Does Electoral Or Institutional Climate Affect the Success of Minority Politicians?

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ABSTRACT

DOES ELECTORAL OR INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE AFFECT THE SUCCESS OF MINORITY POLITICIANS?

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Department of Political Science
Northern Illinois University, 2021
Scot Schraufnagel, Director

Although there is literature on the overarching political behaviors of Americans, what about the motivation of individual minority actors looking to hold state office? What has the literature contributed to the specific experience of those of color? Why do we not see a more representative amount of Black and Latinx Americans in office representing their constituencies? Using the 2020 COVI index and pairing it with election outcome data from 1996-2020, I looked deeper into the story behind the obvious lack of proportional representation for growing populations of American minorities. I found that when the COVI values are higher in a state, indicating that it is harder for a citizen of that state to vote, the presence of Black Americans and Latinx Americans in statewide office is less. This shows that in turn, whether intentional or unintentional, the voting laws in America affect the mobilization or lack thereof for Black and Latinx Americans in the American political system.

Key Words: Mobilization, Disenfranchisement, Electoral Climate, Institutional Climate, Descriptive Representation
DOES ELECTORAL OR INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE AFFECT
THE SUCCESS OF MINORITY POLITICIANS?

BY

KENDRA ESCUDDERO
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FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

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Thesis Director:
Scot Schraufnagel
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my dad, and all others, whose love and support made it possible.
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CHAPTER 1

“A BAD SYSTEM WILL BEAT A GOOD PERSON EVERY TIME”

-W.E. Deming

In the two-hundred years since the inception of the Senate, more than two-thousand members have served in the chamber. Only eleven of those members have been Black Americans. Henceforth, the struggle of representation in politics for Black Americans and others of minority status, is not a new issue. Although it is not a new issue, it is still important and is at the forefront of the political struggle of Black and Latinx Americans today. But what is underrepresentation\(^1\) and why is it a problem?

It is important to note the relationship between and the definitions of representation and mobilization. For my purposes, I define representation as descriptive representation. When I talk about underrepresentation or lack of representation, I am saying that the percentage of Blacks and Latinx American population in a state is not equal to the percentage of Black and Latinx Americans holding elected office. I define mobilization as participation in the electoral system both by voting and running for public office. Moreover, I believe there is a causal relationship between representation and mobilization. Even more specifically, the literature shows that minorities are mobilized when more minorities are running for and holding public office.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) For the sake of this paper and purpose of my research, I define underrepresentation as the percentage of Black and Latinx Americans who hold statewide office being less than the percentage of Black and Latinx Americans in each state.

\(^2\) I acknowledge that some scholars view representation differently, although it has been studied that White representatives can represent Black interests (Canon 1999). Here I am arguing that descriptive representation is responsible for mobilizing Black and Latinx Americans in a manner they are not normally.
The main problem is, and my research tries to make a claim that, the individual minority experience in America is not recognized. When political participation is studied and when findings are produced, the most respected findings are ones that relate to the most common situations in the political world. The most common situations are defined by what the majority experiences. There is a notable gap in the study of minority political participation and electoral success. This paper addresses the lack of research on minority mobilization by studying Black and Latinx electoral success when representatives of these groups run for public office, as well as the subsequent representation gap that exists throughout the United States.

The two research questions I hope to answer with this paper are: Does electoral or institutional climate, defined as the cost of voting, influence the success of minority politicians running for statewide office? Second, does an increase in the cost of voting in the American states lead to less descriptive representation of minorities and women? Specifically, I study electoral success and representation in American state executive offices and legislatures. What I hope makes my research more meaningful and relevant is that it is based in empiricism. My research will produce empirical findings that will be used to answer the two very specific research questions I lay out. To begin to understand the gap in representation we need to look at political participation for minorities as a removed individual experience, rather than the overarching view of them as participating Americans.

Rosenstone and Hansen (2002) seem to come close to realizing where the disparity lies in mobilizing the American public to participate. Rosenstone and Hansen’s contribution is pivotal because they acknowledge that political participation is much lower than it should and could be. They concluded that the cost and benefit analysis for an individual may not be as straightforward
as it is thought to be. They considered money in terms of political participation, discussing money in terms of resources. They acknowledged that the wealthy are more able to participate than the poor. They touched on education and how varying levels of education can affect one’s ability to contribute politically.

Others have identified that due to the time and money voting takes, individuals weigh the costs and choose either to refrain from or participate in a variety of ways (Verba Brady Schlozman 1995; Lau and Redlawsk 1997). The conclusion is that the cost of the going to the polls is constant for most people, but for many people in the lower and middle classes, it may be harder to get off work and find the right polling place. For those in the upper class, since they have more time and money, the process is straightforward. I believe that the acknowledgement of the cost of voting in relation to political participation is not as clear for those of minority status, makes the current research and literature about why and how people participate politically even less straightforward for those of color.

In a study starting in 2018, Li, Pomante and Schraufnagel looked specifically at the literal costs of going to the polls across the 50 states to determine how hard it is to vote in America. The study uncovered many different considerations that influence the overall cost associated with voting, such as identification laws and voter registration restrictions. Moreover, the study found that overall, some states have been trying to make it easier to vote and some have been trying to make it harder. This research provides the groundwork for my research, which attempted to show there are additional burdens for the political participation of those of minority status.
If a test or situation does not apply to most, or all, possible situations, in the political realm then it is not considered a valid finding, in this field of study. While this may be a very credible and robust way to conduct most political research, I believe it has hindered topics relating to race and politics. Unfortunately, the minority experience in America is an individual experience. We vote differently (Rocha et al. 2010), we participate differently, (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999, Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 2004), we go about life differently, and how we end up at the finish line\(^3\) is different. Scholars need to stop being satisfied with the fact that we participate, in general, and start looking at how or why we participate. The question should be, why and how do we make the political participation decisions we do? My research sought to provide insight into the Black and Latinx experience by showing that minority participation in the political process is affected by institutional changes that affect the electoral climate and, in turn, influence the minority political success.

