

# LEADERS OR CARETAKERS

## Examining the Impact of Ideological Diversity on California's Legislative Leaders

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This paper examines the impact of Democrats' ideological diversity on the strength of legislative leadership in the California state legislature since 2001. To measure ideological diversity, I use Shor-McCarty NPAT scores and adjusted California Chamber of Commerce SCores to measure overall ideological diversity and ideologically relating to business interests, respectively. To measure legislative leaders' strength and influence, I use a formal powers index and a media analysis of The Sacramento Bee to measure formal and perceived power, respectively. I supplement this quantitative data with interviews of former legislators. I find evidence of a weak relationship between overall ideological diversity among Democrats and leaders' perceived strength, as well as evidence of a weak-to-moderate relationship between ideological diversity on business interests among Democrats and leaders' perceived strength. I also find evidence to suggest that longevity and legislative leadership styles factor into leaders' strength, and that leaders in recent years have emphasized procedural fairness, possibly in response to increased ideological diversity among Democrats. This research has implications not just for California politics, but for the study of state legislatures nationwide and potentially for the study of the U.S. Congress.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

*“California has problems, but rumors of its demise are greatly exaggerated.”*  
 — Governor Jerry Brown, 2012 State of the State Address

California has long held a towering place in the national imagination. The state’s population is the largest in the country, its economy is the 5th largest in the world, and it is world-renowned for its innovation, entrepreneurial spirit, and premier public higher education system. But in many ways, California exemplifies the United States’s struggles and failures, from the devastating impacts of climate change to soaring income inequality.

California is also a political Rorschach test. Most Democrats view the state as a symbol of progress, a bulwark of diversity, and an example of sound governance, whose mistake is only in not fully living up to its progressive ideals. For most Republicans, California is the opposite—a tragedy of a state with promise, but ruined by taxes, regulations, Hollywood liberals, and Gavin Newsom. Regardless of where one lives in the United States, having an opinion on California can feel like a prerequisite for having an opinion on politics.

But this simple narrative belies the immense political transformations that have taken place in California over the past few decades. While Democrats now hold all eight statewide constitutional offices and supermajorities in both houses of the state legislature, California is also the political birthplace of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. While California has a reputation for its high tax laws, it was the home of anti-tax movements in the 1970s that went national in the 1980s. And while California is a majority-minority state—a state where six of eight statewide constitutional officers are people of color and where more than half of legislators are women or people of color—this only came after the anti-affirmative action and anti-immigration movements of the 1990s, which are eerily paralleled by the rise of Donald Trump in 2016.

These political transformations have gone hand-in-hand with equally immense transformations in state government. A few decades ago, candidates for state legislature had to win closed, partisan primaries in districts drawn by state legislative leaders; those who were elected to the legislature had no term limits. But reformers on the right, left, and center have upended this system since the 1990s. Today, state legislative candidates compete in “top two” primaries—nonpartisan, blanket primaries that advance the top-two vote-getters to the general election — in districts drawn by a citizens’ redistricting commission. Legislators are also limited to 12 years in either or both houses. In addition, while California may have a national reputation as a bastion of the left, recent evidence suggests that state legislators—in particular, Democratic legislators—have moved to the center in recent years, likely because of these electoral reforms.<sup>1</sup> Finally, from an observer’s perspective, gone are days of powerful legislative leaders such as Assembly Speaker Willie Brown and Senate President pro Tempore David Roberti, who served a combined 29 years in leadership in the 1980s and 1990s. Today’s legislative leaders, Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon and Senate President pro Tempore Toni Atkins, have reputations not for strong-arming their members, but for devolving power—and the spotlight—to committee chairs and rank-and-file members.<sup>2,3</sup>

Given California’s size and its role on the national stage, these trends are worth examining in close detail. They not only help us understand our own state’s political landscape, but also provide us with insights that may be applied to other states or the nation as a whole. In this thesis, I explore what impact California’s significant political transformations have had on its legislature, and specifically, its legislative leadership. To do this, I draw on conditional party government theory, which posits a relationship between legislators’ ideologies and the strength of legislative leadership. I seek to answer the following questions: Has there been a decrease in the influence of California’s legislative leadership since 2001? If so, can that decrease be explained by ideological diversity among Democrats, and is that association stronger when only considering legislators’ stances on business issues? In doing so, I hope to capture the ways in which the state legislature has changed over the past two decades, as well as identify and comment on any implications for California’s and the United States’s political landscapes.

1 Eric McGhee, “Political Reform and Moderation in California’s Legislature,” Public Policy Institute of California, May 1, 2018, <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/r-0517emr.pdf>.

2 Andrew Bowen, “Toni Atkins Takes No Blame for Shelving of Major Housing Bill,” KPBS, May 24, 2019, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2019/may/24/toni-atkins-blame-shelving-sb50-housing-crisis>.

3 Bill Boyarsky, “Anthony Rendon: A New Speaker for a Changing State,” UCLA Blueprint (Spring 2019), <https://blueprint.ucla.edu/feature/anthony-rendon-a-new-speaker-for%20a-changing-state/>.

## Background

Reforms to the California state legislature began in the 1960s, when Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh spearheaded an effort to strengthen the legislature by professionalizing it and making it full-time.<sup>4</sup> This professionalized, full-time legislature with partisan primaries, no restrictions on gerrymandering, and no term limits lasted until the 1990s. It was this era that saw the rise of legislative leaders like Brown and Roberti, who had years and years to consolidate their power. Brown, who became extremely powerful and even nicknamed himself the “Ayatollah of the Assembly,” became rather infamous, and by the late 1980s, the legislature began to come under significant public scrutiny.<sup>5</sup> In November 1990, voters responded by passing Proposition 140, which limited assembly members to three two-year terms and senators to two four-year terms.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, aspiring legislative leaders no longer had the time to become what Brown and Roberti once were.

During the following decade, the legislature’s excesses once again led to reform. After the 2000 census, the legislature passed a bipartisan redistricting map that protected the seats of Democrats and Republicans. The districts were so effectively gerrymandered that no Assembly or Senate seats flipped from one party to another in the November 2004 elections. Reformers, backed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and good governance groups, responded by passing Proposition 11 on the November 2008 ballot.<sup>7</sup> This initiative created an independent citizens’ redistricting commission, comprising Democrats, Republicans, and independents, that would draw California’s Assembly and Senate districts. Since the 2010 census, turnover in legislative elections—i.e., the number of seats that changed party hands during each biennial election—has increased.<sup>8,9</sup>

Reformers made two final structural changes in the early 2010s: the top-two primary and relaxed term limits. The top-two primary was largely the brainchild of a Republican moderate: state Sen. Abel Maldonado.<sup>10</sup> In theory, a top-two system would protect a moderate like Maldonado by allowing him to compete for the votes of similarly-minded independents and Democrats in primary elections. Schwarzenegger once again championed the initiative, Proposition 14, which was sold to voters as a way to elect more moderates and take away power from polarized party elites.<sup>11</sup> Unsurprisingly, that message was popular: Proposition 14 passed on the November 2010 ballot over the opposition of the California Democratic Party *and* the California Republican Party.<sup>12,13</sup> Just two years later, facing evidence that the 1990 term limits went too far and prevented legislators from accruing sufficient experience, reformers placed Proposition 28 on the November 2012 ballot.<sup>14</sup> The initiative, which was successful, allows legislators to serve up to 12 years in either or both houses.<sup>15</sup> Because of Proposition 28, legislators have

4 Ed Salzman, “Unruh, First Among Co-Equals,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1987, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-08-06-me-1404-story.html>.

5 “A Veteran Lawmaker’s Advice for California’s Crisis,” National Public Radio, July 15, 2009, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106653001>.

6 “California Term Limits, Proposition 140 (1990),” Ballotpedia, accessed February 1, 2020, [https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Term\\_Limits\\_Proposition\\_140\\_\(1990\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Term_Limits_Proposition_140_(1990)).

7 George Skelton, “Prop. 11 foes waging Orwellian campaign,” *The Los Angeles Times*, October 9, 2008, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2008-oct-09-me-cap9-story.html>.

8 Christian Grose, “The Adoption of Electoral Reforms and Ideological Change in the California State Legislature,” University of Southern California, accessed February 1, 2020, <http://www.schwarzeneggerinstitute.com/images/SI-Adoption%20of%20Electoral%20Reforms%20Report.pdf>.

9 George Skelton, “Gerrymandering Takes the Drama Out of California’s Election Season,” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 20, 2004, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2004-sep-20-me-cap20-story.html>.

10 Christopher Caen, “The Consequences of California’s Top-Two Primary,” *The Atlantic*, December 29, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/california-top-two-open-primary/421557/>.

11 John Myers, “California’s Free-For-All Primary Election Rules Could Surprise Everyone in 2018...Again,” *The Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-top-two-primary-changes-analysis-20180319-story.html>.

12 Scott Schafer, “How California’s New Primary System Hopes to Level the Playing Field,” KQED, June 2, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/jungle-primary-affected-california-politics>.

13 Adam Nagourney, “Here’s How California’s ‘Jungle Primary’ System Works,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/us/california-primary-election-rules-system.html>.

14 “How Have Term Limits Affected the California Legislature?,” Public Policy Institute of California, November 2004, [https://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/rb/RB\\_1104BCRB.pdf](https://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/rb/RB_1104BCRB.pdf).

