Examining the Effects of Electoral Systems on Minority Representation in U.S. City Councils Using a Large Sample

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Abstract:

In recent decades, municipal reform movements have lobbied to remove at-large elections from local governing bodies and replace them with elections by district—in which a city's electorate is divided into geographic regions that each elect their own council member. Prior social science research has somewhat concluded that in most cases, district elections more reliably elect non-white city councilors than at-large elections. However, these studies are limited by their use of small samples of municipalities, usually only the largest ones (pop. > 25,000) or those from a single state. I hope to overcome this limitation by employing a massive sample of more than 15,000 municipal governments across 49 states. My findings are consistent with and build upon previous research in that I conclude that as the proportion of non-white residents within a city's population increases, district elections are predicted to elect higher proportions of non-white council members than wholly at-large elections. I also conclude that the effects of district elections on minority representation are greater in cities with populations fewer than 25,000 residents, and that district elections strengthen Black representation in cities with higher levels of Black-white segregation.

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Since the enactment of 1965's Voting Rights Act, minority interest organizations and scholars alike have examined the role electoral systems play in inhibiting or encouraging minority representation. Recently, municipal reform movements have lobbied to remove at-large elections from local governing bodies and replace them with elections in which the electorate is divided into geographic districts that elect their own representatives (sometimes called wards). They argue that under at-large elections, minority voices are diluted because the city's elected representatives are decided by the preferences of the city's median voter—often white and upper-class residents. Minority groups typically reside in geographic clusters within municipalities. So, even though racial minorities may make up comparatively small proportions of cities' overall populations, subdivided districts drawn across racial lines provide a greater possibility that at least one district will contain enough minority-group votes to reach the threshold required to elect a representative. With a few notable exceptions (Welch 1990), scholars have concluded in most cases that district elections enhance the ability of minority candidates to secure electoral victories in city council elections (Abott and Magazinnik 2020; Collingwood and Long 2021; Davidson and Korbel 1981; Engstrom and McDonald 1981; Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah 2010; Sass and Pittman, Jr. 2000).

However, much of the scholarship on the effects of electoral systems on minority representation is limited by employing small and somewhat homogenous samples of cities. Typically, scholars only examine the largest cities (pop. > 25,000) (see, for instance, Welch 1990), cities within a single state (e.g., Abott and Magazinnik 2020; Collingwood and Long 2021), or cities in which the minority population is a significant proportion of the total population (e.g., Alozie and Manganaro 1993). The conclusions drawn from these somewhat homogenous samples are somewhat incomplete in that they only describe relationships between

electoral systems and minority representation in certain types of cities. I hope to overcome these limitations by examining a massive sample of more than 15,000 cities across 49 states that does not discriminate based on a city's size, geography, or minority population. I use an assortment of data collected by research assistants that coded information on municipal-level institutions based on state city/municipal league publications, interviews with officials, and city websites. As far as I am aware, no prior study on city[i] electoral systems has employed a sample size this large or comprehensive.

My findings are consistent with and build upon previous research in that I conclude that as the proportion of non-white residents within a city's population increases, cities with district elections are predicted to elect higher proportions of non-white council members than those with all at-large seats. I also conclude that the effects of district elections on minority representation are greater in cities with populations fewer than 25,000 residents, and that district elections strengthen Black representation in cities with higher levels of Black-white segregation.

Motivating Factors Behind At-Large and District Elections

The widespread adoption of at-large city council elections came as part of the early twentieth century Progressive Era reform platform aimed at "purifying" local politics. In particular, Progressive Era structural reformers feared the ever-increasing presence of foreign-born immigrants in American cities. Under the suppositious brand of stripping power from political machines and establishing business-like efficient government services, the Progressives took away ethnic and neighborhood leaders' access to city government by adopting at-large election systems and reducing the sizes of city councils to fewer seats (Davidson and Korbel 1981). It is likely that cities with slim white majorities feared the potential of a growing racial and ethnic minority voting power in local elections and embraced at-large elections to reinforce white

majorities' influence (Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina 2008). By the middle of the twentieth century, sixty percent of cities in the United States with a population over 10,000 elected all their city councilors at-large, compared to only twenty-three precent that elected their councils exclusively by district (Banfield and Wilson 1963).

Following the policy victories associated with the Voting Rights Act of 1965, advocates quickly transitioned from dismantling poll taxes and literacy tests and toward evaluating electoral systems. Minority group advocates largely point to at-large systems as a critical reason why minority groups are underrepresented on city councils. The Supreme Court agreed with these advocates in its judgement in *White v. Regester* (412 U.S. 775(1973)), which ruled that at times, at-large systems can unconstitutionally dilute minority group votes. *White* and its progeny[ii] influenced a wave of electoral changes—particularly in the South—away from at-large and multimember districts and toward single member districts in large cities and state legislatures (Davidson and Korbel 1981). Typically, cities attempted to ameliorate the ill-effects of at-large systems by establishing one or more electoral districts in which minority racial/ethnic groups make up the majority of the districts' electorate—so-called "majority-minority districts." The creation of these districts across the South from 1970 to 1991 had a substantial impact on Black representation on city councils (Sass and Pittman, Jr. 2000).

