URBAN SECESSION AND THE POLITICS OF GROWTH
The Case of Los Angeles

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The author argues that the current movement to secede San Fernando Valley from the city of Los Angeles exposes significant weaknesses in the existing literature on urban fragmentation. By constructing a theoretical framework, the author explains the effort as primarily a conflict between interest groups over the power to control urban growth. Second, existing scholarship cannot explain why progrowth Valley business organizations and slow-growth Valley homeowner associations have aligned to form a potent, though seemingly unlikely, urban coalition. The author concludes that these traditional land-use foes share far more common ground on growth issues than conventional theories predict. In particular, both share elements of a suburban land-use vision that provides a substantive foundation for collective action.

Recently, numerous communities in American cities have turned to a relatively new empowerment strategy, urban secession.[1] Unlike the process of suburbanization, in which individuals exercise the option to flee, urban secession movements represent group mobilizations of "exit" over "voice" or "loyalty" (Hirschman 1970). Municipal independence, therefore, offers dissatisfied communities of interest many advantages of exit but "without the inconvenience of moving" (Briffault 1992).

The author examines the Valley Voters Organized Toward Empowerment (Valley VOTE) (1996 to present) secession movement in Los Angeles. During the summer of 1996 in Los Angeles, business groups in city of Los Angeles portions of the San Fernando Valley aligned to revive their longstanding dream of municipal independence. As in previous efforts, Valley business organizations cited an unresponsive city hall, the belief that they were shortchanged in city services, and the need for more local control over community affairs as reasons to seek independence. The Valley VOTE movement, however, represents a departure from this historical pattern. What

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makes the effort unique is that progrowth Valley business interests have embraced slow-growth Valley homeowner associations to form a powerful—though seemingly unusual—urban coalition.

METROPOLITAN ORGANIZATION: IS SMALLER BETTER?

The issue of urban secession speaks directly to a decades-old structural debate over the proper size of local governments. One camp of theorists has argued for metropolitan local government that can employ economies of scale to provide city services at the least cost. This perspective posits that "elastic cities" can bring order and policy consistency to a fragmented and chaotic local government system while promoting the larger goal of socioeconomic integration (Rusk 1993, 1; Hahn and Levine 1980; Yates 1980).

Alternatively, public choice theorists hold that smaller units of government deliver services more efficiently and are more responsive to constituent needs. In this view, local governments are essentially service providers that compete for residents by offering various packages of city services. When individuals are no longer satisfied with a city's service offerings, residents can "vote with their feet" for a more amenable jurisdiction (Tiebout 1956; Ostrom 1972; Ostrom, Bish, and Ostrom 1988; Peterson 1981). The resulting competition between localities, it is alleged, forces cities to cut waste and improve efficiency. Still others have argued that cities above a certain size (between 50,000 and 200,000) may be too large to allow for adequate civic participation and thus are "badly in need of being broken up into smaller units" (Dahl, quoted in Hahn and Levine 1980, 351-61).

Clearly, efficiency and representational explanations add to our understanding of urban secession movements. Indeed, much of the broader literature supports the contention that communities have overlapping economic and political interests that encourage collective action (Davis 1991, 3-14; Goel et al. 1988, 422-23; Castells 1983). Historically, Valley business and homeowner groups have felt exploited for their tax revenue. Both view city government as bloated, inefficient, and dysfunctional. Both also cite the city's sprawling geography and inadequate representation[2] as reasons to carve the city into smaller, more accountable jurisdictions (Purcell 1998).

However, structural efficiency and representational explanations miss important political aspects of the Valley VOTE movement. A new Valley city would be the nation's sixth largest—too large to take advantage of either camp's advertised benefits.[3] Although both business and homeowner associations do share tax, service, and representational grievances, Valley VOTE's "smaller is better" claims disguise a more salient political agenda centered on land-use control.

METROPOLITAN ORGANIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION

Another theoretical perspective might explain the Valley VOTE coalition as an effort by business and homeowner interests to erect political boundaries to ensure local consumption of the tax base. Miller (1981) found that incorporation movements on the Los Angeles periphery during the 1950s and 1960s were a Proposition 13–style strategy to protect community tax bases from annexation by service-hungry central-city residents. Similarly, Burns's (1994, 80) more expansive study of local government formation concludes that "by the 1980s walling out higher taxes appears to have been virtually the only reason citizens created new cities."[4]

Other incorporation studies stress racial/ethnic and class exclusion. Danielson (1976) and others[5] have argued that home rule over land use, taxation, and public education allows groups in positions of power to formulate policies that systematically exclude other groups based on race and ethnicity, income levels, or other undesirable characteristics (Danielson 1976, 1-28). Similarly, Weiher (1991) found that political boundaries provide cues to individuals seeking to segregate themselves according to race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

Although this perspective also partly explains the Valley VOTE story, it too fails to provide a complete and convincing account. First, the emphasis on exclusionary tax motives in city formations (Miller 1981; Burns 1994) fails to give proper weight to the importance of land use. Many studies have found that incorporation leaders on the business side are often willing to pay *higher* taxes to ensure that land is used to its highest productive levels. Similarly, suburban homeowners are also frequently willing to shoulder an increased tax burden to create or preserve a particular quality of life (Goldbach 1970; White 1978; Gottdeiner 1985; Musso 1994).

Second, although studies continue to suggest that race/ethnic and class exclusion are alive and well in American cities (Logan and Schneider 1981; Schuman and Bobo 1988, 274-75; Weiher 1989, 1991; Massey and Denton 1987; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986), increasingly, exclusionary zoning is used to prevent any kind of "undesirable" residential or business development. In other words, it is not that wealthy suburban enclaves just want to exclude the poor and minorities, but they want to exclude *anyone* (White 1978). As Purcell (1997, 668) argued, "While race and class are important for understanding [Valley homeowner association] concerns and agenda, they are not themselves sufficient. The link to territory, to a geographical agenda, is a central part of the picture."

Like all forms of political organization, urban secession movements represent a "mobilization of bias" (Schattschneider 1988). If the traditional metropolitan fragmentation literature fails to identify the nature of this bias, what, if anything, does?

