

# The Effects of the California Voting Rights Act on School Board Composition

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PS 120 Final Report

## Abstract

The authors collect data on recent school board elections in California for school districts that use district elections by going through publicly available election data and school board information. They also collected data on student body composition for all school districts in California and analyzed the differences between schools using at-large representatives and those using district representatives. The authors then conclude that 1) the California Voting Rights Act has affected a fifth of California school districts into changing election systems; 2) school districts with more students and higher percentages of Latino and Asian students are more likely to have switched from at large elections to district elections; and 3) the CVRA may be slightly increasing the number of minority school board members, especially in school districts with higher percentages of minority students.

## Introduction

The history of voting rights in the United States is a long and complicated one. Prior to 1776, only some 10 to 20 percent of the total population was allowed to vote. Land-owning men over the age of 21 with the right background had the right, leaving out women, slaves, most Jews, most Catholics, and anyone too poor to meet the land requirement.<sup>1</sup> Suffrage in the United has gradually expanded since its limited beginnings, most definitively with amendments to the Constitution: the fifteenth, nineteenth, twenty-fourth, and the twenty-sixth, declaring that the right to vote could not be denied on the basis of race, sex, failure to pay a poll tax or other tax, and age for those eighteen years and older, respectively.<sup>2</sup> But guarantees in the Constitution can be subverted by other means, and continuously have been by those who wish to keep political power for themselves.

The South during the post-Reconstruction time period is a perfect example of this. Aside from illegal terrorist methods, to which law enforcement looked away, plenty of legal methods were used by white supremacists to disfranchise African-Americans. These methods included gerrymandering, literacy tests, white primaries, secret ballot laws, and at-large elections, and were extremely effective at removing voting power from millions of African Americans. Some of these

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<sup>1</sup> "Who Voted in Early America?"

<sup>2</sup> "All Amendments to the United States Constitution."

methods served to directly prevent African Americans from voting, such as literacy tests, which an African American registering to vote would “fail”, and then be unable to vote. The rest of these methods were used to dilute the voting power of African American populations by separating them into different districts using gerrymandering, or using at-large elections to insure that a white majority voter population would elect only white candidates. These methods were so successful in disfranchising African Americans that the Civil Rights Commission reported in 1958 that there was not a single registered African American voter in 44 counties in the Deep South.<sup>3</sup> The 1965 Voting Rights Act, passed at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, did a great deal to rectify these injustices. The law banned literacy tests and other blatant restrictive devices, set out several covered jurisdictions in the South that couldn’t change their electoral procedures without clearing it with the Department of Justice, and laid out procedures to facilitate lawsuits against discriminatory practices. The Voting Rights Act, as a whole, has been enormously successful in preventing the disfranchisement of minorities in the United States. Enormous numbers of African Americans registered to vote immediately following the passage of the act: in covered jurisdictions, the percentage went from 29.3% in 1965 to 52.1% in 1967.<sup>4</sup> Changes in voters resulted in changes in elected officials; the number of African American state legislators went from 3 to 176 in former Confederate states.<sup>5</sup> However, the Voting Rights Act hasn’t gone without its challenges and amendments, including more than twenty Supreme Court Cases spanning from 1966 to 2013. Some challenges have decreased its strength, and some amendments have increased it. Overall, it remains one of the most important pieces of legislation from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is responsible for the current and continual franchise of millions of Americans.

Thornburg v. Gingles was one such case that expanded on the Voting Rights Act. The 1986 case concerned the layouts of districts in North Carolina, and the ruling established the Gingles test, which concerns lawsuits claiming that a minority vote has been diluted by an at-large election system. The Gingles test has three conditions. Firstly, a plaintiff must demonstrate that the racial minority group is large enough and concentrated enough that if the election system were single member districts instead of at-large, then there would be a majority. Secondly, the racial minority group must vote similarly. Thirdly, a plaintiff must demonstrate that the “bloc voting majority group must usually be able to defeat candidates supported by [the] politically cohesive, geographically insular minority group.”<sup>6</sup> In order for a plaintiff to successfully sue and force a change in the electoral system, a racial minority must be proven to be a majority within a certain geographical area and to vote the same way.

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<sup>3</sup> Burton 268

<sup>4</sup> Voting Rights Act (1965).

<sup>5</sup> Grofman

<sup>6</sup> Thornburg v. Gingles 478 U.S. 30 (1986).

The California Voting Rights Act was passed in 2001 as an extension of the Voting Rights Act, and primarily eliminates the first requirement of the Gingles test, that “the fact that members of a protected class are not geographically compact or concentrated does not preclude a finding of racially polarized voting... but may be a factor in determining an appropriate remedy.”<sup>7</sup> The law passed by large margins: 22 to 13 in the senate, and 47 to 25 in the assembly, and received the endorsements of the American Civil Liberties Union and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.<sup>8</sup> Consider a location that is 55% blue, 40% red, and 10% white, and assume that blue votes for blue, red for red, and white for white. In an at-large election electing three representatives, with three blue candidates running, two red, and one white, the three blue candidates are elected. Using the Gingles test, a red plaintiff would have to prove that a geographic third of the district existed such that red would be a majority in that district. Under the CVRA, this requirement is eliminated, and the plaintiff must only prove that the majority bloc votes together and exists, that the minority bloc votes together and exists, and that the minority bloc is sufficiently large. This makes it easier for plaintiffs to force a change from an at-large representative election to a district election. Additionally, it has a provision that requires the government to pay all legal fees associated with the lawsuit should the plaintiff be successful, including if the government chooses to settle and transition to district elections without a court order. The CVRA applies to all counties, cities, and school districts within California.

The CVRA, or the threat of it, has been used an unknown number of times to force changes from at-large representation to by-district. The first case that went to court using the CVRA was *Gomez v. Hanford Joint Union School District*, which ended up being settled out of court in favor of the plaintiff, and the district had to pay over \$100,000 in legal fees.<sup>9</sup> For many school districts, who have smaller budgets when compared to towns and counties, the logical choice is to change their electoral processes rather than defend themselves in court and possibly be forced to reimburse the plaintiff.

The California Voting Rights Act has been challenged a number of times by cities and school districts seeking to keep their electoral process as is. It has withstood such challenges and declared to be constitutional by the California Supreme Court. However, it is difficult to fully measure its effects because of the size of California. There are 58 counties, more than 400 cities, and more than 1,000 school districts in California to which the law applies, and no central system that keeps track of changes due to the CVRA or even what type of election system different jurisdictions use.

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<sup>7</sup> Ab-182 California Voting Rights Act of 2001

<sup>8</sup> SB 976 Bill Documents

<sup>9</sup> Abbot

Unlike the larger jurisdictions to which the Voting Rights Act has been applied to, these individual areas are often much smaller and therefore attract less attention.

With over 1,000 school districts in California, each requiring a board of trustees, often consisting of five people or more, there exists a large amount of data that can be used to better understand the effects of the California Voting Rights Act on changing elections from at-large to district and the resulting changes in racial makeup of a body of elected officials. California has the largest racial minority population within the United States, and understanding how the changes in law have affected voter representation within local elected officials is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the law and the ability of a voter to have their vote matter within America.