Minorities Are Still Way Behind

Black and Latinx Americans have continued to make headway in becoming a larger part of American politics for quite some time now. This upward trend seems to be hinting at the fact that those of minority status, disadvantaged by the political system, are finally finding their place in it. While not untrue, this should not be understood as “minorities have arrived.” If we stop and consider that, as of 2001, Black Americans made up about two percent of American elected officials despite making up about 12 percent of the total population (Tate 2001), we can see the representation gap is still very significant. Lack of proportional representation is one thing, but it

\(^3\) Finish line meaning at what point a person of minority status stops participating or when a person of minority status has participated to the extent they would like.
may also be the case that Blacks holding office and Black Americans being truly represented are not the same thing.

Why do we not hear about this deficit? Why do we not care more about the severe lack Black and Latinx Americans in our government system? The answer, I believe, is in the way we study political science, and who studies political science. The way that political participation and the political science world is studied is from an overarching standpoint dominated by white males. With a lot of the tests and findings in political science, only findings that seem to be applicable to the majority population are respected and revered. In most aspects of the field, findings of this nature are acceptable. Researchers should not stop studying in a way that studies most and all people. The problem that it currently poses is that most Americans are Caucasian. This results in political findings being accepted to be about, most if not all people, and it leaves out some critical junctions where minority Americans differ in their political behavior, because their behavior is not one of the majorities. As a science there is not much investigation into why Blacks and Latinx are not experiencing the same political system and behaviors as their dominating majority Caucasian counterparts. One of the ways that political behavior differs between the majority and minority Americans is how they vote.

Many theories from political scholars try to explain political behavior and actions. One of the most prominent theories is the rational choice model (Downs 1957) that attempts to explain the irrational decisions people make through a proposed rational process. Many things in the modern political culture in the United States make it hard to analyze this pattern of behavior, one being the growing population of minorities (Maciag 2015). If we look deeper and with a more critical eye into the rational choice model by Downs, it does not factor in race as a cost or benefit
nor in any specific part of the model. For a long time now, race has been a large mobilizer of political action (Frymer 2005; 2008). Therefore, is should be recognized that, race is not simply a cost or benefit; it affects the entire rational choice model.

Verba, Brady, and Schlozman (1995) argue that the core motivation behind political participation can be put into three main areas: time, money, and civic skills. They argue that because these traits can be attained by non-political factors, they provide a solid sense of how people are motivated. Moreover, they hold these traits are so encompassing that socioeconomic status is the be all and end all in terms of explaining political motivations.

The problem for minority mobilization, as I discuss in this paper, is the absence of motivation. There is no specific mention about the willingness of citizens to give their time or money depending on their ethnicity or race. I believe that despite time, money, and all the civic skills needed to participate, the motivation of minorities to participate is dampened by the absence of role models and a system that appreciates the unique mindset of minority citizens. Minorities need to be motivated and mobilized to give their time and money because at the surface level they do not feel that giving their time is worth it in a system that does not represent them, want them, or that was designed without them in mind.

To illustrate this, we can look to the 2008 presidential election, in which the second largest mobilization of Black voters occurred after the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Clark 2013). Many Blacks were given their first introduction into the American political system, which suggests that the possibility of demographic representation on its own mobilizes minority citizens to become politically involved (Broockman 2013). There is also a trend that shows
proportional representation on its own at the state level mobilizes those of color to participate politically (Broockman 2013).

If the motivation or mobilization of American minorities is being stifled, then an entire population of people is being left out of the American political system. Political scientists need to recognize individual experience and realize that race is a factor that influences a great deal of political behavior in American politics (Federico and Luks 2005, Leighley and Velditz 1999). This is not to say that as Americans we do not have strains of homogenous thought. It does say, that for many of the political decisions that are made, race is arguably an important component of the decision-making process, with considerable weight. It is certainly important enough that with the growing population of American minorities, it needs to be more seriously considered.

This paper aids our understanding and contribution to the literature on political participation and motivation by adding a new perspective to the explanation for the lack of people of color holding elected office. I aspire to show that Black and Latinx Americans are not being motivated to run for state office, resulting in a demobilization of their political participation, because the state level has created a voting system that keeps minorities from being successful when they do run for public office. By focusing on the electoral climate weighed against the success of minority candidates, I hoped to shed new light on the systematic explanations for why Black and Latinx Americans are underrepresented in political life.

Racial Threat Theory, Minority Disadvantage and Other Issues of Underrepresentation: How or why does underrepresentation happen?

Throughout American political history, it has been identified that there is a lack of representation of individuals with minority status. If one were to look to any large body politic,
an example being the United States (Engstrom and McDonald 1982), the numbers show that members are not representative of their constituencies. Although, for a country with a majority population that is not those of color, it is not necessarily obvious why the lack of representation is an issue. Just simply knowing that certain groups of people are not represented is not enough on its own. It is also understanding how underrepresentation happens and why the gap of minority representation is still large. My position is that it can be understood as an institutional problem that promotes an electoral climate problem.

The description of the difference between minority political participation outcomes or determinants and the experience of the majority population can be compared to buying an orange. Person one goes to the supermarket every day to buy an orange. They enter the market, look over the whole section and pick the orange they would like to buy. They do not always pick the ripest orange or the prettiest orange. They could if they wanted, but some days they have different desires in the orange they want. Person two person goes into the supermarket every day and desires an orange as well. But they are handed an orange picked out by the employee from behind the counter. No matter what day they go in, if they want an orange, it is handed to them. Some days the first person might get home with their orange and wish they had picked a different one; the second person might get a nice orange some of the time. The difference between the two people is that no matter what, for the first person, regardless of what orange they pick, it was always whatever orange they wanted. Their orange choice came down to what time they entered the store, what section they looked in, etc. If person one continually gets bad oranges, they stop going because the store does not have good oranges. If the second person continually gets bad oranges, they stop going because they are continuedly given bad oranges,
not necessarily because there are not good oranges to give. Political participation and representation by minorities in American politics has always been what people have been given, not what they have been allowed to choose (Popkin 1994).

Historically, if political institutions have given those from racial minorities very few options, they have never had an opportunity to pick their own orange. Too often, and predictably, minority Americans are handed an orange upon entering the market. Moreover, it is often the case that the supermarket employee has handed them a bruised, over ripe, and picked over orange, despite there being beautiful, sweet, bright oranges still on the shelf.