15 “California Proposition 28, Change in Term Limits (June 2012),” Ballotpedia, accessed February 1, 2020. [https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Proposition\\_28,\\_Change\\_in\\_State\\_Legislative\\_Term\\_Limits\\_Initiative\\_\(June\\_2012\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_28,_Change_in_State_Legislative_Term_Limits_Initiative_(June_2012)).

largely remained in one house and legislative turnover has dropped.<sup>16</sup>

These three electoral reforms—relaxed term limits, citizen redistricting, and the top-two primary—were designed to reduce the influence of parties and party leadership over elections and policy making. A 2018 Public Policy Institute of California report by Eric McGhee (2018b) found that these reforms indeed have a moderating impact on newly-elected legislators. McGhee theorized that the top-two primary prevented activists from controlling the nomination process, that citizen redistricting created more competitive districts, and that relaxed term limits allowed legislators to build up independent bases of support. The resulting moderating effects were stronger among legislative Democrats and more pronounced when considering ideology related to business interests only (measured by legislators' friendliness toward the California Chamber of Commerce, or CalChamber). Notably, the moderation of newly-elected California state legislators is inconsistent with trends from almost every other state, where both Democrats and Republicans have become more polarized. Other research has found little evidence of the top-two primary's impact on ideology or has struggled to attribute moderation to these electoral reforms.<sup>17,18</sup> Despite this debate, however, it is fair to conclude that California state legislators—especially newer classes of legislative Democrats—moved toward the center in the 2010s, and that reforms may have played a role.

California's changing partisan landscape may have interacted with political reforms to specifically moderate state legislative Democrats. For example, because of their dissatisfaction with former President Donald Trump and the Republican Party, many moderate California voters—voters who tended to prefer Republicans years ago—began voting for Democrats; this helped cement California's status as a solid Democratic stronghold.<sup>19</sup> This should make the state's political landscape more favorable to *moderate* Democratic candidates, who could appeal to these voters to gain an edge over progressive candidates. This may explain why traditionally conservative interest groups—such as CalChamber and the California Charter School Association Advocates—have focused more recently on electing Democrats. In districts where two Democrats could advance to the general election, these groups invest significant resources into supporting moderate Democrats, *not* Republicans, in primary and general elections.<sup>20</sup> Notably, as the state becomes more racially diverse, groups like CalChamber are investing in recruiting and electing Democratic candidates of color—in particular, women of color—who are aligned with their interests.<sup>21</sup> While McGhee found that these donations were not necessarily leading to more conservative voting patterns in and of themselves, the changing political strategies of conservative groups suggests that moderate Democrats have a stronger path to victory in today's political landscape.<sup>22</sup> This phenomenon would not be without precedent: Recent scholarship shows that partisan strongholds are associated with more *moderate* members of Congress from the dominant party. This is because constituents identify with the party for locally specific reasons but still have a broad range of opinions, making moderation the best electoral strategy.<sup>23</sup> In California, this trend may have combined with electoral reforms—especially the top-two primary—to boost the influence of moderates in the legislature.

From an observer's perspective, the leadership style of the Assembly Speaker and Senate President pro Tempore—California's two legislative leaders—has changed as well. Former Assembly Speaker John Perez, now Chair of the University of California Board of Regents, had a reputation for getting his way. Rendon, by

16 Eric McGhee, "New Term Limits Add Stability to the State Legislature," Public Policy Institute of California, November 12, 2018, <https://www.ppic.org/blog/new-term-limits-add-stability-to-the-state-legislature/>.

17 Doug Ahler, Jack Citrin, and Gabriel Lenz, "Can California's New Primary Reduce Polarization? Maybe Not," The Monkey Cage, March 27, 2013, <https://themonkeycage.org/2013/03/can-californias-new-primary-reduce-polarization-maybe-not/>.

18 Eric McGhee, "California's Top Two Primary and the Business Agenda," California Journal of Politics and Policy 7, no. 1 (2015), doi: 10.5070/P2cjpg7125441.

19 Jeremy White, "In Reagan's California, Democrats overtake Republicans," Politico, August 7, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/states/california/story/2019/08/07/in-reagans-california-democrats-overtake-republicans-1132678>.

20 Christine Mai-Duc, "Here's Why the Legislature's Moderate Democrats See the 'Mod Squad' Growing on Election Day," The Los Angeles Times, November 5, 2016, <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-pol-ca-moderate-democrats-legislative-caucus-elections-20161105-story.html>.

21 Daniel Cheung, "Corporate Democrats and the Corporate Power Structure in California Politics," UC Berkeley Othering and Belonging Institute, April 18, 2018, <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/corporate-democrats-and-corporate-power-structure-california-politics>.

22 McGhee, "New Term Limits."

23 Neil O'Brian, "One-Party States and Legislator Extremism in the US House, 1876-2012," The Journal of Politics 81, no. 4 (2019): 1223-1239, doi: 10.1086/704223.

contrast, ran for Assembly Speaker by promising to give committees more autonomy.<sup>24</sup> Former Senate President pro Tempore Kevin de Leon—who was defeated by Perez for the speakership in 2009 by two votes and lost his Appropriations Committee chairmanship as a result—championed several high-profile progressive bills, angering moderates throughout the legislature.<sup>25,26</sup> The current Senate President pro Tem, Toni Atkins, has personally championed far fewer pieces of major legislation as Senate leader and allowed her caucus to drive the agenda.

### *Literature Review*

In this thesis, I draw heavily upon the theory of conditional party government. This theory makes a simple but consequential claim: When members of both parties are internally ideologically homogeneous (known as intraparty homogeneity), and when both parties are ideologically polarized (known as interparty divergence), members are more likely to delegate power to leaders, and vice versa.<sup>27</sup> The causal mechanism for this theory is also simple. Intraparty homogeneity and interparty divergence make members of a party more likely to view strong leaders as assets. Members can expect that empowered legislative leaders will help them enact policies that they prefer, which strengthens the party as a whole and improves members' standing with their constituents. By contrast, when members are internally divided and closer ideologically to the other party, empowering leaders is riskier because leaders might advocate for policies that individual members do not prefer. In this scenario, members want more autonomy to determine the policy priorities that best reflect their preferences and the preferences of their districts. Rohde's extensive work on conditional party government, which focuses on the U.S. Congress, is both persuasive and highly relevant in the context of today's national partisan polarization. Additional scholarship suggests that majority parties and majority party leadership do exercise significant pressure on members' roll call votes in state legislatures.<sup>28,29</sup>

In addition, conditional party government theory allows for the study of one legislative body over time. Legislators' ideological preferences can change dramatically over just a few decades, which makes this theory a good vehicle for time-series analyses. The same cannot be said for some other major theories of legislative power delegation, such as the "principal-agent" framework articulated by Kiewet and McCubbins.<sup>30</sup> This theory describes power delegation in Congress as a way to solve collective action, coordination, and social choice problems. Collective action problems of state legislators do vary over time. For example, over the past 70 years, the policy agenda of California lawmakers must have become far more complicated and difficult to manage, which was probably why the legislature was professionalized in the first place.<sup>31</sup> However, it is unlikely that the workload placed upon state lawmakers has increased or decreased significantly in the past 20 or 30 years, which is the window of time I examine for this thesis. Thus, while scholars—such as Mooney<sup>32</sup>—have effectively used principal-agent theory to explain power delegation to leadership across multiple state legislatures at a single point in time, it would be difficult to apply in one state across a few decades. This is the primary reason why conditional party government theory underlies the logic of my thesis.

Conditional party government theory is also valuable because its key independent variables, intraparty

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24 Boyarsky, "Anthony Rendon."

25 Patrick McGreevy, "Setback Put Kevin de León on the Path to Senate Leadership," *The Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 2014, <https://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-kevin-de-leon-20140619-story.html>.

26 Laurel Rosenhall, "How Powerful Lawmakers Are Killing California Bills—Without a Peep," *CalMatters*, April 30, 2019, <https://calmatters.org/politics/2019/04/california-legislators-killing-bills-committee-democrats/>.

27 David W. Rohde, "Reflections on the Practice of Theorizing: Conditional Party Government in the Twenty-First Century," *The Journal of Politics* 75, no. 4 (2013): 849-864, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/s0022381613000911>.

28 James Battista and Jesse Richman, "Party Pressure in U.S. State Legislatures," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3 (2011) 397-422-118, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23053248>.

29 Gary Cox, Thad Kousser, and Mathew McCubbins, "Party Power or Preferences? Quasi-Experimental Evidence from American State Legislatures," *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 3 (2010): 799-811, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/s0022381610000174>.

30 D. Roderick Kiewet and Mathew D. McCubbins, *The Logic of Delegation*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

31 Salzman, "Unruh."

32 Christopher Z. Mooney, "Explaining Legislative Leadership Influence: Simple Collective Action Explanations or Explanations?," *Political Science Research Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2013): 559- 571, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23563165>.

ideological diversity and interparty ideological divergence, are easy to calculate. When analyzing Congress, scholars frequently turn to DW-Nominate scores, which measure lawmakers' ideological diversity relative to one another based on their voting patterns. The McGhee analysis alluded to previously used a similar measure: Shor-McCarty NPAT scores.<sup>33</sup> These scores, released by scholars Boris Shor and Nolan McCarty, use voting patterns to assign each legislator an ideology score in all 50 states between 1993 and 2016. To measure legislators' ideologies on specific issues, scholars have used legislative scorecards from interest groups, which track how legislators voted on bills important to each group. Scholars have also developed statistical techniques to standardize these scores from year to year, such as the maximum likelihood estimation technique developed by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder<sup>34</sup> and used by McGhee.<sup>35</sup>

Questions can be raised about the statistical validity of using vote patterns to approximate ideology. Legislators can, and often do, vote for legislation because of outside pressure, not their conscience or personal ideology. This outside pressure could come from legislative leaders themselves, which would confound an association between ideological diversity and leaders' strength. I use Shor-McCarty scores and adjusted CalChamber scores to quantify ideological diversity regardless because of their simplicity and ease, while bearing in mind that these measures may not capture ideological diversity to its fullest extent. However, it is challenging to meaningfully measure the overall ideological diversity or partisan polarization of Republican state legislators in California. This is because the Republican Party's share of the legislature has dropped precipitously: Today, Republicans hold just 9 of 40 Senate seats and 19 of 80 Assembly seats. It is difficult to imagine how their preferences could significantly and consistently impact legislative leadership, especially in recent years. For this reason, among others, this paper focuses primarily on ideological diversity among Democrats.