## **Direct Impact of the CVRA on School Districts**

When a school district transitions from at-large elections to trustee area elections this can be the result of either a voluntary transition or a legal one through lawsuits or demand letters. In the voluntary ones, school districts perform their own demographic studies and then decide how to accurately split up school districts. This type of transition was found to make up more than 66% of all the transitions to district elections over all levels of government.<sup>10</sup> However, the other set of transitions to district elections is from legal action. This is usually done by lawyers, usually representing community members, gathering demographic information about the school district and school board racial makeup to show that the school district elections are violating the CVRA. Once the lawyers gather the demographic study as evidence of a possible CVRA violation, they send a demand letter to the school district. When the school district receives the demand letter, they have two courses of action. The first is to concede to the demand letter, start the transition to district elections, and pay up to \$30,000 of compensation to the litigation group for their demographic study. The second option is they ignore the demand letter, which allows for a lawsuit to be filed against the school district. Following the passing of the Safe-Harbor Provision in January 1, 2017, bodies served with a demand letter for possible CVRA violations have 45 days after receiving the letter to decide if they want to transition to district elections before a lawsuit against them can be filed.<sup>11</sup> It is also important to note that with the low threshold of evidence that the lawyers need to write to demonstrate a CVRA violation, there have been no successful lawsuits against the demand letters as of May 2018.<sup>12</sup> This lack of success and high lawyer fees may be the reason why very few school districts that receive the demand letter actually go before a judge and just switch to district elections. For example, if a school district loses a CVRA lawsuit, they must

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<sup>10</sup> The California Voting Rights Act in 2018. Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Aziz, Youstina. The California Voting Rights Act: Recent Legislation & Litigation Outcomes. League of California Cities, 3 May 2018.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

pay both their legal fees and the plaintiff's, which could amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars as seen in the *Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights v. Madera Unified School District* case, which cost the Madera Unified School District \$162,500 in legal fees to the plaintiff.<sup>13</sup>

However, the legal fees are not the only burden that school districts must go through when attempting to change their election system. The CVRA also lays out explicit steps that the jurisdiction must go through in order to draw the districts. One of which is working with a demographer, such as the Redistricting Partners, who have redistricted multiple school districts. Once at least one redistricting map is drawn, the school district "must hold at least four public hearings before holding a hearing at which to vote on the ordinance establishing district-based elections. Two of the public hearings must be held before drawing the draft map(s). During those two public hearings, the city council would receive public input regarding the composition of the districts."<sup>14</sup> Only once the redistricting map is approved can the school district transition to district elections.

Thus, it is evident that the school district incurs a high cost both monetarily and time intensively through the receiving of a demand letter. On the other hand, there is a high reward for lawyers that present legal action against school districts, such as Kevin Shenkman, who has sent dozens of demand letters all over California and got compensated up to \$30,000 for each one.<sup>15</sup> This immense profitability of demand letters brings into question the authenticity of the CVRA law and its effectiveness. Therefore, this research paper will hopefully determine if these transitions from at-large elections to district elections are enforcing the CVRA and helping reduce vote dilution of minorities.

## Research Questions

By building our own dataset of Californian school districts, we aimed to answer the following questions.

1. What effect has the California Voting Rights Act had on the type of elections that school districts have? We hypothesized that the CVRA has been used to change a significant portion of California school districts from at-large representative elections to district elections.

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, Michael. "California Voting Rights Act Decision Affirmed By Court Of Appeal." Lozano Smith Attorneys at Law, 2 Mar. 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Aziz *et al.*

<sup>15</sup> Taketa, Kristen. Why School Boards Don't Always Become Diverse Even after Following California Voting Rights Law. San Diego Union-Tribune, 23 Sept. 2018.

2. How have changes in election type influenced that makeup of school boards? We hypothesized that in school districts that have changed to district voting, the racial makeup of school boards would more closely reflect that of constituents and therefore students.
3. Which districts are switching? We hypothesized that districts with higher racial minority percentages with larger populations were more likely to have switched from at-large to district elections.

## Prior Research

Due to the nature of school districts, being numerous and small, school boards haven't attracted much research, especially in the specific area of California school districts affected by the California Voting Rights Act. The Education Governance and Accountability Project at Ohio State University has created a data set covering twenty states, including California, with data from 2002-2015 school district elections that was then used to by Carolyn Abbot and Asya Magazinnik to examine the link between electoral institutions and Latino political success within California. There has been other research done on the effectiveness of the race of representatives at a school district level, including in a 2019 paper by Markie Brayer, which looked at the effect of Hispanic representatives on bilingual funding in urban school campuses in Texas. Brayer concluded that regardless of at-large or single-member district elections, having Hispanic representatives resulted in increased funding for bilingual programs when there was low demand. However, at-large districts did not substantively represent their bilingual constituencies.<sup>16</sup>

## Methodology and Data

In our research, we are seeking to prove our three hypotheses. In order to perform our analysis on them, we generated two datasets. The first hypothesis tests if there is any correlation between the size and/or demographic makeup of the school district and its method for electing board members. For this hypothesis, we had to go through all the school districts in California and find their current process of electing board members. To get an accurate list of all the school districts in California, we first went to the California Department of Education website and exported a CSV file of all the public school districts in California, as of March 2020. It is also important to note that we decided to omit charter and vocational school districts from our dataset because neither elect their board members through countywide elections. Once we had a list of all the eligible school districts in California, we used the most recent county voting records and school board policy pages to find the method that each school board uses to elect their board members. When finding the election method for each school, we chose four different possible labels: at-large elections,

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<sup>16</sup> Translating Descriptive Representation into Substantive Representation: The Role of Electoral Institutions in Urban School Districts in Texas

at-large but changing, trustee-area elections after the passage of the California Voting Rights Act (Post-CVRA), and trustee-area elections prior to its passage (Pre-CVRA). The at-large election label means that the board members of the school district are elected by a school district wide election and there are no plans for changing the election style to trustee area elections in the future. The at-large but changing label means that the board members are currently being elected using the at-large elections but starting with the November 2020 election the school district is electing its board members with trustee area elections. The trustee area elections Post-CVRA label means that the school district transitioned from at-large elections to trustee area elections, sometime after the CVRA law was enacted in 2002. Finally, the trustee area elections Pre-CVRA label means that the school district held trustee area elections before the CVRA law was signed into law in 2002.

In addition to labelling each school district with their method of electing board members, we also collected 2019-2020 school demographic and enrollment size from the California Department of Education Data & Statistics section.<sup>17</sup> This data has nine different racial designations: not reported, American Indian or Alaska Native (Not Hispanic), Asian (Not Hispanic), Pacific Islander (Not Hispanic), Filipino (Not Hispanic), Hispanic or Latino, African American (not Hispanic), White (not Hispanic), Two or More Races (Not Hispanic). With the demographic and enrollment size for each school, we used a Python program to group the schools by school district and find the enrollment size of each school district, in addition to the percentage of the enrollment that identifies as Asian (including Pacific Islander and Filipino), African American (non-Hispanic), and Hispanic or Latino. We have used this to test our third hypothesis, that districts with higher racial minority percentages with larger populations were more likely to have switched from at-large to district elections.

The next wave of our data collection sets out to test our second hypothesis if transitioning to trustee area elections caused any significant change in the racial makeup of school boards. To do this, we created a second dataset that contains only the school districts that were labeled as having trustee area elections Post-CRVA from our first wave of data collection. Then, for each school, we used past election results and information on the school district website to find the year that the first trustee area election happened. Once the year of the transition from at-large elections to trustee area elections was found, we used past elections results and school board minutes to find the school board members that were on the board for each year, starting with 6 years before the election transition to the present. We also made sure cite the sources that we used to find their board tenure. For each board member, we provide their name, gender, and ethnicity. In order to collect the ethnicity data for each elected official, we used the 2015-2019 Rosters of Latino

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<sup>17</sup> "Enrollment by School." Student & School Data Files, California Department of Education, 2019.

Officials provided by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), 2018-2019 rosters of Asian Officials provided by the Asian Pacific American Institute, news reports, and online biographies. For each official, we also included the source where we found their demographic information, when possible.

It is important to note that for past school district elections, we used the county, city, school district, and ballot measure election results compiled from 1995-2018 by the California Elections Data Archive (CEDA) to help us compile the list of board members that for each school district.<sup>18</sup> However, if the school district elections were uncontested for a given election year, the election would be cancelled and not show up in the CEDA dataset. This case of missing elections happened quite frequently for school districts with small enrollments or in rural areas. To avoid missing school board members and fill in missing school board election data, we turned to school board minutes that contained roll calls of the board members or news articles about the cancelled election to help us find the board members for those years and make our dataset as complete as possible. While this allowed us to fill in some of the gaps in years for school board members, some schools would sometimes have multiple uncontested elections and no school board minutes. For these schools, we marked them as inconclusive in our dataset and decided to not include them in our analysis because we were not able to attain enough data about their board members. Furthermore, it is also important to note possible discrepancies in our ethnicity data because we decided to only label the board member's ethnicity as African American, Latino, or Asian, if there are specific sources to that show that this board member identifies with this ethnicity. Thus, there could be elected board members who may personally identify as African American, Latino, or Asian, but if there is not source we can find to show that or other evidence, we did not mark them down.

