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Not the usual story: the effect of candidate supply on models of Latino descriptive representation

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Most of the literature on descriptive representation focuses on voters and the choices they make during an election. Missing from this scholarship, however, is a more complete picture of when and where minority candidates are on the ballot. In this study, we focus on the context in which Latinos are on the ballot in state legislative elections, and the relationship between winning and district composition. We present results using a unique data-set from the 2012 general elections that allows us to compare and contrast empirical analyses and predictions with and without the censoring effect of Latino candidate supply. The findings challenge the traditional role of majority–minority districts, and show quite decisively that descriptive representation is not only a demand problem, as it has been understood for the last few decades, but also a problem of minority candidate supply.

Keywords: Latino politics; representation; minority politics; state legislature; Voting Rights Act; Latino representation; white voter

Introduction

A record number of Latinos held state legislative office in 2012, attesting to a political and demographic revolution. These gains, however, have not come without a fight. For example, a District Court in Washington ruled in August 2012 that the political maps drawn by the Republican-controlled state legislators in Texas discriminated against African-American and Latino voters, and failed to comply with preclearance requirements of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965. As a result, the Court threw out the 2011 district maps and Federal Judges drew interim maps for the 2012 elections (*Perez v. Perry*, 5:11-cv-0360, US District Court, Western District of Texas, San Antonio). The presiding judge, Rosemary Collyer, at one point told the Texas' lawyers flatly: "It's really hard to explain [changes to the map] other than doing it on the basis of reducing minority votes" (Associated Press, August 28, 2012).

This battle is premised on conventional wisdom: Latinos have significant difficulty winning elections outside of majority–minority districts (MMDs) (Casellas 2011; Lublin et al. 2009; Michelson 2010). After the 1982 amendments to the VRA, Sections 2 and 5 have been interpreted (although consequently narrowed) by the Supreme Court to prohibit political jurisdictions that dilute the power of minority groups to have equal opportunity to select representatives of their choice. To estimate the proportion of minority voters or residents needed to provide equal

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opportunity, the court has relied on expert testimony from political scientists who provided empirical evidence of racial voting patterns and the extent of racially polarized voting (*Georgia v. Ashcroft* 2003; McCrary 1990). Indeed, this connection between district racial/ethnic composition and likelihood of minority representation has often been at the crux of arguments to create MMDs, as these can ensure Latinos an “equal opportunity to elect a candidate of their choice.” More directly, the theory of voter-driven representation suggests that the continued descriptive *underrepresentation* of racial/ethnic minorities is best understood as a demand-side problem: Latinos represent predominantly Latino districts because many white voters will not vote for them.

Missing from this descriptive representation narrative, however, is a vital question that comes full circle to the promises of the VRA: increasing the opportunities for Latino candidates to run for office outside of MMDs. We argue the descriptive representation research is currently incomplete. For decades, scholars have studied minority *officeholders* and the districts from which they are elected, and have found strong and consistent evidence of a racial and ethnic component to this process. Minority officeholders represent predominantly minority districts, and white officeholders represent predominantly white districts. Recently, however, work has begun to question the nature of the relationship between officeholder and district. New research which incorporates the fact that minority candidates rarely run in white majority districts has begun to change the way we think about the process of minority representation. In particular, the theoretical focus of the work in this area has shifted away from voters to party elites and potential candidates themselves.

We add to this research, which is focused on evaluating whether minority candidates are encumbered in white districts, as past officeholder models suggest. Specifically, we develop and test a supply side perspective of the relationship between district composition and Latino representation after censoring for candidacy. We ask: Conditional on a Latino candidate running, what is the relationship between co-ethnic voting strength and the likelihood of winning? Using a unique data-set of state legislative elections in 2012 that includes contextual information about the legislative district and the race and ethnicity of the candidates, we demonstrate that scholars have overestimated the extent to which district ethnic composition impedes Latino representation.

The findings challenge the traditional role of MMDs as the *exclusive* generator of minority representation, and show quite clearly that when Latino candidates and white candidates are compared in similar districts, their likelihood of success is equivalent. By ignoring candidate supply, previous descriptive representation scholarship substantially underestimates the opportunities for minority candidates in white majority districts. In other words, descriptive representation is not only a demand problem, as it has been understood for the last few decades, but also a problem of minority candidate supply.

Explaining Latino descriptive representation in state legislatures

State legislatures have increasingly become a laboratory for testing questions about minority politics because of the greater number of minority candidates compared with Congress, and because of the broader socio-political contexts from which these candidates arise (Broockman 2013; Butler and Broockman 2011; Juenke 2014; Juenke and Preuhs 2012). This tremendous variability serves our purposes well here. For example, we find that since passage of the VRA, the overall number of minority representatives has grown steadily at all legislative levels, and this is also true for Latino state legislators. Between 1992 and 2012, the number of Latino state representatives grew from 161 in 1992 (2% of all state legislators) to 264 (3.3%) in 2013 (National Council of State Legislators 2013).¹ This increase is quite modest in contrast to changes in the Latino population between 1990 and 2010, during which the Latino population in the USA grew from 22.4

million (9% of the total population) to 50.5 million (16.3% of the total population). Similarly, the number of Latino eligible voters – adults who are US citizens, increased from 13.2 million in 2000 to 21.3 million in 2010 (Lopez 2011). In other words, population changes have greatly outpaced Latino descriptive representation over the last two decades. Attempts to explain this continued underrepresentation of Latinos focus almost exclusively on voter preferences. Below, we review the literature that links majority–minority places to Latino representation, and then offer an alternative explanation that accounts for candidate supply.