Unlike its independent variables, conditional party government theory's dependent variable—legislative leaders' strength—is difficult to operationalize. Rohde's evidence for conditional party government relies heavily on rules changes over time under Democratic and Republican majorities in the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>36</sup> This is effective because congressional rules, such as those governing committee appointments and bill referrals, are quite complicated and change frequently. By contrast, state legislatures generally have simpler rules and procedures. In addition, though scholars have developed indices to quantify state legislative leaders' power, these indices usually involve just a handful of metrics.<sup>37,38</sup> For example, Mooney devised a formal powers index, which I use for this thesis, that measures leaders' strength on a five-point scale.<sup>39</sup> But quantifying formal rules changes will not capture many—if not most—of the ways in which lawmakers exercise influence. For example, legislative leaders can quietly engage in agenda setting, broker deals, persuade fellow lawmakers, and use the bully pulpit. None of these actions would be reflected in an analysis of formal rules, but they are inextricably linked to the way that power within a legislative chamber is distributed.

In response, scholars have devised ways to measure informal forms of influence, with some measures being more robust than others. One avenue is to measure how often members vote with legislative leadership.<sup>40</sup> This, however, has a few complications. First, if voting patterns are used to determine legislators' ideology, then this measure essentially just correlates vote patterns with vote patterns. Second, this measure still does not take into account the many informal kinds of influence, such as setting the agenda or brokering deals. A second avenue

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33 McGhee, "Political Reform."

34 Tim Groseclose, Steven D. Levitt, and James M. Snyder, Jr., "Comparing Interest Group Scores Across Time and Chambers: Adjusted ADA Scores for U.S. Congress," *The American Political Science Review* 93, no. 1 (1999): 33-50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2585759>.

35 McGhee, "Political Reform."

36 Rohde, "Reflections."

37 Richard Clucas, "Principal-Agent Theory and the Power of State House Speakers," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2001): 319-328, doi: 10.2307/440206.

38 Christopher Z. Mooney, "Measuring State House Speakers' Formal Powers, 1981-2010," *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (2013): 262-273, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.838.9463&rep=rep1&type=pf>.

39 Ibid.

40 Richard Clucas, "The Effect of Campaign Contributions on the Power of the California Assembly Speaker," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1994): 417-428, doi: 10.2307/440140.

is to use survey data of state legislators.<sup>41</sup> There are a few survey data sets from state legislators across the country, and this kind of survey data does measure legislative leaders' perceived influence. However, not enough data sets are available to generate a time series analysis, legislators' response rates to these types of surveys are low, and, depending on how survey data is used, their results can be inconsistent with analyses of formal powers.<sup>42</sup> A third avenue is to conduct a media analysis and count how often legislative leaders are mentioned in news articles relative to committee chairs and individual members. When Ban, Moskowitz, and Snyder used this method to study the U.S. Congress, their analyses of newspaper coverage provided results consistent with what conditional party government theory predicts: When the theory predicts that legislative leaders should be more powerful, they receive more coverage in newspapers, and vice versa.<sup>43</sup> In addition, while this form of analysis does not capture legislators' perceptions of one another, it does capture political reporters' perception of legislators. Since political reporters are familiar with the dynamics of the capitol write about, this measure has some statistical validity.

### *Methodology*

In this study, I test whether or not there is an inverse relationship between Democrats' ideological diversity—on all issues *and* on issues affecting business interests—and legislative leader influence since 2001. This time scale allows me to capture roughly ten pre- and post-reform years, all situated in the modern era of permanent Democratic state legislative majorities. To measure ideology, I use Shor-McCarty NPAT scores and adjusted CalChamber legislative scorecards. I use both measures because previous scholarship using this method suggests that legislative Democrats are less cohesive on business issues than issues overall.<sup>44</sup> To measure influence, I quantify legislative rules over time based on Mooney's<sup>45</sup> formal power index, conduct a media analysis of legislator mentions in *The Sacramento Bee*, and interview three former California state legislators. I first examine broad trends in the independent and dependent variables. Then, I evaluate the association between ideological scores and measurements of leadership strength, and I assess if any association is stronger when only adjusted CalChamber scores are considered. I supplement these findings with interview responses as well as any other notable assembly or senate rules I encounter in my research.

I found some evidence of a weak relationship between overall ideological diversity and perceived leader strength, and a weak-to-moderate relationship between ideological diversity with respect to business interests and perceived leader strength, in the California state legislature since 2001. Formal powers of legislative leaders have remained unchanged since 2003, though there are other factors—such as term limits and individual leadership styles—that may impact leader strength as well. Finally, interviews suggest that leaders today place greater emphasis on process fairness relative to advancing an ideological vision.

## **CHAPTER II: RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this study, I begin by assessing trends in legislators' ideology, both overall ideology and ideology on business issues specifically, as well as the overall distribution of power since 2001. Then, I evaluate two hypotheses: 1) There is an inverse relationship between Democratic legislators' increased ideological diversity and the strength of legislative leaders relative to committee chairs and individual members since 2001; and 2) Ideological diversity with respect to business issues will have a stronger inverse relationship with legislative leaders' strength than ideological diversity on all issues. Because most modern legislative reforms occurred around 2010, beginning in 2001 allows me to capture and compare several pre- and post-reform years.

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41 Richard Clucas, "Legislative Professionalism and the Power of State House Leaders," *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2007): 1-19, <https://www-jstor.org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/stable/40421565>.

42 James Battista, "Formal and Perceived Leadership Power in U.S. State Legislatures," *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (2011) 102-118, <https://www-jstor.org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/stable/41575815>.

43 Pamela Ban, Daniel Moskowitz, and James Snyder, "The Changing Relative Power of Party Leaders in Congress," Harvard University, February 12, 2016, [https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/jsnyder/files/pac\\_leadership\\_draft.pdf?m=1460063073](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/jsnyder/files/pac_leadership_draft.pdf?m=1460063073).

44 McGhee, "Political Reform."

45 Mooney, "Measuring."

### *Measures of Independent & Dependent Variables*

To measure the independent variable (legislators' ideological diversity), I employ two quantitative measurements, both used in the McGhee report regarding the moderating impacts of reform efforts.<sup>46</sup> The first is Shor-McCarty NPAT scores. These scores come from an extensive dataset developed by Boris Shor and Nolan McCarty that predicts state legislators' ideology based on their voting patterns. When legislators' voting patterns overlap, their ideology scores are predicted to be closer together, and vice versa. Shor-McCarty data is available for all state legislatures between 1993 and 2016, so I focus only on data from California between 2001 and 2016. I use these scores to represent legislators' ideological positions on a comprehensive set of issues, including economic and social issues.

My second measure of the independent variable is adjusted CalChamber legislative scorecards. At the end of each calendar year, CalChamber issues a report that lists bills that significantly implicate business interests. This report counts the number of times that each legislator voted with, or against, CalChamber's preferred position. I first calculate each legislator's score as a proportion for each year between 2001 and 2019. Because the issues confronting legislators changes from year to year, and because CalChamber itself may have shifted ideologically over time, I adjust each legislator's scores so that they are comparable over time and across chambers using a method developed by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder.<sup>47</sup> This method assumes that each legislator's adjusted CalChamber ideological score ( $y^{\wedge}it$ ) equals the observed score ( $yit$ ) minus a shift parameter ( $act$ ), divided by the stretch parameter ( $bct$ ). The "shift" parameter accounts for how CalChamber's ideology may have changed over time, while the "stretch" parameter accounts for how the spread of CalChamber's bill positions may have changed over time. These "shift" and "stretch" parameters are estimated by maximizing a likelihood function. This function, as well as the simple equation it represents, are provided in the appendix. For this thesis, I use publicly available code from Groseclose to estimate these parameters in RStudio. Then, I calculate two key metrics for each year: Democratic legislators' adjusted annual scores and standard deviations in each chamber. I use these metrics to reflect legislators' ideological positions on issues relating to business, which is where I believe there is most likely to be a split between moderate and progressive Democrats.

I use two quantitative measurements to capture the dependent variable: the influence of legislative leaders relative to committee chairs and members. First, I quantify legislative leaders' formal power based on Assembly and Senate rules, which are passed on a biennial basis and outline the procedures that each chamber will follow during that two-year legislative session. To do so, I use Mooney's formal powers index.<sup>48</sup> This index gives legislative leaders a numerical score out of five based on a protocol provided in the appendix. The numerical score is based on metrics that are readily available in *The Book of States*, a compendium of state legislative structures and rules published annually by the Council of State Governments. Because Mooney calculated the formal powers index for each state's lower house between 1983 and 2011, I supplement his data by calculating the index score for the Assembly between 2012 and 2019 and for the Senate between 2001 and 2019. In addition to measuring rules quantitatively, I read the biennial rules from the Assembly and Senate to take note of any relevant changes that are outside the scope of the formal powers index. I use this to measure the formal, procedural powers available to legislative leaders.