THE GROWTH MACHINE PERSPECTIVE

One of the most important and enduring conceptualizations of power in cities has been the work of sociologist Harvey Molotch. His well-known early model (1976) argued that land is a city's primary commodity, which business and government elites—growth machines—have a mutual interest in maximizing. Logan and Molotch (1987) refined and expanded the approach by distinguishing the motives of realtors, developers, and other *rentier* business interests who pursue profits or "exchange value," from slow-growth activists who favor quality-of-life concerns, or "use value." Although Logan and Molotch allowed for the possibility of "broader alliances between local entrepreneurs and environmental activists" in defense of use values, in general, urban politics is viewed as a battlefield between exchange (rentier) and use (resident) interests (Logan and Molotch 1987, 2, 215, 162, 187). Similarly, Gottdeiner (1985, 224) depicted the conflict between these antagonists as "a deeply rooted ideological battle over the uses of space."

RETHINKING URBAN LAND-USE COALTIONS

Although growth machine theory's emphasis on land-use politics fares better, it too is unable to fully explain the nature of the Valley VOTE coalition. Like much of the general urban literature (Cox and McCarthy 1982; Mollenkopf 1983; Fainstein and Fainstein 1983; Elkin 1987; Davis 1991), growth literature assumes "conflict between residents and businesses in the developed fringe areas" (Fleischmann 1986, 73). Even Purcell's (1997, 696) study of Valley homeowner associations concludes that "homeowners have a very different land use vision for the space of the city than do either business or government interests." By rigidly conceptualizing rentier and homeowner interests as land-use foes, both growth machine theory in particular and the urban literature generally do not adequately explain instances when these interests act collectively to reproduce urban space.

Admittedly, a few studies have noted the potential for business-resident coalition (Stone 1987; Logan and Rabrenovic 1990, 86; Leo 1998; Lo 1990). In particular, Fleischmann's (1986, 72) analysis of boundary changes concludes that in developed areas, "there is greater potential for collective action by residents and businesses." However, even when business-homeowner coalitions are envisioned in the literature, they are typically represented as collective efforts to limit government spending or lower taxes (see Lo 1990, 28, 36-37; Burns 1994); their sociospatial agendas are assumed to be "fundamentally different" (Purcell 1997, 695).

Using Valley VOTE as a case study, I offer two correctives to the growth machine perspective in this article. First, I suggest that the theory's emphasis on "land-use intensification" is overly general. As Lewis (2000, 1) noted in his critique of growth machine theory, " 'Growth' is not undifferentiated; it comes in widely varied packages, including residential, industrial, and commercial development." Business interests, particularly in relatively developed suburban areas, do not simply pursue growth for growth's sake. A more nuanced understanding of the various *kinds* of development growth that elites desire is warranted to better understand urban land-use politics.

Second, the case of Valley VOTE suggests that growth machine theory in particular and the urban literature in general often overstate the level of antagonism between rentier and homeowner groups. With regard to the creation of new cities—whether through incorporation or secession—it is argued that shared *suburban land-use vision* can provide a basis for business-homeowner coalition. This common vision of urban space seeks to protect single-family areas and create high-end retail districts catering to middle-class tastes while contributing to a vibrant business climate and generating tax revenue to pay for services. Meanwhile, poor residents and undesirable businesses are excluded to other areas.

RESEARCH METHODS

The goal of the study was to determine why a coalition of Valley business and homeowner interests emerged to pursue a strategy of secession from the city of Los Angeles. Valley VOTE was chosen as the unit of analysis because the organization is the primary vehicle for collective action (Olson 1965; Lo 1990). The investigation draws on archival research from various newspapers, government documents, and position papers in constructing the historical and political context of Valley VOTE. Participant observation research was conducted by attending monthly public meetings of Valley VOTE from April 1999 to May 2000 and as a researcher for the Elected Los Angeles Charter Reform Commission. From May 1998 to May 1999, I attended more than 50 commission meetings in which homeowner and business organizations aligned with Valley VOTE participated.[6]

Following previous researchers of social movements (Purcell 1997, 1998; Olson 1965; Wood 1981), numerous formal and informal interviews with business, homeowner, and political leaders involved with Valley VOTE were conducted. According to Logan and Rabrenovic (1990, 73), "Interviewing

Figure 1: City of Los Angeles Boundaries, San Fernando Valley, and Selected Communities

leaders is a strategic choice, given their high levels of involvement and information." The decision to interview elites was also influenced by Purcell's (1998) study of Valley VOTE, which concluded that the vast majority of the important decisions were made by a relatively small group of leaders. Approximately 15 formal interviews were conducted from August 1998 to July 2000.[7] Each interview proceeded from a prepared set of questions about why a particular organization was involved, what their objective was, how they thought their organization or community would benefit from independence, and why the business-homeowner coalition had formed.

VALLEY SECESSION: A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although the first organized secession movement had operated in the Valley as far back as the 1920s (Keropian 1961a, 1961b), it was during the region's wartime economic boom that support for the idea first became galvanized. Between 1940 and the late 1950s, the city's failure to increase Valley political representation and respond to complaints over zoning, parking, traffic, and services led to the Valley's first real demands for autonomy. At the time, Mayor Fletcher Bowron attempted to counter secessionists by proposing a borough system that would have carved the city into five semiautonomous political jurisdictions (Brownell 1947; "L.A. Borough Plan Studied" 1948). However, policy makers never gave the concept serious consideration, and a proposal was never placed before voters (Crouch and Dinerman 1963, 167-69; Maccoby 1950).

VALLEYWIDE BETTER GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

Between 1961 and 1963, a group of West Valley chamber of commerce leaders organized the Valleywide Better Government Committee (VBGC) to revive the notion of seceding from Los Angeles.[8] VBGC leaders cited the Valley's systematic denial of fair representation on the city council, city boards, and commissions among its reasons to secede. The group also registered complaints over high taxes, poor city services, and a general lack of attention to the Valley's needs (Addeo 1961; Keropian 1961a, 1961b). The spark for the movement grew out of an invitation by the West Valley chamber of commerce to have all 15 council members to tour the West Valley to assess possible capital improvements there. When only Valley councilmen Everett Burkhalter and Tom Shepard showed up, outraged chamber leaders voted to pursue secession (Addeo 1961).