Racial Threat Theory

One reason minorities are not well represented in American politics is that White or majority political actors are afraid of what an influx of minority political participation might do to upset the dominant or status quo system. Recent studies show that despite younger generations being more tolerant and aware of race, it is still a huge factor in how they make decisions (Schildkraut and Marotta 2018). This suggests that racial threat theory may still be a prominent explanation for political outcomes in the United States, despite current generational shifts. Racial threat theory suggests that the majority sees the minority as a threat, especially as the minority grows in number (Dollar 2014). This can help us understand how and why underrepresentation in the political sphere has always been a problem that does not seem to be getting better (Tate 2001). Racial threat theory also explains that the threat is felt through the looming possibility of change. This suggests that in the political realm, White males have dominated for so long that the

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4 Here I reference segregation, Jim Crow laws, voting suppression.
idea of having women and those of color participating in politics and gaining public office creates an uncertainty and fear that they will change the system. Right now, there is not a large number or even a proportional number of Blacks and Latinx in public office throughout most of the United States. The fear then is that if minorities were to gain proportional representation in office, they would start creating policies that advantage only minorities and not white Americans.

By extension of this theory, they are afraid that office holders of color will change the system in a way that does not benefit the majority. Although what is not understood is that due to the disadvantages, discrimination, and disenfranchisement of Black and Latinx Americans, even if they did think in a way that only benefitted them, the needs and wants that have been withheld from these groups, would benefit most if not all people in the country. Often when people of color enter office with an agenda, it is to create better housing, address poverty, and provide better schooling, policies that stand to benefit all Americans. (Minta and Sinclair-Chapman 2012) Racial threat theory is one attempt to explain why we do not see more Blacks and Latinx in public office.

My research aims to shed light on the fact that racial disadvantages are deeply seeded in the political institutions and electoral systems of state governments and that these arrangements disproportionality and consistently disadvantage political candidates of color. My research seeks to advance the discussion and consider the possibility that even if policies, laws, systems, etc. are not racially motivated in theory or practice, they have consequences that need to be re-examined to see why minorities are experiencing disproportionate representation. Just saying that racial
attitudes have changed does not erase them from political institutions or erase them from electoral climates.

State Political Culture

Other scholars have looked at the state political culture to help answer why certain people fail in their political participation efforts (e.g., Elazar 1970, Johnson 1976). A state’s political culture is based on the idea that more moral or moralistic states will strive for a more detailed and individual culture in which more needs are met for the common good (Elazar 1970). This allows for a freer flowing society in which more general respect is common. States that are more moralistic understand they must interact and engage with the government to get what they want. There is a more distant relationship between citizens and government in states that are more traditional in political culture. Traditional state cultural theory suggests there are economic and political elites who should be in charge and running the government system (Elazar 1972). Pairing this with what my research looked at; I assumed the political culture influences electoral climate. If a state wants a less individualistic culture and elites to be in charge, minorities and the traditionally underrepresented segments of society will arguably have a more difficult time gaining political influence.

Political culture is important for assessing and analyzing why and how underrepresentation happens. Political culture can be pointed to or blamed for a more stringent electoral climate, making it harder to vote. From a qualitative stance and pairing it with racial threat theory, if traditionally the constituency does not want to have a hand in the government that serves them, they are not going to be as accepting of who is elected. They want people who
are safe and reliable and who are not going to disrupt the system. With what was previously mentioned with racial threat theory, it is safe to say that Black and Latinx Americans will be less likely to win public office in states with a more traditional political culture.

What I expect to test are the two following hypotheses: **Hypothesis 1:** The Cost of Voting Index will have a negative effect on the electoral success of minority politicians running for statewide offices. **Hypothesis 2:** There will be less descriptive representation when the Cost of Voting Index values are higher. Aside from looking into why underrepresentation is an issue and where it comes from, research also shows how minority groups are mobilized by the desire for descriptive representation alone. Simply seeing someone who looks like you run for public office, for a minority constituent is one of the facts that can lead to mobilization and vote choice (Broockman 2013). My project sought to prove that one reason underrepresentation started and is continuing to happen is voting laws and that is it affecting the mobilization of those of color.

**Revolving Door Dilemma of Underrepresentation**

If Blacks feel underrepresented in politics and do not feel that their issues and problems are being heard, then they should run for office and represent. But Blacks are not running, and when they do run, they are not winning. Beyond voter turnout, at either an aggregate or an individual level, I wanted to test the electoral success of minority candidates when they do run for public office. I was limited to answering these questions using the statewide Cost of Voting Index (COVI) values. However, there are several statewide offices, such as governor and senator, in which the electoral constituency is the entire state. These offices, and other statewide elected offices, become my primary testing ground.
The COVI is a set of values that are given to each state based on a variety of variables, representing state election laws, starting in 1996 and going through to 2020. The availability of the COVI is what defines my timeline for the research. For each year, each state is assigned a value and a rank from 1-50, with larger numbers indicating a more restrictive electoral climate. Index values provide a measurement of each state singularly and in relation to the other states. Over time some states have made it harder to vote and some have made it easier. All these factors are analyzed in conjunction with the election performance and election results data I collect. For the first research question and I use the COVI ranks because I look at all the years together and standalone index values are not comparable over time. In the latter test, I use the raw 2020 values because I am analyzing a single year.

As a reminder, the lower the COVI value and subsequent rank the easier it is to vote in each state. The system uses between 21-42 different variables, depending on the year, to establish the difficulty of casting a ballot in all 50 states. Some of the factors for determining how easy it is to vote are being able to register as late as Election Day, early voting, and felon restrictions on voting. Considering the 2020 election in Illinois (Illinois is a state that is easier to vote in) it was possible to register to vote the same day before the election. Media accounts note many new voters registered on Election Day in Illinois. This raises the question if this level of mobilization would have been possible in Illinois without the ability to vote so easily. Other factors that result in lower COVI values in 2020 are the number of early voting days, mail-in ballots, and not requiring photo identification to register (Schraufnagel, Pomante, Li 2020).