Legal and political activism against at-large elections and in favor of district elections returned to the political zeitgeist at the turn of the 21st century with the passage of the California Voting Rights Act (CVRA) of 2001. The CVRA softens the legal requirements by which minority group plaintiffs can challenge the presence of minority vote dilution and overturn their communities' at-large city council and school board elections. The Act welcomed a plethora of successful litigation against at-large systems and has cost Californians millions of dollars in

terms of legal fees and settlements. Within fifteen years of the CVRA's passage, the presence of district-based elections within the state nearly tripled (Heidorn 2017). At the same time, opposition to the electoral reform movements germinated. Critics of district elections claim that the new systems divide rather than unite the cities' populations, cause racially charged voting, result in less responsive city councilors, and have yet to produce any significant increase in minority representation (Welch 1990; see Abott and Magazinnik 2020 for a more detailed review of this literature). Some scholars have also expressed skepticism at majority-minority districts' ability to maximize representation. For instance, in jurisdictions where the minority population grows to an influential number, white majorities could be incentivized to pack the growing minority populations into only one or two legislative districts (Trebbi, Aghion, and Alesina 2008). As a result, minority group legislators would be few in relation to their groups' proportion of the city's population and minority interests may end up underrepresented in legislative bodies (Cameron, Epstein, and O'Halloran 1996).

A more recent body of research, however, has found evidence that switching to district elections can increase minority representation on city councils (Collingwood and Long 2021; Sass and Pittman, Jr. 2000; Trounstine and Valdini 2008). Sass (2000) finds that district elections' ability to elect councils that are more proportionally representative depends largely on the ethnic and racial characteristics of the city's electoral districts versus the city's overall demographics. As a result, minority representation in district elections is positively related to the level of racial residential segregation. Trounstine and Valdini (2008) confirm Sass's findings yet add another caveat—district elections increase council diversity only if underrepresented groups are geographically concentrated and make up a sizable portion of the city's population. Collingwood and Long (2021) found 10% to 12% changes in Latino representation on governing

bodies that adopted district elections in the fallout of the California Voting Rights Act, with the largest changes coming from cities with larger Latino populations. These recent works have led scholars of municipal electoral systems to come to a near consensus on district elections' superior ability to elect higher proportions of minority representatives to city councils.

Yet, these studies are limited by only evaluating smaller samples of cities. Table 1 displays the sample sizes of notable studies on electoral systems and minority representation on U.S. city councils. Typically, these evaluations examine samples of these sizes simply due to a lack of readily available data on city electoral systems. I aim to overcome this limitation by employing a massive sample of more than 15,000 cities across 49 states, in the hopes that this sample can help paint a more accurate picture of how electoral systems affect minority representation in cities across the entire nation, regardless of a city's shape, size, or geography.

Table 1: Sample Sizes of Previous Studies

Author	Year	Sample Size (N)	Notes on Sample
Davidson & Korbel	(1981)	21	Cities in Texas that transitioned from at-large to by district elections
Engstrom & McDonald	(1981)	239	Largest cities within Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas in which Blacks constitute less than half of the voting population
Karnig & Welch	(1982)	264	Cities with pop. > 25,000 and ≥ 10% Black
Welch	(1990)	356	Cities with pop. > 50,000
Alozie & Manganaro	(1993)	572	Cities with pop. > 25,000 and 5% ≤ Black/Hispanic ≥ 50%
Sass & Pittman	(2000)	1067	Large population respondents to ICMA survey
Sass	(2000)	590	Large population respondents to ICMA survey
Trounstine & Valdini	(2008)	7,174	1986, 1992, 1996, and 2001 ICMA respondents
Marschall, Ruhil & Shah	(2010)	309	Cities with pop. > 30,000
Abbot & Magazinnik	(2020)	458	California School Boards
Collingwood & Long	(2021)	476	California Cities

Expectations

Why should we expect to see any difference in minority descriptive representation on councils elected by districts versus those elected all at-large? Because of the nature of winner-take-all

elections, candidates must customarily appeal to their constituencies' median voter—that is, the policy/ideological preference that lies in the center of the electorate's distribution of preferences (Black 1948). In at-large electoral systems, each candidate is seeking the support of the entire city's electorate—appealing to the city's median voter in the process. Nearly all of America's city populations (about 90% of the cities within this sample) are more than 60% white. Thus, if we are to assume that local political preferences align with racial identity—which, many scholars have concluded that they do (see Hajnal and Trounstine 2014)—the median voter will almost always be white, and citywide elections will be decided by white interests.

When councilors are elected via geographic districts, however, the electoral game changes. Rather than answering to the interests of the city's median voter, councilors seeking election by district simply must win the support of those voters that reside in their district. Given the close relationship between residential geography, race, and class in American urban landscapes, it is much more likely that a particular racial minority group will hold enough influence in certain regions of cities to substantially sway the results of the elections that take place in their district. (Be that as it may, this line of reasoning does not consider the possibility of whether city council districts are racially gerrymandered to prevent minority groups from gaining influence.)

