on these graphs, with the size of the marker being proportional to a county's total ballots cast, 1904–1920.

periods, San Francisco County is the largest observation and Los Angeles County is the second largest; in the third period, they switch ranks. Alameda County is the third largest observation in each period. These three counties clearly illustrate the substantial volatility of the policy landscape in California over these years. The precise meaning of the factors themselves is ambiguous (Harman 1976), but the dispersion of the scatterplot is telling. The large counties can be seen to drift around the space from one period to the next. San Francisco and Los Angeles are always outliers on one dimension each, but they are never the least similar counties (i.e., furthest apart). What is not obvious from the plots, absent labels, is that the other counties also drift substantially across the time periods, to an even greater extent than the three large counties. Our data do not allow us to draw a substantive account of this volatility, in the sense of identifying the precise nature of dimensions and movements to the left or right, top or bottom. But there was significant instability in policy voting alignments at the county level. We infer from this that similar issues could provoke very different geographic bases of support in different elections. In other words, the geography of Californians' policy preferences was neither simple (i.e., one-dimensional) nor stable.

What can this analysis tell us about voting motivation on the Alien Land Law? First, Proposition 1 did not load highly on any of the first six factors in the 1916–20 model. Its loadings were -0.59009, -0.01040, 0.23663, -0.29078, 0.01137, and 0.20393, respectively. Only two other propositions in 1920 (out of 20) had loadings as low as Proposition 1. Hence, while we can reasonably reduce the relationship between the 52 1916–20 propositions to six underlying factors, the Alien Land Law of 1920 stands out with a unique pattern of support. As we shall see, these comparatively small loadings do not mean that none of the variance in Proposition 1 support can be accounted for in terms of the principle factors that organized California politics of the day. Rather, the Alien Land Law was simply less explicable in these terms than were other propositions of the era. Because of the paucity of ethnic or racial ballot measures in this period, this lack of explanatory power may be due to the fact that variation in county-level racial prejudice is largely uncaptured by these scores, except insofar as it maps onto other issues. To assess this explanation, we next compare the explanatory power of the initiative-based factor analysis with demographic and political variables in an effort to disentangle sources of support for discrimination against aliens. We are especially interested in whether racial and economic variables can explain the county-level Alien Land Law vote, independent of our factor-analytic variables that capture normal politics.

We estimated least squares regression models of support for Proposition

1 in California's 58 counties.³ Since the counties varied tremendously in population, we weighted them by the total number of ballots cast in the 1920 general election to avoid heteroskedasticity.⁴ Table 4 displays the results from four models. Each of the first three models includes a different category of explanatory variable, while the fourth includes all these variables. Comparison across columns allows us to assess the robustness of these relationships.

Model 1 includes only the first two factors extracted from the factor analysis of the votes on all 1916–20 California propositions. These factors can be interpreted as estimates of latent policy and ideological preferences of the county electorates. Model 2 trades those relatively powerful, but substantively ambiguous, factor analysis variables for a set of demographic and economic independent variables that might plausibly capture various factors driving voter sentiment toward Japanese immigrants in a county. The percent Asian (Chinese and Japanese) should capture the degree to which economic competition with Asians was a consideration in the area. Because almost none of the Asian residents in 1920 were adult citizens, this variable should be understood as a measure of the context in which non-Asians (almost all of

Table 4. Determinants of County-Level Vote on Proposition 1

	1	2	3	4
Percent Asian		1.480 ** (0.401)		1.357 ** (0.378)
Non-white farm owners, tenants		-10.965 ** (4.190)		-8.041 ** (3.947)
Farm value per capita [†]		7.721 (5.570)		-5.066 (6.270)
Manufacturing value per capita [†]		14.153 (8.137)		5.877 (6.635)
US Senate Democratic vote			0.315 ** (0.077)	-0.017 (0.122)
Anti-Japanese voting index (1913)			-0.109 ** (0.029)	-0.119 ** (0.031)
Factor 1	-0.013 ** (0.005)			-0.008 (0.008)
Factor 2	-0.021 ** (0.005)			-0.014 ** (0.005)
Intercept	0.751 ** (0.005)	0.711 ** (0.011)	0.669 ** (0.038)	0.802 ** (0.057)
Adjusted R^2	0.32	0.20	0.32	0.51
N	58	58	58	58

Note: Weighted least squares regression coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses.