There is a lot that can be done with COVI values to test how they may influence minority political representation. Is it the case that states with lower COVI values associate with greater
descriptive representation of minorities? One might imagine that states with more inclusive electoral processes are more likely to produce state legislators who look like state citizens. I know that some state legislatures are part-time positions and that these legislatures tend to be more elite bodies with lower descriptive representation (Johnson 1976). Can COVI values also help explain variance in the descriptive representation of state legislatures?
CHAPTER 2
MINORITIES, THE COVI, AND ELECTORAL SUCCESS

I had several ways to test each state’s electoral/institutional climate against minority electoral success. In the first set of tests, I examined candidates running for statewide offices. Packing, as a gerrymandering strategy, has increased minority candidate electoral success in some states, especially when gerrymandering has led to majority-minority districts (Engstrom 2013). But the COVI values distinguish states and not legislative districts within a state. To overcome this modeling problem, I limited the analysis of electoral performance to minority candidates running for statewide offices. Specifically, I collected data on all minorities who ran for governor, senator, lieutenant governor (when running alone), at-large house races, and other positions within the plural executive of state governments such as attorney general, treasurer, and secretary of state. I examined all statewide races from 1996 to 2020 and included only minorities who ran as the candidate of one of the two major political parties. Third party candidates were already disadvantaged and their inclusion in the analysis would have confounded my tests of minority electoral accomplishment.

I examined the electoral success of minority candidates who ran for statewide office three different ways. The first was a dummy variable scored 1 if a minority candidate won office, and the variable was scored 0 if the candidate lost the statewide race. I expected a higher state COVI value to associate with zeros, so a negative coefficient was expected in the logistical regression I
ran. Second, I tested whether COVI values and other control variables can predict a minority candidates’ own percent, or the percentage of total votes received. Third, I ran the same model with the election margin as the dependent variable, so candidates who lost received a negative value.

All three considerations are related, and the latter two might seem perfectly correlated. But not all statewide races have only two candidates, so the third test accounted for this by examining the difference between the winning candidate’s vote percentage and the minority candidate’s vote percentage, which accounted for possible third-party candidates on the ballot. For instance, let us assume a minority candidate received 40 percent of the vote and lost. In one scenario, the winning candidate might have received 60 percent of the vote and the minority candidate’s election margin would equal -20% (40 – 60). In a different scenario, with a third-party candidate running, the minority candidate may have fared, relatively speaking, better. In this instance the winner may have received 45 percent of the vote, to 40 percent for the minority candidate, and 15 percent for a third-party candidate. Now the minority election margin equals -5 percent (40 - 45). The assumption is that in the second scenario, the minority candidate performed better than they did in the first example.

To further illustrate the three measurement strategies, for my dependent variables, consider Kamala Harris (D), a Black woman, who ran for Attorney General of California against Steve Cooley (R) in 2010. Four minor party candidates also ran in this race. Ms. Harris won the race, obtaining 46.05% of the vote to 45.21% for Mr. Cooley. In the first model, Ms. Harris is simply scored 1 because she won. In the second model, she received a score of 46.05,
representing her own vote percentage. In the third instance, she receives a score of .84 (46.05% - 45.21%) equal to her winning vote margin.

With each of the three dependent variables, or measures of minority electoral support, I expected a negative association with state COVI values. I ran the three different tests in the spirit of scientific inquiry to learn how robust the relationship is between the two concepts and to test whether a statistical relationship can withstand multiple model specifications. Each model represents at least one, and sometimes more, unique assumptions.

**Volume of Minority Candidates**

Before I began tests of the electoral success of minority candidates who ran for statewide office, it was possible to simply test whether minorities, in general, were less likely to run for public office than majority Whites. My tests were that many competent minority individuals simply would not run for public office given the long history of White male dominance of electoral politics in the United States (Shapiro 2016). This level of demobilization is particularly troubling because it suggests a level of political alienation that will certainly result in less minority representation in elected political positions.

To test minority demobilization, generally, I calculated the number of possible times a minority candidate could have run in a governor's race, a US Senate race, or an at-large House race from 1996 through 2020. In all there were 870 opportunities, and 59 minority candidates ran in the period studied. In other words, 6.78% (59/870) of all candidates for statewide office represented one or the other of the two largest minority groups in the United States. This, of course, is a lot less than the percentage of these two groups in the population during any year
from 1996 to 2020. Indeed, in the time studied, US Census Bureau estimates suggest that over 28 percent of the country’s population was either Black or Latinx. Hence, I obtain a difference of about 21% (28 – 6.78). This suggests minorities, overall, are descriptively underrepresented in American state politics. But I suspected this might have been the case in some states more than others and tested this. Specifically, I wanted to know what role a restrictive state electoral climate, or higher COVI values, might be playing when it came to the scarcity of minority candidates. Was it because when they do run, they are less likely to win?

Most specifically, I tested whether a more restrictive state electoral/institutional arrangement could help us understand minority candidate electoral success or lack thereof. I began by examining bivariate relationships. The strength and direction of the relationship between each of the three dependent variables, outlined above, was compared to state COVI Ranks because this standardized state performance across the 25 years studied. Specifically, I used the state rank in the presidential election cycle prior to, or contemporaneous with, the relevant statewide race. So, for an Arizona race for secretary of state in 2006 (Israel Torres-D) I used the state’s 2004 COVI rank. In the Alabama Senate race between Jeff Sessions (R) and Vivian Davis Figures (D) in 2008, I used the state’s 2008 rank. In the time studied, I identified 182 minority candidates running for a statewide office as a representative of one of the two major political parties. Table 1 displays the bivariate relationships between state COVI ranks and the three measures of electoral achievement.

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5 We do not include the 23 minority candidates who ran for Lieutenant Governor on the same ticket with a gubernatorial candidate.
Table 1


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COVI Rank</th>
<th>Won Office</th>
<th>Own Percent</th>
<th>Election Margin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.27 (p &lt; 0.001)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won Office</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.71 (p &lt; 0.001)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Percent</td>
<td>0.23 (p &lt; 0.001)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Margin</td>
<td>0.25 (p &lt; 0.001)</td>
<td>0.77 (p &lt; 0.001)</td>
<td>0.94 (p &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note in the first column of Table 1, each of the three indicators of the electoral accomplishment of minority candidates is negatively linked to state COVI rank. That is minorities, on average, performed more poorly in states with higher COVI ranks. A higher rank, relative to other states, indicates that the cost of voting is higher. As the state rank moves toward 50th, the electoral achievement of the minority candidates goes down. Moreover, the statistical significance of the relationships, considering each of the three tests, cannot be denied. The bivariate relationships between the three dependent variables (Columns 2 and 3) suggest these are not exactly alike, so I have three unique tests of the role the COVI plays in depressing minority electoral success.