In my analysis, I anticipate finding increased support for district elections' superiority over at-large elections in their ability to elect more descriptively representative city councils. My inquiry will go further than the existing research on this topic, however, in that it will be able to describe the impacts of electoral systems on minority representation more accurately as they exist in most of the cities in the United States—irrespective of the size of a city's minority population, overall population, or geographic location. I do not, however, expect the effects of

the different systems to be uniform across all cities. The nature of local politics in different-sized cities varies greatly in terms of competitiveness, size and scope of government, and the services the local governments provide (Oliver, Ha, and Callen 2012). Accordingly, these differences provide plenty of reason to expect that the effects of electoral systems on representation may vary across cities of different sizes. The politics of smaller cities will most likely place more of its emphasis around administrative rather than social or racial issues. By contrast, in larger cities—where the city government provides more services and policy more directly impacts minority groups—issues relating to racial differences will be much more prevalent (Trounstine 2018). This could result in minority groups becoming more involved in local politics in larger cities, eventually leading to a push for increased representation on city councils despite any institutional barriers.

Data

To further examine this question and address some limitations in past work, I use a nearly comprehensive data set on sub-county governing bodies and their electoral institutions across the United States. This data set was created by Butler, Dynes, and Torres (2021) and a team of research assistants, including myself. Research assistants collected data by drawing from information made available on city websites, municipal league publications, state publications, and interviews with city officials. The research assistants coded information on the following city government institutions: presence of a home rule charter, type of government (Mayor-Council, Council Manager, Select Board, Commission, etc.), nonpartisan/partisan elections, election timing, total number of city councilors, and the number of city councils elected at-large. City level demographic data is drawn from Census 2016 estimates. The data yield a sample size of 15,573 unique city governments across 49 states. Figure 1 displays the frequency of the three

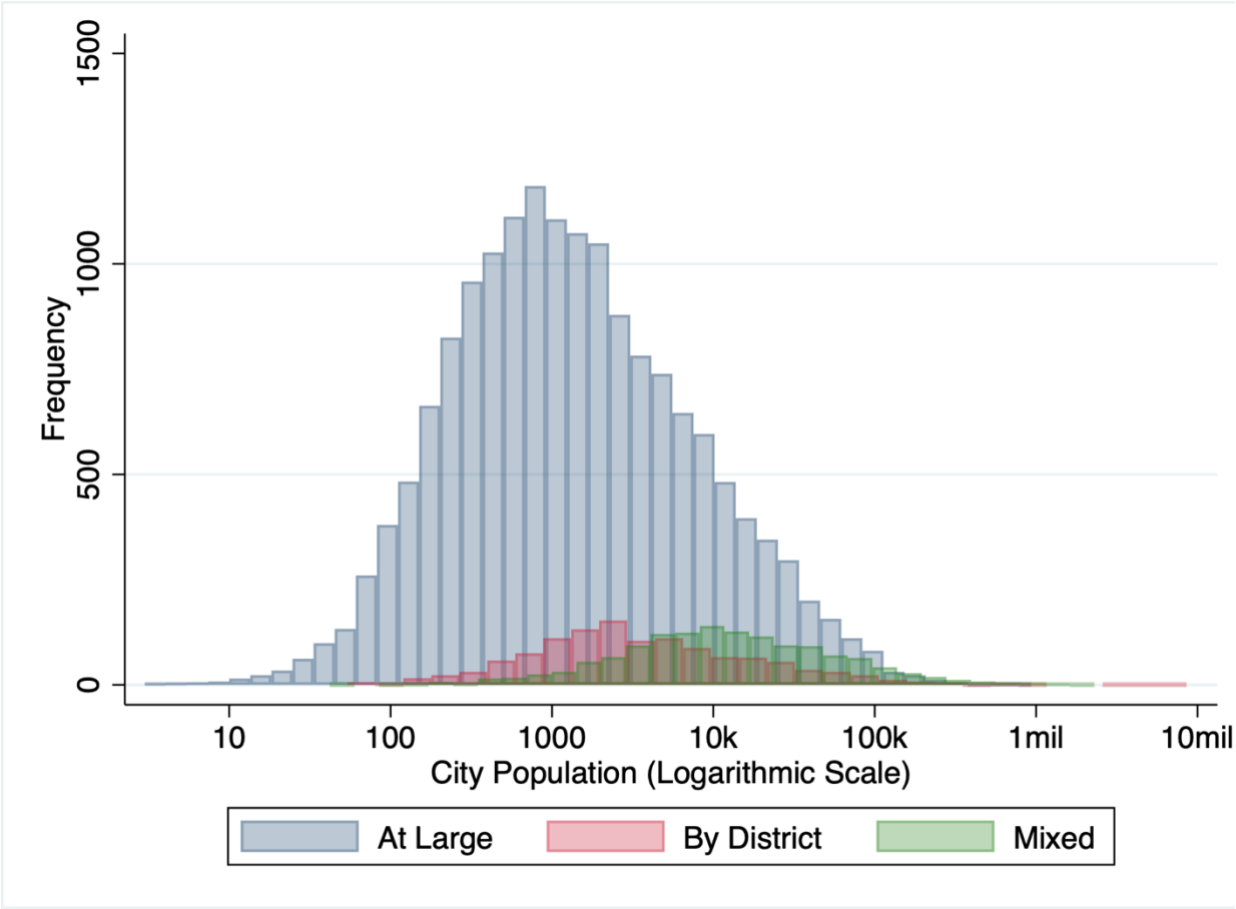
different electoral systems examined in this study. I define councils that elect some of their members by districts and some at-large as "mixed" structures.