Second, I conduct a media analysis to determine how the attention given to legislative leaders has changed over time relative to committee chairs and individual members. To do this, I use *The Sacramento Bee*, which has the most frequent, detailed coverage of ongoing business in the state capitol of all major California papers. Then, I randomly sample 30 weekdays from each calendar year between 2001 and 2019, inclusive, for a total of 570 weekdays. I use an online database to locate each weekday's edition of *The Sacramento Bee* and search the edition for 10 key words or phrases: "committee," "speaker," "pro tem," "senator," "assemblymember," "assemblyman," "assemblywoman," "asm," "sen," and "minority leader." Then, I read through each article in the edition that contains these words or phrases, and I count mentions of legislative leaders, committees and members mentioned in their capacity as committee chairs, and individual members. I verify that the article is discussing state legislative

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46 McGhee, "Political Reform."

47 Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder, "Comparing Interest Group Scores."

48 Mooney, "Measuring."

or policy-making work, and not something unrelated to the legislature's business. A given legislator is only counted once per article. For each calendar year, I calculate the percentage of total mentions that were about Democratic legislative leaders, Republican minority leaders, committees and committee chairs, and individual members in the Assembly and the Senate. Because I randomly sampled 30 weekday editions from each year of *The Sacramento Bee*, per the central limit theorem, I can assume that the distribution of sample means is approximately normal. I use these values to capture how strong various legislators are perceived to be.

Finally, I conduct interviews of three former state legislators—including two former legislative leaders—regarding the power and influence of legislative leadership, committee chairs, and individual members during their terms. Throughout these interviews, I asked about the cohesion of party caucuses, controversial issues, approaches used by legislative leaders to resolve disputes, and the importance of committee chairs. I would have hoped to conduct more interviews, but the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic—which struck during the writing of this thesis—made legislators unavailable for anything unrelated to essential, constituent-related matters. Nonetheless, the interviews I was able to conduct were insightful. A list of interview questions is available in the appendix.

### *Research Design*

First, I use my quantitative data to analyze trends in both ideological scores and measures of legislative leader influence since 2001. Then, using the data and interview responses, I answer two questions: 1) Is there an inverse relationship between measures of ideological diversity and measures of leader influence since 2001?; and 2) Is any relationship stronger when only adjusted CalChamber scores are considered?

In my initial discussion of ideological scores and leader influence, I examine overall trends and assess whether any changes were statistically significant. To do this, I analyze line graphs of each measure for each chamber. Then, I average scores for “pre-reform” years (2001-2001) and “post-reform” years (2011-) and use a difference of means t-test to evaluate whether any changes are statistically significant between the pre- and post-reform periods.

Next, I analyze whether or not an inverse relationship may exist between ideological diversity and measures of leader influence, and to what degree that relationship changes when only CalChamber data is considered. I begin with formal powers index data for the Assembly and Senate, compare it to overall trends in ideological diversity, and discuss the implications for the hypothesis along with any other relevant rules changes not counted by the powers index formula. Then, I turn to the *Sacramento Bee* analysis data and compare it with both measures of ideological diversity. I perform two bivariate analyses: one between the standard deviation of the Democratic caucus's Shor-McCarty NPAT scores and percentage of mentions of Democratic legislative leaders between 2001 and 2016, and another between the standard deviation of the Democratic caucus's adjusted CalChamber scores and percentage of mentions of Democratic legislative leaders between 2001 and 2019. I calculate the regression coefficient as well as the coefficient's standard error and p-value. Based on this information, I assess how strong the association is, if any, between leader strength and ideological diversity, and evaluate any differences between overall ideological scores and CalChamber ideological scores.

Lastly, I supplement these findings with my interviews with former state legislators. I use this to provide additional detail and nuance to my quantitative research—especially with respect to legislative power dynamics that cannot be fully captured with a quantitative approach.

### *Limitations*

My two concepts, ideology and leader influence, express themselves in countless ways in a legislature. This makes them hard to measure, even with a multifaceted approach. While I have alluded to my approach's limitations, I take a moment to delineate them clearly here.

First, it is impossible to make definitive assessments of causality between ideological diversity and leader influence even when correlation exists. There are a few confounding variables that complicate these findings. Term limits may lead to more moderate legislators, but they may also lead to weaker legislative leadership by giving leaders less time to gain experience and strengthen their networks; in theory, this could make it difficult to

prove a separate inverse relationship between ideological diversity and leader strength. Second, it is quite possible that the rise of independent expenditure committees—of all ideological stripes—may have made members less deferential to their leaders in recent years as they become less reliant on party financing. Third, factors unique to the 2010s could weaken leaders: For example, the current Assembly Speaker is known to be deferential, but that could be a matter of personal preference or the result of significant frustration with previous, heavy-handed speakers. In addition, the unusually powerful tenure of Jerry Brown, who served as Governor from 2011 to 2019, may have compelled legislators to follow his lead, rather than the leadership of their chambers. Finally, as I have discussed previously, stronger legislative leadership can compel members to vote the same way, which introduces the possibility of *reverse* causality. Put simply, members may appear to be ideologically homogeneous because their leaders are forcing them to vote that way, and not the other way around. I discuss how these confounding variables may be reflected in or contravened by the findings later.

Second, my quantitative independent variable measures—the Shor-McCarty NPAT scores and adjusted CalChamber scores—do not have the same timeframe. Shor-McCarty NPAT scores have not been updated since 2016, but CalChamber has issued legislative scorecards until and including 2019 (which was the most recent, complete legislative year at the time of this thesis’s writing). This is significant because the 2017-18 and 2019-20 legislative sessions have featured Democratic supermajorities built on victories in moderate suburban districts. As a result, the Shor-McCarty scores exclude years during which many ideological moderates served. I take this into account in my discussion of trends and findings.

Third, my quantitative dependent variable measures—the formal powers index and *Sacramento Bee* media mentions—likely do not capture the multifaceted ways in which legislative leaders wield power. I have attempted to account for this through my interviews, but there is simply no systematic way to account for informal forms of influence, such as threats of losing committee assignments, promises of financial support in future elections, and other pressure tactics. Counting media mentions also introduces a significant element of unreliability. Determining what counts as a “mention,” and for what category, is far more complicated in practice than it is in theory. What if a legislator is referenced as “Assembly Speaker pro Tempore” in one article, but simply as “Assemblymember” in another? What if an article discusses a senator who was recently selected to be the next Senate President pro Tempore, but has not formally assumed the position yet? When legislative leadership is receiving attention for its handling of a scandal, is that sufficiently related to this thesis to count? These are but a small sampling of the questions I encountered while counting media mentions, and my answers to these questions—though well-grounded in this thesis’s purpose—must have been imperfect. In addition, newspapers like *The Sacramento Bee* have made significant staffing cuts since the early 2000s due to a loss of revenue from print circulation. One could easily imagine how a smaller number of overworked journalists could give more attention to showy, high-profile members or legislative leaders, which may not actually reflect their influence in the building.

Finally, while my interviews were extremely valuable, my interview subjects were—at least to a certain extent—unreliable narrators. Those who served in the legislature decades ago have little incentive to sugar-coat their experiences. But my time frame is the very recent past, and many legislators who played a prominent role during the past two decades are still active in politics or policymaking today. Even in an anonymous setting, my interviewees did not seem willing to be completely candid. They insisted that their caucuses were generally ideologically unified, and when they talked about their own influence, they did so in very broad strokes. Former leaders avoided describing themselves in ways that would seem heavy-handed, tough, or strong, even though public evidence exists to the contrary. This is a very understandable response, but it necessitates approaching their commentary from a critical perspective. I have tried to do so in my discussion of my findings.

I attempt to counter the limitations of any one measure by studying many. Each one of these measures, even with its limitations, provides some insight on the nature of legislators’ ideologies or the influence of legislative leadership. The goal is not to make strong, absolute assertions about the relationship between ideology and leaders’ strength, but to put forward a nuanced, complicated, and informed picture that considers the different sources of data I have as well as each source’s limitations.

### CHAPTER III: RESEARCH FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

In this section, I try to accomplish three tasks: 1) Analyze and explain overall trends in ideological diversity and leadership strength since 2001 in California based on my quantitative data; 2) Evaluate my hypotheses quantitatively using two bivariate regressions that compare measures of ideological diversity to measures of leadership strength; and 3) Supplement and elaborate on these findings by commenting on my interviews with three former state legislators.

My data suggests that legislators have become more ideologically diverse, particularly on issues relating to business interests. Legislative leaders' formal powers have remained relatively constant, but their perceived influence has fallen since the early 2010s. Though I am unable to show a clear bivariate relationship between overall ideological diversity and leadership strength, I do find a statistically significant inverse relationship between ideological diversity relating only to business interests and leadership strength. My interviews with legislators underscore the additional roles that term limits and individual leadership style play when it comes to leaders' actual and perceived influence, and they suggest that legislative leaders may have responded to these changing conditions by emphasizing procedural fairness over an ideological vision.