Of course, bivariate relationships are not the whole story, and I had to control for other considerations. For instance, I might have expected minority candidates to perform better in states with larger minority populations. I also know that minority citizens, especially African American voters (White and Laird 2020), are more likely to align with the Democratic Party. If a disproportionate number of the minority candidates in my tests represented the Republican Party,
this could have complicated matters and helped explain lower electoral accomplishment for Black candidates. The following explains the modeling assumptions I made and how each of the control variables was operationalized or measured.

**Control Variables**

The first control variable was the candidate’s party. I labeled this consideration Democrat and scored all candidates who ran for statewide office representing the Democratic Party 1 and the Republican Party candidates “0.” Third party minority candidates were excluded from the analysis. I anticipated a positive association between being a candidate of the Democratic Party and electoral success. In this instance, it was important to appreciate that in some scenarios a minority Republican candidate might be viewed as less threatening to majority White voters, and this could have caused the candidate to obtain greater support. This might especially be the case once the cost of voting was held constant. I take a qualitative look at the electoral process of a few minority Republican candidates later.

Next, I controlled for the level of Electoral Competition. In this instance, I was not using a competitive electoral environment as an indicator of the benefits of voting. Instead, my concern was that when electoral contests are tighter, voters will not want to risk voting for a minority candidate out of fear their vote may be wasted. If an average voter assumes minority candidates are systematically disadvantaged and they want to vote for the eventual winner, they may opt for the White candidate. I measured electoral competition as the difference between the vote percentages of the two major party candidates at the top of the ticket (governor, senator, or president) in either of the contemporaneous election cycle or the previous election cycle. I used
the previous election cycle value for odd year races for statewide office. For instance, when Donald McEachin, a Black Democrat, ran for Attorney General in Virginia in 2001 I used the competition at the top of the ticket in the 2000 Virginia presidential election cycle. I anticipated a larger margin, indicating lower electoral competition, would associate with more minority candidate support. Similarly, lower competition equaled more minority candidate support and a negative coefficient in the regressions is expected.

Next, I tested whether the gender of the minority candidate made a difference. I labeled this variable Female and expected that minority females might be especially disadvantaged. Although research has shown that female candidates, in general, perform on par with men when they have similar previous experience and campaign resources (Dittmar 2015; Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997), I hypothesized that minority women are disadvantaged. If women are disadvantaged in society, minority females might find it particularly difficult to win statewide elected office. Again, I anticipated negative coefficients in the regression analyses.

My fourth and fifth control variables were the Percent Black Population and the Percent Latinx Population. In each instance I used US Census Bureau data. The 1990 values were used for the 1996-1999 elections, the 2000 Census figures for the 2000-2004 elections, the 2005 population estimates provided by the Census Bureau were used for the 2005-2009 elections, the 2010 values for the 2010-2013 elections, the 2014 values (population estimates) for the 2014-2018 election, and the 2019 (population estimates) for the 2019-2020 elections. Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for each of the three-dependent variables, my key explanatory variable (COVI Rank), and each of the control variables.
Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Variables used to Test Minority Candidate Electoral Success in Statewide Races: 1996-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Min. Value</th>
<th>Max. Value</th>
<th>Mean Value</th>
<th>Stand. Dev.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won Office</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Percent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Margin</td>
<td>-63.88</td>
<td>43.53</td>
<td>-11.06</td>
<td>19.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Explanatory Variable</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVI Rank</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28.66</td>
<td>13.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Competition</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>51.41</td>
<td>14.55</td>
<td>9.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black Population</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>15.33</td>
<td>10.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Latinx Population</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>13.75</td>
<td>13.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Considering the descriptive statistics, I noted the mean value of .24 for the Won Office consideration can be interpreted in a straightforward manner. Specifically, the value indicates that when minority candidates ran for a statewide office in the period studied, they won about 24 percent of the time. In other words, 44 of the 182 minority candidates won, and 138 minority candidates lost. Dropping to the third dependent variable, or the Election Margin consideration, I noted the minimum value was represented by Ed Lopez, a Latino Republican who lost the Secretary of State race in Rhode Island in 1998 and the maximum value belongs to Jesse White, a Black Democrat who handily won the 2010 race for Secretary of State in Illinois. The minimum COVI rank of 2 tells us that in the period studied there were no minority candidates running for statewide office in a state that was ranked easiest to vote in (usually Oregon). The
mean of .32 for the variable Female indicates that about 32 percent (58/182) of the minority candidates running for statewide office in the period studied were women.

Using the variables presented in Table 2, I ran three regression models, one for each of the three dependent variables, and reported the results in Table 3. My primary concern was the relative cost of voting or the restrictiveness of each state’s electoral climate.

### Table 3

Minority Electoral Success when Running for Statewide Office and the COVI

| Models: Logit Regression/Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression/OLS Regression |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Key Explanatory Variable**    | **Won Office**  | **Own Percent** | **Election Margin** |
| COVI Rank                       | -.053 (.019) *  | -.227 (.080) *  | -.454 (.158) *  |
| **Control Variables**           |                 |                 |                 |
| Democrat                        | .939 (.592)     | 5.233 (2.633) * | 9.502 (4.649) * |
| Electoral Competition           | -.004 (.020)    | -.222 (.077) *  | -.397 (.145) *  |
| Female                          | -.215 (.620)    | .373 (1.986)    | -2.126 (3.835)  |
| Percent Black Population        | -.013 (.025)    | -.014 (.097)    | .002 (.161)     |
| Percent Latinx Population       | .016 (.017)     | .113 (.060) *   | .220 (.113) *   |
| Constant                        | -.43 (.66)      | 47.53 (3.09) *  | -1.98 (5.90)    |
| Wald Chi²/F-Statistic/F-Statistic | 10.39 *        | 2.99 *         | 3.13 *         |
| Pseudo R²/R²/R²                  | .10             | .16            | .16            |
| n                               | 182             | 182            | 182            |

* p < .05 (two-tailed test); † p < .05 (one-tailed test)

Considering the Won Office model, results presented in the first column suggest the COVI Rank is statistically linked to whether the minority candidate won a statewide race. That is when a state had a higher rank, or a more restrictive electoral arrangement, minority candidates were less likely to win. The test of whether the minority candidate was a Democrat, and the test
of the state electoral competition climate return coefficients are in the correct hypothesis direction. However, they are not statistically significant, on average, after controlling for the state electoral climate. In the next two model runs, both variables are statistically significantly associated with minority electoral achievement in the manner hypothesized. Hence, I feel comfortable suggesting that each of these considerations does matter.