To determine the racial characteristics of each city councilor, Butler, Dynes, and Torres (2021) constructed a comprehensive list of municipal elected officials from 2017 using publications from the various states' municipal and city leagues. They then merged this list of officials with a national voter file compiled by Data Trust (a campaign consulting firm similar to Catalist). Because many states' voter files do not contain information on race, Data Trust predicted the races of the city councilors within the sample based on their names and addresses in a similar manner to Enos (2016). As such, there is a possibility for error in the predicted racial characteristics of some of the city councils in the sample. These potential errors should not be widespread enough to skew the results in any one direction, however. In about 1,200 instances, the predicted racial characteristics of a city's council seemed questionable (i.e., the non-white proportion of a city's population was small, but the proportion of non-white city councilors was large, or vice-versa). I manually corrected the predicted race of the city councilors in each of these 1,200+ cities based on information made available via municipal league publications and city websites.

As evident by this sample, at-large elections remain vastly popular among city governments across the United States, especially in cities with smaller populations. Cities that elect their councilors solely by district make up ~8% of the sample and cities that employ a mixed system make up ~9%. The median population for at-large cities is 1,157 (mean 6,315), for by district cities is 2,934 (mean 28,049), and for mixed cities is 11,526 (mean 42,323). Previous studies that only examined cities above a certain population threshold excluded valuable information on smaller cities' governing bodies. In 2019, the Census Bureau estimated that

nearly 61% of the U.S. population lives in cities with fewer than 50,000 residents (Toukabri & Medina 2020). Thus, by omitting these smaller cities, previous studies could not paint accurate pictures on the role of electoral systems play in determining minority representation in the places where most Americans reside. This sample works to overcome these limitations by including these smaller cities in the analyses.