#### *Overall Trends in Ideological Diversity and Leadership Strength*

Before delving into bivariate regressions, I provide an overview of overall trends in ideological diversity and legislative leaders' strength in my quantitative data. Shor-McCarty NPAT scores from 2001 to 2016, which I use to reflect overall ideology, suggest that Democratic legislators may have become a bit more ideologically diverse over time. Figure 1, which plots the standard deviation of Democratic state legislators' ideological scores over time, clearly illustrates an upward trend in the Senate. In the Assembly, the standard deviation decreased between 2007 and 2012, only to increase again afterward. In both houses, the average standard deviation in post-reform years (2011-Present) is higher than in pre-reform years (2001-2010). In the Assembly, the average standard deviation among Democrats rose from 0.467 in pre-reform years to 0.470 in post-reform years, and in the Senate, it rose from 0.394 in pre-reform years to 0.482 in post-reform years. That change in the Senate is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Because these scores cannot take external pressures, including pressures from leadership into account, they are likely underestimating legislators' true ideological diversity. Taken altogether, this evidence suggests that Democratic legislators may be moving in an ideologically diverse direction, albeit slowly.

I also use adjusted CalChamber legislative scorecards from 2001 to 2019 to measure legislators' attitudes on business issues (such as taxes, business regulation, etc.). Here too the picture is nuanced. Figure 2, which plots the standard deviation of Democratic legislators' adjusted CalChamber scores over time, shows little change in the Assembly and Senate. I have added lines of best fit to this figure to make the overall trends easier to discern. In the Assembly, the overall trendline is positive, and in the Senate, it is ever so slightly negative. However, both houses show an increase in standard deviation in the past few years. In addition, in both the Assembly and Senate, the average post-reform standard deviation is greater than the pre-reform one by 0.009. These are doubtless small changes, but they are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. (Far more data points are involved in the CalChamber scores analysis vis-a-vis the Shor-McCarty NPAT scores analysis).

That the Senate trendline in Figure 2 does not align with its pre- and post-reform averages illustrates an additional point: There is significant volatility in the percentage of legislators that vote with CalChamber in any given year. Because the scores have been adjusted, this should not be a reflection of any variation in CalChamber's ideology or the kinds of bills it selects each year. Instead, it may be the result of business-friendly Democrats' success in any given year. This would explain why Senate data seems to be more volatile than Assembly data; there are half as many Senators as Assemblymembers, so a change in just two or three seats can significantly impact the ideological composition of the caucus. This could have impacts for legislative leaders, particularly for those in the Senate. Leaders typically govern through a few biennial election cycles, and changes to a caucus's ideological composition in the middle of leaders' terms could force them to adjust their governance styles or risk upsetting newly elected members of the caucus. But it is possible that this volatility will even out over time since the three reforms—relaxed term limits, the top two primary, and citizens' redistricting—were only implemented

a few years prior.

My first measure of the dependent variable, legislative leader strength, is the formal powers index. This index, developed by Mooney, considers various procedural rules to measure leadership strength on a five-point scale.<sup>49</sup> The original intent of this project was to use a bivariate regression to compare this index with measures of ideological diversity. However, only one change to the formal power index's legislative rules was made in the Assembly and Senate between 2001 and 2019 (a centralization of legislative staffing in 2003), making a bivariate regression an unhelpful tool. But insights can be drawn nevertheless. For example, Table 1 contains formal powers index measures for the California State Assembly between 1981 and 2019, combining data calculated by Mooney<sup>50</sup> and by myself. As the table illustrates, formal leadership strength began to increase significantly in the mid-1990s, but stopped in 2003 and has not changed since. That further consolidation of leadership strength did *not* take place could be due to the increased ideological diversity of Democratic caucus members, though this merits further study.

Recent changes to legislative rules not considered by the formal powers index suggest that formal steps have been taken to empower committee chairs: In early 2019, Assembly Democrats adopted rules that allowed committee chairs to decide whether bills in their committees would receive hearings.<sup>51</sup> This expanded committee chairs' power relative to previous years, when custom dictated that bills received committee hearings at the request of their authors. This change is also consistent with the philosophy of the current Assembly Speaker, Anthony Rendon, who made an explicit commitment to devolve power down to committee chairs.<sup>52</sup> Committee chairs used this power to squash several progressive pieces of legislation, including rent control and data privacy protections; however, the changes have been also criticized by moderate Democrats and were voted against by the entire Assembly Republican caucus.<sup>53</sup> All of this indicates that the Assembly rules change has made it harder for either party caucus to advance a top-down, cohesive ideological agenda, while empowering Democratic committee chairs with ideological differences with leadership—and their own colleagues.

My second measure of legislative leaders' strength is an analysis of attention given to them in *The Sacramento Bee*. Conceptually, if legislative leaders are more powerful, then reporters—as professionals who understand the dynamics of the capital well—may give them more coverage in their news articles and political analyses. As illustrated by Figure 3, the share of mentions of Democratic legislative leaders in both the Assembly and Senate generally rose between 2001 and 2012, and fell between 2012 and 2019. Random variation is likely contributing to much of the trendlines' volatility, and the strategies and styles of individual legislative leaders may also play a role. In addition, media coverage may lean toward eye-catching news as opposed to news that best reflects the legislative process. Regardless, the timing of the fall in mentions is significant because it happens after the electoral reforms—i.e., after Democrats begin to moderate. In the Assembly, the average share of mentions fell from 0.222 in pre-reform years to 0.125 in post-reform years, and in the Senate, it fell from 0.253 in pre-reform years to 0.210 in post-reform years. Both these changes are statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that the perceived influence of legislative leaders—by reporters, pundits, and to a degree, other legislators—has fallen since the implementation of reforms.

Though conditional party government theory suggests that stronger committees go hand in hand with weaker leaders, the *Sacramento Bee* analysis does not reflect this. There is no clear trend in committee mentions in either chamber, and the average pre- and post-reform share of mentions of committees in both houses is approximately the same. This suggests that perceived influence of committees is unchanged. This may be a result of the state legislature's uniquely small environment, which can lend itself to very close relationships between leaders and committee chairs. The winner of this coverage analysis was individual legislators, who have seen their coverage in the *Sacramento Bee* increase since 2010 as seen in Figure 4. The overall implication is profound: perceived influence may be far more widely distributed than it was when reforms were first implemented. However, there is reason to approach these findings with caution. Individual legislators can do attention-grabbing things that get them news coverage, but that do not have any meaningful impact on the legislative process. In

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Rosenhall, "How Powerful Lawmakers."

52 Boyarsky, "Anthony Rendon."

53 Rosenhall, "How Powerful Lawmakers."

particular, as media outlets like *The Sacramento Bee* have been hit hard by staffing cuts in recent years, a smaller number of reporters might disproportionately cover high-profile rank-and-file members and may lack the capacity to regularly cover committee business.

If there were a loser of California's recent political transformations, it would be Republican legislative leaders, whose mentions have dropped precipitously since around 2010. In the last decade, Republican leaders in the Assembly and Senate have seen eight total years in which they received zero mentions in the articles I sampled. This is likely because of the shrinking Republican caucus, as well as a recent ballot initiative that allows state budgets to pass on a simple majority vote; these have left decisions almost entirely up to the Democrats.<sup>54</sup> For me, this is why it made sense to focus on ideological diversity among Democrats instead of making this a true conditional party government analysis and considering inter-party divergence; for better or worse, in recent years, the Democratic Party has run the show.

### *Bivariate Regressions Between Ideological Diversity and Leader Strength*

To more directly evaluate my hypotheses regarding the relationship between ideological diversity and leadership strength, I use my quantitative data to conduct two bivariate regressions. Here, I combine data from the Assembly and Senate so that each regression has twice as many data points to compare. The first bivariate regression, seen in Figure 5, depicts the relationship between the standard deviation of Democratic caucuses' Shor-McCarty NPAT scores (i.e., their overall ideological diversity) and the share of legislative leader mentions in *The Sacramento Bee* (i.e., leaders' perceived influence). The timeframe for this regression is 2001 to 2016 because the Shor-McCarty data stops in 2016. This regression is intended to evaluate my first hypothesis, which predicts that there will be an inverse relationship between ideological diversity and leader strength. As the figure shows, there is a negligible relationship between these two measures. Between 2001 and 2016, a one-unit increase in standard deviation of the Democratic caucus's Shor-McCarty NPAT scores is associated with a -0.149 decrease in the percentage of legislative leader mentions in *The Sacramento Bee*. However, the standard error of the regression coefficient is 0.252 and its p-value is 0.558. This association is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, which suggests that ideological diversity on a broad set of issues is not necessarily associated with the perceived influence of legislative leaders. This data from the Assembly and Senate, on its own, is an inconclusive answer to my first hypothesis.

Then, I evaluate my second hypothesis, which posits that there will be a stronger inverse relationship between legislators' ideological diversity on business issues and the strength of legislative leaders. For this hypothesis, I conduct a bivariate regression that compares the standard deviation of Democratic caucuses' adjusted Chamber of Commerce scores (i.e., their ideological diversity on business issues) and the amount of legislative leader coverage in *The Sacramento Bee* (i.e., leaders' perceived influence). Here, a clearer picture emerges: As seen in Figure 6, there is a clear, if weak, inverse relationship between these two measures. A one-unit increase in standard deviation of the Democratic caucus's adjusted CalChamber scores is associated with a -1.000 decrease in the percentage of legislative leader mentions in *The Sacramento Bee*. The standard error of the regression coefficient is 0.455 and the p-value is 0.035, meaning that this association is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that there is indeed an inverse relationship between the standard deviation of adjusted CalChamber scores and coverage of legislative leaders.