Considering the other two models, I obtained evidence that being a Democrat, on average, helps a minority candidate, all else being equal. Perhaps more telling, I learned that when Electoral Competition in a state is greater, minority candidates perform more poorly in statewide races. One interpretation of this finding is that voters, in general, are less likely to support a minority candidate if they think their vote will be wasted. Alternatively, and consistent with racial threat theory, White voters may be more willing to vote for a minority candidate in a race in which the minority candidate is less likely to win, in part because there is less two-party electoral competition in the state.

For instance, I noted that Stephen Benjamin, a Black Democrat, ran for Attorney General in South Carolina in 2002 and received a larger percentage of the state’s vote than Al Gore received in the 2000 South Carolina presidential contest. Benjamin’s vote percentage topped Gore by 2.63%. The Palmetto State is known to be a Republican Party stronghold and a vote for a minority Democrat might seem less worrisome for majority White voters because they could safely assume, he would not win. Indeed, he did lose. In another instance, I noted former football player Damon Dunn, a Black Republican who ran for Secretary of State in California in 2010 beat John McCain’s performance in the 2008 California presidential contest. Dunn was not a threat to win in a notable stronghold of the Democratic Party, and he outperformed his political
party in the state. If these occurrences are systematic, it is easy to understand why minorities perform more poorly in states in which elections, on average, are closer.

The research presented does not aim to prove that Black or Latinx Americans never win elections. It also does not set out to prove that they should win every election they run for. Although there is evidence in some circumstances that they should have or could have won, they did not. For those who did, what is the success measured by and what kind of political climate did they have to make that so? I do not aim to disprove that Blacks can win elections, but more so I wanted to explore the circumstances that led to their losses. Not all Blacks lose; some win. Some who lose even perform quite well.

Randy Brock of Vermont seems to rise against the grain of most of the data and show that sometimes Blacks perform well. If we unpack Brock’s specific situation, a few areas may have attributed to why he may have performed so well. Our first observation is that he is the only person of color we see from Vermont in our data. This points to the possibility that his success is more than its face-value. Circling back to the previous observations, Brock might be a safe nonthreatening candidate. The second observation is that when Brock ran the first few times, Vermont had a relatively low COVI ranking. This low ranking may have been what gave him the electoral climate in the mid-2000s to be able to have his initial success. This corroborates with the data, since this is when Brock had his largest vote percentages. In his later two races, he still performed well, but the COVI ranking was higher and his party and own percentages were lower.

Therefore, even when Black Americans perform well and their percentage beating the percentage of support their own party receives at the top of the ticket, when the political climate
is more stringent, or a state has a higher COVI rank, the performance is still not as good as it could have been. Another obvious trend we see with Brock is that he is a Republican male. This is important since most Blacks and their interests are associated with the Democratic Party. When Blacks run as Republicans, the question about why arises because this appears to go against their own interests (White and Laird 2020). I might assume that because of racial threat theory, Blacks will run as a Republican because they hope it makes them a less threatening candidate. On the flip side, if their hunch is right, White voters may be more likely to forgive the fact that a candidate is Black since he is a male running as a Republican, taking away part of the potential threat the candidate poses by being Black. I can make this assumption because there are Black female candidates in a similar situation that do not perform as well and Black male Democrats who do not win either. With this trend, it can be at least qualitatively assumed that gender, race, and party each play a significant role in deciding how threatening a candidate may be.

Amos Williams (MI), who had a similar COVI rank, similar election date, and is a Black male did not perform nearly as well as Brock. One obvious difference is that he was a Democrat. This begs the question of how or why one factor can determine so much. Brock was a Black man who ran as a Republican, and Williams was a Black man who ran as a Democrat. In a quantitative analysis paired with what we know from racial threat theory and state political cultures, connection to electoral success becomes more apparent.

Some might say that without identical situations, it is hard to weigh how one factor can be considered as correlated. So, let us take a situation that is identical and show that party is a big determining factor. In 2018, there were two Black men who ran for state office, Boyd Rutherford
and Ben Jealous, in Maryland. Both men were running in a state with the same COVI rank and same state conditions, the only difference was that Jealous ran as Democrat and Rutherford ran as a Republican. Both men even ran to be leader of the same state agency. In this situation, the Democrat won and the Republican lost. When these two candidates are put side by side, it is hard to ignore that party was the only factor on paper that separated the two. The COVI score for Maryland in 2018 was relatively low, having a rank of 9. I cannot attribute the disparity in electoral success to the electoral/institutional climate. But I can find a scenario in which COVI rank is higher, making it more difficult to vote. Chris Morris (AR) who ran for state treasurer in 2006 can be compared to Randy Brock in which their difference is the COVI Rank. When Randy Brock was successful, Vermont had a COVI rank of 9 compared to Morris’ situation in Arkansas with a COVI rank of 41. This shows that the one difference between these two is that one ran in an electoral climate that made it harder to vote. This poses the obvious question of whether Morris would have won his race if his constituency had had an easier way to vote. Situations that put similar races side by side and compare the COVI rank differences, it asks why Black are and Latinx Americans are not winning in environments where they maybe should have.

Next, I turned to the underrepresentation of minorities in state legislatures, testing if the COVI can help understand variations in the demographic representation of these subpopulations. Because the data were readily available, I also checked for the underrepresentation of women in states with more restrictive electoral climates.
Underrepresentation of Minorities and Women in State Legislatures

The research question I address in this section is: Do higher COVI values, indicating a more restrictive state electoral climate, produce less minorities and women holding state legislative seats. Although I have not consistently considered gender, in this instance because the data were readily available and this is another underrepresented group in political positions across the United States (Dolan and Hansen 2018), I tested whether fewer women are in the state legislatures when the cost of voting in the state is higher.