[†] in millions of dollars

* $p < 0.10$

** $p < 0.05$

them white) voted, not as a measure of the size of an Asian voting bloc. The percentage of non-white farm owners and tenants (the 1920 United States Census did not report data for Asians separately from blacks and American Indians on these variables) should similarly capture the degree to which locals stood to gain by limiting competition, specifically in agriculture. Per capita farm and manufacturing values are other general measures of the nature and size of the local economy. There is no ecological inference problem here, insofar as we do not draw inferences about individual voters (white or Asian). Rather, we examine a set of nearly homogenous white electorates to see if their aggregate behavior was sensitive to the racial mix of the population or its related economic characteristics.

Model 3 features political variables, the Democratic two-party vote percentage in the 1920 United States Senate contest and an anti-Japanese legislative voting index based on roll calls from the 1913 session. Since the Senate vote was cast simultaneously with the Proposition 1 vote, the causal order here is ambiguous. Nonetheless, this vote is of special interest because the Democratic candidate, James Phelan, campaigned on an anti-Japanese platform, trying to piggyback on support for Proposition 1, while Samuel Shortridge, a non-Progressive, old-line Republican, mostly ignored Asian issues (Daniels 1962, 81–9). The anti-Japanese index for each county was developed from eight roll call votes on a variety of anti-Japanese measures cast by members of both chambers of the state legislature in the 1913 session that produced the original Alien Land Law.⁵ To the extent that those legislative votes can be understood as having reflected constituency preferences, this index assesses county-level hostility to Japanese resident aliens.

First, note that most of the relationships detected in Models 1, 2, and 3 in Table 4 hold up in Model 4, reducing the possibility that these effects are spurious or indirect. Judging by the variance explained, while each model shows some explanatory power, Model 4 is a statistically significant improvement, based on formal *F* tests. The coefficients of several of our variables were statistically significant in the models, despite the limited variance in our dependent variable and the relatively small number of cases. The fact that one of the factors from Model 1 retains some explanatory power even in the presence of the other independent variables in Model 4 suggests that the process determining how counties voted on this proposition was too complex to be accounted for by the other six variables. On the other hand, the magnitude of the factor's coefficient is very small, and the statistical significance of the other variables reveals that they indeed had an independent influence on county-level voting on Proposition 1.

One important result in Model 4 for our central research question is that

the coefficient for each of the variables having some racial aspect (percent Asian, percent non-white farm owners and tenants, and the anti-Japanese index) was statistically significant. Furthermore, the primary non-racial, economic variables (farm and manufacturing value per capita) did not have statistically significant effects on Proposition 1 county-level voting. These results might seem to suggest that psychology trumped economics in driving support for Proposition 1. However, two of the racial variables, the anti-Japanese index and the non-white farm percentage, have effects in the opposite direction from our expectations. That is, the more hostile towards Japanese immigrants were the legislators from a county in 1913, the lower was that county's support for Proposition 1. Also, counties with larger Asian farm populations supported the Alien Land Law at comparatively lower, not higher, rates. By contrast, as expected, the larger the local Asian population, in percentage terms, the higher the support for Proposition 1. Thus, the presence of non-farming Asian residents in a county was associated with increased support for the racially discriminatory policy, but the presence of non-white farmers—including those Japanese farmers who were the main target of the policy—was strongly related to an opposition to this discrimination.

In summary, support for Proposition 1 seems to have been a function of both racial prejudice and economic discrimination, but in a surprising combination. All else equal, where there were more Asians, proportionately, the Land Law was more popular. But the “all else” here includes economic factors. The lack of impact of the farm-value variable in Model 4 suggests that the Alien Land Law's popularity was not related to a rural-urban split. On the other hand, the variable that combines racial and economic factors, the percent of local farmers who were non-white, is a statistically significant net predictor of opposition to land discrimination. That is strong evidence against a simple economic account for the law. Ideally, measurement on the economic dimension would be much richer, but United States Census data for the period are limited, and none of our variables are available at a lower level of aggregation.