Demand for minority officeholders: voter-driven theories

Political science has devoted a great deal of effort to the study of Black and Latino descriptive representation in the last three decades (Cameron, Epstein, and O’Halloran 1996; Canon 1999; Engstrom and McDonald 1981; Epstein and O’Halloran 2006; Karnig and Welch 1982; Lublin 1997, 1999; Meier et al. 2005). Much of this scholarship developed as a reaction to passage of the VRA in 1965 (and the extension of the Act to language minorities in 1975). This research has concluded quite clearly that the most important variable in models of minority office holding is the size of the minority voting population in a district or city.

As a result, much of the recent scholarship on Latino descriptive representation has focused on the size of the Latino population required to ensure Latino electoral success (Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Bedoya 2006; Casellas 2011; Lublin 1997; Lublin et al. 2009) and the effectiveness of majority-Latino districts in promoting descriptive and substantive representation. For example, Lublin’s (1997) analysis of the 1990 round of redistricting finds that state legislatures constructed 10 new MMDs and 7 Latino freshmen consequently joined the House of Representatives. More recently, Casellas (2011) concludes that the size of the Latino population and citizenship rates are the best predictors of Latino officeholding, with the majority of states considered requiring a greater than 50% Latino population in a district to reach a 50% chance of electing a Latino state legislator (Appendix B (see Supplemental data), pp. 149–156). Similarly, Michelson (2010) finds that the creation of MMDs post-1990 is responsible for many of the gains in Latino representation in the last two decades.

Why does Latino representation rely so strongly on district minority population? Studies devoted to this question have focused on aggregate patterns of racialized voting and conclude that minority candidates do not do as well in white districts as they do in MMDs (Absoch, Barreto, and Woods 2006; Lublin et al. 2009; Trounstine and Valdini 2008). Thus, MMDs are deemed essential to concentrate Latino populations and ensure Latinos’ ability to “elect a representative of their choice.” Based on much of this research, legislatures and courts have extended the logic of minorities doing *very* well in MMDs, to minorities doing *very* poorly in white districts.²

Thus, although much of the implementation of the VRA is about allowing minority voters to elect their chosen representatives, the underlying logic of racialized voting has spilled over into general questions of descriptive representation in both the courts and the political science literature. Scholars have used the inverse logic of minority success in MMDs to explain the lack of minority officeholders in white districts; i.e., if voters are responsible for minority officeholding success, voters must also be responsible for their absence in white districts. Consequently, the Justice Department, Congress, and other legislatures have used a “totality of circumstances” approach to some VRA implementation, which accounts for “competing political considerations” (Isachoff 2006, 114; and see Grofman, Handley, and Niemi 1994, 74–81 for a discussion of the white-only candidate problem in the courts). These political considerations characteristically include estimates of moments of minority “opportunity” and “influence” that encompass majority–minority thresholds (*Page v. Bartels* 2001; *Georgia v. Ashcroft* 2003; *Bartlett*

v. *Strickland* 2009). Thus, what began as an assessment of the ability of minority voters to elect their candidates of choice has evolved into a broader discourse into the tradeoffs of manipulating the minority population in white plurality and minority plurality districts (see *Georgia v. Ashcroft* 2003). Throughout this time, the theoretical engine of minority descriptive representation (both for its presence *and* absence) has been the minority voter and, by implication, the white voter. It is this research and its conclusions that are affected by the present analysis.

Supply of minority candidates: the role of district composition on candidate emergence

A focus on the voters in elections, rather than the candidates, has led observers of the continued underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities to point to characteristics of the voters – such as racial bias – as the culprit. Missing from this dialog, however, is the important prior commitment of minorities to enter the election. Accordingly, inferences drawn from voter-driven theories do not account for the role of strategic choices made by elites prior to the election.

We begin with the well-developed premise that Latino candidates, like all candidates, are strategic in choosing when to run for office (Black 1972; Fox and Lawless 2004, 2005; Schlesinger 1966). These strategic choices are tied to the amount of resources available to candidates, thus hindering racial and ethnic minorities burdened by their lack of incumbency, experience, skills, political networks, and money in the political arena (see, e.g., Lawless 2012; Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001). This general lack of resources creates incentives to run in places where the perceived likelihood of being competitive is greater: MMDs. Indeed, recent research finds that high proportion minority districts are more likely to have a minority candidate on the ticket (Branton 2009; Casellas 2011; Fraga 2014). Theoretically we expect Latino candidates to self-select *into* Latino MMDs for a variety of resource-based motivations. This does not necessarily mean that Latinos are selecting *out* of white majority districts because of white voter bias fears. We do not preclude this as a theoretical possibility, but it is a claim that has yet to find much direct empirical attention. We discuss some related research below, and look at some implications of this perspective in the “robustness checks” section.