Comparing Figures 5 and 6, the CalChamber scores seem more closely linked to perceived legislative leader influence than the Shor-McCarty NPAT scores. This is especially notable because the adjusted CalChamber scores, as seen in Figure 2, are quite volatile from year to year. When I first plotted the CalChamber scores, I doubted that a clearer association between them and perceived leader influence could emerge because they fluctuate so much. One possible explanation for this is that leaders are reacting in real time to changes in caucus composition by either consolidating or devolving power. Regardless, this clear association tentatively confirms my second hypothesis.

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<sup>54</sup> "California Proposition 25, Simple Majority Vote to Enact State Budget Amendment (2010)," Ballotpedia, accessed February 1, 2020, [https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Proposition\\_25,\\_Simple\\_Majority\\_Vote\\_to\\_Enact\\_State\\_Budget\\_Amendment\\_\(2010\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_25,_Simple_Majority_Vote_to_Enact_State_Budget_Amendment_(2010)).

*Interviews with Former Legislators*

For this project, I spoke to three former legislators, including two former legislative leaders, whose insights help elaborate on some of the trends I have described in this project. (I do not refer to them by name, but they were comfortable with my use of specific information from the interviews.) First, legislative leaders used to explicitly manipulate committee assignments to shape policy outcomes. One former legislator explained that former Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, who led the chamber from 1980 to 1995, would change committee assignments right before votes in order to secure the outcomes he wanted. This practice eventually fell out of favor, but it reminded me of a 2007 news article I encountered in my media analysis research: That May, Senate leader Don Perata removed two moderate senators from the Senate Appropriations Committee as a “signal that he would not allow moderate Democrats to acquire life-and-death power over legislation.”<sup>55</sup> The former legislator I interviewed felt that the legislature was rather polarized between Democrats and Republicans, and homogeneous within the Democratic caucus, during the 2000s. While I focused this thesis on ideological diversity among Democrats instead of considering both ideological diversity and interparty divergence, Perata’s decision is consistent with what conditional party government theory predicts. If Democrats were generally left leaning and strongly ideologically divergent from Republicans—during a time when the Republican minority in the legislature was more significant—then Democratic members might want Perata to remove any obstacles to enacting their party agenda.

Former legislators also described several ideological and demographic changes to the legislature in the 2000s and 2010s with which leaders must contend. One noted that the top-two primary, first implemented statewide in 2012, may have had the effect of electing more moderate Democrats to the legislature. Another argued that the concept of a moderate itself has changed over time; according to this interviewee, moderate Democrats tended to break with labor from the late 1990s until around 2006, and since then, have disagreed with the party’s majority on issues relating to the environment, regulation, and tort law. Former legislative leaders also flagged issues that divided their caucuses in the 2010s; these issues included a 2013 bill to repeal California’s ban on affirmative action, a 2017 bill to create a statewide single-payer healthcare system, and a 2017 law that largely prohibited local police departments from working with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement. While these comments reinforce the idea that today’s legislative leaders have a lot of complex issues to contend with, they also challenged my initial assumption that business issues were uniquely divisive relative to “social” issues. Affirmative action and immigration are not directly related to business interests, yet they fractured the Democratic caucus like few business-related bills have.

The former legislators I interviewed generally argued that today’s Speaker and pro Tem are not as strong as those from years past, but they disagreed on whether or not the cause was structural or a matter of individual leadership style. One interviewee believed that individual leadership style and ability, a recent rise in Democratic moderates, and shorter leadership tenures in the term limits era are all factors in today’s weaker leadership. He also argued that this weaker leadership made divisions in the Democratic caucus more apparent. Put simply, stronger leaders help the caucus overcome divisions internally, but when leaders are weaker, the splits become public and receive more media attention. Finally, he emphasized the importance of longevity to a leader’s strength. Longevity not only makes a leader more experienced, but also helps them build influence over members and interest groups. Since the current Speaker and pro Tem do not term out until 2024, it is possible that they will end their tenures much stronger than when they started. Another former legislative leader argued that weaker leadership today was a matter of individual leadership style. In his experience, legislators pick their next leader based on what they did not like in the previous one, making it possible that future leaders are stronger than they are today.

When interviewing the two legislative leaders, I was struck by their emphasis on procedural fairness. Both led their respective chambers in the post-reform era, after the implementation of longer-term limits, nonpartisan redistricting, and the top-two primary. My data suggests that this was when leaders weakened and legislators diversified. Interestingly, one former leader I spoke to described how he expected every bill to get a committee hearing if the author requested it. When a committee chair used an obscure procedural tactic to avoid a committee vote, he warned the committee chair that using that tactic again would result in removal from the chairmanship.

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55 Dan Walters, “‘Job Killer’ Bill Battle Rages Anew,” *The Sacramento Bee*, May 23, 2007.

(Interestingly, he disagreed with the Assembly Democrats' 2019 decision to give committee chairs the explicit discretion to deny hearings). The other former legislative leader said that he selected committee chairs based on their "workability"—that is, their willingness to work with leadership and other members to arrive at reasonable outcomes on difficult policy issues. To be clear, both of these former legislative leaders had ideological priorities and pursued them vigorously, including by persuading and pressuring rank-and-file members. I believe they downplayed these ideological priorities in their conversations with me. However, they seemed sincerely committed to the importance of procedural fairness in fostering a healthier, more productive dynamic in the legislature.

While one of these former legislative leaders was unsure about the influence of ideology on leadership, I suspect that their emphasis on procedural fairness was a response, in part, to a caucus that was ideologically diversifying. As Democratic caucuses—which are becoming increasingly unwieldy—struggle with difficult and divisive issues such as business regulation, taxes, climate change, affirmative action, and tort law, it may become especially important for leaders to establish clear, respectful ways for these conflicts to be resolved. As one former legislative leader reminded me, leaders have the responsibility of protecting their entire caucus when election season comes around, meaning that public, acrimonious conflicts that tarnish the caucus's reputation should be avoided. In this context, it is easy to imagine that the quality most desirable in legislative leaders may be facilitation skills, in addition to—or even instead of—the ability to advance a specific vision.

### Summary

Taken altogether, my quantitative and qualitative data put forward a rich, complicated picture of the relationship between ideology and legislative strength. I predicted that, as the majority party's caucus becomes more heterogeneous, legislative leaders would lose power and influence—and there is some evidence that this is occurring in the California state legislature. Legislative leaders stopped consolidating formal powers in the early 2000s and mentions of them in *The Sacramento Bee*—a proxy for their perceived influence—have dropped since the early 2010s. This seems to be particularly associated with increased ideological diversity as it relates to business interests, such as taxes, labor law, and regulation. However, other factors, such as longevity of leaders' tenure and leaders' own preferences, may also impact the power that leaders possess. Finally, my interviews suggest that leaders have responded to these changing political dynamics by emphasizing order, facilitation, and procedural fairness.

## CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the relationship between ideological diversity and the strength of California's state legislative leaders since 2001. This is rooted in conditional party government theory, which asserts that legislative leaders will become stronger when the parties are ideologically divergent but internally homogeneous. I was inspired by my interest in the state legislature, where Democrats have bucked the trend of national polarization by possibly becoming slightly more *moderate* since the implementation of nonpartisan redistricting, the top-two primary, and extended term limits in the early 2010s. I had two hypotheses: 1) There is an inverse relationship between overall ideological diversity and leader strength; and 2) This inverse relationship is stronger when considering ideology on issues salient to business interests. This latter piece was motivated by Public Policy Institute of California research showing that legislative moderation has been especially strong when considering ideology as measured by adjusted Chamber of Commerce scorecards alone.<sup>56</sup>

For a multifaceted approach, I used several measures of the independent and dependent variables. I turned to Shor-McCarty NPAT scores and adjusted Chamber of Commerce legislative scorecards to represent legislators' overall ideology and their positions on business issues, respectively, and Mooney's<sup>57</sup> formal powers index and *Sacramento Bee* media mentions to represent leaders' formal and perceived strength, respectively. I also conducted interviews of former legislators. Taken altogether, my research suggests that there is a weak relationship between overall ideological diversity and legislative leaders' perceived strength, and a weak-to-moderate relationship

<sup>56</sup> McGhee, "Political Reform."

<sup>57</sup> Mooney, "Measuring."

between ideological diversity with respect to business issues and legislative leaders' perceived strength. However, legislative leaders stopped consolidating formal powers in the early 2000s, and other factors—including the length of legislative leaders' time in office as well as their own leadership styles—likely influenced the strength of legislative leaders as well. Lastly, my interviews suggest that changing political dynamics is affecting the way leaders approach their work, potentially reflecting a shift in emphasis from advancing an ideological vision to fostering a fair legislative process.

As I have discussed previously, my research design has several limitations, and it is important to take them into account when making statements of findings. The rise of independent expenditure committees, for example, may have strengthened individual members at the expense of legislative leaders. Unique political figures such as Speaker Anthony Rendon, who is unusually deferential to committee chairs, and Governor Jerry Brown, who was unusually strong relative to legislative leaders, likely affected these results. In addition, it is possible that staffing cuts at *The Sacramento Bee* in recent years have resulted in more attention on the individual members and legislative leaders who know how to get journalists' attention. I feel comfortable with my findings and conclusion as stated because of the variety of measures I turned to, but they are not absolutes.