Figure 1: Frequency of Electoral Systems in Sample

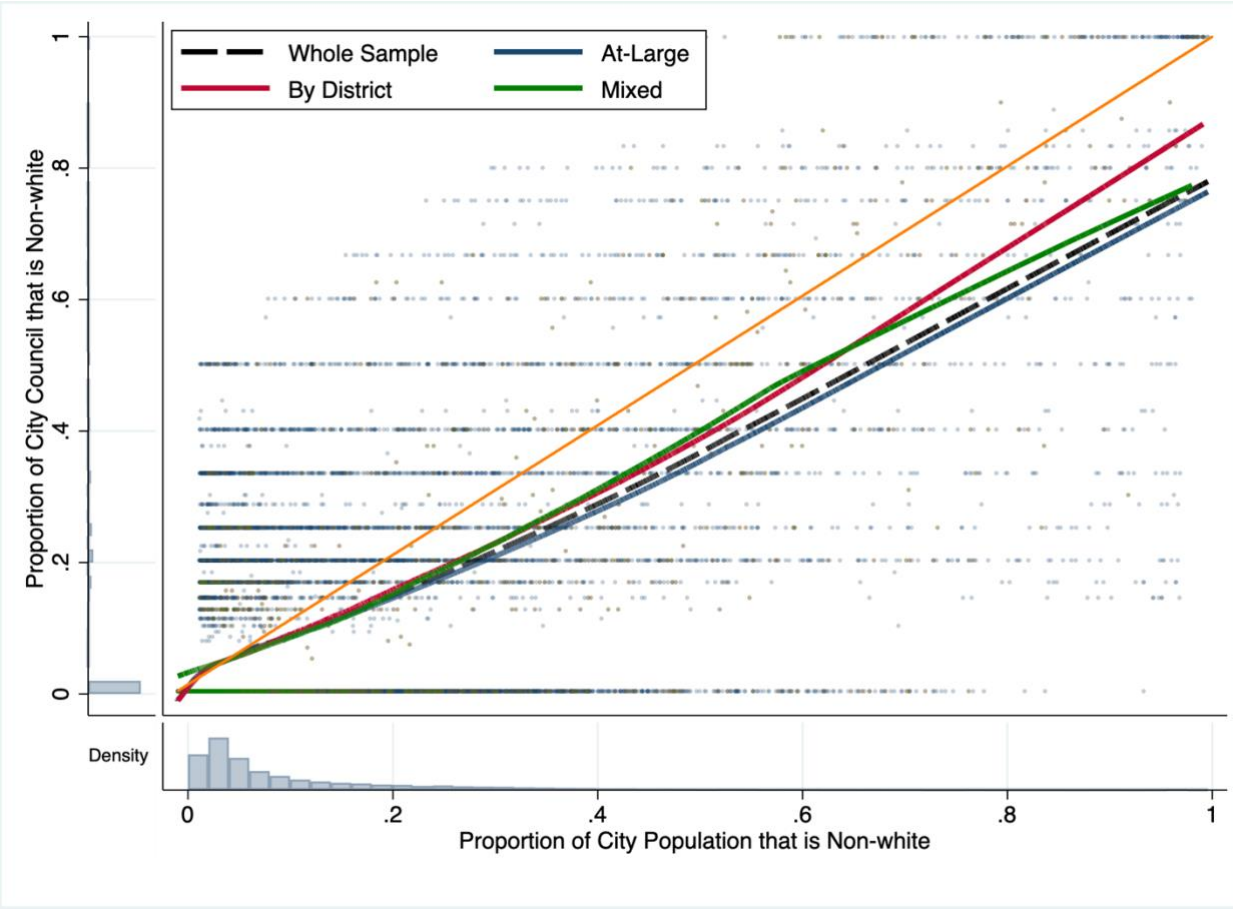


Results

My analysis compares the proportion of the city council that is non-white to the proportion of the city's population that is non-white. Figure 2 displays a scatterplot and rug plots of the observations in the sample with locally weighted scatterplot smoothing ("LOWESS") lines for each of the three election types and for the entire sample. Each dotted plot represents one observation. Darker dots suggest higher frequencies of municipalities with shared statistics. The

lightest dots represent some interesting outliers, but these are very few in comparison to the vast number of cities contained in the sample. The Figure also displays a straight, 45-degree line to illustrate where the cities would achieve perfect proportional or descriptive representation. So, any dot below the 45-degree line is an under-representative city council, and any above is over-representative.

Figure 2: LOWESS Lines and Rug Plots, Non-white Proportions

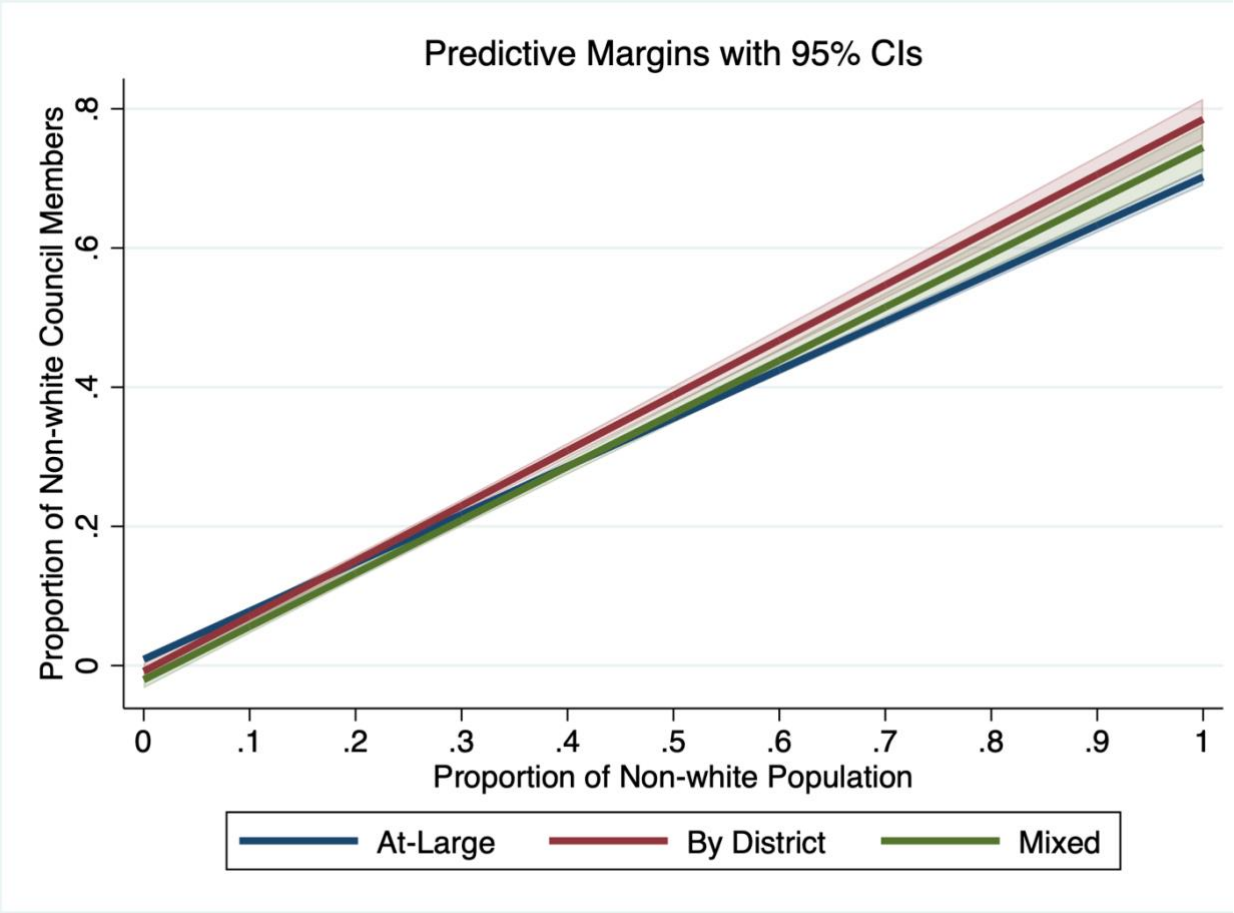


The LOWESS lines indicate noticeable patterns in the different electoral systems' abilities to elect representative city councils. In predominately white cities, there is no noticeable difference between the different election types' capability to boost minority representation. A clear difference emerges, however, as the proportion of the cities' non-white population increases. District and mixed elections are predicted to elect more representative councils than

at-large elections once the proportion of a city's population that is non-white surpasses .2. And, as the proportion of a city's non-white population increases, these differences become much larger.