A number of scholars have noted the important selection or gatekeeping mechanism of primary elections for African-American candidates. Exploring runoff elections in Georgia, Bullock and Johnson (1985) test the “minority loses hypothesis:” Black primary leaders lose runoffs to whites. Their analysis of 215 elections, however, refutes this expectation: “Blacks and women who led primaries do at least as well in run-offs as white males” (945). Extending this research to control for the Black population size in 401 country races between 1970 and 1984, Bullock and Smith (1990) find that over 45% of Black primary candidates led in places with fewer than 50% Black constituency. Moreover, Black candidates did equally well in jurisdictions just over the majority-Black line, and it was not until the Black population reached a super-majority (65%) that there was a large jump in Black primary leaders (close to 80%). Importantly, in both of these earlier works, once a Black candidate led the primary, his/her likelihood of winning was not statistically different from a white candidate (see also Bullock and Johnson 1992).³ Canon (1999) also explicitly examines how the supply side of representation impacts descriptive representation. Examining candidates in House districts at least 30% African-American in 1972, 1982, and 1992 after redistricting, he finds that size of the population is positively related to likelihood of a Black candidate running. Runoff elections, however, hypothesized to negatively influence Black candidate emergence, are not significant. Together, then, each of these early works corroborates our earlier proposition: minority candidates often do run in places with few co-racial voters, and their success is not determined by this demographic profile.⁴

Despite the acknowledgment that candidate selection truncates the choices for voters, very few other scholars who look at a large number of elections have explicitly asked the question: Do candidates of color win *when they run*? Three recent exceptions are Juenke (2014), Shah (2014) and Fraga (2014). Juenke (2014) considers Latino state legislative candidates in 2000 and 2010, and argues that candidate strategy plays an important role in determining when and where minority candidates run for office, constraining the choices given to voters at the ballot box. His evaluation of Latino representation among state legislators concludes that if this prior strategy is taken into account, and the likelihood of a Latino legislator *given a Latino ran for office* is assessed, Latinos are very often the winner, regardless of the Latino population within the district. Thus, he asserts, much of the traditional understanding of descriptive representation has been significantly biased toward underrepresentation. We evaluate Juenke's conclusions with a new data-set using a different candidate coding process, and we enlarge the scope of inquiry to differentiate between incumbents and challengers, as well as co-partisan whites. Additionally, we conduct robustness checks to test for primaries as an alternative mechanism to underrepresentation, something Juenke is unable to evaluate (2014).

Similarly, Shah's (2014) analysis of Black candidate emergence into local office in Louisiana arrives at very similar results: the likelihood of a Black candidate winning, if an African-American is on the ballot, is greater than 60%. Moreover, she finds that voter strength, or size of the Black voting pool, is most predictive at the first stage of representation – the supply of Black candidates – and that once a Black candidate has decided to run for office, other electoral and demographic factors are influential. In other words, voter strength is more influential in determining if we see a Black candidate on the ballot at all; once this is accounted for, size of the Black electorate is less consequential.

Fraga (2014) examines racial and ethnic minority candidates for Congressional Office between 2006 and 2012, and finds evidence that race is a salient factor predicting candidate emergence at the primary stage, and in the nomination stage (for Latinos only), but not at the general election stage. In particular, via a set of difference of means tests (and accompanying regressions in the appendices (see Supplemental data)), Fraga shows Latino primary candidates doing much better in Latino districts than in non-Latino districts. His work is one of the first to look at representation as a multi-stage process, extending and testing the idea that representation is a process of both supply and demand first noted by Bullock and Johnson (1985), Bullock and Smith (1990) and Canon (1999). While his overall conclusions are mixed on the question of whether minority supply or voter demand drives minority representation, his research creates more questions for scholars to explore. We extend his work here in part by focusing on state legislative candidates, giving us more observations and variation with which to test these competing theoretical perspectives.

To sum up, the present research builds upon the literature that explicitly accounts for the supply side story of Latino descriptive representation, and makes a number of significant contributions. First, we develop a fair comparison. We are interested in understanding how Latino candidates fare when compared with their Democratic and Republican counterparts *in predominantly white districts*. That is, we are not just interested in whether Latino candidates do poorly in white districts compared with how they do in Latino majority districts (where they tend to do incredibly well).⁵ Moreover, we compare the performance of Latino candidates to their white partisan counterparts, providing an important context within which to understand the results. In addition to these theoretical contributions, empirically, we make a number of improvements. First, unlike Juenke (2014), we code the race and ethnicity of candidates during the general election instead of relying on post-election observations, which ameliorates the use of Latino surname lists alone (see Appendix B (see Supplemental data) for more information). Second, we incorporate robustness checks that previous studies of state legislatures have excluded.⁶ In particular, we control for

the role of Latino incumbency in the models and re-examine the gatekeeper role of primary elections for Latino general election candidacies. We posit the following hypotheses:

H1 (*Naive Model*): When candidate supply is ignored, a likely Latino victory will require a majority Latino population.