### *Implications*

The story of California's legislature adds nuance to our understanding of the relationship between polarization, ideological diversity, and legislative function (or dysfunction). Normally, polarization and intraparty homogeneity are thought of as going hand in hand. Conditional party government theory, for example, implies that these two conditions go together. But in California, these two conditions are not necessarily linked. Evidence suggests that California's electoral reforms—lengthened term limits, nonpartisan citizens' redistricting, and the top-two primary—may have boosted moderate Democratic legislative candidates as the state turned into a party stronghold. As a result, legislative Democrats may have moderated and ideologically diversified in the past decade, even though the legislature was one of the most polarized in the country.<sup>58</sup> At least in California, it seems to matter that these two conditions did not move together. My research ties this unique situation to a weakening of legislative leadership and a focus on procedural fairness. The overall result is likely a freer and fairer environment for rank-and-file legislators to develop ideas, negotiate with their peers, and enact substantive legislation. That is certainly more compelling to watch as an observer of California politics. More importantly, it is probably a better thing for any legislature to be. If these electoral reforms contributed to these effects on the legislature in California, it speaks well to what they might accomplish in other states or in the United States as a whole.

To me, the impact of term limits merits unique attention. As I discussed in the introduction, California voters passed strict term limits in the 1990 (six years for Assemblymembers, and eight years for Senators), and then relaxed them in 2012 (12 years in the legislature, regardless of chamber). The 2012 reform was sold to voters as a way to allow legislators to gain expertise and govern more effectively. Research suggests that these *relaxed* term limits also incentivize moderation; legislators are not so focused on running for a new office, and consequently are able to build their own base of support instead of relying on their respective parties.<sup>59</sup> Interviews for this project also identified term limits as a way to constrain the power of legislative leaders, independent of the effect of any ideological moderation or diversity. I began this project as a personal opponent of term limits, believing that they handicapped lawmakers relative to lobbyists and special interests. But California's 12-year term limit may offer legislators ample time to develop experience and build bases of support in their districts, while also preventing legislative leaders from consolidating power to the degree that we saw in the 1980s and 1990s. It is a thoughtful good-governance reform that has helped the legislature function in a fairer manner.

Lastly, this research somewhat complicates the idea that leaders exist on a weak-strong axis. One could argue that enforcing procedural fairness, as recent leaders seem to try to do, is a form of strength. It is not formal power, and it is not the kind of work that receives a lot of coverage in newspapers. However, while it may not clearly impact policy outcomes, procedural fairness is still a constraint on members being imposed by leaders.

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58 Boris Shor and Nolan McCarty, "Updated Polarization Plot for 2015-2016," AmericanLegislatures.com, November 8, 2016, <https://americanlegislatures.com/blog/>.

59 McGhee, "Political Reform."

Relatedly, leaders whose positions are secure may feel more comfortable sharing power—and attention—with others, while ensuring that bills are considered and voted on in a fair manner.

### *Areas for Future Research*

My research opens up a few questions for those interested in California politics, or in state legislatures in general, to explore. First, my interviews made it clear that there were quite a few policy issues that can seriously divide Democratic legislators. My legislative scorecard analysis for CalChamber could be easily applied to other interest groups that may reflect crosscutting among Democrats. These interest groups include the American Civil Liberties Union, the California Peace Officers Association, the California District Attorneys Association, the Consumer Attorneys of California, the Sierra Club, and the California Federation of Teachers. Delving into other legislative scorecards, and the associations between the standard deviation of those Democratic caucuses' scores and leadership strength, could shed light on the disputes that affect the way power is structured. It may also help us better understand the ideological conflicts facing the Democratic majorities in the U.S. House and Senate today.

More broadly, scholarship on state legislatures would benefit significantly from more insight on the kinds of power leaders have and how they use them. This could be accomplished by a more robust newspaper analysis than the one I used in this project—perhaps, one that incorporated more newspapers and counted total mentions instead of randomly sampling weekday editions. It would also be valuable to create a questionnaire that is sent to legislators across the country. Such questionnaire data exists from legislators in the 1980s and 1990s, but in my research, I could not find reliable data sets from recent years. If one were to focus on California specifically, more one-on-one interviews with current and former legislators than allowed by the timeline of this project and the COVID-19 pandemic could yield insightful results.

Finally, future research could explore the implications of this project by considering legislative outcomes. For example, is it harder for today's state legislative Democrats to pass legislation that reflects the party's agenda if power is distributed in a more decentralized fashion? Does a decentralized distribution of power incentivize individual creativity in policymaking? These are difficult questions to operationalize, but researching the effect of an individual-centric power distribution would shed considerable light on the overall implications of conditional party government theory, and give us better insight into how state legislatures—and potentially the U.S. Congress—may work.

## APPENDIX A

*Functions by Groseclose, Levitt, and Snyder*

1. Simple function to approximate legislators' ideologies (*each legislator's adjusted ideological score ( $\hat{y}_{it}$ ) equals the observed score ( $y_{it}$ ) minus a shift parameter ( $a_t$ ), divided by the stretch parameter ( $b_t$ ):*

$$\hat{y}_{it} = \frac{(y_{it} - a_t) \div b_t}{c_t}$$

2. Likelihood function to estimate shift/stretch parameters (*maximizing this likelihood function provides estimates of the shift parameter ( $a_t$ ) and the stretch parameter ( $b_t$ ), allowing for the use of the simple function above):*

$$L(\underline{a}, \underline{b}, \underline{x}, \sigma, \underline{y}) = \prod_{t \in T} \prod_{t \in T(H,S)} \prod_{i \in I} \frac{1}{c_t} \phi\left(\frac{(y_{it} - a_t) \div b_t - c_t x_{it}}{\sigma}\right) (1 \div \sigma)$$

**APPENDIX B***Formal powers index by Mooney*

## 1. Committee chair appointment:

Speaker appoints committee chairs = 1  
 Speaker is involved, but not the sole authority = 0.5  
 Speaker has no committee chair appointment authority = 0

## 2. Committee member assignment

Speaker makes committee assignments = 1  
 Speaker makes majority party committee assignments = 0.67  
 Speaker is involved, but not the sole authority = 0.33  
 Speaker has no committee assignment power = 0

## 3. Chamber leadership appointment

Equals the proportion of chamber leadership appointed by the speaker

## 4. Bill referral

Speaker has complete control over bill referral = 1  
 Speaker controls referral, but with restrictions = 0.75  
 Speaker shares power with no restrictions on referrals = 0.50  
 Speaker shares power with restrictions on referrals = 0.20  
 Speaker is not formally involved = 0

## 5. Control over legislative staff

Leadership is the only source of professional staff = 1  
 Leadership plus one agency source professional staff = 0.75  
 Leadership plus two agencies source professional staff = 0.50  
 Leadership plus three agencies source professional staff = 0.25  
 Leadership is not a source of staff = 0

Scores from each of the five categories are added together to produce a total formal powers index score out of five. A given formal powers index score applies to one house for one legislative session only.

**APPENDIX C***Interview Questions**For Legislative Leaders:*

1. When you were a legislative leader, was your caucus more divided on economic issues (e.g., taxes and business regulation) than social issues?
2. How did you handle situations in which a minority of your caucus did not agree with your opinions, or the opinions of the majority of the caucus?
3. When working with committee chairs, what was your approach? Did you try to advance a shared policy vision with your committee chairs, or allow them to run their own committees as they see fit?
4. Were there any situations in which caucus chairs disagreed with you on a bill or policy issue? If so, how did you handle the situation?
5. In your opinion, how has the composition of the legislature changed over time?
6. In your opinion, how have the approaches of legislative leaders changed over time?

*For Legislators:*

1. When you served in the legislature, was your caucus more divided on economic issues (e.g., taxes and business regulation) than social issues?
2. How did leaders handle situations in which a minority of your caucus did not agree with their opinions, or the opinions of the majority of the caucus?
3. When working with committee chairs, what was leaders' approach? Did they try to advance a shared policy vision with your committee chairs, or allow them to run their own committees as they see fit?
4. Were there any situations in which caucus chairs disagreed with you on a bill or policy issue? If so, how did they handle the situation?
5. In your opinion, how has the composition of the legislature changed over time?
6. In your opinion, how have the approaches of legislative leaders changed over time?

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Formal Powers Index of CA State Assembly, 1981-18

Session	Formal Powers Index
1981-82	2.14
1983-84	2.11
1985-86	2.14
1987-88	2.14
1989-90	2.14
1991-92	1.64
1993-94	1.13
1995-96	0.63
1997-98	2.25
1999-00	2.33
2001-02	2.33
2003-04	2.75
2005-06	2.75
2007-08	2.75
2009-10	2.75
2011-12	2.75
2013-14	2.75
2015-16	2.75
2017-18	2.75

Table 1 — Source: 1981-2018 data from Christopher Mooney.

