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Do Electoral Systems Matter?: Candidate and Organizational Activity in U.S. Local Elections Under Cumulative Voting, Districting, and At-Large

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**Do Electoral Systems Matter?:
Candidate and Organizational Activity in U.S. Local Elections Under
Cumulative Voting, Districting, and At-Large**

Tracy Sulkin
Honors Senior Project
June 4, 1997

ABSTRACT

This study compares candidate and organizational activity in U.S. local elections under cumulative voting, districting, and at-large electoral arrangements. Candidates' campaign activities and their evaluations of their electoral system were measured with a mail survey conducted in the spring and summer of 1996 and winter of 1997. Preliminary results indicate that electoral systems have a negligible impact on the ways in which candidates contest elections.

By the late 1970's and early 1980's, it became apparent that the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were not doing enough to insure that people of color had influence in the political system. Although minorities were not denied the right to vote, at-large electoral arrangements largely froze their preferred candidates out of holding office. To remedy this, the Voting Rights Act (VRA) was amended in 1982 to prohibit vote dilution¹ and give racial and ethnic minorities greater opportunity to elect representatives of their choice (Engstrom, Taebel, and Cole 1989). In the aftermath of the 1982 amendment to the VRA, a number of lawsuits were brought against jurisdictions where vote dilution was alleged to occur. If vote dilution was confirmed, a jurisdiction was required to replace its at-large electoral rules with an alternative system, usually single member districts (Taebel, Engstrom, and Cole 1990).

Although these districting plans did help to reduce vote dilution and allow minority candidates to be elected, race-based districting introduced a new set of problems (Yale Law Journal 1982). For instance, it is only effective in places where the minority population is geographically compact enough to form a district (Engstrom, Taebel, and Cole 1989). Thus, minority voters who live in communities that are not residentially segregated may not benefit from single member district electoral arrangements. This is of particular concern to Latino voters in the southwestern U.S., whose residential segregation levels have been shown to be

¹ The definition of vote dilution was clarified after the Supreme Court's decision in *Thornburg v. Gingles* (1986) as occurring when the minority is large enough to compose a majority in a single member district, the minority is politically cohesive, and the majority votes as a block to defeat minority candidates.

significantly lower than those of African Americans (Taebel, Engstrom, and Cole 1990).

In addition, the process of drawing and redrawing district boundaries is expensive and fraught with the potential for controversy. For instance, in 1993, the Supreme Court dealt a major blow to districting plans by ruling in *Shaw v. Reno* that North Carolina's "bizarrely shaped" 12th District was unconstitutional because it could only be understood as an attempt to segregate voters by race (Rush 1995). The Court further restrained race-based districting in a second ruling in 1995, when it decided that district boundaries should not be determined by "race in substantial disregard of customary and traditional districting practices" (*Miller v. Johnson*).

Because of these decisions, interest has increased in alternative electoral systems that have the potential to ease minority vote dilution while avoiding some of the problems associated with race-based districting (Amy 1993; Bowler, Donovan, and Brockington 1995; Brischetto 1995; Brischetto and Engstrom 1995; Cole, Taebel, and Engstrom 1990; Guinier 1994; Still 1984). One such system is cumulative voting (CV), which is currently used in over seventy communities, largely in the South and Southwest.

Cumulative voting is a relatively simple modification of the at-large system. Under CV, representatives are elected at-large in multi-member districts and voters are given as many votes as there are seats to be filled. Voters may distribute their votes among several candidates or may "plump" them all on one. The effect of this

system is to lower the threshold² needed to gain office. Under at-large systems, candidates must receive the support of a majority or plurality of the voters to win a seat. Under CV, however, the threshold is lowered. Moreover, the more seats there are to be filled, the lower it becomes. For instance, on a three seat council, a candidate would need the support of 25% of the voters to gain a seat, but on a seven seat council, a candidate would need the support of only 12.5% (if those voters plumped their votes) (Engstrom, Taebel, and Cole 1989: 479). Thus, cumulative voting allows voters to express the intensity of their preferences for candidates (Cole, Taebel, and Engstrom 1990) and gives a politically cohesive minority the opportunity to vote strategically to gain representation (Guinier 1994).

Several empirical studies have shown that cumulative voting does, in fact, provide minority voters with the opportunity to elect representatives of their choice in jurisdictions where they had previously been unable to do so. For example, CV has helped Native American voters in South Dakota elect a representative to a local school board (Engstrom and Barrilleaux 1991), African Americans in Chilton County, Alabama to select a member of the County Commission (Kirksey, Engstrom, and Still 1995), and Latino voters in Alamogordo, New Mexico and various towns in Texas to elect representatives of their choice to school boards and city councils (Cole and Taebel 1992; Engstrom, Taebel, and Cole 1989; Brischetto 1995).

² The threshold of exclusion is defined as “the proportion of votes that any group of voters must exceed in order to elect of a candidate of its choice, regardless of how the rest of the voters cast their votes.” (Brischetto 1995: 351). It is calculated as $(1/[1+n])$, with n equaling the number of seats to be filled.

The possible benefits of CV are not limited, however, to its potential to increase minority representation. From a normative perspective, it has been suggested that systems like cumulative voting have the potential to encourage greater activity by candidates and voters, thus invigorating the political system (Amy 1993; Bowler, Brockington, and Donovan 1996; Guinier 1994). This is due to the strategic burdens that CV places on candidates and groups. Specifically, although systems like CV give groups the opportunity to gain representation proportionate to their vote share, this degree of representation is not automatic. Instead, to maximize their seat share, groups must control candidate nomination and place an optimal number of candidates (i.e. commensurate with their vote share) on the ballot (Still 1984; Bowler, Donovan, and Brockington 1995). If too many or too few candidates are nominated, a group is likely to receive less representation than its electoral strength might indicate.