H2 (*Censored Model*): After accounting for candidate supply, the population threshold required for a likely Latino victory will be substantially lower compared to the naive model.

Data and analyses

To assess our hypotheses, we combine information from three sources to create a unique data-set of 2012 general election candidates. The pre-election data consist of official candidate lists for each of the 15 states in the sample.⁷ The New Organizing Institute (NOI) provided many of the candidate lists during the summer of 2012, as well as partisan, incumbency, and website information for most candidates. Our research assistants located the remaining candidates' websites or Facebook pages using the names provided by NOI or from each state's election administrator (typically the Secretary of State). After the election, we recorded the number of votes received by each candidate, the winner of the election and any remaining party and incumbency information using data from Klamer et al. (2013) and state election agencies. We then verified election winners and incumbency using Ballotopedia (2012) as a double check on the merging procedure.⁸

The candidate-level data were matched with the voting age population (VAP) district data from the 2010 Census redistricting file (US Bureau of the Census 2012). This matching process was more difficult than usual because of redistricting in 2010–2011. The Census has not yet released the summary 2010 data using new district lines, but it has provided VAP data by race/ethnicity at the "block level" and the matching block codes for each state's new districts. We constructed the district VAP data from these blocks and validated the procedure using available sources from select states.⁹

Finally, the candidate-level data are aggregated to the district level to test district-level hypotheses and traditional models of representation. Theoretically we are interested in the kinds of choices given to voters in a district, and the type of descriptive representation that emerges after an election, both of which are captured at the district level. While we do provide some candidate-level election results in the manuscript, all of the multivariate models are at the district level.

Full descriptive statistics for the data-set are provided in Appendix A (see Supplemental data). The number of observed districts for the 15 states is 2044. Using our expert coding procedure, we identify 293 Latino candidates, 365 African-American candidates, and 2535 white candidates in the 15-state sample for the 2012 state legislative elections (see Appendix B (see Supplemental data) for a full description of the coding process). The summary statistics illustrate a number of interesting patterns in Latino descriptive representation in the states. First, without knowing anything else about the data, we find that Latinos are underrepresented before the election takes place. In particular, Latinos make up 20% of the population on average in these 15 states and are only 9% of the candidates. At the district level, we get a similar picture of Latino candidacy. Thirteen percent of the elections have at least one Latino candidate on the ballot.¹⁰ In addition, we note the remarkable differences in partisanship by ethnicity. Seventy percent of Latino candidates run as Democrats. In comparison, only 36% of white candidates run as Democrats. Thus, similar to the voting public in the era of party polarization, Latino candidates are not simply racial and ethnic minorities; they are overwhelmingly Democrats as well. Conversely, Republican candidates are almost exclusively white (93%). This highlights the difficulty of

separating partisan politics and racial/ethnic politics in the USA (see, e.g., Fraga 2014; Juenke and Preuhs 2012). Latino candidates face the double obstacle of ethnicity and partisan affiliation in many majority white/Republican districts.

Comparing naive and selection models of descriptive representation

Descriptive representation is typically modeled using officeholder data. In this case, we can replicate these traditional models by using only the election winners. We label these traditional models “naive” because they ignore the electoral choices provided to voters on Election Day. The dependent variable for the analyses is whether a Latino (1) or non-Latino (0) won the election. The main independent variable of interest is the Latino VAP in the district. As the percentage of Latino VAP increases, we expect more Latino winners. More importantly, the officeholder model of Latino representation creates the expectation that a majority, or near majority-Latino population is crucial for the election of Latino legislators. Conversely, Latino candidates are not expected to do well in low Latino and largely white districts according to the officeholder model.

In addition, we control for the size of other racial groups: VAP percentages for African-Americans and “Other” racial/ethnic groups (whites are the reference group). Given the large literature that finds an incumbency advantage (see Trounstein 2011), we also control for a Latino incumbent and a non-Latino incumbent. Finally, we include a number of institutional controls for chamber of the legislature (upper or lower), a proxy for turnout,¹¹ and term limits.¹² The expectation is that Latino candidates who are not incumbents are more likely to win in districts with open races, in lower chamber districts and in states with term limits.¹³

The naive descriptive representation probit model is presented in column one in Table 1. As expected, the Latino population variable dominates the Latino winner results. More Latino voters equates to a greater likelihood of Latino victory. Indeed, the pseudo- R^2 in models that include *only* the population variables (results not displayed) is .52, suggesting that we need to know little else about state legislative districts besides how many co-ethnic voters reside there in order to predict Latino descriptive representation.

Table 1. Comparing uncensored and censored models of Latino representation.

	Naive model (Latino winner)		Censored model (Latino winner)	
Latino VAP	5.57	(0.35)**	3.89	(0.67)**
Black VAP	-0.63	(0.96)	0.36	(0.99)
Other VAP (excludes whites)	1.84	(0.72)**	1.70	(1.17)
Upper chamber	-0.14	(0.12)	-0.18	(0.10) ⁺
Latino incumbent	4.06	(0.32)**	2.61	(0.30)**
Other incumbent	-1.28	(0.19)**	-1.27	(0.31)**
Turnout proxy	2.62	(0.60)**	2.51	(0.69)**
Term limit state	-0.04	(0.24)	-0.10	(0.30)
Constant	-3.97	(0.34)**	-2.03	(0.69)**
<i>N</i>	2044		245	
Wald χ^2 (7)	1485.89**		222.13**	
Pseudo- R^2	.78		.46	

Notes: Unstandardized probit coefficients with state clustered standard errors in parentheses.