## Results and Analysis

### *Changing School Districts – Appendix 1*

The first part of our research was determining how many and which school districts we would be collecting further information on. From the over 1,000 school districts in California, we found 927 that elected their school boards through county-run elections, meaning we would be able to collect data on them, and were therefore neither charter nor vocational schools. Of these, we determined that 617 use at-large elections and that 310 use district elections or will be using them starting in 2020. Of these 310, we divided them into three subcategories. For the first category, school districts that started holding district elections prior to the signing of the CVRA in 2002, we

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<sup>18</sup> "County, City, School District & Ballot Measure Election Results 1995-2017." Elections and Voter Information, California Elections Data Archive.



found 98 districts. For the second, school districts that started holding district elections after the signing of the CVRA, we found 152. For the third, school districts currently in the process of switching from at-large elections to district elections, we found 60. We did not find any school districts that have changed from district elections to at-large elections over the past twenty years.

Figure 1 - California School District Election Type

Totals	
Pre-CVRA Elections	98
Post-CVRA Elections	152
At-large/But changing	60
At-large	617
Total	927

Nearly two thirds of California school districts have been unaffected by the CVRA, continuing to use at-large elections. Of the remaining third, a sixth of the total have been changed since the signing of the CVRA, and another portion are currently changing. It is difficult to determine how many of those that have changed have directly been a result of the CVRA – although some of these schools were sued into changing, others may have changed as a result of the pressure the CVRA exerts on schools by forcing them to pay for legal fees that should they lose the case. Others may have changed because of community sentiment. However, given that in all the years prior to 2002, only 98 used district elections, and in the past twenty years, that number has increased by 211, the influence of the CVRA on facilitating switching election types is undeniable.

#### *School District Demographics – Appendix 2*

The second part of our research was collecting data on school district demographics. Using the data that we collected from the California Department of Education Data & Statistics, we were able to group the data by school district type: all districts that used district elections, school districts that switched after the signing of the CVRA, and those that used at-large elections. We grouped those school districts that are changing in 2020 in the at-large category because those district elections have not yet happened, and there is no way to evaluate how effective the CVRA has been in those districts.

Figure 2 - Student Enrollment Within School Districts

		<b>District Elections (All)</b>	<b>District Elections (Post CVRA)</b>	<b>At-Large Elections</b>
Asian	Average	7.30%	7.95%	2.69%
	Standard Deviation	9.19%	9.70%	12.96%
	Median	4.05%	4.46%	3.00%
African American	Average	3.77%	3.99%	8.38%
	Standard Deviation	4.87%	4.49%	4.32%
	Median	2.04%	2.36%	1.19%
Latino	Average	56.61%	58.80%	41.91%
	Standard Deviation	23.32%	21.59%	28.54%
	Median	56.99%	60.66%	33.52%
Enrollment	Total School Districts	250	152	677
	Total Enrollment	3534677	1642200	2497432
	Average	14139	10804	3689
	Median	6219	6219	1189
	Standard Deviation	39727	10901	6600

We previously noted that two thirds of school districts used at large elections. This corresponds to 2.5 million students, whereas the 250 districts using district elections have over 3.5 million students, an average of 14,139 students per school district, compared to the 3,689 average for at large districts.

Figure 3 – Enrollment Average of School Districts

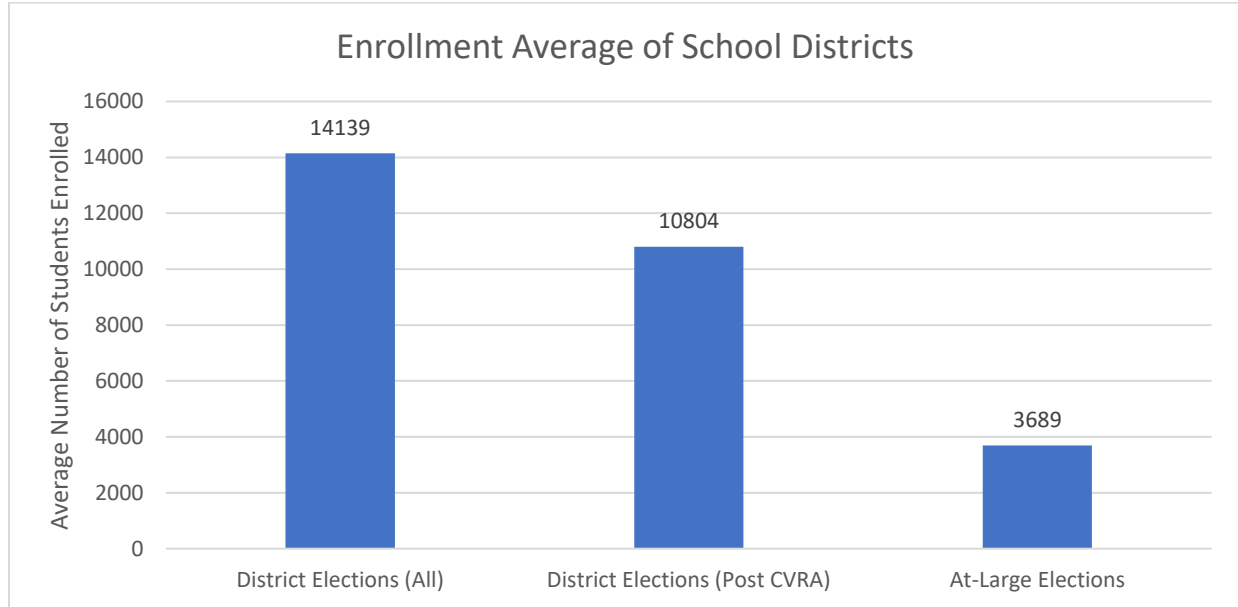
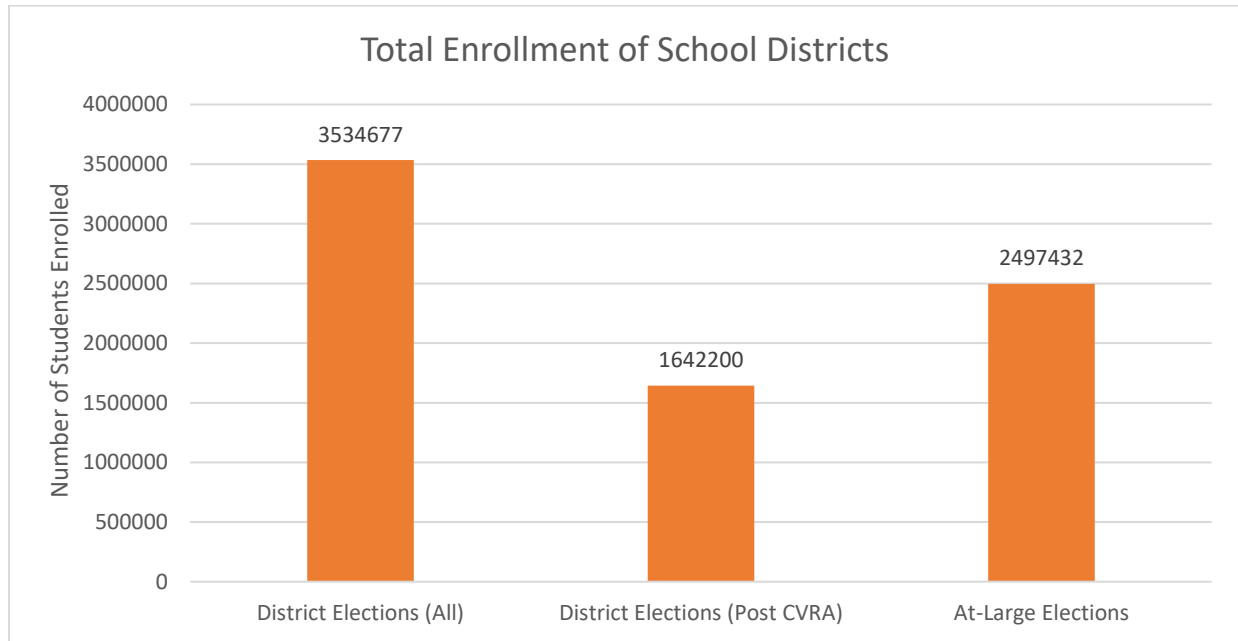
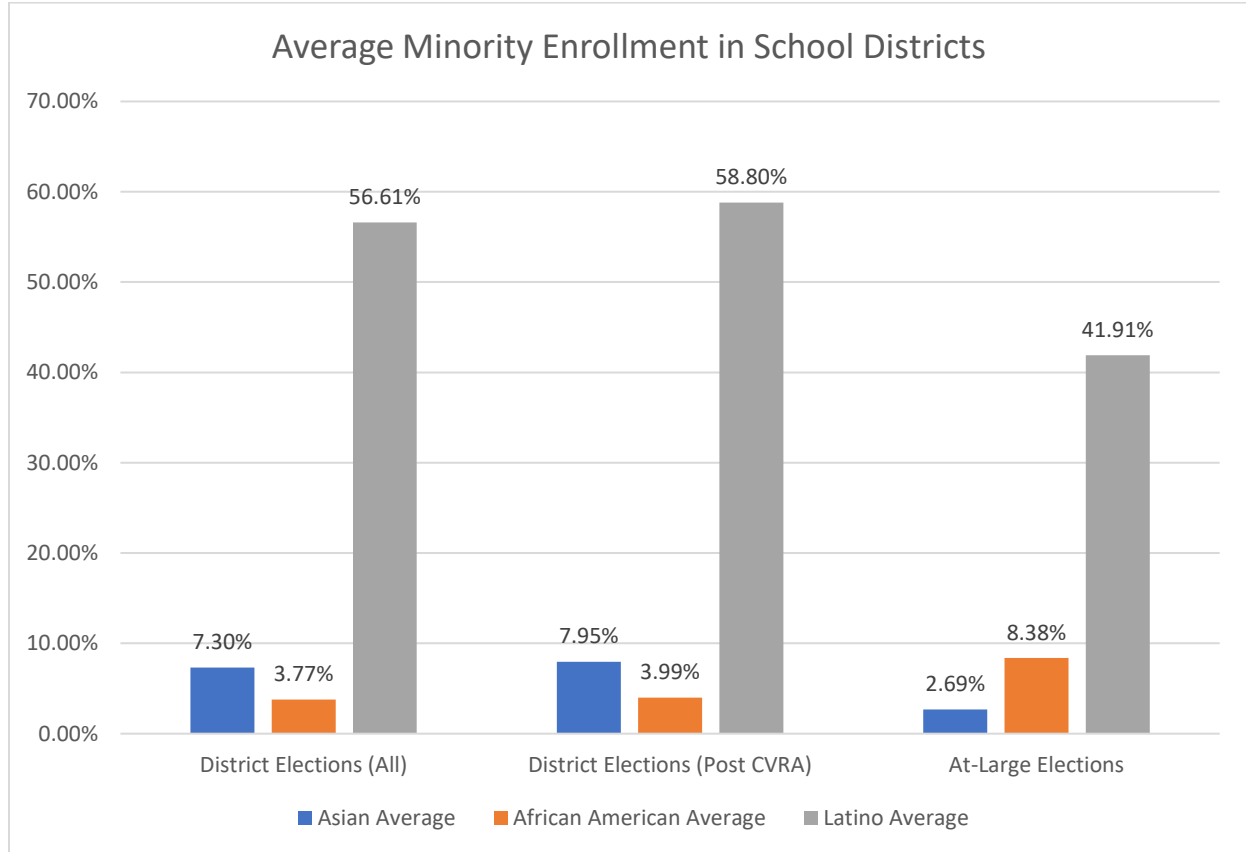