In addition to managing the nomination process, groups must also coordinate voting. Specifically, candidates and organizations working on their behalf must communicate vote plumping and dispersal strategies to potential supporters and work to register and mobilize these individuals. Thus, under CV, there seem to be strong incentives, which are largely absent under districting and at-large, for candidates to be active campaigners and to seek endorsements and support in campaigning and mobilizing potential voters from political organizations (Bowler, Brockington, and Donovan 1996; Brischetto 1995). Although the reason for insti-

tuting CV in jurisdictions has been to increase representation of ethnic minorities, these incentives exist for all groups.

However, most research done on CV thus far has not focused on the ways in which candidates respond to these incentives. Instead, most attention has been given to individual voting behavior (i.e. Do voters understand CV and use the plumping option?) and outcomes of elections. There have therefore been few empirical studies to assess the effects of CV on candidate behavior and organizational activity. This study will compare campaign activity in local elections using cumulative voting to similar activity in jurisdictions that use at-large or districting arrangements to determine whether electoral systems have an effect on the ways in which elections are contested.

Research Questions

An initial study of candidate behavior in cumulative voting elections has shown that candidates behave in ways that are predictable given the strategic burdens that CV places on them (Bowler, Brockington, and Donovan 1996). Specifically, candidates reported receiving support and endorsements from organizations and communicating “plumping” requests to potential voters. These results suggest several research questions. First, given the incentives for active campaigning that CV places on candidates, does campaign activity in CV elections differ significantly in type or amount from activity in non-CV elections? Second, are CV candidates more likely than districting or at-large candidates to coordinate their campaigns with others and to have organizations working on their behalf to

mobilize and register supporters? Finally, does CV result in different types of candidates running in and winning elections?

In addition to questions of activity, this study will look at candidates' evaluation of their electoral system. Specifically, we are interested in seeing whether differences exist between CV candidates and non CV candidates, winning candidates and losing candidates, and incumbents and non-incumbents. In addition, given the reason for CV being adopted by communities (i.e. to decrease minority vote dilution, we are interested in examining whether minority and white candidates feel differently about CV.

Methods

This study is based on a mail survey of candidates who ran for office in U.S. local elections.³ Candidates who had run in jurisdictions using cumulative voting were surveyed by Bowler, Brockington, and Donovan in the spring and summer of 1996, and candidates in jurisdictions using districting, at-large, or mixed election systems were surveyed by Donovan and Sulkin in the winter of 1997.

Communities using cumulative voting to elect representatives to city or county councils or school boards were identified in Alabama, New Mexico, South Dakota, Illinois, and Texas. In all, thirty-nine jurisdictions were identified. Local officials in these jurisdictions were contacted to request copies of recent ballots or lists of candidates who had run in elections since CV was instituted. In these jurisdictions,

³ The offices candidates ran for include County Council, City Council, and School Board.

352 candidates had run, and valid addresses were obtained for 304 of them.

To identify a sample of candidates who had run in jurisdictions using electoral systems other than cumulative voting, 1990 Census data was used to find communities that matched the CV communities in geographical location, population, and percentage of minority residents. Two matches were found for each CV community. Telephone interviews were conducted in the fall of 1996 with city, school district, or county officials in each of the identified jurisdictions to obtain information about local election systems and a list of the candidates who had run in the last election. In the 78 jurisdictions identified, 337 names of candidates were obtained. Of these, valid addresses were available for 302.

All candidates were sent an eight page survey that included questions about their campaign activities and electoral histories, and about campaigning, slating, and voter registration activities that organizations might have engaged in on their behalf. Candidates were also asked to respond to standard demographic questions and questions asking them to evaluate their current election system. In addition, CV candidates were asked about attempts at communicating voter dispersion/plumping strategies, and districting and at-large candidates were asked about which groups they viewed as their constituency and which groups they appealed to for votes.

A multiple contact survey method was used. Surveys were sent to candidates' home or business addresses with a letter of introduction. Two weeks later, a follow-up postcard was sent to non-respondents. Within two weeks of the follow-

up mailing, remaining non-respondents were contacted by telephone and asked to complete the survey. After the telephone contacts were completed, a final wave of the survey was sent. We received 102 surveys from CV candidates and 133 surveys from non-CV candidates, for a response rate of 38.8%. Filtering questions eliminated 17 respondents from the sample.

This response rate is consistent with those of other mail surveys of state and local officials. For instance, Button and Hedge's (1996) comparative study of African American and white state legislators had a response rate of 40% for African American legislators and 34% for white legislators. Dolan and Ford (1995) had a 46% response rate for their survey of women state legislators, and Moncrief, Thompson, and Kurtz (1996) obtained a 44% return on their survey of long-serving state legislators. MacManus and Bullock (1992) obtained a 53% return on their survey of women elected to local office in Florida.

These surveys, however, were limited to individuals who had won their elections. Since our survey included both winning and losing candidates, it is understandable that our response rate is somewhat lower. Losing candidates were probably less likely to return the survey because they may have perceived it as questioning why they lost. In addition, a number of the jurisdictions surveyed had recently changed electoral systems, likely as a response to vote dilution complaints, so some candidates, particularly non-minorities, may have been wary about answering questions about their campaign activity.

Of the respondents, 37% had run in CV elections, 26% had run in at-large elections, and 23% had run in district elections. The remaining 14% ran in mixed systems or were unsure of the system used. Most candidates reported that, in their most recent election, they had run for city council (46%) or school board (42%). Seventy-eight percent ran in non-partisan races. Three quarters of the candidates had won an election at least once, and nearly half (45%) had been incumbents in the last election. This overrepresentation of winning candidates is the only apparent source of bias in the sample. For the reasons mentioned above, losing candidates were probably less likely to be willing to answer questions about their campaigns. Also, 30% of the candidates in the non CV sample had run unopposed. Thus, the population contained many more winning candidates than losing candidates.