The “censored” model only includes races with at least one Latino on the ballot. White VAP is the comparison category for the other group VAP coefficients.

*Significant at <.05 confidence levels in two-tailed tests.

**Significant at <.01 confidence levels in two-tailed tests.

+Significant at <.10 confidence levels in two-tailed tests.

The relationship supporting the naive model is visualized in the top panel of Figure 1, where we plot the probability of a Latino candidate winning office against the percent Latino VAP in the legislative district.¹⁴ This picture clearly demonstrates the strength of the traditional descriptive representation story: Latino candidates are given little chance of success in white majority districts, and probability of winning does not reach 50% (where success changes from possible to likely) until the Latino VAP makes up about 60% of the district. This fits conclusions from other research (Lublin et al. 2009) and suggests that Latinos have almost no chance of holding office in districts that are less than 30% Latino VAP.

In column two in Table 1, we present a model that takes minority candidacy into account. This model is censored by the presence of a Latino candidate on the ballot, and all other districts are excluded from these analyses.¹⁵ The results indicate that Latino VAP is a less precise predictor of Latino success at the polls than the traditional voter-centered perspective would have us believe. Latino candidates have good chances of winning in very low Latino population districts. While Latino population is still a significant correlate of Latino victory, the relationship has changed dramatically when compared with the naive model.

We illustrate this comparison in the bottom panel of Figure 1, which displays the censored predicted probabilities for Latino winners against the percent Latino in the district. The difference

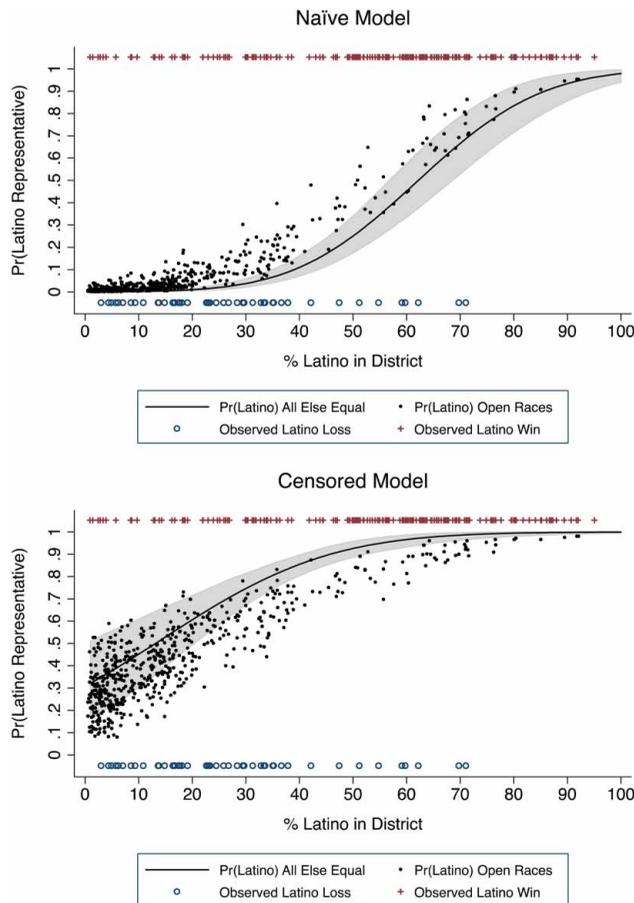


Figure 1. Latino descriptive representation in 15 states.

between these predictions and those from the naive model portrayed in Figure 1 is stark. While most of the censored predictions are out of sample due to the paucity of minority candidates, they demonstrate the capacity of Latino success in very low Latino population districts *if a Latino candidate would be on the ballot*.¹⁶ The observed Latino win/lose outcomes are also displayed and show the value of the censored approach in low Latino districts. The naive model predicts that very few (if any) Latino candidates in low Latino districts will win. These actual winners are thus “outliers” in an officeholder model (a paltry few dozen out of thousands of other officeholders). They are, however, expected with relative frequency in the censored model (about half of the Latino candidates that were on the ballot). Indeed, the “tipping point” at which a Latino candidate becomes a likely winner drops to 15% Latino VAP. Further, at 50% Latino VAP, a Latino victory is almost guaranteed if a Latino is on the ballot (90% probability). These findings suggest that the Latino descriptive representation gap, contrary to the voter-driven theories that place the onus primarily on the public, may instead be the result of strategic considerations of latent Latino candidates and party elites prior to the election.