The issue of land-use control was also central in the VBGC effort. Paul McCann of the Northridge chamber of commerce stated outright that cityhood was "in the interest of securing an honest, efficient government with local control, as opposed to downtown political groups, sub-dividers and commercial developers and other pressure groups" ("Governmental Study Pushed in West Valley" 1961, 1). The area's haphazard growth even prompted Valley resident Mayor Samuel Yorty to sympathize: "I don't blame the Valley for being irritated. The area, which grew like [crazy], has so many problems—streets that dead-end, no sidewalks or curbs or other improvements" ("Valley's 3 Cities" 1962, 1).

By early 1963, the group's success in drawing attention to the area's representational and service inequities, as well as significant legal hurdles,[9] had sapped much of the group's momentum. According to Ruth Richter,

> We got some results and then it just sort of stalled out. We just sort of waited for the next group to pick up. We never could get things done; they always ignored us. It's strange, they only recognize the Valley when the Valley gets vocal and takes some serious action toward getting out of the city. Then they manage to give us a little more. It's the same thing we've had for more than 40 years. (VBGC secretary, interview, 3 December 1999)

COMMITTEE INVESTIGATING VALLEY INDEPENDENT CITY/COUNTY

Between 1975 and 1978, a group calling itself the Committee Investigating Valley Independent City/County (CIVICC) reconstituted the secession effort. Composed primarily of West and South Valley chamber of commerce leaders, CIVICC arose out of a business group called the Breakfast Forum that met regularly to discuss Valley issues.[10] As in previous decades, discussions railed against the city's bloated bureaucracy, the lack of representation, and the perceived disparity between Valley taxes paid and services received (Willon 1998; Larry Calemine, executive director, Los Angeles LAFCO, interview, 9 September 1999; Greig Smith, chief of staff for Hal Bernson, interview, 23 August 1999; Marks 1977, SC-2).

As with the VBGC, the issue of land-use control was also central to the effort. Breakfast Forum members complained that the city's restrictive planning and zoning process limited the growth potential of the area. The final catalyst for the creation of CIVICC may have been a July 1975 Los Angeles city council ordinance limiting the height of new construction to three stories along a stretch of Ventura Boulevard from Tarzana to Encino (Littwin 1978, SC-25). After the passage of the law, Baum, the director of West Valley Bank located in the rezoned area, commented,

> We need eight votes on the City Council, and there's no way the Valley can get that. The majority of the council has always prevented the San Fernando Valley from achieving social and economic development by zoning and restricting density. (Littwin 1978, SC25-SC26)

Three months later, Breakfast Forum organizers Hal Bernson and Larry Calemine joined with several South and West Valley chamber of commerce members, developers, and realtors to form CIVICC (Littwin 1978, SC25-SC26).

CIVICC's Land Deal

CIVICC, at least for a time, was able to mount a credible threat of detachment. After discovering a loophole in state law, CIVICC formed a plan in which the tiny neighboring city of San Fernando (see Figure 1) would annex the Valley and then later allow parts of it to secede.[11] However, fearful it would forfeit political control to the new inhabitants, the San Fernando city council narrowly decided against pursuing CIVICC's secession plan (Lo 1990, 165). San Fernando leaders then turned the tables on CIVICC and formulated their own plan to annex portions of Granada Hills and all of Mission Hills, without the rest of the Valley (Baker 1978; Marten 1978).[12] Hal

Bernson, one of the main architects of the annexation plan, later said of San Fernando's decision the following: "That's the double-cross that hurt the movement more than anything else" (quoted in Willon 1998, A27).

Many observers believed the plan was destined to fail anyway because the city of San Fernando was unlikely to file the necessary legal documents with the L.A. Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) before new legislation closed the loophole (Marten 1978). Still, the plot represented enough of a threat that city leaders recruited state Assemblyman John T. Knox (D-Richmond) to alter state statutes governing detachment. In one respect, the amendment of the Municipal Organization Act of 1977 eased the path to secession by requiring a majority approval in the seceding area only. However, it included a "kiss of death" provision that authorized a city council veto power over detachment proposals.

Early Secession Movements in Retrospect

Since the area voted to join Los Angeles in 1915 to access its water, Valley business organizations have periodically sought to divorce the region from its marriage of convenience. Resenting their subordinate status in the city's business establishment, Valley business interests have historically viewed secession as a strategy to assume their rightful place in a new Valley growth machine (Purcell 1997, 1998).

Homeowner associations, however, were never formally part of either secessionist organization. Until relatively recently, Valley homeowner associations typically mobilized against specific local land-use threats and rarely formed alliances with associations in other areas. According to former Vice Chair of CIVICC Bob Scott, "There was more of a distance between homeowner associations and businesses in those days. . . . Growth was not as much of a dirty word 30 years ago as it is now" (Valley VOTE land-use chair, city planning commissioner, interview, 28 June 2000). Thus, although VBGC's and CIVICC's emphasis on lower taxes and government accountability resonated with Valley homeowners,[13] both groups remained suspicious of one another on many issues of growth (Lo 1990, 165).

THE EVOLUTION OF A MOVEMENT: VALLEY VOTE

In 1995, Granada Hills Assemblywoman Paula Boland, former vice president of the United Chambers of Commerce of the Valley and CIVICC board member, introduced AB 2043 to remove the city council veto over secession proposals.[14] That legislation died, but the near success spurred Jeff Brain, a

Sherman Oaks–based commercial real estate broker, and Richard Close, longtime president of the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association, to resurrect the idea of secession. Brain recalled,

> Within a month we had a coalition coming together. At that point we had five business people, five homeowner representatives and decided to form a group under a co-chair system because at that point homeowner and business groups didn't work together. I was chair of the business side, Close chaired the homeowners. Then we started to organize in support of legislation. (President, Valley VOTE, interview, 28 January 2000)

The effort began by sending out letters to Valley business and homeowner groups urging them to support a LAFCO study of the fiscal impacts of Valley secession (Brain, Valley VOTE, interview, 28 January 2000). Eventually, a coalition of 24 business groups (mostly area chambers of commerce) and 17 homeowner associations threw their support behind Valley VOTE. The group then embarked on a successful campaign to gather the signatures of 25% of the area's registered voters necessary to trigger a LAFCO comprehensive fiscal analysis of secession.[15]

In the summer of 1997, Valley VOTE recruited Granada Hills Assemblyman Tom McClintock (R-38th district) and longtime Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association member Assemblyman Robert Hertzberg (D-40th district) to sponsor a new and improved secession bill to remove the city's veto power over secession.[16] After some initial hesitation, Governor Pete Wilson signed the bill into law in October 1997, saying, "This is a bill that permits detachment, but doesn't make it easy" (Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century 1999, 2). Following its passage, the new law spawned half a dozen other secession efforts in various Los Angeles communities.[17]