Figure 4 – Total Enrollment of School Districts



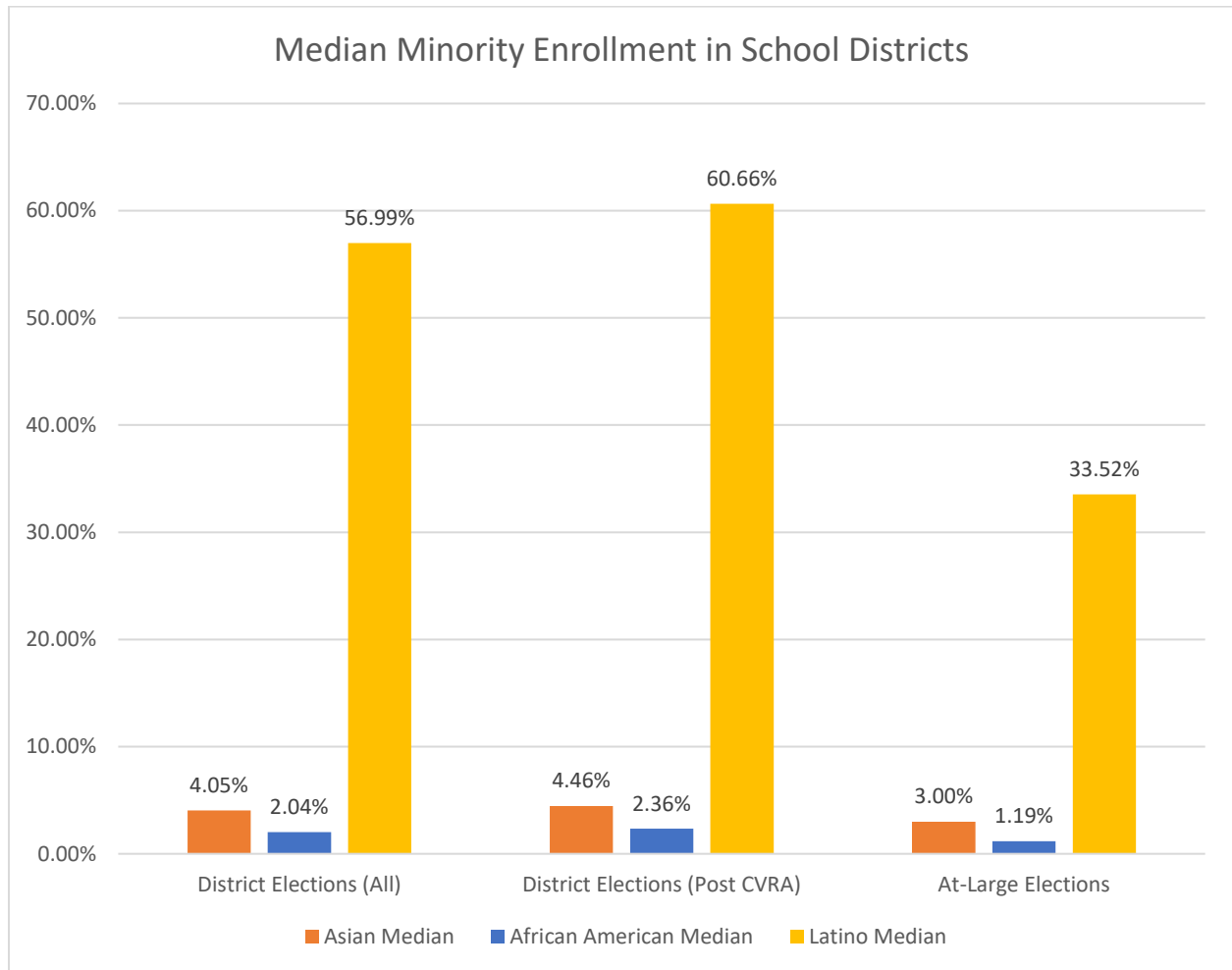
Here, we can also see that the number of students enrolled in Post-CVRA schools is less than half of all students enrolled in district schools, and therefore more students and larger school districts had switched to district elections prior to the CVRA.

Figure 5 – Average Minority Enrollment in School Districts



We then examined the aggregate enrollment data broken down by the three main racial minority categories. First, we found that school districts using district elections had a significantly higher average percentage of Latino students than school districts using at large elections, at 56.61% compared to 41.91%. We found a higher percentage of Asian students in at-large school districts, at 7.30% in district schools compared to 2.69%. We found that the opposite was true for African American students, making up 3.77% of student enrollment in district election schools but 8.38% in at large election schools.

Figure 6 – Median Minority Enrollment in School Districts



We then examined the median for each of the groups for each of the election categories. We found the same trends, where there was a much lower percentage of Latino students in at-large school districts compared to district election school districts, a higher percentage of Asian students, and a lower percentage of African American students. Looking at the standard deviations across each racial group, we found that each group was consistent across election type.

Based on student enrollment and demographics, we can conclude that school districts using district elections are generally larger and have larger percentages of Latino students than those that use at large elections.