Further, Latinos do as well as the average white co-partisans in these white contexts. In Table 2 we present comparisons of Latino and white partisans in “competitive” white districts. These districts are above 50% white VAP and have at least one Democrat and one Republican in the election. We find Latino Democrats win at the same rate (43%) as their white Democratic counterparts (41%). Latino Republicans do not win as often in these contexts compared with their white co-partisans (48% compared with 61%), but these differences are not significant due to the relative dearth of Latino Republicans. Finally, we compare the percent of vote received by Latino and white partisans. Latino Republicans garner significantly less of the vote in these contexts, but these average differences are not substantial (46–51%). Latino Democrats perform as well as their white Democratic counterparts in these contexts (46% and 48%, respectively). In summary, in competitive white contexts, Latino Democrats do as well as white Democrats, all else equal, and Latino Republicans do almost as well as white Republicans, when they are on the ballot.¹⁷

Robustness checks

Primaries

An alternative explanation for the lack of minority candidates in white districts in November is that a significant number may lose during the party primary (see, e.g., Fraga 2014). Indeed, this explanation would support the perspective that voters are in fact keeping minority candidates from holding office in white districts, but doing so at an earlier stage. To test this explanation, we collected primary candidate data during the summer of 2012 in two states with large Latino populations, Texas and California. These states are compelling for testing voter-based theories of

Table 2. Comparative performances in competitive races in white majority districts.

	Average winners (%)	Average vote (%)	<i>N</i>
White Rep.	64%	51%	(827)
Latino Rep.	48%	46%*	(29)
White Dem.	41%	48%	(750)
Latino Dem.	43%	46%	(30)

Notes: “Competitive” races are those with at least one Democrat and one Republican on the ballot. These data are at the individual candidate level, thus the *N*s for Republicans and Democrats are not equal, as some races had multiple Republicans or Democrats. White majority districts are those with over 50% white non-Latino population.

*Intra-party differences between white and Latino candidates are significant at the 95% confidence level.

Table 3. Primary candidates in Texas and California in 2012.

Where do they run?			
	White VAP	Latino VAP	African-American VAP
White candidates	57%	25%	9%
Latino candidates	27%	60%	5%
Average win percentage			
	Overall	Incumbents	Non-incumbents
White (466)	64%	85%	54%
Latino (153)	64%	95%	53%
Win percentage in open races with at least one white and one minority candidate			
	Overall		In white majority districts
White	50% (118)		50% (38)
Latino	50% (70)		60% (15)

minority underrepresentation for a number of reasons. There is significant partisan diversity within each state. Texas is a conservative Republican state with large pockets of liberal Democrats in the metropolitan areas and near the US/Mexican border, and California is a liberal Democratic state with pockets of conservative Republicans throughout. Both states also have a long history of racial/ethnic politics that have been explored recently by scholars (Abosch et al. 2006; Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Segura, Nicholson, and Bowler 2006). These histories have created political atmospheres that have been, many times, very hostile to minority candidates for office.

How much of the effects presented in Figure 1 is being driven by primaries? We present the results examining primary candidates in Table 3 and find the supply side story continues to explain much of the variation in Latino descriptive representation. To begin, we find that Latino candidates are not running in predominantly white districts in Texas or California (see Table 3). For example, white primary candidates run in districts that are more than twice as white on average (57% white VAP) than those where Latinos are running (27% white VAP). Latino candidates are instead showing up in districts that are Latino majority–minority (60% Latino). The Latino representation deficit begins with the choices of the candidates prior to the primary election in these two states.¹⁸

Given the long literature on the strong effects of incumbency, we examine the primary results against the possibility that Latino incumbents are driving the results. In the second panel of Table 3 we see that overall, Latino primary candidates are winning just as often as their white counterparts (64% each), and when these candidates are broken into incumbent subsets, the conclusions do not change. Latino primary incumbents *and* non-incumbents perform just as well as their white counterparts in these two states in 2012. Indeed, Latino incumbents perform at a slightly higher rate than their white counterparts (95% vs. 85% win rate, respectively), and non-incumbents of both groups win about half of the time when they run.

In the bottom panel of Table 3 we examine the most difficult test of the biased primary theory: races where there is at least one white candidate *and* one Latino candidate, no incumbent in the

race and the district is over 50% white. Again, we find that Latinos actually fare slightly better in these types of open races, winning 60% of the time, in contrast to whites' rate of 50%. In summary, we find no evidence that Latino candidates are being systematically blocked from moving on to the general election, even in competitive white majority districts in two states with long histories of racial/ethnic politics.¹⁹

Self-selection bias

Another potential source of bias in the analysis is that Latino candidates are *correctly* self-selecting out of districts with white voters who will not vote for them *because of their ethnicity*. To be clear, self-selection is not a problem simply because some Latino candidates select out of white districts; because if these latent candidates are wrong about the level of white racist voting then the counterfactual (i.e., the Latino candidate runs anyway) would produce the same, or higher, estimates of Latino winning odds. Specifically, we discuss two claims regarding possible self-selection bias.