VALLEY VOTE'S CASE FOR SECESSION

Valley VOTE offers three main arguments in favor of secession. First, like the CIVICC and VBGC movements, it has argued that the Valley does not receive its fair share of city services. The fair-share argument has long been a staple of secession movements in the Valley and elsewhere. In its early stages, Valley VOTE dusted off a 1978 CIVICC study and offered it as proof that the Valley was being shortchanged in services.[18] However, three subsequent analyses—one by the Valley's unabashedly prosecession *Daily News*, one by a Cal State Northridge economist and Valley VOTE member, and one by the mayor's office—found little or no overall service disparity (Barrett 1996; Svorny and Carroll 1996; *Analysis of the City Budget* 1997).[19]

For Valley VOTE, like the VBGC[20] and CIVICC movements, it is less important that an actual disparity exist than for a *perception* of unfairness to exist. As with secession efforts at the nation-state level,[21] the group's exploitation rhetoric serves to create collective consciousness and momentum for the movement (Premdas 1990, 15). Recently, the group has backed away from the fair-share argument (Brain, interview, 28 January 2000), possibly realizing that the image of a "secession of the successful" (Reich 1996) could harm the movement's chances for success, both in the rest of the city and in the Valley.[22]

The second claim, that smaller is better, is essentially a restatement of the political economy approach first articulated by Tiebout (1956) and expounded on by Ostrom, Bish, and Ostrom (1988), Ostrom (1972), and many others. In its public presentations and literature, the group often refers to public choice-style studies claiming that smaller governments are more efficient and that "voters' common sense tells them that the closer they are to government the more it will respond to their demands" (Valley VOTE 1998, 2).

In this article, I do not aspire to shed new light on this debate or challenge the theory's core assertions. However, an independent city would comprise roughly 1.6 million residents and span roughly 254 square miles, still making it one of the nation's largest in terms of population and geographic size. Even if one concedes that smaller governments possess all the advantages that the political economy approach advertises, much of the literature suggests that a separate Valley city would do little to improve the alleged defects of city size (Oliver 2000; Ostrom 1972; Dahl 1980, 361).[23] Thus, like the fair-share argument, the smaller-is-better claim has a superficial appeal that fails to withstand critical scrutiny. Rather, as Miller (1981) noted, it suggests that proponents are using the Tiebout hypothesis to garner public support for private gain.

The third main argument for Valley secession emanates from historically familiar calls for local control. Perhaps the most cherished suburban ideology (Teaford 1997; McKenzie 1994; Jackson 1985; Fishman 1987; Wood 1981), local control is a euphemism for asserting political power over the institutions of American local government (Burns 1994).

The local control slogan has become a mantra of the group. Yet for most of the rank and file, the term is used generically, in the sense that they resent the fact that remote bodies (usually the city council or the city bureaucracy) make decisions that affect them (Purcell 1998). A new city would redistribute political power away from the entrenched downtown corporate interests, city employees unions, and a city bureaucracy that Valley VOTE believes pursue their interests at the Valley's expense. Thus, local control—particularly of land use—would free the Valley VOTE coalition from downtown control and provide the tools to advance its spatial agenda.

VALLEY VOTE: THE BUSINESS AGENDA

Since the city's founding, the downtown business elite has been the dominant entity in the Los Angeles business community. The Owens Valley Aqueduct, San Pedro Harbor, and later the California Aqueduct and the Colorado River Aqueduct and other catalysts for regional growth were all brought to fruition by infamous growth boosters such as the *Los Angeles Times* (Erie 1992; Fogelson 1967; Crouch and Dinerman 1963). Representing a classic "corporate" regime (Stone 1987), this relatively cohesive network of large downtown corporations has, until recently, wielded unchallenged economic and political power in Los Angeles (Purcell 1997).

Davis's (1990) analysis of the city's economic history depicts a conflict between the corporate growth elites of the downtown Anglo "Chandlerian Old Guard" and the entertainment-centered Jewish west side. The battle, Davis writes, produced a city economy resembling a "beast with two heads" (p. 125). What has been largely ignored in analyses of Los Angeles's business structure, however, is the recognition of the Valley business community as the city's "third head."

As with previous secession movements, the core of Valley VOTE's business support comes largely from small- to medium-sized businesses—mostly area chambers of commerce—in the Valley.[24] They favor such measures as simplifying the city's complex permit process, eliminating the business license gross receipts tax, and a general scaling back of nonessential government functions, which they believe amount to an "invasion of the essential profit motive in all business" (Powers 1998). Moreover, they believe that the city's high taxes and bloated bureaucracy place the city at a competitive disadvantage in efforts to woo new business.

As many researchers recognize, Valley businesses form a powerful economic sector (Allen and Turner 1998; San Fernando Valley Economic Research Center 1999) but one that is almost completely divorced of formal ties to other areas of the city. For example, the Valley has evolved separate business alliances such as the United Chamber of Commerce of San Fernando Valley, the Valley Industry and Commerce Association (VICA), the San Fernando Valley Association of Realtors, and the Economic Alliance of San Fernando Valley—all of which have declared their support for secession.[25] Meanwhile, downtown corporate interests are represented by the Los

Angeles chamber of commerce, the Central City Association (CCA), the Los Angeles Realtors Association, and the influential Los Angeles Business Advisors (LABA),[26] all of which oppose secession.[27] Moreover, the Valley publishes the *San Fernando Valley Business Journal*, whereas matters of downtown interests are chronicled in the *Los Angeles Business Journal* (Purcell 1997).

Economic-driven theories might predict a high level of shared interest between business interests based on common philosophies toward matters such as lower taxes, fewer regulations, and expanding economic growth. However, for historical and spatial reasons, as well as the fact that downtown businesses tend to reflect larger corporate interests, most Valley commercial enterprises have viewed their economic and political interests as distinct from downtown businesses. Thus, the Valley business community can be seen as a separate and distinct growth network (Gottdeiner 1985) operating within its own territorial sphere of influence. Secession, therefore, offers Valley business the opportunity to free itself from the orbit of the downtown growth machine and establish itself as the dominant entity in a separate Valley growth alliance (see also Purcell 1997, 1998, 2000).