The majority of the respondents were white males. Fourteen percent of the respondents identified themselves as Latino, African American, Native American, or multiracial. The percentage of women in the population (23%)⁴ was equal to the percentage of women respondents. The modal age category for respondents was 41-50, with three quarters of the sample between the ages of 31 and 60.

Results

Candidates' Campaign Activities

The majority of candidates (62%) reported that they conducted some sort of campaign activity in the last election. The most common campaign activities

⁴ This figure is estimated by counting "female" first names of candidates, and thus is not exact.

included paying for advertising (38% of respondents), knocking on doors to meet voters (35% of respondents), telephoning potential voters (30% of respondents), and speaking at public forums (29% of respondents). The average candidate participated in 2.3 campaign activities.⁵

Table 1**Candidate Activity**

| Candidates | Mean # of Activities | Standard Deviation |
|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| All | 2.82 | 2.53 |
| CV | 2.12 | 2.50 |
| At-large | 2.26 | 2.26 |
| Districts | 2.61 | 3.09 |
| Winning | 2.05 | 2.42 |
| Losing | 3.15 | 2.59 |
| Incumbents | 1.46 | 2.08 |
| Non-Incumbents | 2.92 | 2.62 |
| White | 2.22 | 2.54 |
| Minority | 2.48 | 2.38 |

Two-thirds (67%) of the candidates who said they campaigned also reported spending money. Candidates' biggest expenses were newspaper advertisements, postage and mailing, and signs. Of the candidates who spent money, the average amount spent was \$1700, although this number is skewed by a few candidates who spent a relatively large amount on their campaigns.⁶ The median amount spent was \$325, and most candidates (52%) spent no money at all.

⁵ These activities included knocking on doors to meet voters, walking precincts, speaking at public forums, sending letters to the local newspaper, meeting with the editor of the local newspaper, holding meetings with supporters, telephoning potential voters, organizing social events, paying for advertising, and paying for campaign staff.

⁶ The highest amount spent by a candidate was \$17,000.

Table 2

Campaign Expenditures

| Candidates | Mean \$ Spent | Standard Deviation |
|----------------|---------------|--------------------|
| All | \$703 | \$2130 |
| CV | \$627 | \$1543 |
| At-large | \$1129 | \$3532 |
| Districts | \$767 | \$1716 |
| Winning | \$565 | \$1858 |
| Losing | \$781 | \$2028 |
| Incumbents | \$493 | \$1883 |
| Non-Incumbents | \$952 | \$2473 |
| White | \$791 | \$2256 |
| Minority | \$87 | \$201 |

In comparing CV candidates to non CV candidates, there was no difference in the percentage of candidates who reported campaigning (chi square = .017, $p < .896$), and, on average, CV candidates participated in no more activities than non CV candidates ($t = -.607$, $p < .544$). Similarly, CV candidates were no more likely to spend money on the campaign (chi square = .608, $p < .436$) and spent about the same amount ($X = \$631$) as non CV candidates ($X = \755, $t = -.401$, $p < .689$).

Limiting the analysis to only those candidates who reported winning the election yields similar results. Winners in CV and non CV were just as likely to report campaigning and spending money (chi square = .002, $p < .965$ and chi square = .004, $p < .947$), and there was no difference in either the number of activities participated in ($t = -.259$ and $p < .796$) or the average amount of money spent ($t = -.717$, $p < .475$).

Differences did exist, however, between those candidates who won their

elections and those candidates who lost. Losing candidates were more likely to report having campaigned (chi square = 9.054, $p < .003$) and, on average, participated in more campaign activities ($X = 3.26$) than winning candidates ($X = 2.06$, $t = -2.703$, $p < .007$). They also perceived their campaigns to be more active than their opponents'. On a five point scale asking candidates to evaluate their campaigns, losing candidates were more likely than winning candidates to report that their campaigns were "slightly more active" or "far more active" than their opponents' ($t = -2.648$, $p < .010$). Losing candidates were also more likely than winning candidates to report spending money on their campaigns (chi square = 6.625, $p < .010$). However, on average, they spent no more money than did winning candidates ($t = -.770$, $p < .442$).

These differences between winning and losing candidates are likely related to incumbency. Winning candidates were more likely than losing candidates to have been incumbents (chi square = 48.485, $p < .000$). In fact, all incumbent candidates in the CV sample reported winning their elections, as did 92% of the incumbents in the non-CV sample. Non-incumbents won 64% of their elections. Incumbents were less likely than non-incumbents to report have campaigned and spent money (chi square = 11.681 and $p < .001$, chi square = 14.481, $p < .000$). Similarly, incumbents participated in fewer campaign activities ($X = 1.26$) than non-incumbents ($X = 2.92$, $t = 4.088$, $p < .000$). There was no significant difference, however, in the amount the two groups spent ($t = 1.299$, $p < .196$).

The differences between winning and losing candidates are most likely not associated with race. Minority candidates were just as likely as white candidates to have reported winning their election (chi square = .715, $p < .398$). They were also just as likely to report having campaigned and spent money (chi square = 2.329, $p < .127$, chi square = .114, $p < .736$). Minority candidates also reported the same number of campaign activities as non-minorities ($t = -.476$, $p < .634$). Interestingly, they reported spending substantially less on their campaigns ($X = \$87$) than white candidates ($X = \$813$, $t = 3.981$, $p < .000$). Those minority candidates who won their elections, however, spent the same amount as those who lost ($t = .178$, $p < .861$). Therefore, amount of money spent on the campaign does not seem to be associated with minority candidates' electoral success.

Organizational Activities

Since the literature suggests that organizational activity is important for candidates, particularly candidates running under CV, we asked questions about candidates' efforts at mobilizing and registering voters, about organizations that may have helped them or their opponents to do this, and about any activities these organizations may have conducted on their behalf. Overall, very few candidates reported receiving help from organizations. Five and a half percent of respondents reported that campaigning or advertising had been done on their behalf by an organization other than their campaign. Three fourths of these said that the organization had spent money to assist them. The most common activities organizations performed were to pay for signs and newspaper ads, and to knock on doors, walk

precincts, and telephone potential voters to inform them about the candidate and the campaign. Since so few candidates reported receiving campaign help from organizations, it is not possible to see whether differences exist between CV candidates and non-CV candidates.