I focused on the underrepresentation of minorities and women in 2021 and used the 2020 COVI values as my primary predictor variable. Because I was conducting my tests using a single year, it was appropriate to use just the COVI values. I tested things multiple ways to ensure my findings were not simply the product of a particular measurement strategy. First, I tested the gap between the percentage of each state’s minority and female populations and the percentage of these same groups in state legislatures. For instance, using the 2019 Census Bureau population estimates in Mississippi, I learned that 37.80 percent of state citizens identified as Black or African American. In 2021, Blacks held only 31.03 percent of the seats in the state legislature (40/122 in the House and 14/52 in the Senate). The Black representation gap in Mississippi equaled 6.77 percent.

Note the strong positive association between the gap in representation of African Americans and COVI values in 2021 shown in Figure 1. This relationship is statistically significant and indicates that on average Blacks are more underrepresented in states with higher COVI values. One can also notice that there are eight American states in which Blacks are
overrepresented in state legislatures. The eight states all appear below the zero (0) horizontal line. In alphabetical order the states are Colorado, Illinois, Missouri, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, and Washington. Importantly, six of the eight states have negative COVI values or make voting less restrictive on average. Blacks are underrepresented in the other 42 state legislatures. The states with more than a five percent gap are Arkansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Mississippi. Of those four, only Massachusetts has a negative COVI value. The other three states are ones in which the act of voting is more restrictive.

![Figure 1. 2020 COVI and the gap between % Blacks in state legislatures and state Black populations in 2021.](image)

Considering the gap in representation of the Latinx population shown in Figure 2, all states are above the horizontal line marked by zero (0). There are no states in which the Latinx population is overrepresented in a state legislature. The state that comes closest is West Virginia, where only 1.7 percent of the state residents identify as Latin American or Hispanic and 1.49
percent of state legislators (2 out of 134 total legislators) identify as Latin American or Hispanic. Notably, West Virginia is a conservative state and voted for the Republican Party presidential candidate in the past six presidential election cycles (2000-2020), but it had a negative COVI value in 2020, indicating it is a state with a more inclusive state electoral/institutional climate than average.

![Figure 2. 2020 COVI and the gap between % Latinx in state legislature and state Latinx population in 2021.](image)

Overall, there is no positive relationship between COVI values and the Latinx representation gap. Undoubtedly, this is in part explained by the variability in the size of state Latinx populations. In 2019, state Latinx populations varied from 1.7% in West Virginia to 49.3% in New Mexico. In California, one of the states where it is easiest to vote, 39.4% of the population identifies as Latinx. The state has a small legislature, 120 seats in total, yet there are 33 Latinx state legislators representing 27.5 percent of the two chambers (22/80 in the state
House and 11/40 in the state Senate). There is an almost 12 percent gap (39.4 – 27.5) in representation in the state ranked sixth easiest to vote in during the 2020 election cycle. This finding alone suggests that states with larger Latinx populations might find it more difficult to close the Latinx representation gap, irrespective of the cost of voting. To get a clearer and more in-depth analysis, I omitted the states with Latinx populations larger than 15 percent to see how the states with smaller Latinx populations would hold up to the test. When I did this, the familiar positive association between higher cost of voting and a larger minority gap appeared.

Next, I turned my attention to the proportional representation of women in state legislatures, displayed in Figure 3. Here I found the same pattern that exists for African Americans. A statistically significant positive association is obvious. In other words, as COVI values turn positive, the gap in representation of women grows larger. There is only one state in the Union in which women are overrepresented in a state legislature—Nevada. In the Silver State, in 2021, 37 of the 63 state legislators (27/42 House and 10/21 Senate) were female. Moreover, the representation gap is below 10 percent in Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington, all states that make it easier to vote on average. States that make it harder to vote such as Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Wyoming have among the largest female representation gaps.

I also wanted to test the effect that the cost of voting is having on the number of representatives in state legislature, when I controlled for the size of minority and female populations in each state. I used the proportional size of the Black, Latinx, and female delegations in each legislature in 2021 as my dependent variables. I combined the number of representatives from the two chambers, added the size of the two chambers, divided to obtain the
proportion of each group, and then multiplied by 100 to obtain the %Black Legislators, %Latinx Legislators, and %Female Legislators. These become the three dependent variables. My key explanatory variable is each state’s 2020 COVI value. I used the Census Bureau’s 2019 population estimates of each group as an important control variable. I expected that as the state Black Population and state Latinx Population grows as a percentage of all state residents, the size of the same group would grow in the state legislature. Although there is some variation in Female Population, I did not anticipate there is enough variability to pick up a statistically significant relationship in this instance.⁶ Last, I controlled for the Squire Index of legislative professionalism as a surrogate or proxy for state culture. In this instance I hypothesized that larger index values, indicating a more fulltime and professional legislature, would result in better representation of minorities and women in state legislatures.

![Figure 3. 2020 COVI and gap between % females in state legislature and state female population in 2021.](image)

⁶ The state, in 2019, with the largest female population is Alabama where 51.7% of residents are women and the state with the lowest percentage of women is Alaska with 47.9%.
The results are reported in Table 4. Note that the COVI is easily statistically significant in both the African American and Female models. In the first model that tests the effect of the cost of voting on Black representation in state legislatures, I obtained a coefficient of -.736. The 2020 COVI ranges from -2.92 to 1.44 or 4.36 units. Considering this, we saw a drop in Black representation of more than three percent for the full range of the COVI. The drop for females (Column 3) equals a little more than one percent (-.251 * 4.36). However, when I looked at the middle model, which sought to explain Latinx representation in state legislatures, the COVI did not make a difference or did not depress the percentage of Latinx state legislators. Both the size of each state’s African American and Latinx population explains a great deal of variation in the presence of legislators from each group as expected. States like Maine, Vermont, or Wyoming where minority populations are very low do not elect minority legislators. Other states, in which minority populations are larger, witness a greater percentage of minorities in the state legislature as hypothesized.

It is important to treat the two minority groups in this analysis independently. Some states like California and New Mexico have large Latinx populations but well below average African American populations. Other states like Louisiana and Mississippi have relatively large African American populations but very small Latinx populations. You can see control variables are returning coefficients very large relative to the standard error (s.e.), suggesting a very tight fit or relationship between the population variables and the percent of legislators from each group. The Squire Index of legislative professionalism always returns a positive association as expected, but it is not statistically significant. When looking at a simple bivariate relationship between the Squire Index and our three dependent variables, more minorities and women are in state
legislatures with above average professionalism scores. In the case of females, the bivariate relationship is approaching statistical significance, and in the case of Latinx in state legislatures, the relationship is statistically significant (Pearson R = .28 p < .05, two-tailed, n = 50).