These results hold in an OLS regression that controls for other variables, including the size of the city council, presence of non-partisan or partisan elections, off-cycle elections (elections that are not concurrent with state/federal elections), as well as the city's logged population, median income, unemployment, and homeownership. Table 2 presents these results. I interact the three different electoral systems with the proportion of the city's population to evaluate the differences in the effect of each system as the minority population in a city changes. These interactions produce three distinct predictive slopes—one for each system—which are displayed in Figure 3. Because there could be several state-level variables that impact minority representation on city councils, I also include a separate model that accounts for state-fixed effects.

Figure 3: OLS Regression Predictive Margins



The regression models reaffirm the conclusions drawn from the LOWESS analysis: in cities with relatively few minority residents, electoral systems make little impact on minority representation. But as the proportion of non-white residents in the population increases, district elections are predicted to elect more representative city councils than those elected only at-large. The regression interactions predict that a .01 increase in the proportion of a city's population that is non-white that elects its councilors all by district will result in a .0054 increase in the proportion of city council that is non-white (when controlling for state-fixed effects). Without state-fixed effects, the coefficient is nearly twice as large. The difference in the predicted proportion of the city council that is non-white between the two systems is statistically

Table 2: OLS Regression Results

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)
Proportion of municipal population that is non-white	0.693*	0.717*
	(0.007)	(0.009)
All by district	-0.017*	-0.004
	(0.007)	(0.007)
Mixed	-0.029*	-0.018*
	(0.007)	(0.007)
All by district × % non-white	0.100*	0.054*
	(0.020)	(0.020)
Mixed × % non-white	0.072*	0.039
	(0.021)	(0.021)
Number of city council seats	0.003*	0.003*
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Nonpartisan elections	0.000	0.004
	(0.003)	(0.006)
Off-cycle elections	-0.003	0.012*
	(0.003)	(0.006)
Population, logged	0.021*	0.013*
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Median income	-0.000*	-0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)
% Unemployed	0.048	0.027
	(0.025)	(0.026)
% Homeowner	0.071*	0.077*
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Constant	-0.103*	-0.073*
	(0.012)	(0.016)
State fixed effects	No	Yes
Observations	15,573	15,573
R-squared	0.504	0.528

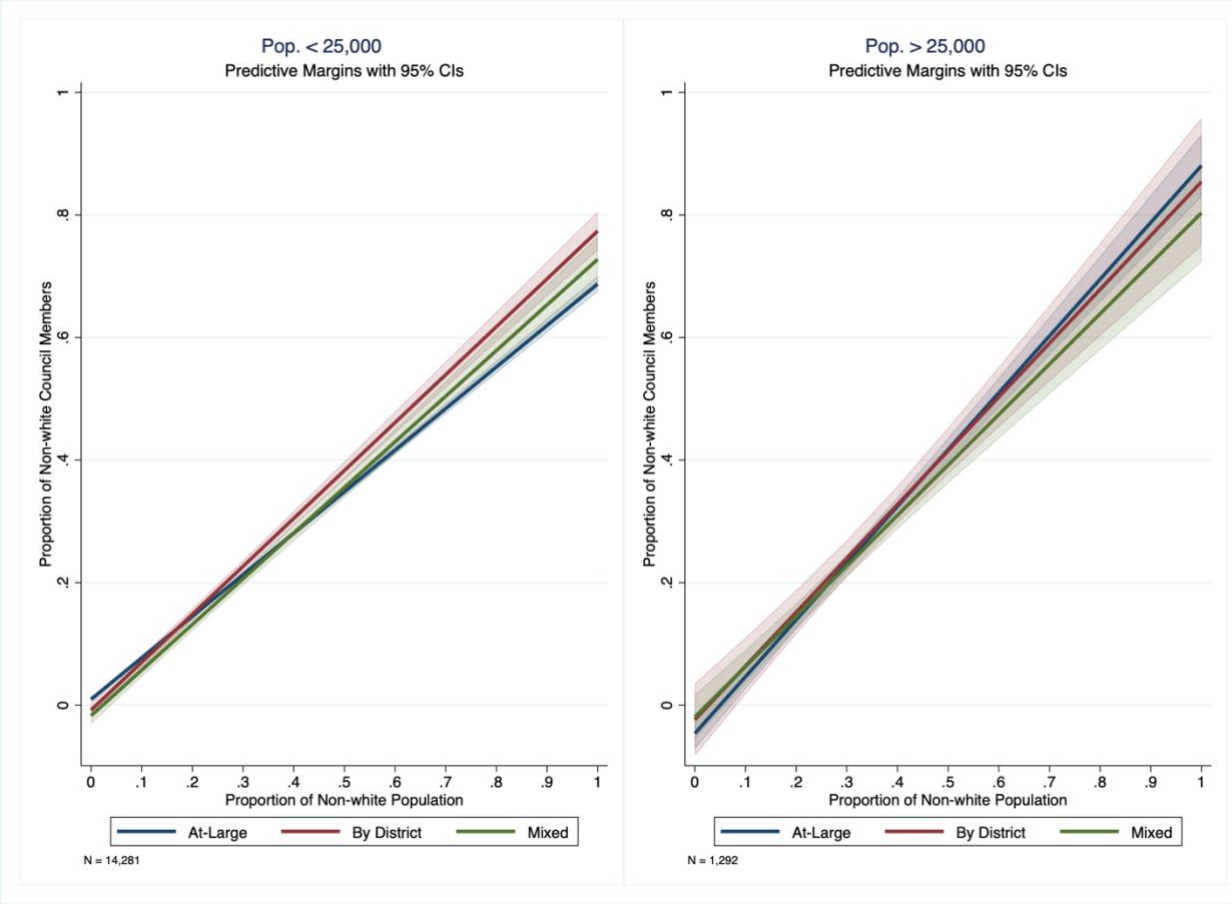
Standard errors in parentheses.
Dependent variable is the proportion of city council that is non-white.
* $p<0.05$