A higher percentage of candidates reported that their campaign, or organizations working on behalf of the campaign, worked to register and mobilize potential supporters. Twenty-two percent of candidates said that their campaign worked to mobilize supporters. There is no significant difference between the percentage of CV candidates and the percentage of non CV candidates who reported that they led efforts to mobilize and register supporters (chi square = .661, $p < .416$). Limiting the analysis to only those candidates who won yields similar results. CV winners were no more likely to participate in this activity than non-CV winners (chi square = .362, $p < .547$).

Differences were apparent, however, in the proportion of minority candidates and white candidates who worked to mobilize and register their supporters. Minority candidates were more likely to participate in this activity (chi square = 5.408, $p < .020$). However, minority candidates who won were no more likely to report efforts to mobilize supporters than those who lost (chi square = .095, $p < .758$). Thus, although minority candidates were, in general, more active in efforts to register and mobilize supporters, this does not seem to have been a significant factor in explaining the success of individual candidates.

Nearly one fourth of candidates (23.4%) reported that there were groups in the community working to register and mobilize voters who would have been likely to support their opponent(s). The groups most commonly mentioned were LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) and labor unions. Candidates who ran in cumulative voting were more likely than non CV candidates to say that there were organizations were working to mobilize their opponents' supporters (chi square = 6.868, $p < .032$). No differences existed between minority candidates and white candidates (chi square = 1.212, $p < .271$).

A smaller percentage of candidates (13.7%) said that community groups worked to mobilize and register *their* supporters. Candidates in CV were no more likely than non CV candidates to have organizations working to mobilize their supporters (chi square = .031, $p < .860$). However, minority candidates were more likely than white candidates to receive the help of community groups in this area (chi square = 4.888, $p < .027$).

In addition to these questions about organizational activity, candidates were asked whether they coordinated their campaign with other candidates. Seventeen candidates (8.5%) reported that they campaigned as part of a well-organized or loosely organized group of candidates, and another 7.5% reported that they were endorsed by a group that recommended candidates that shared similar views. The vast majority (84%), however, said that their campaign was not linked to any others. No differences exist on this measure between CV and non CV candidates

(chi square = 1.289, $p < .525$), winning candidates and losing candidates (chi square = 2.134, $p < .344$), or minority candidates and white candidates (chi square = .994, $p < .608$).

Summary information about candidates' campaign and organizational activities is given below in tables 3-5.

Table 3**CV and Non CV Candidates Compared**

| Hypothesis | Reject Null? | Test Stat Value | Probability |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Campaigned? | No | chi square = .017 | .896 |
| Spent Money? | No | chi square = .608 | .436 |
| # of Activities | No | t = -.607 | .544 |
| \$ Spent | No | t = -.40 | .689 |
| Register/mobilize? | No | chi square = .661 | .416 |
| Groups working for | No | chi square = .031 | .860 |
| Groups working against | Yes | chi square = 6.868 | .032 |
| Campaigned as a group | No | chi square = 1.289 | .525 |

Table 4**Minority and Non-Minority Candidates Compared**

| Hypothesis | Reject Null? | Test Stat Value | Probability |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Campaigned? | No | chi square = 2.329 | .127 |
| Spent Money? | No | chi square = .114 | .736 |
| # of Activities | No | t = -.476 | .634 |
| \$ Spent | Yes | t = 3.981 | .000 |
| Register/mobilize? | Yes | chi square = 5.408 | .020 |
| Groups working for | Yes | chi square = 4.888 | .027 |
| Groups working against | No | chi square = 1.212 | .271 |
| Campaigned as a group | No | chi square = .994 | .608 |

Table 5**Winning and Losing Candidates Compared**

| Hypothesis | Reject Null? | Test Stat Value | Probability |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Campaigned? | Yes | chi square = 9.054 | .003 |
| Spent Money? | Yes | chi square = 6.625 | .010 |
| # of Activities | Yes | t = -2.703 | .007 |
| \$ Spent | No | t = -.770 | .442 |
| Register/mobilize? | No | chi square = .005 | .942 |
| Groups working for | No | chi square = .108 | .743 |
| Groups working against | No | chi square = 2.222 | .136 |
| Campaigned as a group | No | chi square = 2.134 | .344 |

Candidate Characteristics

In comparing electoral systems, another issue to examine is what types of candidates run in and win elections. Specifically, do certain groups fare better in one system than in others? To answer this, I compared the percentages of minority, women, and incumbent candidates and winners in CV and non CV election systems, and looked at the ages of candidates in each category. No difference existed in the percentage of minorities who contested elections in the two types of systems (chi square = .052, $p < .820$), and minority candidates and white candidates won their elections at about the same rate (chi square = 1.533, $p < .216$). Similarly, no difference existed between CV elections and non CV elections in the number of women candidates who contested and won these elections (chi square = .051, $p < .822$, chi square = .041, $p < .840$). The two systems attracted about the same proportions of incumbent and non-incumbent candidates (chi square = .834, $p < .361$), and these candidates fared the same in outcome across the systems (chi square = 1.096, $p < .295$). Finally, there were no apparent differences in the ages

of candidates or winners in CV and non CV races (chi square = 3.108, $p < .807$, chi square = 1.251, $p < .974$). Thus, CV appears to neither favor nor hurt minority, women, incumbent, or younger/older candidates.