### *Post-CVRA school boards – Appendix 3*

The third part of our research was focused on the school boards of schools that have switched from at large elections to district elections since 2002 and prior to 2019. Schools that switched prior to 2002 were not a result of the CVRA. Schools that have switched since 2019 haven't yet elected their school boards using the new election type, and the few that do hold elections in odd numbered years didn't hold elections for the entire board because of staggered elections. For example, a board of five people using at large elections with four-year terms would typically hold elections for two of the seats in one year, then hold elections for the remaining three seats two years later. In the transition from at large elections to district elections, school boards typically keep the elections staggered to preserve term lengths.

Of the 152 schools that transitioned to district elections after the signing of the CVRA, we were unable to find sufficient data for 51 of them due to uncontested elections, lack of publicly accessible records, and little news coverage. For each school district, we recorded data before and after the switch, up to six years prior, or as far back as we could find records, and to the present day. After using various sources to determine if each board member was Asian, African American, Latino, or unidentified, and their gender, we aggregated the data.

First, we went school by school and determined the average percentage of board members who were minorities both before and after the switch from at large elections to district elections.

Figure 7 – Minority School Board % vs. Minority Enrollment % Before Election Type Switch

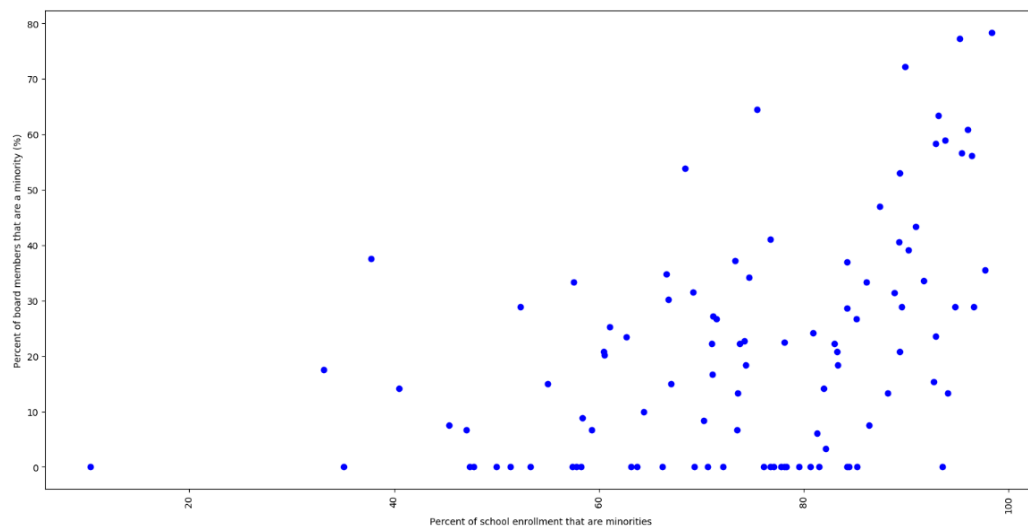
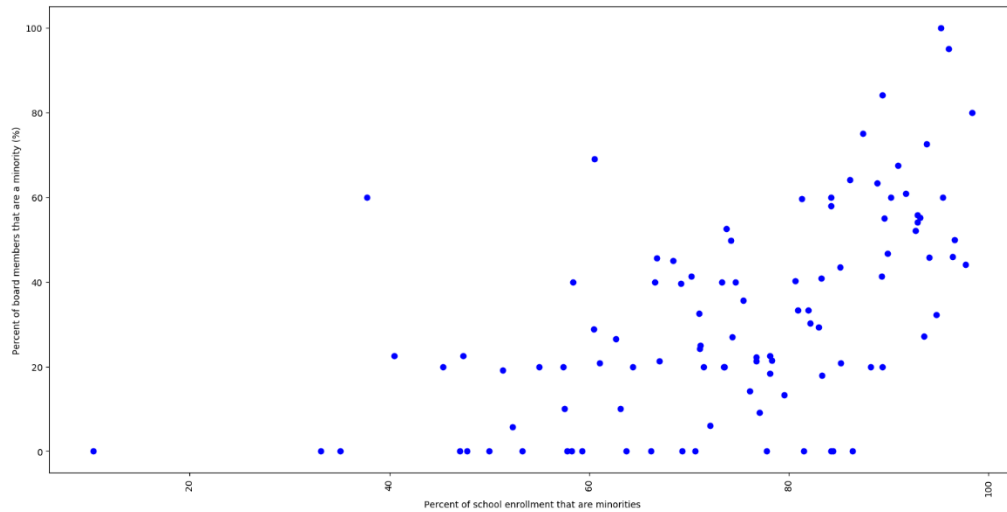
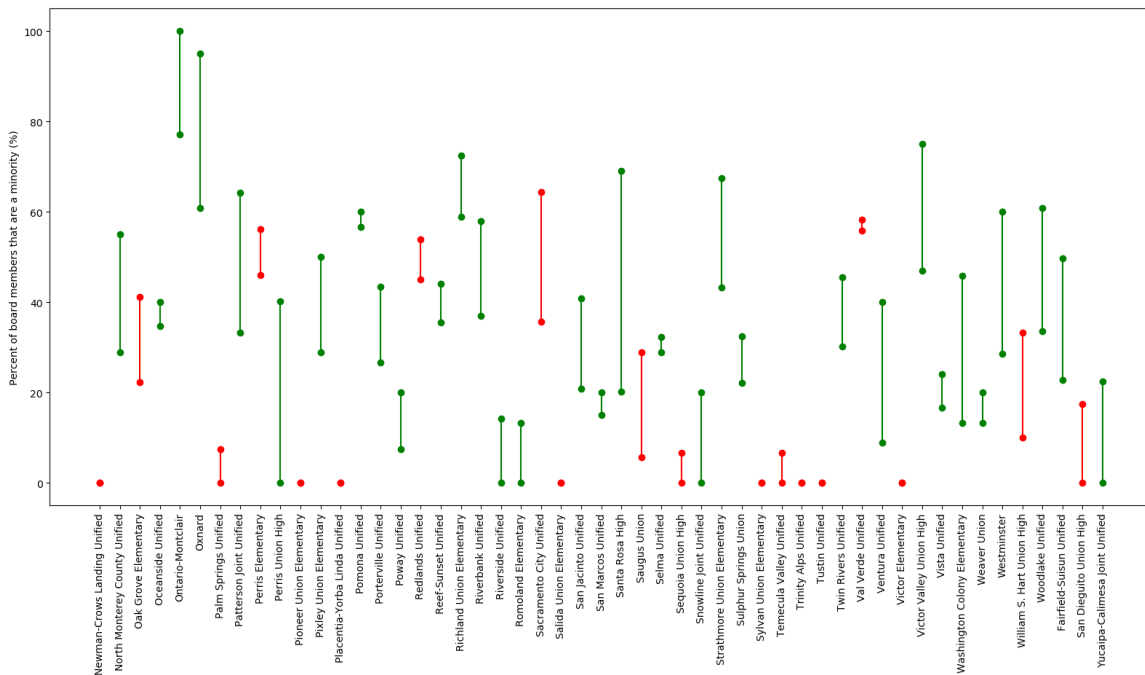
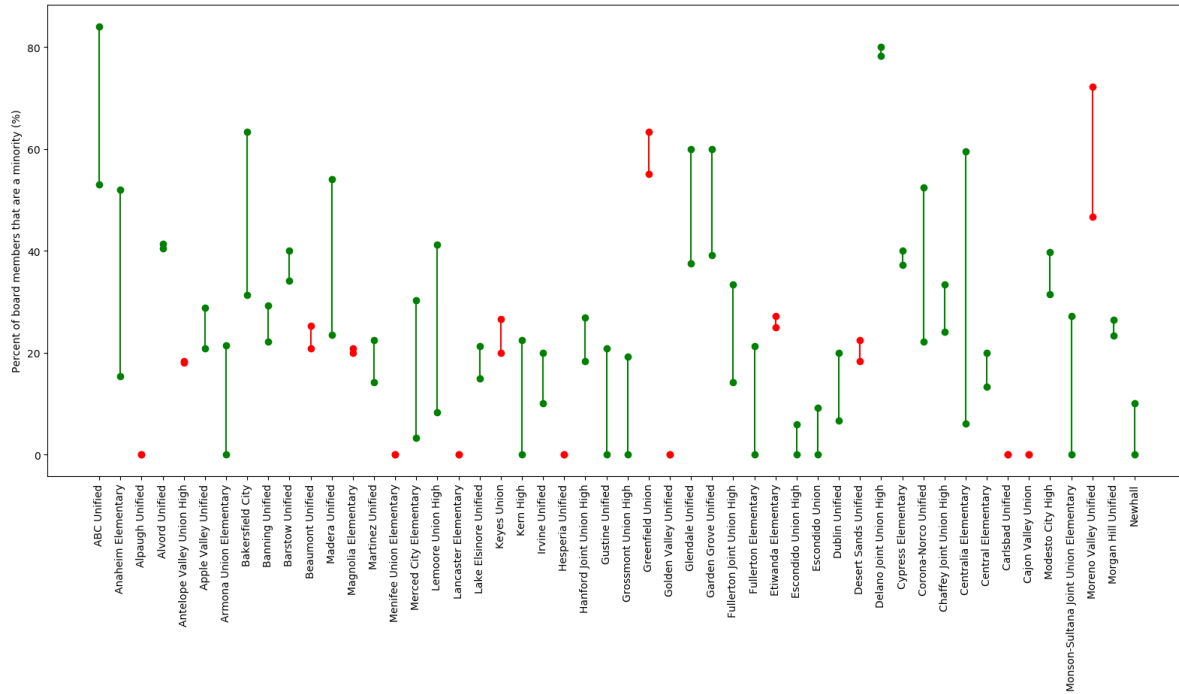