significant when the proportion of non-white residents in a city is greater than .35. Thus, district elections appear to have a significant edge over at-large elections in terms of their ability to boost minority descriptive representation in cities with larger minority populations. And, as the proportion of a city's minority population increases, so too does district elections' ability to elect more representative councils.

Effects Across Different Sized Cities

As previously mentioned, a key strength of the sample is its inclusion of a wide variety of cities in terms of size and geography. Prior research on this topic typically only examined the presence of a relationship between minority representation and electoral systems in the country's largest cities. To see if the relationship between electoral systems and minority representation varies based on the size of the city, I divide the sample's cities into two groups based on their population. One group consists of the cities with populations fewer than 25,000 (N = 14,281), while the other contains all those with populations greater than 25,000 residents (N =1,292). I run similar regression models with the same controls as those present in Table 2—one model for the cities below 25,000 population, and another for the cities above 25,000. The predictive margins with 95% confidence intervals of both models are presented in Figure 4. (See supplementary materials for a detailed report of the regression results.)

Figure 4: Predictive Margins based on City Population



The magnitudes of the slopes of the various systems in larger cities do not predict any significant difference in ability to elect more descriptively representative city councils. Although insignificant, district elections appear to have an edge in their ability to boost minority representation in large cities where the proportion of the city population that is non-white is below .5. This could imply that district elections in these large cities operate in a somewhat opposite manner than they do in smaller cities—effectively boosting representation in cities with smaller minority populations, with the effects getting smaller as the minority population increases.

I attribute the variation in the effects of the electoral systems across cities of different sizes to the contrasting nature of local and racial politics in small and large cities. As mentioned

earlier, local polities in the United States vary greatly in terms of their size, scope, and the services they provide (Oliver, Ha, and Callen 2012). Larger cities especially provide more services than smaller ones and are much more likely to enact social policies that directly impact minority residents. Thus, by nature, local politics in larger cities is much more concerned with racial differences. The greater focus on issues and policy relating to race could result in an increased desire among minority groups to become more involved in the process of local politics, eventually leading to minority representation on city councils regardless of the electoral system. This idea is somewhat supported by the regression coefficients, that suggest that in general city councils in larger cities see higher proportions of non-white council members than smaller cities regardless of the electoral system.

By contrast, smaller city governments are limited in the number of services they provide and the scope of their legislative abilities. As such, the politics of these small-scale democracies may be centered more around administrative rather than racial or social issues. District elections in smaller cities will consequently allow greater opportunities for minority candidates to put their foot in the door in what are seemingly non-racial elections, especially if districts are drawn in a manner such that the minority population gains a more decisive voting power within one or two districts.

These findings exemplify the necessity for research on this topic to include America's smaller cities within their samples. Previous research that concluded the effects of the different electoral systems were slim or insignificant may have missed the larger picture by excluding these smaller cities from their analyses (Welch 1990). Here, I find that the difference between electoral systems' effects is strongest among cities with populations less than 25,000. Had I not

included cities of this nature in the larger sample, I may have incorrectly failed to reject a null hypothesis.

Does Residential Segregation Change Things?

Because racial minorities are often packed into somewhat homogeneous geographic regions within cities, it follows that single member city council legislative districts drawn along racial lines would further assist minority candidates seeking a seat on the council. To test if such a relationship exists, I create three OLS regression models that control for the level of Black, Hispanic, and Asian residential segregation using a smaller sample of cities. To quantify residential segregation, I use the Index of Dissimilarity[iii], which measures the degree to which two groups are spread evenly within census tracts within a city (for a more detailed description of the Index of Dissimilarity, see Logan 2013). This measure is widely used by other work examining the effects of different institutions on descriptive representation (Abott and Magazinnik 2020; Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah 2010; Sass 2000). While the Index of Dissimilarity is helpful in that it quantifies racial residential segregation, it is limited in that it only assigns values to cities with populations larger than 10,000. This unfortunately leaves out a large portion of my sample from the analysis. For the regression models, a dummy variable was created to indicate the cities where at least one of the city councilors is elected by district. Each model predicts a unique dependent variable: the proportion of the city council that is Black, Hispanic, or Asian, respectively. Table 3 presents the three models' results.