Additional Considerations

Most of the jurisdictions we surveyed had populations under 3,000. Since it is possible that differences in candidate activity and organizational activity in CV elections and non CV elections may only emerge when looking at jurisdictions of a larger size, I reanalyzed the data, limiting the analysis to those places that had populations over 30,000. This included six cities in the states of New Mexico and Illinois. We received surveys back from twenty eight candidates who had run in these places. Since the N is low, significance tests may be suspect. However, my analysis showed that CV candidates in these jurisdictions were no more likely than non CV candidates to report that they campaigned (chi square = .465, $p < .486$) or spent money (chi square = .485, $p < .486$). Similarly, they participated in no more activities ($t = -.319$, $p < .755$) and spent no more money ($t = .527$, $p < .605$) than non CV candidates.

In comparing organizational activities, there were no differences between CV candidates and non CV candidates in whether organizations campaigned or spent money on their behalf (chi square = 1.406, $p < .236$, chi square = 2.435, $p < .119$). In addition, CV candidates were no more likely to report that their campaign worked to mobilize and register potential supporters (chi square = .262, $p < .609$)

or that community groups worked to help their opponents in these activities (chi square = .991, $p < .319$). However, they were slightly less likely than non CV candidates to say that community groups worked to mobilize supporters on their behalf (chi square = 3.291, $p < .070$). Finally, no difference exists between CV candidates and non CV candidates in the percentage who coordinated their campaign with others' (chi square = 3.915, $p < .141$). In short, then, it seems that, at least on these measures, size of the jurisdiction does not affect the differences (or lack thereof) in activity and organization between CV and non CV candidates.

Since CV and districting are both used as alternatives for at-large in jurisdictions where vote dilution is confirmed, it is also of interest to see whether differences exist between the two systems in candidate activity or organization. If one of the systems is found to encourage higher levels of activity and more vigorous campaigns, then perhaps it should be the preferred alternative in vote dilution cases.

An analysis of the data, however, shows that no significant differences exist in either candidate activity or organization between CV candidates and districting candidates. Candidates in the two groups were just as likely to report having campaigned and spent money (chi square = 1.841, $p < .175$, chi square = 0, $p < 1.000$). Moreover, there were no differences overall in either the average number of activities candidates participated in ($t = -.607$, $p < .54$)⁷ or the amount they spent ($t = -.620$, $p < .537$).

⁷ When the analysis is limited to only those candidates who reported participating in one or more campaign activities, a slight difference emerges between the two groups. Districting candidates participated in more activities ($X = 4.750$) than CV candidates ($X = 3.580$, $t = -1.967$, $p < .055$).

CV candidates and districting candidates were also just as likely to report participating in efforts to register and mobilize potential supporters (chi square = .469, $p < .493$). No difference existed between the two groups in the percentage who reported that groups in the community had worked to mobilize supporters who would have been likely to support their candidacy (chi square = .130, $p < .718$). CV candidates were, however, slightly more likely than districting candidates to report that groups in the community were working to register and mobilize potential supporters of their opponents (chi square = 2.886, $p < .089$). Finally, CV candidates were no more likely than districting candidates to report coordinating their campaigns with those of other candidates (chi square = .079, $p < .961$).

Candidate Evaluation of Electoral Systems

Candidates were fairly evenly split in their evaluations of their electoral systems. Ranking the current system on a five point scale (comparing it to “other systems”), 21% said that their system was “very good,” 20% reported that it was “good,” 19% said it was “the same,” 16% ranked their system as “poor,” and 17% said that it was “very poor.” Non CV candidates were more likely than CV candidates to rank their system as “very good” or “good” and less likely to rank it as “poor” or “very poor” (chi square = 42.771, $p < .000$).

Table 6**Candidates' Evaluation of Electoral System**

| Candidates | Very Good | Good | Same | Poor | Very Poor |
|------------|-----------|------|------|------|-----------|
| All | 19% | 18% | 17% | 15% | 15% |
| CV | 4% | 18% | 9% | 30% | 30% |
| At-large | 46% | 16% | 20% | 6% | 4% |
| Districts | 25% | 27% | 25% | 8% | 10% |
| Winners | 22% | 21% | 17% | 16% | 16% |
| Losers | 9% | 17% | 31% | 11% | 23% |
| Incumbents | 23% | 24% | 18% | 13% | 16% |
| Non-Inc. | 25% | 16% | 16% | 21% | 13% |
| White | 19% | 19% | 19% | 18% | 19% |
| Minority | 33% | 30% | 17% | 7% | 7% |

Since CV systems were imposed upon jurisdictions to remedy minority vote dilution, group differences may be expected in candidates' evaluation of electoral systems. Several studies of CV elections have shown that minority voters and candidates tend to evaluate CV more favorably than do white voters and candidates (Cole, Taebel, and Engstrom 1991; Engstrom and Barrilleaux 1991). Minority respondents in the CV sample did evaluate the system more favorably than white respondents (chi square = 12.582, $p < .002$). No differences existed, however, between minority and white candidates' evaluations of at-large (chi square = .105, $p < .949$) or districting systems (chi square = 1.668, $p < .434$).

An analysis of the data shows that, overall, winners were slightly more likely than losers to rank their system as "very good" or "good" (chi square = 5.402, $p < .067$). Non CV winners were more likely than CV winners to rank their system favorably (chi square = 34.019, $p < .000$). No differences exist between incumbents and non-incumbents in their evaluation of the electoral system (chi square =

.537, $p < .764$). However, non CV incumbents ranked their system more favorably than did CV incumbents (chi square = 25.072, $p < .000$). Overall, then, successful CV candidates reported dissatisfaction with the electoral system, despite the fact that they won their elections.

This phenomenon also appeared when CV candidates were asked whether they felt that CV helped or hurt their chances of election. Interestingly, no differences exist between winners and losers on this measure (chi square = .036, $p < .850$). In fact, while 17% of losing candidates thought that CV helped their chances of election, only 14% of winners felt the same. These results are likely associated with race because minority candidates, even when they lost, were more likely than non-minorities to say that the system helped them (chi square = 6.496, $p < .011$). White candidates, on the other hand, reported dissatisfaction with CV, regardless of how they had fared in their elections (Bowler, Donovan, and Brockington 1996).