Figure 8 – Minority School Board % vs. Minority Enrollment % After Election Type Switch



Next, we measured the difference between the average percentage of board members who were a minority prior to the switch and the average percentage after. Below are the results. An increase in the percentage of minority board members is represented in green, a decrease or lack of change is in red. From this graphic representation, it is easy to see that there was more often an increase in the percentage of minority board members.

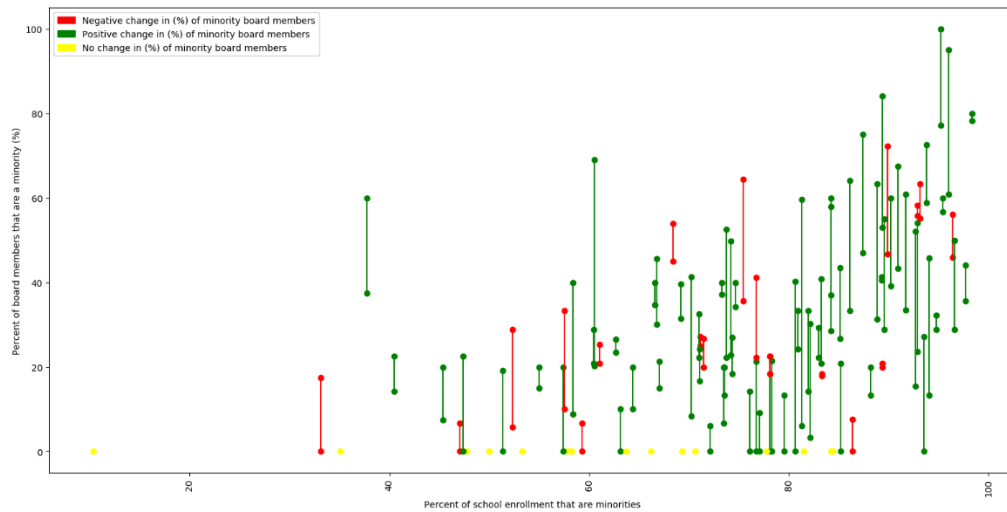
### Figure 9 – Change in Average School Board Composition





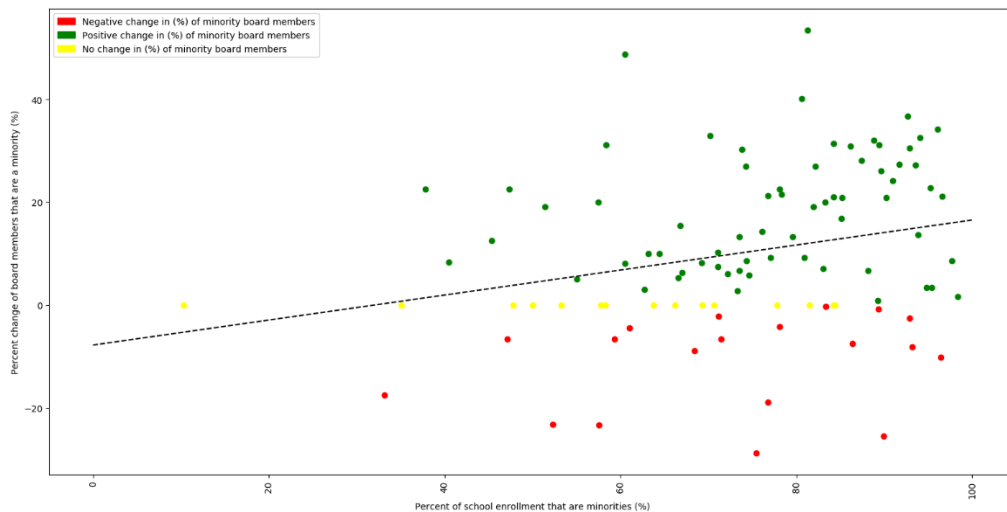
We then compared this to the percentage of students that were minorities.

Figure 9 – Change in Average School Board Composition by Enrollment Minority %



We calculated the average of the change in school board composition and found that it was 10.22% with a standard deviation of 15.9%. This indicates that school districts that changed due to the influence of the CVRA have seen a positive increase in the number of minority board members. However, the high standard deviation indicates a widespread. We then examined the difference in averages before and after switching election types compared to the composition of the student body to determine if there exists a correlation.

Figure 10 – Difference in Average School Board Composition



After performing a linear regression on the differences, we found a positive correlation between the percentage of a student body that was a minority and an increase in the percentage of the school board that was a minority. The linear regression has an  $r$  value of .259,  $p$  value of .008, and standard error of .091. This indicates again that there is a wide spread of data, however, the positive correlation still exists.

In addition to performing a linear regression, we also used a  $t$ -test to see if we could further find a correlation between the racial makeup of school boards and the switch to district elections. To do this, we used Welch's  $t$ -test to compare the averages of minority board members for the school districts before and after the switch to district elections. We have included a link to our  $t$ -test results in the appendix, but when looking over the results, we decided to focus on schools that had  $p$  values less than 0.005 in this report because we wanted to only look at school district's  $t$  values that had the greatest confidence of being correct. Looking at the values in the table below, we see that of these 23 schools with  $p$ -values less than 0.005, only 3 schools had  $t$ -values less than 1, suggesting a negative correlation. Also, when looking at all the  $t$ -test results, we saw that 19/85, schools had a negative  $t$ -value suggesting a negative correlation for these school district, but these results are less reliable due to their high  $p$ -values. Another important observation that can be seen in the table below, is that all the  $t$ -values are greater than at least 3, if the  $t$ -value is positive and less than -3 if the  $t$ -value is negative. These high  $t$ -values and low  $p$ -values give us confidence that there may be a positive correlation between the racial makeup of school boards after the switch to district elections for schools with positive  $t$ -values and a negative correlation for negative  $t$ -values. However, it is important to note that the  $t$ -test performed on each school district relates

only to that school district, and since many of the p values in the t-test were found to be quite high it is hard to draw any generalizable conclusions from our t-test results. Rather, we can say that the 23 schools in the table below did each individually show t-test results that suggest a correlation between switching to district elections and changes in the racial makeup of board members.