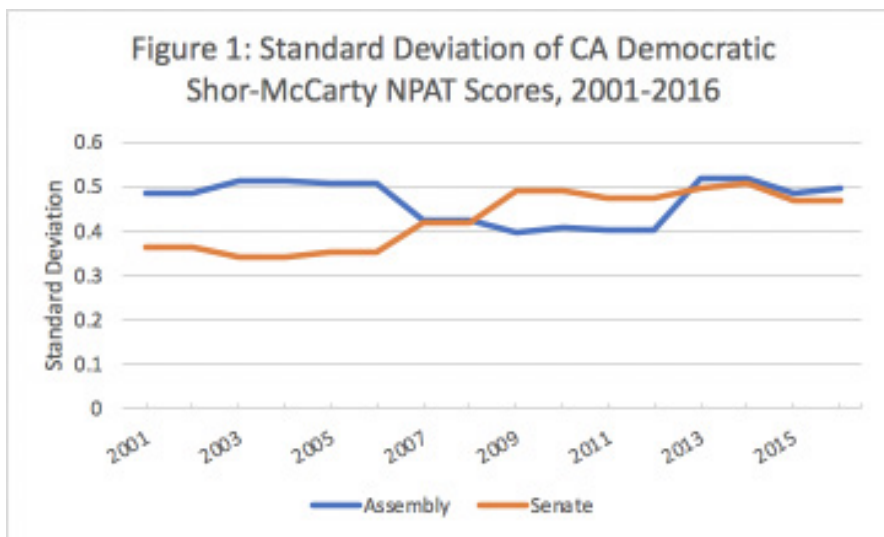


Figure 1 — Source: Data from Boris Shor and Nolan McCarty.

Figure 2: Standard Deviation of CA Democratic Adjusted CalChamber Scores, 2001-2019

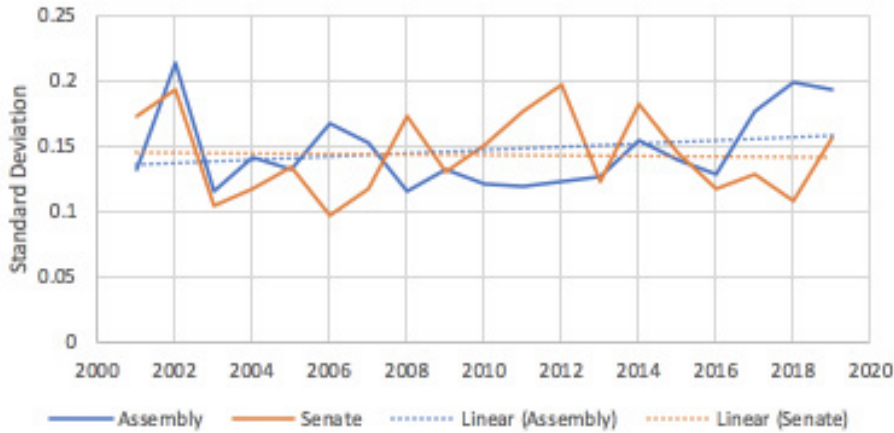


Figure 2 — Source: Legislative scorecard data from the California Chamber of Commerce.

Figure 3: Democratic Legislative Leaders in *The Sacramento Bee*, 2001-2019

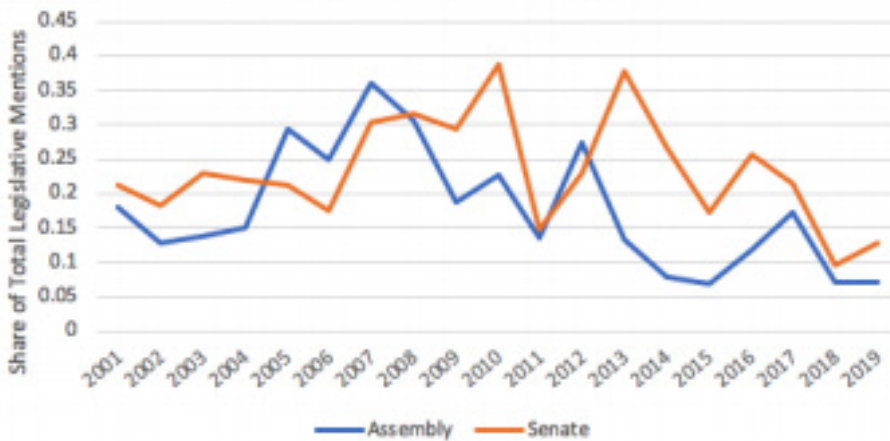


Figure 3 — Source: *The Sacramento Bee*.

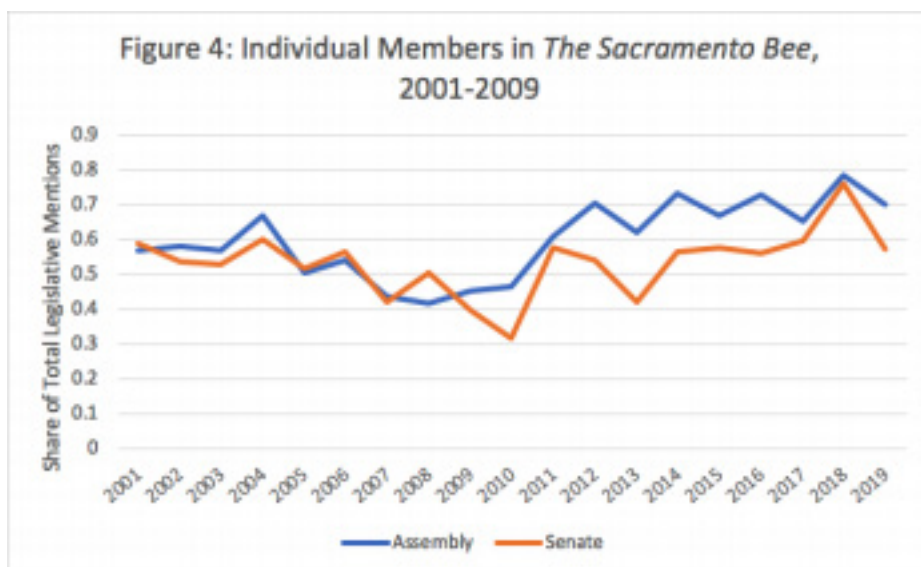


Figure 4 — Source: *The Sacramento Bee*

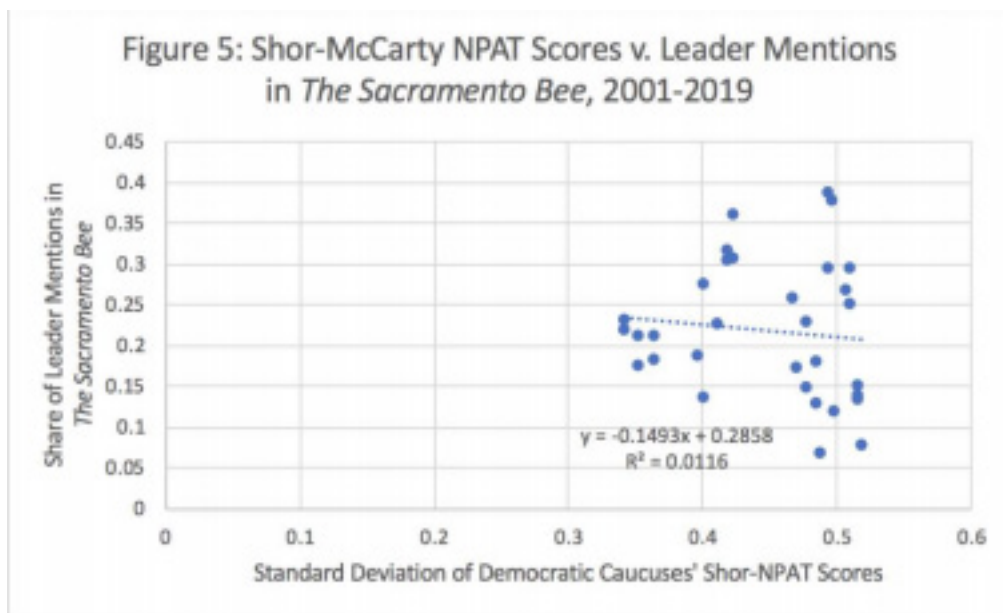


Figure 5 — Source: Data from Boris Shor and Nolan McCarty; *The Sacramento Bee*.

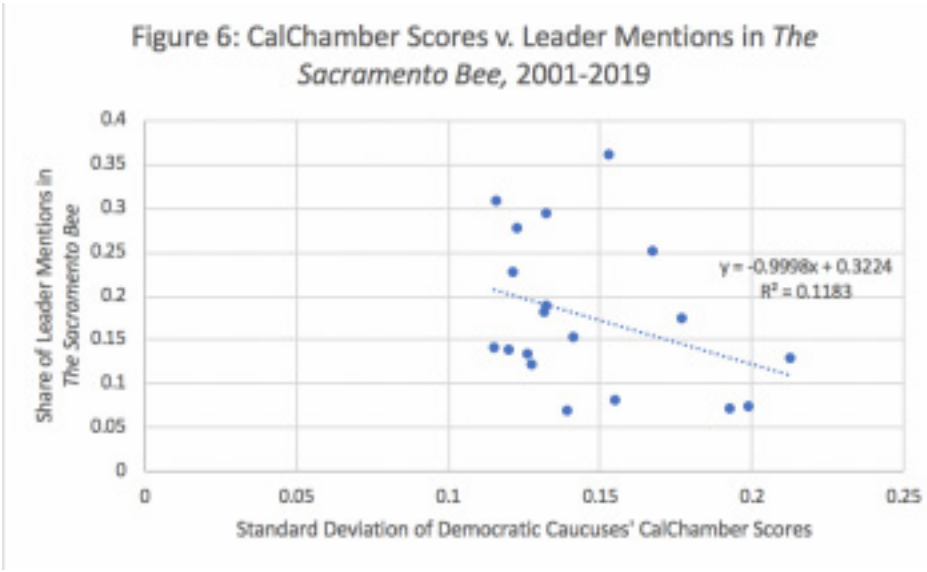


Figure 6 — Source: Legislative scorecard data from the California Chamber of Commerce; *The Sacramento Bee*.

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