The first claim is that Latino candidates are not running in white districts because they fear white racist voting. How should this claim be evaluated empirically? In a perfect world, we would survey latent candidates for office and ask them about their reasons for running or not running. If we found that latent Latino candidates avoided running for office *at higher rates* than white candidates *because of their fear of white voter bias*, then we would have some direct empirical support for this claim. For obvious reasons this is very difficult to do. The best research in this area is focused on women running for office, and Fox and Lawless (2005) do include latent Latinos in their analysis. They find that there is no difference between Latinos and white men in thinking of running for office *or* interest in "high-level office" (650). Further, they find that none of the structural or contextual variables in their models, including "self-perceived likelihood of winning," affects personal ambition or interest in running for higher office (see also Lawless 2012).

Further, as we discussed above, *all* candidates are in some ways strategic in that they incorporate their odds of winning into their decision to run at various levels.²⁰ Latino candidates would need to be somehow more strategically prescient than white Democrats or Republicans for us to expect self-selection effects (and this is precisely what Fox and Lawless find no evidence for in their 2005 article). Theories of strategic candidacies more generally focus on open races, individual candidate experience/resources, elite support, party support, and voter partisanship (Canon 1999; Moncrief, Squire, and Jewell 2001), which is how we understand Latino strategic decision-making in this analysis.

The second claim is that white voters are using their bigotry to make decisions against Latino candidates. Citrin, Green, and Sears (1990) argue that pure racist voting is not the right way to think about how racism affects candidate choice (75–79). Instead, racism or bigotry seems to extend to the policies and people that the parties represent, not *who* is representing the party. Sigelman et al. (1995, 259–260) also warn against extrapolating from biased *voters* to biased *voting* in an actual election. Experimental research is fairly clear that while many voters are bigots and/or racists, these factors do not directly determine vote choice. Abrajano, Alvarez, and Nagler (2005) use a quasi-experimental setting to investigate racist voting against Latino candidates. They conclude, "Overall, our results cast doubt on the claim that there is something inherent about white voters that make them anti-Latino, or unwilling to support Latino candidates" (215). Kam (2007) finds that white bias against Latino candidates disappears once party cues are introduced. Finally, McConnaughy et al. find "no evidence that a Latino candidate significantly altered Anglo subjects' use of ethnic stereotypes or ethnic ingroup attachment in their vote decisions" when they experimentally manipulate candidate

ethnicity (2010, 2108). Thus, even if some Latino candidates are avoiding white districts because they fear racist voting (claim 1), they are likely wrong about its influence on their chances of winning (claim 2).

What would the data look like if Latinos were somehow privy to information about which districts were unwinnable because of voter racial biases, *and* they were correct in these assessments? That is, what would our data look like if Latino candidates were (differently from whites) correctly avoiding district where they have no chance of winning? We think the data would show that Latino candidates would be winning at higher rates than their white counterparts, and would be winning a higher percentage of the vote as well. As we demonstrate in Tables 2 and 3, this not what the data show in white districts. The rates of success for Latino and white candidates in the general and primary races are nearly identical. Not only are Latinos winning just as often as their co-partisans, but also they are getting the same percentage of the *vote* (Table 2). We encourage scholars to continue to evaluate these claims more directly in the future.

Conclusions

In this project we begin to untangle some of the causal relationships between the type of district in which Latino candidates are on the ballot, and the likelihood of a victory based on his or her decision to run. The results presented here lead us to two conclusions. First, the voter-driven models are not wrong: the size of the co-ethnic population continues to matter for descriptive representation. But we demonstrate that this relationship between the size of the district's Latino population and the likelihood of a Latino officeholder is driven primarily by the near-certainty of a Latino winner in Latino majority districts. As Latino district population declines, this "near-certainty" becomes simply "highly likely" and then "likely" in white majority districts. However, Latino candidates rarely show up on ballots in white districts, creating the empirical "fact" that white districts will not elect them.

Second, when Latinos do run in white districts, their chances of winning are much better than would be expected from a voter-driven model. In other words, the *exclusive* focus on the Latino electorate (eligibility, partisanship, participation) and a bigoted white electorate is inadequate to explain the underrepresentation of Latinos in state legislatures. The results from this paper suggest that Latino representation is as much of a supply problem as a demand one. Latino candidates run in Latino MMDs, where their chances of winning are very high, but they are not showing up in white districts where their chances are lower, but not significantly different from their white counterparts. These findings also lead us to conclude that additional work needs to be done in disentangling the effects of other important covariates associated with Latino candidate emergence, such as political ambition, political activism, perceptions of candidate qualifications campaign financing, and party elites (Lawless 2012).

How do these findings speak to current Supreme Court rulings regarding the continued usefulness of the VRA in ensuring descriptive representation? On the one hand, we do find evidence that Latino candidates are more likely to run in a primary or general election when they have strong co-ethnic support, corroborating previous findings (Casellas 2011; Fraga 2014). Thus, the creation of Latino MMDs leads to two related benefits: more candidates of choice running and greater proportions of voters who will likely vote for them. However, the findings also clearly show that Latino candidates' chances of winning are not solely constrained by the district population, as argued by voter-driven theories. Indeed, once they choose to run, district ethnic population matters much less than would be expected. Latino candidates in 2012, as incumbents or as challengers, as Republicans or as Democrats, in primary or general elections, appear to do just as well as their white counterparts in white districts. In other words, policies

focused solely on population characteristics are not going to solve the problem of continued Latino underrepresentation. Instead, we believe that the processes by which party and other political elites encourage and support Latino candidates are a better place to concentrate future analyses. For reasons that demand additional inquiry, Latino candidates are a rarity in white districts, and this is significantly inhibiting more representational diversity in state legislatures across the USA.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Supplemental data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2015.1050406>.