Figure 11 – School District t-test and p-test

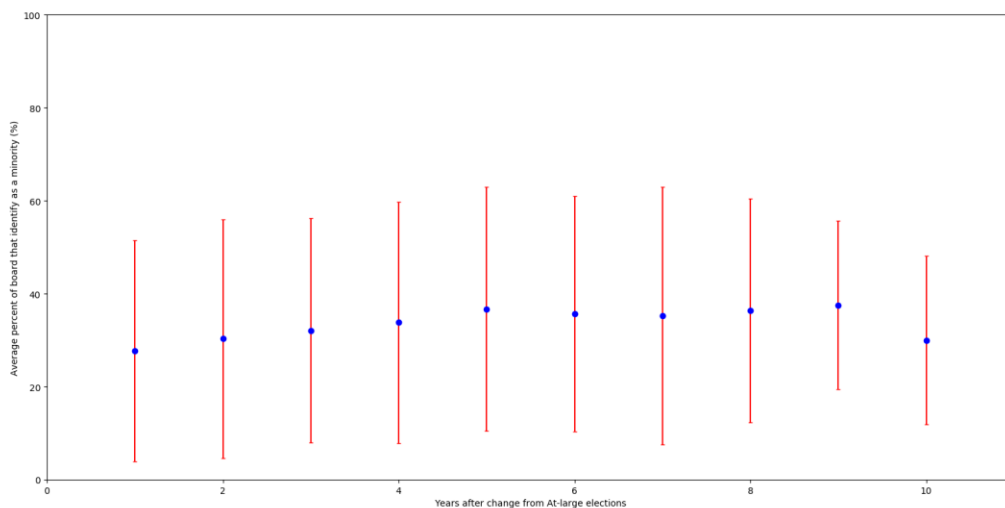
School District	t-value	p-value
Armona Union Elementary	3.4808754	0.0045390
Bakersfield City	4.2431332	0.0011411
Madera Unified	3.9832342	0.0011995
Merced City Elementary	4.4000496	0.0005169
Lemoore Union High	6.4858523	0.0000300
Kern High	9.2791359	0.0000031
Gustine Unified	4.8795004	0.0003788
Grossmont Union High	29.0929545	0.0000000
Garden Grove Unified	5.0964719	0.0009339
Fullerton Elementary	21.5034881	0.0000000
Corona-Norco Unified	6.4495348	0.0001984
Centralia Elementary	5.3907480	0.0006532
Monson-Sultana Joint Union Elementary	3.8370709	0.0020574
Oak Grove Elementary	-3.8823054	0.0016585
Oxnard	6.0084951	0.0003203
Riverbank Unified	4.9851642	0.0007541
Riverside Unified	3.5626265	0.0044523
Sacramento City Unified	-4.0832408	0.0008665
Saugus Union	-4.8588204	0.0005036
Strathmore Union Elementary	4.6239978	0.0036002
Woodlake Unified	6.0316325	0.0000422
Yucaipa-Calimesa Joint Unified	19.0918831	0.0000013

As a result of the 10.22% increase in the percentage of school board members who are minorities, we conclude that CVRA is effective in increasing minority representation on school boards. Furthermore, as a result of the slight positive correlation between the minority enrollment in schools and minority representation on a school board, we conclude that the switch is more effective in increasing minority representation for those school districts with more minority students. However, it is important to note the gaps in our data. We searched for every board member but were sometimes unable to determine if they fit into one of the categories we were

looking at. This is especially true the longer ago a board member held their seat, as news sites containing that information and other sources have vanished over time. One of our most used sources, rosters from National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, only goes back to 2015. Therefore, this 10.22% is possibly due in part to lack of information from before the switch from at large elections to district elections.

Additionally, we separated the school districts by the length of time between the switch and the current year, then took the average of the difference for each year. We found no correlation between how long ago the switch occurred and the change in percentage of school board members that were minorities. This potentially indicates that whatever change in minority representation occurs immediately after the switch, and does not trend one way or the other as time goes on. However, it is important to note the lack of data in later years. We did not include schools that have switched for more than 10 years because there were only 4 schools that made the switch 11 years ago, 2 that made the switch 12 years ago, and none beyond that.

Figure 12 – Change in School Board Composition Over Time After Election Type Switch



### *Gender*

We performed all on these analyses on each school for gender as well. Although the CVRA was not intended to rectify gender imbalances, we wanted to see if there was any effect. First, we determined the average percentage of each school board that was female before and after the switch. Here, it is graphed compared to the percentage of school enrollment that are minorities

for clarity. Every school district has gender parity, so we did not compare with the percentage of enrolled students who were female.

Figure 13 – Female School Board % vs. Minority Enrollment % Before Election Type Switch

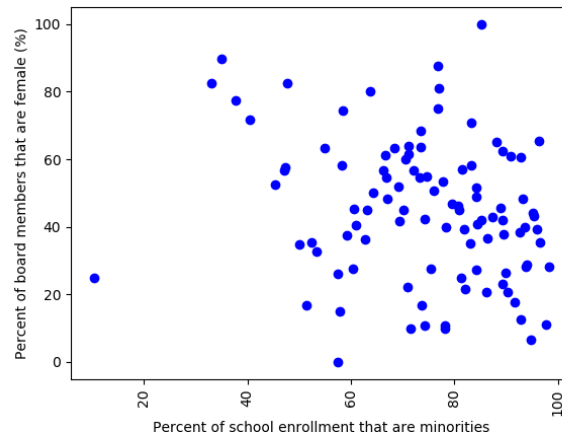
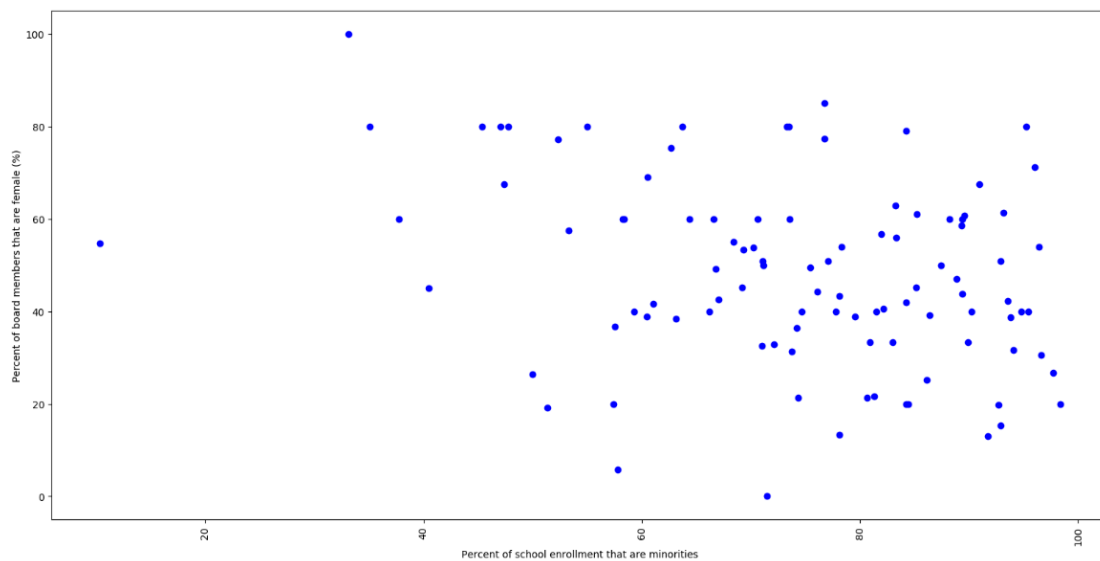
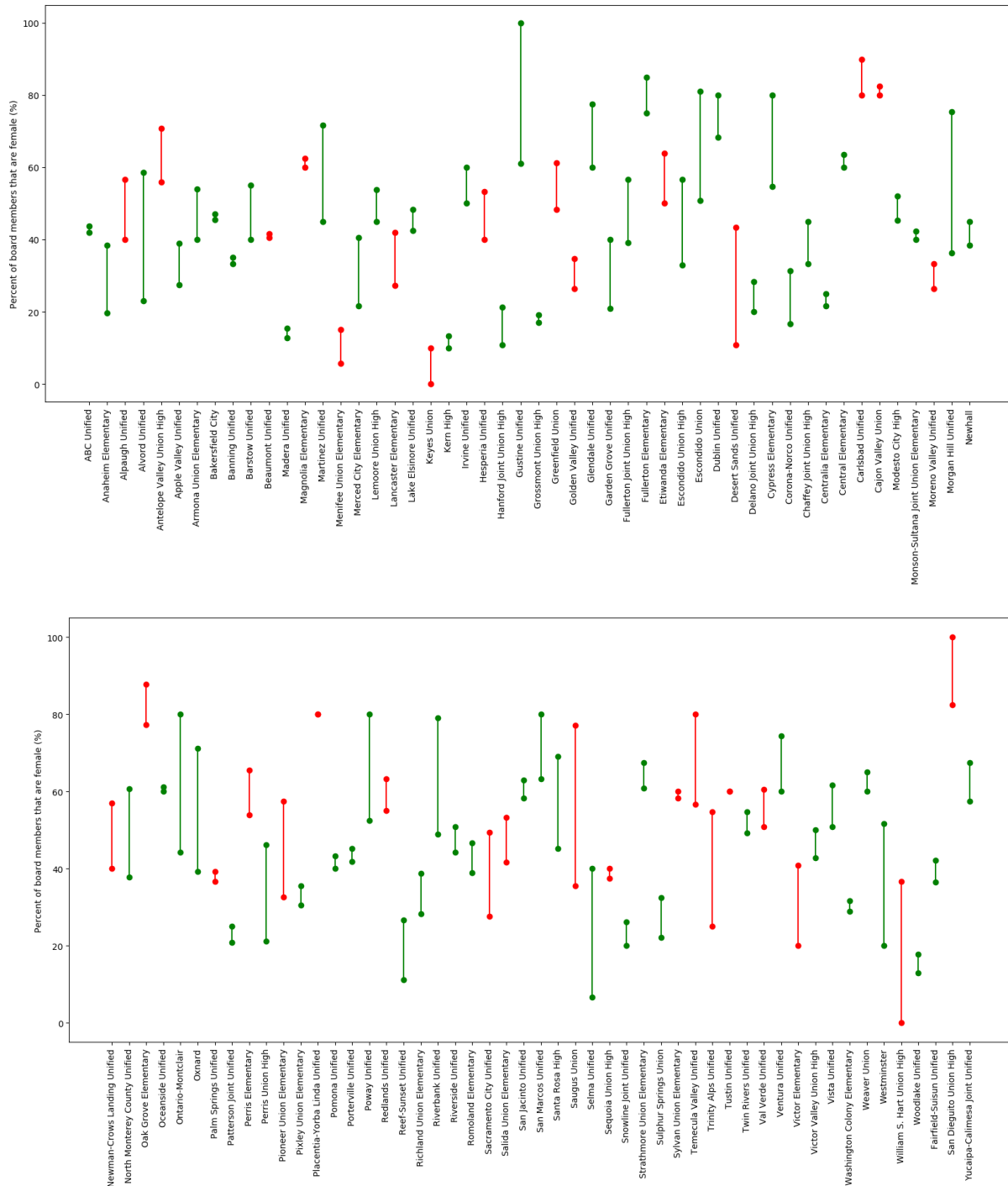