Limiting the analysis to only non CV candidates shows that districting and at-large candidates were just as likely to rank their systems as “very good” or “good” and “poor” or “very poor” (chi square = 2.296, $p < .130$). Looking at only white candidates or only minority candidates yields similar results (chi square = 2.947, $p < .086$, chi square = .014, $p < .906$).

Over one third (35%) of the non CV candidates reported that their jurisdiction had, in the past, used a different electoral system than the one currently in use. The majority of these jurisdictions (76%) had used at-large arrangements and had

moved to a districting or mixed (at-large and districting) system. Nearly half (49%) of the candidates who reported that their jurisdiction had used another system in the past said that they had run under the previous system. Fifty three percent thought that the old system was “better” than the new system, 11% thought it was “worse,” and 27% didn’t know or thought it was “about the same” as the current system.

Discussion and Conclusions

Thus far, there have been few empirical studies of candidate behavior in CV elections, and this study is among the first to compare candidate activity in local elections across electoral systems. Therefore, given the preliminary nature of these findings and the small sample size, any conclusions drawn should be accepted with caution.

At this point, however, it is not possible to confirm the hypotheses put forth about campaign activity in CV compared to similar activity in districting and at-large systems. Specifically, the results show that CV and non CV candidates behave similarly regarding campaign activity, expenditures, and organization. In these mostly small communities, the electoral system used does not seem to affect the ways in which elections are contested. Therefore, although CV may allow for more minority representation than pure at-large and may save communities the expense of drawing and redrawing district boundaries, it does not appear to result in the normative benefits (e.g. more vigorous campaigns, more participation by candidates and groups) that proponents like Amy (1993) and Guinier (1994) attribute

to it.

It is possible that there is a learning curve associated with the strategic burdens that CV places on candidates. Most of the CV communities included in the survey had contested only one or two elections under CV rules. Therefore, candidates may not have been very familiar with the system. As candidates and community groups become more savvy about CV, perhaps differences will emerge in the way elections are contested. Thus, the results of this study will be useful as a baseline for future research on this topic.

One of the more interesting findings from this study is not directly related to electoral systems, but focuses instead on the campaign behavior of minority candidates. Specifically, although minority candidates participate in the same number of campaign activities as white candidates, they spend much less money on their campaigns. Our results show that, on average, white candidates spent nine times the amount of money that minorities spent. However, minority candidates were just as likely as white candidates to have reported winning their elections. This suggests that minority candidates may participate in different types of activities than white candidates. Along these lines, our findings show that minority candidates put more emphasis on activities designed to register and mobilize potential supporters and appear to rely more heavily than white candidates on assistance from community groups and organizations in these efforts.

Future research is needed to further investigate candidate activity in these

local elections. Specifically, measures that evaluate the intensity of activity (rather than just the number of activities) by candidates may better illustrate differences between minority and white candidates and, perhaps, between CV and non CV candidates. Longitudinal research on communities that have adopted CV plans is also necessary to show whether there is a learning curve associated with the strategic demands that CV places on candidates. Finally, since assistance from organizations appears particularly important to minority candidates, and perhaps also to CV candidates, future research should examine how these organizations affect participation on the part of candidates and voters.

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Appendix A Communities Surveyed

| City/Town | State | Body | Electoral System |
|------------------|-------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Abernathy | TX | City Council | CV |
| | | School Board | CV |
| Alamogordo | NM | City Council | CV |
| Andrews | TX | School Board | CV |
| Anson | TX | City Council | CV |
| | | School Board | CV |
| Anton | TX | City Council | CV |
| Aransas Pass | TX | School Board | at-large |
| Atlanta | TX | School Board | CV |
| Balmorhea | TX | City Council | at-large |
| | | School Board | at-large |
| Bishop | TX | City Council | at-large |
| | | School Board | at-large |
| Bovina | TX | School Board | CV |
| Bridgeport | AL | City Council | at-large |
| Brownfield | TX | School Board | mixed |
| Calera | AL | City Council | districts |
| Carbon Hill | AL | City Council | at-large |
| Centre | AL | City Council | CV |
| Chilton County | AL | Board of Commissioners | CV |
| | | School Board | CV |
| Clovis | NM | City Council | districts |
| Colorado City | TX | School Board | districts |
| Commerce | TX | School Board | at-large |
| Covington County | AL | Board of Commissioners | districts |
| | | School Board | at-large |
| Crosbyton | TX | City Council | districts |
| | | School Board | districts |
| | | School Board | mixed |
| Cuero | TX | School Board | mixed |
| Decatur | IL | City Council | at-large |
| Denver City | TX | School Board | CV |
| Dimmitt | TX | City Council | mixed |
| | | School Board | districts |
| Dumas | TX | School Board | CV |
| Earth | TX | City Council | CV |
| | | School Board | CV |
| Flandreau | SD | School Board | at-large |