Table 4

2020 COVI and the Percentage of Minorities and Female State Legislators in 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model: Ordinary Least Squares Regression</th>
<th>% African American Legislators</th>
<th>% Latinx Legislators</th>
<th>% Female Legislators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (s.e.)</td>
<td>Coefficient (s.e.)</td>
<td>Coefficient (s.e.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 COVI</td>
<td>-.736 (.342) *</td>
<td>.637 (.458)</td>
<td>-.251 (.099) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Population</td>
<td>.895 (.230) *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx Population</td>
<td></td>
<td>.806 (.039) *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.849 (1.657)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squire Index</td>
<td>.251 (2.927)</td>
<td>.690 (4.085)</td>
<td>2.344 (13.799)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.641 (.754)</td>
<td>-4.280 (.996) *</td>
<td>79.854 (82.664)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Statistic</td>
<td>305.53 *</td>
<td>158.11 *</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05 (two-tailed test)

To further explore the relationship between the 2020 COVI and Latin Americans and Hispanics serving in state legislatures, I eliminated the states with relatively large Latinx populations. The growth of the Latinx community in the United States has been considerable (2020 Census | U.S. Census Bureau n.d.) in the past few decades. Some states, presumably because they have been more welcoming or perhaps because there are more jobs, have received many new residents from Latin America. In states like Colorado and Nevada, the Latinx
population is well above average and much of the growth has occurred more recently. Presumably, Latinx representation in these state legislatures has not caught up. This might be more the case because of a lag in obtaining citizenship and the opportunity to run for elected office.

States like Colorado and Nevada that have both lower-than-average COVI values in 2020 and fewer Latinx state legislators prevented the statistical negative relationship from materializing when we consider all 50 American states. But what about a subset of states? When looking at the inter-state distribution of the Latinx population, there is a natural break at 15 percent. Thirty-eight states have less than 15 percent Latinx residents and 12 states have more. I tested the role the COVI might be playing in the 38 states in which Latinx are a truer minority group.

Table 5 presents the results. If I am allowed a one-tailed test of statistical significance, the 2020 COVI is now negatively associated with the percentage of state legislative seats occupied by Latinx citizens. The full range of the 2020 COVI is from -1.44 (Oregon) to 2.91 (New Hampshire) or about 4.35. Both Oregon and New Hampshire are among the 38 states with a less than 15 percent Latinx population. The test of the 2020 COVI, reported in Table 5, returns a coefficient equal to -.394. This suggests that, on average, New Hampshire should expect roughly two percent fewer Latinx representatives in their state legislature than Oregon (-.394 * 4.35), all else being equal. Note also, that the Squire Index is now statistically linked to greater Latin American and Hispanic representation in state legislatures across the board, and of course, states with larger Latinx populations also have a larger percentage of Latinx politicians in the state legislature.
Table 5

Percentage of Latinx State Legislators and the COVI in 2021:
State Population Less than 15 Percent of the Total

Model: Ordinary Least Squares Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Latinx Legislators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient (s.e.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 COVI</td>
<td>-.395 (.228) †</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx Population</td>
<td>.215 (.058) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squire Index</td>
<td>4.448 (2.152) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.646 (.636)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Statistic</td>
<td>14.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05 (two-tailed test); † p < .05 (one-tailed test)

I tested the role played by the state electoral/institutional climate on the electoral success of minority candidates and the proportional representation of minorities and women in state legislatures. Using a combination of racial threat theory and culture theory, I imagined that Black and Latinx candidates and overall representation could be determined by each state’s unique election laws. Laws and processes can make voting restrictive. In some instances, it was necessary to go below the surface to find the evidence, but one does not have to look far to learn that minorities are disadvantaged by a more restrictive state electoral climate.
CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION: PROGRESS FOR THE SAKE OF PROGRESS

In my research, I aimed to show there is a systematic reason for the lack of mobilization of Black and Latinx Americans by looking into the individual experience of those of color. I extended the analysis to examine what effect the cost of voting has on minority candidates who run for statewide offices and test the representation gap in state legislators of minorities and women. I found that a more restrictive electoral climate is working to lower the representation of these notably underrepresented groups.

I measured minority electoral achievement three different ways and found that a more restrictive state electoral climate associates with lower minority electoral success. Moreover, the drop in the probability of winning was not only statistically significant, but it was also substantively very relevant. Analysis of the move from a state in which it is most difficult to vote to a state in which it is easiest to vote led to a drop in the probability of winning from roughly 58 percent to four percent. I also learned that the representation gap in state legislatures is larger states with more restrictive voting laws, with the caveat that a state population is less than 15 percent Latinx.

This research is a starting point for explaining why those of color participate in the way that they do. This research begins to shed a light on the institutional effect of an electoral climate. The research shows that minorities are systematically disadvantaged when it comes to running for and winning elected office a practice that is supposed to be for all Americans. I
found at the micro-analysis level that is not necessarily true and when paired with racial attitudes that influence behavior, as laid out by racial threat theory, it shows this is the first of a string of necessary investigations our American political system.

We are left to ponder how can people be expected to participate politically when it may literally not matter at all how qualified they are or how much good they could do. With minority populations growing larger, are we going to sit idly by while older White males continue to hold a vast majority of legislative seats in a system that is begging for change? My research starts the conversation about who would be in office if given an equal opportunity. Do I aim to say that the system is racist? Do I wish to demand that everyone in the current political system be branded as acting with racial motivations? I do not claim or wish to do either of those things. However, we do have some empirical facts now that warrant a good long and hard look at how we can make the governing system better by making it more inclusive so the representation gap can finally begin to close.

I am not suggesting Black and Latinx Americans should be winning because they are of minority status, so the country can have proportional representation. Of course, everyone should be supported electorally based on ability, qualifications, and the constituency that is voting for them. The people should still have the right to choose whoever they would like. But what I am saying and what this research gives insight into is that there is a possibility of intentional institutional changes that are disproportionately disadvantaging those of color. Candidates who may have otherwise won and started to close the gap on proportionally representing a state’s population in statewide offices are not getting that opportunity. The results reported here are a call to action and a call to examine our current political system more deeply below the surface.
REFERENCES