Notes

1. Alternative measures of this gap accounting for the varying sizes of chambers result in similar numbers. Indeed, some of the most disproportionate outcomes occur in Latino-populated states, such as Texas, California, and Arizona, which have officeholder/population gaps at or above 15%.
2. Much of the VRA implementation and litigation regards individual cases of vote dilution and racially polarized voting in the presence of minority candidates (e.g., *Beer v. US* 1976; *Thornburg v. Gingles* 1986; *Reno v. Bossier Parish* 2000; and the “ecological inference” research, see King 1997). The issues we discuss here do not necessarily bias these particular cases.
3. In Bullock and Smith (1990), this is true specifically for Black primary leaders who displayed a “strong performance” in the primary (defined as polled 40% or more of the vote and led their white opponent by at least 5%).
4. Focusing solely on Congressional primary elections between 1994 and 2004, Branton (2009) confirms Canon’s finding for Black and Latino candidates: they are more likely to emerge in places with larger co-ethnic or co-racial populations. Branton also finds that African-American and Latino candidate emergence results in greater competition in Democratic primaries.
5. Fraga instead compares white candidate victories with white citizen voting age population (CVAP) and (separately) Latino candidate victories with Latino CVAP (Fraga 2014). These are interesting and informative associations, but they do not present a fair baseline from which to assess Latino candidate performance in low Latino districts.
6. Specifically, we build on work by Juenke (2014) and Shah (2014), who are unable to evaluate alternative hypotheses of challenger, party, and primary effects.
7. The states are AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, IL, LA (2011), MI, NC, NM, NV, NY, OH, PA, TX. Future research will incorporate all states, however the time-intensive nature of coding race/ethnicity for every candidate limited this study to 15 states with large Latino and Black populations. Other minority population states MD, NJ, and VA did not hold state legislative elections in 2012. LA did not hold elections in 2012, but the state provides the race and ethnicity of candidates in 2011.
8. The Ballotopedia validation was crucial as our pre-election data and post-election data came from two different sources. It became imperative to make sure all sources were recording the same candidates in the same races in the same states. Ballotopedia made it possible to check for dropouts and late additions to some ballots.
9. Ideally, we would use CVAP data to determine district composition. Unfortunately, getting these data are impossible at the state legislative level at this time. However, we agree with Juenke (2014) that using VAP numbers actually bias the evidence against our hypotheses. Put simply, if Latinos are getting elected in districts that are 25% VAP Latino, then these districts are likely only 15–20% CVAP Latino, thus Latinos are getting elected in districts that include fewer Latino voters than we are projecting.
10. The discrepancy between “% Latino candidates” and “% of elections with a Latino” comes from the disparate rates at which white and Latino candidates run against co-ethnics in the same district.

11. This is a proxy because we do not have information about registered, active, or eligible voters. Instead we divide the total number of votes by the VAP in the district.
12. AZ, CA, CO, FL, MI, NV, and OH are term limited states.
13. Controls for district partisanship, district socio-economic indicators, and candidate quality would be meaningful in these models, but indicators do not yet exist for 2012.
14. For clarity, we present the predicted point estimates of “open races” only, because they are the most theoretically relevant. The “Latino incumbent” and “non-Latino incumbent” point estimates are presented in the appendix (see Supplemental data) for comparison.
15. A (Heckman) selection model produces substantively similar results, though diagnostics suggest that a correlated error model is inappropriate. The results are in the appendix (Tables and Figure A3, see Supplemental data).
16. The in-sample predicted probabilities follow the exact same shape (available upon request).
17. The evidence in Table 2 diminishes the possibility that Latinos are simply cherry picking white districts where they know they will do well. We discuss the possibility of self-selection due to perceived “white racist” voting in the robustness checks section below.
18. We supplement this two-state analysis with an additional, if limited, look at Latinos in primaries in other states in the sample. We detail this supplementary analysis in Appendix C (see Supplemental data).
19. One alternative explanation for the success of minority officeholders is that they must be of much higher quality than their white counterparts in order to succeed in white districts. We collected some limited candidate quality measures for these primary candidates in 2012 using candidate biographies. These indicators include measures of education level, educational institution, and prior political experience. These limited results suggest that Latino candidates do not appear to be overqualified relative to their white counterparts. We urge scholars to pursue this question in the future.
20. It is important to note that winning is not always the sole or most important factor in the decision-making calculus of candidates. Often, candidates know they are long shots, but they want to make sure that voters have a choice or that their message gets out, or they gain experience for future races (Moncrief et al. 2001). In addition, candidates often *overestimate* their chances of being competitive (Moncrief et al. 2001). Candidates are confident and ambitious (and often “wrong”) prognosticators.

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