| City/Town | State | Body | Electoral System |
|-----------------|-------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Friona | TX | City Council | CV |
| | | School Board | CV |
| Fulton | AL | City Council | at-large |
| George West | TX | City Council | at-large |
| Gladewater | TX | School Board | at-large |
| Gonzales | TX | School Board | at-large |
| Guin | AL | City Council | CV |
| Hale Center | TX | City Council | CV |
| | | School Board | CV |
| Hart | TX | School Board | at-large |
| Haskell | TX | School Board | districts |
| Heath | AL | City Council | CV |
| Hobbs | NM | City Council | districts |
| Kaufman | TX | School Board | at-large |
| Keene | TX | School Board | at-large |
| Lawrence County | AL | Board of Commissioners | districts |
| | | School Board | districts |
| Levelland | TX | School Board | mixed |
| Lockhart | TX | School Board | CV |
| Lockney | TX | City Council | districts |
| | | School Board | districts |
| Loraine | TX | City Council | at-large |
| Lorenzo | TX | City Council | districts |
| | | School Board | mixed |
| Luling | TX | City Council | districts |
| | | School Board | at-large |
| Marfa | TX | School Board | districts |
| McKenzie | AL | City Council | districts |
| Morton | TX | City Council | at-large |
| | | School Board | CV |
| Munday | TX | City Council | at-large |
| Myrtlewood | AL | City Council | CV |
| O'Donnell | TX | City Council | CV |
| | | School Board | CV |
| Olton | TX | City Council | CV |
| Peoria | IL | City Council | CV |
| Petersburg | TX | City Council | at-large |
| Plains | TX | City Council | at-large |
| Platte | SD | School Board | at-large |
| Pleasanton | TX | School Board | districts |
| Post | TX | City Council | districts |
| | | School Board | at-large |

| City/Town | State | Body | Electoral System |
|--------------|-------|------------------------------|------------------------|
| Ralls | TX | City Council School Board | districts mixed |
| Red Level | AL | City Council | at-large |
| Refugio | TX | City Council School Board | at-large districts |
| Richmond | TX | School Board | districts |
| Rockford | IL | City Council | districts |
| Roscoe | TX | City Council | CV |
| Rotan | TX | City Council School Board | CV CV |
| Rutledge | AL | City Council | at-large |
| Seagraves | TX | City Council School Board | districts districts |
| Sisseton | SD | School Board | CV |
| Spur | TX | City Council School Board | districts mixed |
| Stamford | TX | School Board | CV |
| Stanton | TX | City Council School Board | districts mixed |
| Sundown | TX | City Council | at-large |
| Sweetwater | TX | School Board | districts |
| Tahoka | TX | City Council School Board | districts districts |
| Three Rivers | TX | City Council School Board | districts at-large |
| Tulia | TX | City Council School Board | districts mixed |
| Vernon | AL | City Council | at-large |
| Waelder | TX | City Council School Board | at-large at-large |
| Winters | TX | City Council School Board | districts mixed |
| Yoakum | TX | School Board | CV |
| Yorktown | TX | City Council School Board | CV CV |

Appendix B Survey

Western Washington University Local Candidate Survey

This survey is part of a university study designed to improve our understanding of local elections. You have been included in the survey because your name was listed recently on a local ballot that we have obtained. We are surveying everyone listed on these ballots.

Given your experience as a candidate for public office, your participation in this survey is very important to us. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey. Remember, your responses are confidential. After the results are tabulated, there will be no record that can be used to identify your response from the rest of the sample. We will mail you a summary of our results. Thank you for your time.

1) Have you ever run as a candidate for public office?

YES NO

2) Have you ever been appointed to a public elected body? (i.e. school board, city council, etc.)

YES NO

2a) If YES, what office(s)? _____

If you answered **NO** to Question #1, you may **stop now** and return the survey in the enclosed envelope. Otherwise, please continue.

3) Please list the offices you have run for recently. _____

4) What is the **most recent** office you sought?

School Board/Board of Education

County Commission/County Council

City Council/Town Council

Other--please specify: _____

5) What is the name of the jurisdiction you **most recently** sought office in?

6) Have you ever won an election for a public office?

YES, once YES, more than once

NO

6a) If YES to #6, which offices? _____

6b) If YES to #6, when were you most recently elected?

_____ (Month and Year)

6c) IF YES to #6, were you an incumbent at the time?

YES NO

7) (non CV survey only) In your most recent election, did you run unopposed?

YES NO

7a) If YES to #7, was the election cancelled?

YES NO

8) Considering your **most recent** run for office, how would you say your campaign compared to campaigns of the people you were running against?

- My campaign was **far more active** and organized than most.
- My campaign was **slightly more active** and organized than most.
- My campaign was **about as active** and organized as most.
- My campaign was **slightly less active** and organized than most.
- My campaign was **far less active** and organized than most.
- Don't know

9) Considering your **most recent** run for office, how would you say your campaign finances compared to the people you were running against? (Consider spending from all sources.)

- My campaign spent **far more money** than most other candidates.
- My campaign spent **slightly more money** than most other candidates.
- My campaign spent **about the same** as most other candidates.
- My campaign spent **slightly less money** than most other candidates.
- My campaign spent **far less money** than most other candidates.
- None of the candidates spent any money on the campaign.
- Don't know

10) Did you conduct any campaigning at all in this recent run?

- YES NO

10a) If **YES** to #10, which of the following activities were part of your campaign? (Check all that apply, if **NO** to #10, skip to #12):

- Knocked on doors to meet voters
- Walked precincts
- Spoke at public forums
- Sent letters to editor of local paper
- Met with editors/reporters from local paper
- Held meetings with supporters
- Telephoned potential supporters
- Organized social events (barbecues, dinners, etc.)
- Paid for advertising
- Paid for campaign staff
- Other--please specify _____

11) Did your campaign efforts involve spending any money on the election (beyond filing fees)?

- YES NO

11a) If **YES** to #11, what did you spend money on? (Check any that apply.)