Table 3: OLS Regression Results, Residential Segregation

VARIABLES	(1) Black Representation	(2) Hispanic Representation	(3) Asian Representation
At least one councilor elected by district	-0.037*	-0.013	0.001
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.007)
Black-white segregation	0.243*		
	(0.031)		
Elected by district × Black segregation	0.206*		
	(0.047)		
Hispanic-white segregation		0.092*	
		(0.038)	
Elected by district × Hispanic segregation		-0.041	
		(0.055)	
Asian-white segregation			0.019
			(0.019)
Elected by district × Asian segregation			-0.019
			(0.030)
Number of city council seats	0.003*	-0.004*	-0.001*
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Nonpartisan elections	-0.016	0.015	0.007
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.004)
Off-cycle elections	0.026*	-0.025*	0.002
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.003)
Population, logged	-0.049*	0.048*	0.008*
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.003)
Median income	-0.000	0.000	0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
% Unemployed	1.642*	0.730*	0.090*
	(0.107)	(0.107)	(0.045)
% Homeowner	-0.040	-0.119*	-0.071*
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.013)
Constant	0.114*	-0.105*	-0.023
	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.018)
Observations	2,576	2,576	2,576
R-squared	0.250	0.084	0.049

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p<0.05$

The models demonstrate that Black representation on city councils is bolstered by an interaction between residential segregation and district elections. All else held equal, a city with a heavily segregated Black population is predicted to see higher levels of Black representation on

city councils if at least one of the city councilors is elected by district. Such a relationship does not exist, however, for increased Hispanic and Asian representation within the cities in this subsample. Additional analysis is required to determine why exactly these effects are not constant across all three of the measured racial/ethnic groups.

This analysis is somewhat weakened by an absence of data describing the racial characteristics of the drawn districts within each of the cities. Just as geographic districts can be drawn around racially segregated neighborhoods to provide a greater opportunity for minority representation, they could also be gerrymandered in forms that hinder the potential for increased minority representation. Here I only consider the presence of geographically drawn electoral districts, not the districts' racial characteristics. Because such data is not currently available, I leave the possible unmeasured effects of city-level racial gerrymandering on minority representation to future research. Nonetheless, the relationships defined in Table 3 still provide useful information as to what types of relationships currently exist.

Discussion

By employing a massive sample of more than 15,000 cities across 49 states, I attempt to overcome the limitations of previous research and accurately paint a picture of how electoral systems affect minority representation on city councils across the United States. Unique to my sample is the inclusion of a wide variety of cities, not discriminating based on their geography, size, or demographics. By employing a sample this large and diverse, I hope to do what existing research could not. That is, explore the effects of city-level electoral systems on minority representation across all of America's cities, including the smaller towns where most Americans live.

Overall, I find that as the proportion of a city's non-white population increases, district and mixed election systems elect more descriptively representative city councils than those that elect their councilors at-large. These results hold even when other city-level institutions—size of city council, partisan/non-partisan elections, and on/off-cycle elections—are held constant. Further, I find that the effects of electoral structures on minority representation are not the same across different sized cities, with district elections being much more effective at boosting minority representation in smaller cities than in larger cities and districts bolstering Black representation in cities with high levels of Black-white segregation.

These findings are also consistent with recent pieces of literature that employ methods to ensure more accurate causal identification. For instance, by comparing school boards before and after they converted to district elections, Abott and Magazinnik (2020) find higher levels of minority representation post conversion in cities with more minorities and higher levels of residential segregation. Likewise, Collingwood and Long (2021) use matching and difference-in-difference methods to measure the success of minority candidates before and after converting to district elections. They also find that converting to district elections produces higher levels of minority representation, with the largest effects in cities with larger minority populations. My analysis reached near identical conclusions, despite relying on cross-sectional data with weak causal identification.

Now that relationships between electoral systems and minority representation have been identified, scholars and activists may want to begin examining the potential normative benefits to increased minority representation in local government. The limited work that has investigated the existence of these benefits has found that minority legislators can improve the quality of deliberation, introduce more "group-based" legislation, and raise the electorate's level of trust in

the governing process (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1986; Hayes and Hibbing 2017; Mansbridge 1999; Reingold, Haynie, and Widner 2020). Yet, many remain concerned that district elections will lead to more divisive local politics. Future research should determine to what extent that is the case. Further, future scholarship could ask if the substantive representation of minority interests on city councils differs depending on the level of minority descriptive representation.

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[i] I use the terms city, town, village, and municipality interchangeably. While there are minute differences between the terms, each refers to a form of subcounty governing institution. I also use the term city council to refer the elected legislative body, which at times is known by other names such as board of trustees or city commission.

[ii] See also *Mobile v. Bolden* (466 U.S. 55 (1980)), Amended Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, and *Thornburg v. Gingles* (478 U.S. 30 (1986)).

[iii] Data on the Index of Dissimilarity was gathered by Brown University's Spatial Structures in the Social Sciences (S4) Diversity and Disparities project. https://s4.ad.brown.edu/projects/diversity/segregation2010/Default.aspx.