VALLEY VOTE: THE HOMEOWNER AGENDA[28]

In his incisive analysis of Los Angeles growth politics, Davis (1990) described the rise of homeowner association (HOA) power as a "homegrown revolution." Davis traced the formation of homeowner associations in the 1920s in defense of white racial and economic privilege to the homeowner-driven Lakewood plan incorporations of the 1950s and 1960s to the first rumblings of the slow-growth movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Davis wrote, "The most powerful 'social movement' in contemporary Southern California is that of affluent homeowners, organized by notional community designations or tract names, engaged in the defense of home values and neighborhood exclusivity" (p. 153).

Since the late 1960s, homeowner associations in Los Angeles have indeed become increasingly assertive in the region's politics. Valley homeowners were central for efforts in the 1970s to pass the property tax rollback Proposition 13, as well as the bus stop movement to halt the integration of Valley public schools (Davis 1990; Lo 1990; Purcell 1997). Since the 1970s, homeowner associations in Los Angeles have also spearheaded the Southern California slow-growth movement. Following the success of homeowner-backed Proposition U in 1986, which placed caps on commercial development in the city, HOAs in Los Angeles have continually agitated for greater decentralization of land-use authority. In 1988 and again in 1998, they were turned back in their effort to establish elected neighborhood councils with formal authority over zoning and land use in their jurisdiction (Davis 1990).[29]

Studies of homeowner and residential associations invariably find that although property value and tax concerns are important, their primary goal is to protect the residential environment from outside threats to quality of life (Logan and Rabrenovic 1990, 90; Lo 1990; Purcell 1997, 1998; McKenzie 1994). Some cite their emergence as reasons for the collapse of the growth consensus in Los Angeles (Fulton 1997; Sonenshein 1993). However, their inability to gain an institutional foothold in land-use decision making has prompted many Valley homeowner associations—particularly those in the affluent South and West Valley[30] (see Figure 2)—to view secession as their only alternative. As Purcell (1997, 696) argued, "Affluent homeowners associations already enjoy considerable informal sway over neighborhood decisions, but they seek a formalization of this power." Homeowners of Encino President Gerald Silver explained the dilemma:

> Right now we have a quasi-decision-making system that gives the appearance that homeowners and residents have some control over their destiny, particularly [over] land use. You can get in front of these panels but you can't do anything other than just voice your opinion. You have no direct authority. The law says "we have to let you speak but we don't have to listen." That's what's driving a lot of this. (Interview, 23 August 1999)

Although the homeowner agenda is complex, the main objective is to protect community use and exchange values by controlling land-use decisions in and around their communities. Repeatedly thwarted in efforts to decentralize land-use decision making, Valley HOAs view secession as a means to ensure their political influence.

In practical terms, this is almost certain to mean tightening regulations on such land-use threats as the encroachment of multifamily dwellings. For example, when city planning documents and a *Daily News* analysis recently revealed that the Los Angeles Department of City Planning was preparing to accommodate the region's predicted population growth by zoning for high-density, low-income housing throughout the Valley (*Citywide General Plan Framework* 1996; Barrett 1998; Southern California Association of Governments 1998), Valley VOTE chairman and longtime Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association President Richard Close commented, "This is the debate. Who will have the power: the communities to focus on quality of life, or the politicians and unions that want to maximize the size of projects?"

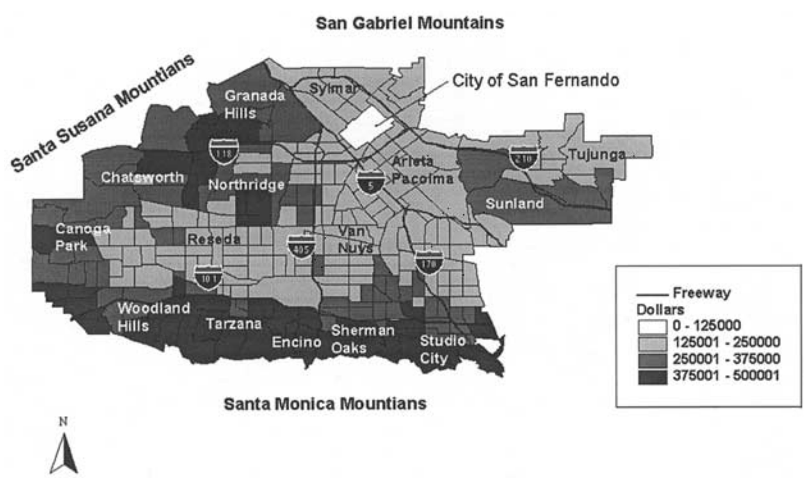

Figure 2: Median Home Value by Census Tract and Selected Valley Communities
SOURCE: 1990 census.

(quoted in Barrett 1998, A13). As a separate city, homeowners associations would almost certainly view such growth as a threat to their use and exchange values (Logan and Molotch 1987) and attempt to prevent these kinds of developments in or near their neighborhoods (Purcell 1997).

UNDERSTANDING THE BUSINESS-HOMEOWNER ALLIANCE: THE SUBURBAN LAND-USE VISION

As mentioned previously, it is the coalition of business and homeowner associations that distinguishes Valley VOTE from previous secession efforts in San Fernando Valley. Although a number of factors sustain the alliance, the primary goal of both groups is the reproduction of urban space (Gottdeiner 1985; Purcell 1997, 1998).

However, existing theories depict rentier and homeowner conceptions of urban space as fundamentally opposed. In this study, I have called into question this account of growth politics and argued that the two share far more common ground on growth issues than previously believed. In particular, both groups share a *suburban land-use vision* that provides a basis for collective action.

David Fleming, chairman of the Economic Alliance of San Fernando Valley[31] and influential Valley VOTE supporter, described his vision of an independent Valley this way:

> Valley residents look at Burbank, Glendale or Pasadena and long to have what they have: small governments managing clean, well-policed, efficient, user friendly tax structures, clean and safe neighborhoods and great community pride. These cities are not anti-development. . . . They have each permitted and even sought out large, well planned, area-friendly developments . . . [that] have helped pay for the superior services and benefits the residents of these cities have come to expect. In smaller cities, the benefits and burdens of development are inextricably fused. But in Los Angeles and the Valley, it's a different story. (Fleming 1998, 12)

The suburban land-use vision seeks to create a balance between homeowner and businesses amenities and improve a city's competitive advantage in the Tieboutian (1956) competition for business and residential customers. To fulfill this common vision, rentier business and homeowner groups seek local government authority to attract and maintain, as well as exclude, certain types of commercial and residential development.