- Signs
- Mailings/Postage
- Radio ads
- Newspaper ads
- TV ads
- Information brochures
- Bumper stickers
- Food, coffee, and drinks for campaign volunteers
- Telephone bills from the campaign
- Miscellaneous items promoting candidate's name
- Other--please specify _____
- Precinct data
- Staff/personnel
- Office space
- Legal consultations
- Opinion research/data
- Political consultant
- Buttons

11b) If **YES** to #11, what was the single biggest expense? _____

11c) If **YES** to #11, approximately how much did you spend? _____

12) Was any money spent on your behalf by some organization/group other than you and your campaign?
 YES NO (if NO, skip to #14)

12a) If YES to #12, what group(s)? _____

13) Was any campaigning or advertising done on your behalf by some organization/group other than you and your campaign?
 YES NO

13a) If YES to #13, what group(s)? _____

13b) If YES to #13, what sort of campaign activities did the group do on your behalf? (Check any that apply.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Signs on your behalf | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide you with precinct data |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mailings/postage | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide you staff/personnel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radio ads | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide you office space |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper ads | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal services/consultations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TV ads | <input type="checkbox"/> Provide opinion research/data |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Information brochures | <input type="checkbox"/> Political consultant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provide food and coffee for campaign volunteers | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cover telephone bills from the campaign | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Knocked on doors on your behalf | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walked precincts on your behalf | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organized public forums for your benefit | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sent letters to editors of local paper in support | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephoned potential supporters on your behalf | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Organized social events (barbecues, dinners, etc.) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paid for advertising | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paid for campaigning staff | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other--please specify | |

14) In your most recent election, did your campaign work actively to register and mobilize potential supporters?
 YES NO

15) In your most recent election, were there groups in the community that were working actively to register voters that would have been likely to support your candidacy?
 YES NO

15a) If YES to #15, what group(s)? _____

16) In your most recent election, were there groups in the community that were working actively to register and mobilize supporters that would have been likely to support your opponent(s)?
 YES NO

16a) If YES to #16, what group(s)? _____

17) In your most recent election, was any effort made to coordinate your campaign with the campaign(s) of other candidates who shared some of your views and/or interests?

- Yes, I ran as part of a well-organized group of candidates sharing similar views.
 Yes, I ran as part of a loosely organized group of candidates sharing similar views.
 No, but I was endorsed by a group that recommended certain candidates who shared some views.
 No, my campaign was not linked to any others.

18) If you did campaign jointly with other candidates, who were they?

19) (non CV survey only) If you are a representative or potential representative, who do you view as the primary constituency you represent?

- Mostly people in my own racial/ethnic group
 People in all racial/ethnic groups
 Mostly people outside my own racial/ethnic group

20) (non CV survey only) What groups do you concentrate on when appealing for votes?

- Mostly people in my own racial/ethnic group
 People in all racial/ethnic groups
 Mostly people outside my own racial/ethnic group

21) (non CV survey only) In your most recent run for public office, which electoral system was used?

- Districts Mixed (both districts and at-large)
 At-large Other--please specify: _____
 Don't know

22) (non CV survey only) Has your jurisdiction (i.e. city, county, or school district) in the past used a different electoral system than the one you last ran under?

- YES NO

22a) If YES to #22, what was the old electoral system?

- Districts Mixed (both districts and at-large)
 At-large Other--please specify: _____
 Don't know

22b) If YES to #22, did you ever run under the old electoral system?

- YES NO

22c) If YES to #22, how would you compare the old system to the system that you last ran under?

- The old system was **much better** than the system I last ran under.
 The old system was **somewhat better** than the system I last ran under.
 The old system was **about the same** as the system I last ran under.
 The old system was **somewhat worse** than the system I last ran under.
 The old system was **much worse** than the system I last ran under.
 Don't know

23) (non CV survey only) Has there been a change in the electoral system used in your jurisdiction since you were elected?

- YES NO

23a) If YES to #23, which electoral system is currently in use?

- Districts Mixed (both districts and at-large)
 At-large Other--please specify: _____
 Don't know

23b) If YES to #23, how would you compare the new system to the system you last ran under?

- The new system is **much better** than the system I last ran under.
 The new system is **somewhat better** than the system I last ran under.
 The new system is **about the same** as the system I last ran under.
 The new system is **somewhat worse** than the system I last ran under.
 The new system is **much worse** than the system I last ran under.

23) (CV survey only) Would you say that cumulative voting helped or hurt your chances of being elected?

- Cumulative voting probably **helped my chances** in the election.
 Cumulative voting probably **hurt my chances** in the election.
 Cumulative voting probably **made no difference** in the election.
 Don't know

24) Overall, would you say that the current system is a good election system, a bad election system, or what?

- The current election system is a **very good** system. It works quite well compared to other systems.
 The current election system is a **good** system, but it has a few problems compared to other systems.
 The current election system is the **same** as other systems--neither better nor worse.
 The current election system is a **poor** system. There are a few problems with it that make it difficult to use.
 The current election system is a **very poor** system. It does not work at all compared to other systems.
 Don't know

25) Did your campaign efforts extend over the whole jurisdiction you ran in, or were your efforts concentrated in specific areas?

- My campaign efforts were spread evenly over any place where voters could be found.
 My campaign efforts were concentrated in a specific area.
 I did not campaign actively.

26) What is your approximate age?

- 18-30 51-60 over 80
 31-40 61-70
 41-50 71-80

27) Generally speaking, what best describes your orientation toward the political parties?

- Strong Republican
 Republican
 Weak Republican
 Independent, leaning Republican
 Independent
 Independent, leaning Democrat
 Democrat
 Strong Democrat
 Other--please specify: _____

28) What sort of education have you completed?

- Elementary/Grade school
 Jr. High school/8th grade
 Some high school
 High school diploma/GED
 Community college/Junior college
 Technical school
 Some college
 College degree
 Some graduate study
 Graduate degree

29) What best describes your race/ethnicity? (Check more than one if necessary.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anglo | <input type="checkbox"/> East Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Native American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mexican American | <input type="checkbox"/> East Indian American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Latino | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chicano | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mexican | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese American |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

30) Are you male or female?

- Male Female

31) Please list your occupation. _____

32) When you most recently sought office, was the contest partisan?

- YES NO

32a) If YES to #33, what party label did you use when you ran?

- Democrat Republican
 Other _____

Thank you for completing the survey. Please use the self-addressed stamped envelope provided to return it. We will mail you a summary of the responses when the results are tabulated. If you have any questions or comments about this survey, please feel free to contact us.

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