CONCLUSION

What does our analysis of the California Alien Land Law initiative of 1920 say about the general question of what motivates racially discriminatory policy in the United States? Our prior work on anti-Japanese policy enacted by the California state legislature (Cho and Gaines 2000) showed that these motivations are rarely simple, and we have reinforced that conclusion here. We tested whether county-level support for the Alien Land Law initiative

followed a direct economic logic, but the data do not support that hypothesis. Neither the size of a county's agricultural sector nor the size of its non-white farm population predicts support for limiting the rights of Japanese residents, most of whom farmed. Indeed, the latter factor—which has both economic and psychological facets—had a negative relationship with support: those areas most likely to have been affected by the Alien Land Law because they had more non-white farmers were, on balance, less supportive of the law, controlling for the direct effect of the percentage of Asians in the county. That finding mitigates the impact of the expected positive relationship between the size of Asian population and support for discriminatory policy, based on a racial threat effect (Giles, Cataldo, and Gatlin 1975). Furthermore, the fact that the counties that were most supportive of restricting Japanese land rights were the counties that produced the least anti-Japanese legislators less than a decade earlier is an additional complication. This may be evidence that the anti-Asian movement was not geographically stable. Finally, the finding that variables constructed to explain voting on all the era's propositions explain support for the Alien Land Law about as well as demographic variables, but that each set of variables has an effect independent of the other would suggest that the Alien Land Law in some respects fitted the political space of the day and in other respects was a novelty. In short, a simple economic model of support for this racially discriminatory policy is inadequate because purely economic, nonracial variables had no effect. But a simple psychological model is also inadequate, insofar as some of the racial variables had unexpected effects.

Thus, the best statistical model of the Alien Land Law initiative voting at the county level reveals some evidence of racial prejudice, but it also reveals a complexity that is missing in too many accounts of the period (Chang 1999; Fugita and O'Brien 1991). In the end, there is no gainsaying the overall statewide popularity of the 1920 Alien Land law initiative. To adjudicate further between whether material or affective forces were stronger would require finer data. But we can conclude even from the aggregate data available at this far remove that most of the accounts of the anti-Japanese movement in California in texts on Asian-American history are oversimplified. The fact that the forces behind racially discriminatory policy are complex should not really be surprising. Given the basic conflict between the founding principles of the United States and the possibilities for group conflict created by democracy, such complexity should be expected.

ENDNOTES

1. California was not the only place to consider anti-Asian policies at this time. Canada and Australia had experiences with Asian immigration broadly similar to that of the United States, and those countries responded similarly. For example, British Columbia, the destination for the majority of Asians emigrating to Canada, waged a legislative campaign against Asians very much like California's, sometimes in parallel and sometimes in conflict with the governments in Ottawa and London (Roy 1989; Hallett 1972).

2. There was a special election in November 1915 featuring 11 ballot propositions.

3. The dependent variable is the proportion Y_1 from Table 1. Results for models using Y_2 (the "yes" vote as a proportion of all ballots) as the dependent variable are broadly similar, although they account for less variance and have some variables that are less clearly statistically significant.

4. We also ran a spatial-lag model to examine whether geography had a direct effect on voting behavior. For instance, if a county's support for a measure is higher (after controlling for county-level characteristics such as partisanship, percent Asian, and so on) when that county is geographically close to other counties with high support, then a regional culture or attitudinal diffusion process may be at work. No such spatial effects showed up in the analysis, perhaps because the county is too large a unit of aggregation. That is, the spatial-lag model results are virtually indistinguishable from our weighted least squares results (the spatial-lag model results are available from the authors).

5. Details of this index construction can be found in Cho and Gaines 2000. Although several years elapsed between these roll calls and the 1920 proposition vote, the 1913 session produced the richest roll call data in terms of number of measures, their scope, and the degree to which the votes divided the chambers into relatively large competing blocs.

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