The power to attract and maintain. Business and homeowner groups share relative consensus on the kinds of commercial and residential development that contribute to a community's place advantage. Both groups seek to attract high-end retail outlets.[32] Rentier associations desire high-end retail enterprises that attract middle-class customers and contribute to a vibrant economic climate from which the entire business community benefits (Logan and Molotch 1987). Meanwhile, homeowners covet high-end retail to cater to their consumption tastes and reside within easy travel distance.

Both business and homeowners also seek to attract high-tech, office, and other white-collar firms to their communities. For businesses, such enterprises improve the economic potential of an area and provide a steady stream of affluent customers. For homeowners, such companies provide high-paying jobs within easy commuting distance, without imposing undue environmental or infrastructural burdens. Both organizations also benefit from additional tax revenue to pay for high-quality city services that maintain the attractiveness of both residential and commercial districts.

Both groups also generally seek to maintain (but not necessarily attract) single-family residential areas. Homeowners prefer single-family districts to protect neighborhood stability and property values and to ensure that their community remains "spacious, affluent, clean, decent, permanent, predictable and homogeneous" (Fogelson 1967, 145; see also Teaford 1997; Jackson 1985; Purcell 1997).

Rentier groups also frequently prefer maintaining single-family areas. Several interviewees reported that single-family residential customers tend to be wealthier and establish long-term relationships with local businesses, whereas apartment dwellers tend to be more transient, less affluent, and less stable customers. Moreover, low-population density places fewer demands on public services and infrastructure and is associated with lower rates of criminal activity. Valley VOTE President Jeff Brain described the business-homeowner view of local development this way:

> Their destinies are linked and we need to work together. As go the business communities so go the residential communities. If Ventura Boulevard has empty stores, it brings in graffiti, crime, and property values go down. We saw that during the recession. Who comes to the small businesses but the residents? [Businesses] need those residents. (Interview, 28 January 2000)

The power to exclude. To carry out the suburban land-use vision business and homeowner interests, one must have the power to exclude certain types of commercial and residential development. Undesirable businesses such as pawn shops, tattoo parlors, and auto parts and liquor stores that have proliferated in the Valley in recent years (Don Schultz, president of the Van Nuys Homeowners Association, interview, 9 August 1999; Jeff Brain, commercial real estate developer and president of Valley VOTE, interview, 28 January 2000), as well as most heavy industry, are considered undesirable by both groups. Both view these kinds of businesses as injurious to use and exchange values because of their perceived association with criminal activity, low-income groups, and pollution. Similarly, both groups share fears that such firms drive away middle-class shoppers and damage an area's residential and business image. Although these examples of "undesirable" businesses all represent various forms of "growth," business and residential organizations shun such development as a threat to local use and exchange values.

In pursuing a suburban land-use vision, business and homeowner groups also need local government authority to exclude undesirable residents. As White (1978) noted, low-income apartments in particular (but even high-end single-family development) may be viewed as a land-use threat if it changes the character of the community or if increased tax revenues fail to cover the cost of extending infrastructure and services to new consumers (Danielson and Doig 1982). Moreover, the encroachment of multifamily housing (

particularly low income) contributes to the perception of an area as urban and thus "congested, impoverished, filthy, immoral, transient, uncertain, and heterogeneous" (Fogelson 1967, 145; see also Purcell 1997).

Above all, the suburban land-use vision seeks to promote high rates of owner occupancy. Bob Scott—co-chair of the Local Issues Committee Valley Industry and Commerce Association, city planning commissioner, and a founding member of Valley VOTE—described owner occupancy as a critical area of shared business-homeowner concern:

> The thing we have to watch out for is disinvestment. Watching the changes in the area, watching the demographics, what we notice is that there is a decline in certain areas in terms of owner-occupied residences. When that falls below a certain level, that sends a signal that people are moving out of the area that have an investment in the area. There's also been a decline in middle-income demographics . . . and the increased concentration of poverty ends up in what we call "donut" cities where the center starts to melt away. And that very thing can and is happening in the San Fernando Valley, which is one of the reasons why folks in the Valley are looking for alternatives to local government. (Meeting of the Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century, 5 March 1999)

Largely Anglo (75%) and single family as recently as 1980, the Valley, like many quintessential American suburbs, has rapidly transformed into an "edge city" with an increasingly urban feel (Teaford 1997; Fishman 1987; Garreau 1991).[33] Demographic and housing shifts were particularly dramatic in areas in the Valley's flatlands such as Van Nuys, Panorama City, Reseda, and North Hollywood, where rates of single-family ownership and percentage Anglo have dropped precipitously (see Figure 3). Although more affluent areas in the hills of the South and West Valley also have become somewhat more ethnically diverse and less single family since 1980, they still remain predominantly Anglo, owner-occupied single-family areas. For Valley VOTE, whose organizational (particularly homeowner) support largely comes from the predominately suburban South and West Valley, the primary goal of cityhood is to acquire tools to protect these communities from perceived threats associated with urbanization.[34]

To summarize, rentier and homeowner organizations, often depicted in the traditional literature as land-use antagonists, actually occupy a great deal of common ground. They share the goal of using local government authority to create the idyllic suburban enclave that protects single-family areas and attracts revenue-generating high-end retail and white-collar firms that cater to the middle class. Meanwhile, undesirable businesses and poor residents are excluded and forced into other areas. Armed with suburban-style land-use control, commercial and residential interests equip themselves with

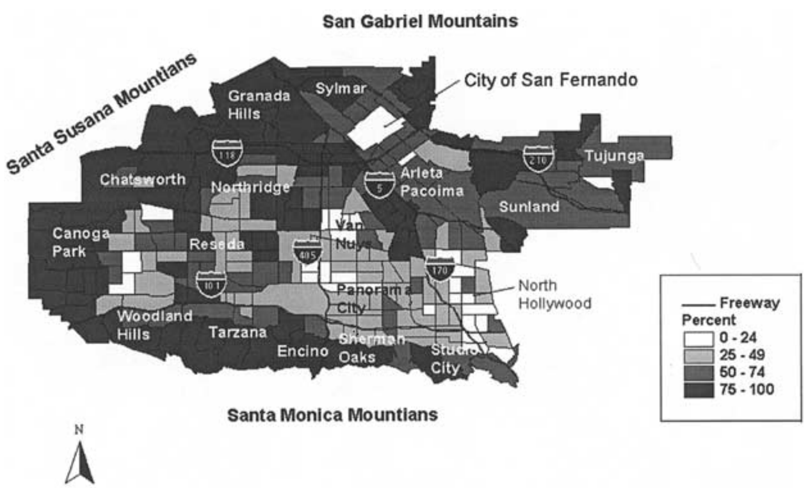

Figure 3: Percentage of Owner-Occupied Housing by Census Tract and Selected Valley Community
SOURCE: 1990 census.

the institutional tools to attract and maintain commercial and residential amenities while excluding perceived land-use threats from their territory. By assembling the ideal package of residents and businesses, cities gain a competitive advantage in the Tieboutian marketplace (Lewis 2000).

For the most part, the existing urban literature is ill equipped to explain the Valley VOTE coalition. Traditional urban scholarship depicts business and homeowner associations as land-use rivals and downplays their potential for collective action (Cox and McCarthy 1982; Mollenkopf 1983; Fainstein and Fainstein 1983; Elkin 1987; Gottdeiner 1985; Logan and Molotch 1987; Logan and Rabrenovic 1990; Davis 1991). Although a few note potential for business-homeowner coalition on tax issues (Burns 1994; Lo 1990; Stone 1987), the general assumption is that land-use conflicts are likely to preclude the formation of such alliances. The Valley VOTE movement illustrates that the relationship between rentier and residential groups is more complex than this conventional wisdom suggests. Although their general orientation toward growth may differ, they share a suburban land-use vision that can provide a substantive foundation for collective action.

By way of conclusion, several qualifications must be noted. First, it must be stressed that other factors such as tax and service concerns (Burns 1994; Miller 1981) will frequently operate to promote the maintenance of such unions. Second, such alliances may be most viable when both groups are relatively evenly matched in terms of political power. In the case of Valley VOTE, the group's dual leadership structure and relative balance between homeowner and business interests on the group's 35-member executive board help ensure that neither interest will dominate. Third, as Fleischmann (1986) and others have noted, such coalitions may be more likely in developed suburban areas experiencing rapid development or otherwise facing land-use threats. Fourth, the fact that Valley business owners are invariably Valley homeowners—although not usually involved in HOA politics—nonetheless increases the likelihood that these interests will share a degree of consensus on what their community should look like. Fifth, as Lo (1990) has noted, such alliances are more likely to arise between homeowners and rentier businesses. Typically marginalized from power to a far greater extent than corporate interests, "small property" may be compelled to band together to exercise political influence.

Finally, traditional disagreement between business and homeowner interests over use and exchange values remains relevant to any understanding of urban growth politics. Undoubtedly, the suburban ideal envisioned by Valley VOTE will not make all land-use conflict magically disappear. Rather, new arrangements would likely decrease the scope of conflict and make consensus between residential and commercial interests only less difficult to find.

TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF URBAN COALITIONS

It has been argued that the traditional scholarship on metropolitan fragmentation is inadequate to explain the Valley VOTE secession movement in Los Angeles. Although the various perspectives all contribute to our understanding of the effort, none fully captures Valley VOTE's essence. Following Purcell (1997, 1998), it was argued that the movement is properly seen as a political struggle between interest groups over the production of urban space (Gottdeiner 1985). Historically excluded from the city's power structures and repeatedly thwarted in their efforts to decentralize land-use decisions, Valley rentier and homeowner interests view secession as a strategy to advance their vision of the good community.

A second major theme is that although their general orientation toward development may differ, business and residential interests still share a significant degree of consensus on land-use issues. Thus, the case of Valley VOTE suggests that a rigid depiction of urban growth politics as homeowners pursuing use values—versus business interests pursuing exchange values—does not adequately capture the full spectrum of land-use reality. Rather, the case suggests that collective action between rentier business and homeowner associations can arise based on shared conceptions of urban space.

Of course, further research is needed to more fully understand the precise conditions under which such coalitions may form. The fact that similar alliances have also formed in other secession-minded areas of Los Angeles[35] provides reason to expect similar coalitional dynamics elsewhere. Particularly in movements to create new cities—whether through incorporation or secession—business and homeowner groups share an overriding interest not just in land-use control but in also using political institutions to impose their vision of urban space.

NOTES

1. In recent years, there have also been secession efforts in Staten Island and Queens, New York, as well as in the cities of Boston; Seattle; Miami; Dallas; Carlsbad (California); Frye Island (Michigan); Ortley Beach and Ocean Grove (New Jersey); New Haven, Stamford, and Norwalk (Connecticut); Laconia (New Hampshire); Layfayette (Louisiana); Louisville (Kentucky); Broomfield (Colorado); and Covington (Georgia). County-level efforts have surfaced in Snohomish County (Washington), Hemingway and Marlboro (South Carolina), Orange County (California), Fulton County (Georgia), Hillsborough County (Florida), Suffolk County (New York), Fairbanks North Star Borough (Alaska), and Allegheny County (Pennsylvania). In 1991, the district of Long Island successfully detached from the city of Portland, Maine.

2. The current resident to council member ratio is roughly 233,000 to 1, by far the largest in the nation.

3. This point is more fully addressed later in the article.

4. Of the various interest groups, Burns (1994) concluded that business support of incorporation was most decisive.

5. See also Linowes and Allensworth (1973), Popper (1980), Mills and Oates (1975), Logan and Schneider (1981), and Rabin (1987) for discussions of zoning powers and racial and class exclusion.

6. On 8 June 1999, Los Angeles voters passed Measure 1, voting 60% to 40% to approve a new city charter. As a separate organization, Valley VOTE did not formally participate in the charter reform process.

7. In addition to numerous informal interviews and conversations before and after public meetings.

8. The Valleywide Better Government Committee (VBGC) effort initially comprised leaders from the 11-member West Valley–associated chamber of commerce and later was joined by the 13-member North and East Valley chambers of commerce.

9. To get a secession question on the ballot, signatures of a majority of registered voters in the entire city would have been required, followed by a favorable vote in the entire city (see McCurdy 1961).

10. Two leaders in particular, longtime 12th District City Councilman Hal Bernson, at the time a clothing retailer, and Larry Calemine, a prominent Valley developer, were responsible for organizing the Breakfast Forums. Calemine is currently executive director of the Los Angeles Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) that will decide whether secession, or "special reorganization," is financially feasible.

11. The loophole permitted an existing city to annex another city's territory without the consent of the other city, unless at least 25% of registered voters or landowners had protested. In that case, the annexation would have required majorities in both the city of San Fernando and the annexed areas. Under the law at the time, an annexation would only have required a majority approval of the annexing city's council and of the county's LAFCO board (see Willon 1998).

12. Besides increasing the city's tax base and geographical area, San Fernando's primary interest in annexation was in ensuring that the nearby San Fernando mission, which adorns the city's logo, would be captured within the city's limits.

13. And, as Lo (1990) argued, helped to form the homeowner/small business–led Proposition 13 tax revolt coalition.

14. Boland, as president of Finally Restoring Excellence in Education (FREE), has also been a central figure in efforts to break up the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Valley VOTE is also actively supporting LAUSD breakup.

15. On 9 December 1999, Valley VOTE submitted roughly 205,000 signatures to LAFCO. On 15 March, LAFCO announced that enough signatures had been validated to meet the 25% threshold (132,000). If the study finds that separation can be "revenue neutral," a vote could be held as soon as November 2002.

16. AB 62 requires a majority of voters in the seceding area, as well as the entire city to approve a breakup.

17. Among them are the communities of Venice, Eagle Rock, the Westside, and Westchester. The communities of San Pedro/Wilmington and Hollywood will be included with the Valley in the LAFCO fiscal reorganization study.

18. The study concluded that the Valley paid 40% of the city's taxes but received only 15% in return. Similar conclusions were reached in its analysis of the Valley's tax contribution to the county of Los Angeles (see CIVICC 1977a, 1977b).

19. None of these studies can be considered definitive. Valley VOTE claims that its main purpose is not secession but in providing city residents with information about city expenditures, particularly with respect to geographic location in the city.

20. Which also performed a study concluding that the Valley was shortchanged in services (see Selph 1962; Lee 1962).

21. See Buchanan (1991), Buchheit (1978), Brilmayer (1991), Wood (1981), and McGee (1992) for a discussion of standards that constitute a legitimate justification for secession.

22. The group may also be concerned that the philosophy of distributing services based on an area's ability to pay rather than on need may dissuade poorer communities in the Valley from supporting the movement.

23. Oliver's (2000, 364) findings suggest that participation in a separate Valley city may improve slightly. However, the Valley would still fit into Oliver's largest category, "more than one million." Dahl (1980) argued that without smaller governmental units, participation even in cities of between 50,000 and 200,000 is reduced to "nothing more than voting in elections." Regarding efficiency claims, the creation of one new city in the region would do little to create the kind of competitive market for residents that public choice theory envisions. Other studies of public choice theory have found significant diseconomies of scale in cities with more than 250,000 (see Ostrom 1972).

24. Some larger corporations do support Valley VOTE. However, many large Valley-based corporations such as WellPoint Health Insurance Networks and Anheuser-Busch, with broad, statewide constituencies, generally loathe entering the debate over secession (see Fine 1997). In addition to their larger territorial interests, larger Valley corporations generally do not lack the resources and political access to the same extent as smaller Valley businesses. Moreover, they can more easily petition state government when their interests are at stake (Bob Scott, interview, 28 June 2000).

25. As with previous secession efforts, Valley VOTE's business support comes from virtually all identified communities in the Valley. The major retail and office thoroughfare in the Valley runs along Ventura Boulevard from Studio City to Woodland Hills in the affluent South Valley. Other areas such as Northridge, Chatsworth, and Panorama City possess popular commercial districts most notable for their indoor shopping malls.

26. Some have argued that Los Angeles Business Advisors (LABA), formed in 1996 by 24 corporate executives to foster the local business environment, is the modern-day reincarnation of the Chandler-led corporate oligarchy known as the "Committee of 25," which ruled the city until the early 1970s.

27. Although most organizations are waiting for the LAFCO fiscal study to take a formal position on secession, it is almost a foregone conclusion that downtown business and government elites—concerned that the city will be deprived of tax revenue for downtown redevelopment and the negative impact on the city's business image—will strenuously oppose secession (see Purcell 1997).

28. Unlike McKenzie's (1994) study of mandatory homeowner associations, the focus here is on voluntary associations. Most incorporate as nonprofit organizations and have boards of directors, written bylaws, elections, and regular meetings. Unlike mandatory associations, which are typically concerned with events within the community, voluntary associations are far more likely to further a political agenda that extends beyond community boundaries (see Purcell 1997).

29. The recent charter reform effort, passed by Los Angeles voters in June 1999, was largely an attempt to quell secessionist discontent throughout the city. During the debate, Valley business and homeowner associations aligned to agitate for elected neighborhood councils with land-use authority. Downtown business groups such as the Central City Association, Los Angeles chamber of commerce, and the influential Los Angeles Business Advisors emerged to vigorously oppose the proposal, arguing that neighborhood planning would portent economic disaster for the city (see Schatz 1998; Los Angeles Business Advisors 1998). In the end, the new charter created a network of advisory neighborhood councils under a new Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, as well as decentralized planning department functions to various area planning commissions throughout the city.

30. Homeowner associations involved in Valley VOTE include the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association, Homeowners of Encino, Encino Property Owners Association, Woodland Hills Home Owners, Sherwood Forrest Homeowners Association, and Tarzana Property Owners Association. Homeowner leaders from communities such as Van Nuys, Northridge, and Porter Ranch are also prominent in the movement.

31. The largest business alliance in the Valley.

32. This is particularly true in states such as California, where local sales taxes comprise a major portion of city budgets (see Lewis and Barbour 1999).

33. According to the 1990 census, the Valley was 56% Anglo, 33% Latino, 8% Asian, and 4% African-American. Observers expect that the 2000 census will reveal a steady rise in the percentage of Latinos and Asians and a continued decline in the percentage of Anglos.

34. It is also entirely plausible that once in power in a separate city, business and homeowner leaders would seek to gentrify residential and commercial areas in more urbanized, less affluent areas of the central and northeast Valley.

35. Secessionist organizations in Hollywood and San Pedro–Wilmington also comprise predominantly small business and homeowner associations.

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