Figure 14 – Female School Board % vs. Minority Enrollment % After Election Type Switch



Next, we calculated the difference between the two averages for each school.

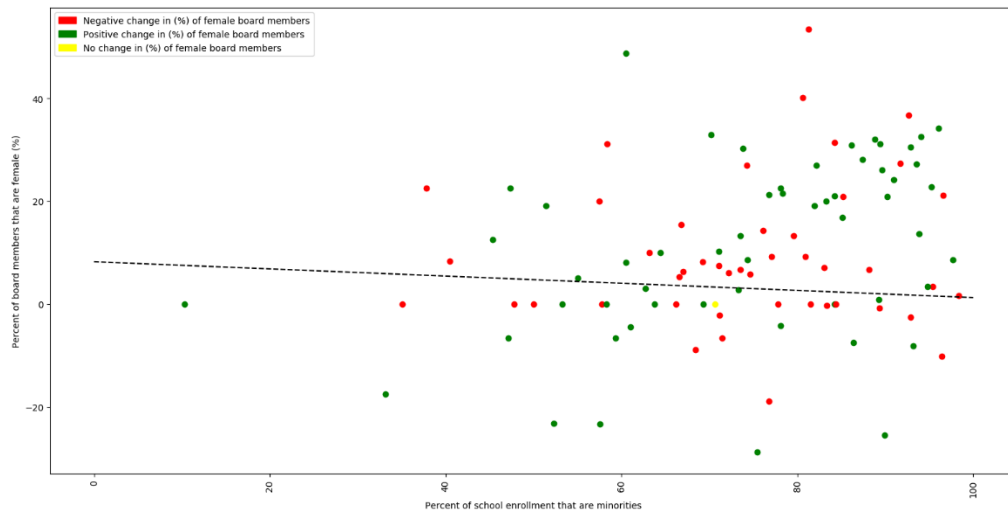
Figure 15 – Change in Average School Board Composition



We found that the average change from the before the switch to after was 3.05% with a standard deviation of 16.99%. This indicates that the switch may result in a small increase in the percentage of female board members, the spread is so wide and the number of data points is few enough to suggest that the switch has no effect at all. Furthermore, when we compared the difference to the

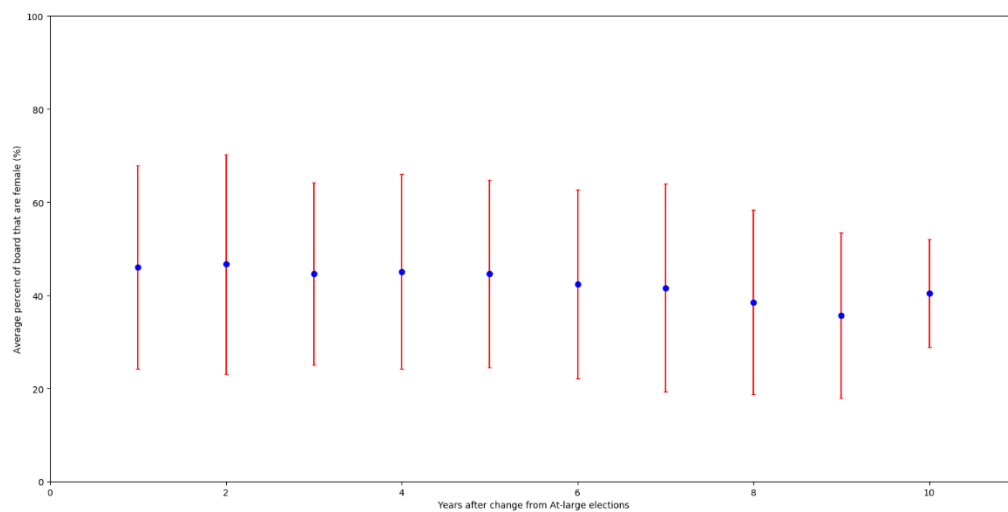
minority percentage in a student body and performed a linear regression, we found that there was a very slight negative correlation.

Figure 16 – Difference in Average School Board Composition



We then grouped the schools into years since the change and found no correlation, however, we again have fewer data points the longer it has been since the switch.

Figure 17 – Change in School Board Composition Over Time After Election Type Switch



As a result of the 3.05% increase in the percentage of school board members who are female and high standard deviation, we conclude that the CVRA has had no noticeable effect on the gender composition of school boards. As a result of the nearly flat linear regression, we conclude that there was no influence from the minority composition of the school on the gender composition of the school board.

### *School Spending*

From the California Department of Education, we were able to obtain information for each school district on their total adjusted expenditures per average daily attendance (ADA), the total days of student attendance divided by the total days of instruction. These numbers provide an indication of how much money a school district is spending per student and therefore is taking in.

Figure 18 – Expenses Per ADA

District Schools	Average	13340.65
	Standard Deviation	5271.471
	Median	12590.25
At Large Schools	Average	15640.12
	Standard Deviation	15247.65
	Median	12911.32

We found that on average, at large schools spend about \$2,000 more than district schools per ADA, suggesting that at large school districts have more funds, and since school district money comes from tax dollars, wealthier constituents.

### **Conclusions**

Our first research question was: what effect has the California Voting Rights Act had on the type of elections that school districts have?

By going through every non-charter, non-vocational school district in California, we determined that 212 have changed from at large elections to district elections of 927 school districts, or 22.86%. Because of the monetary threat that the CVRA poses to school districts that would try to resist a lawsuit, we can conclude that our hypothesis was correct and the CVRA has influenced the change in election type for a fifth of California school districts to which the law applies.

Our second research question was: How have changes in election type influenced that makeup of school boards?



By going through election records and news reports, we found as much information as we could about school board members from six years before a given school district switched to the present day. We removed school districts for which there was insufficient past data. Of the rest, we computed basic statistics and performed t-tests and p-tests to confirm our results. Consequently, we discovered that overall, school districts that switched from at large elections to district elections after the signing of the CVRA saw increases in the number of minority board members, especially in districts with higher percentages of minority students

Our third research question was: Which districts are switching?

We found that larger school districts were more likely to have switched and found correlations between switching and higher percentages of Latino and Asian students, but lower percentages of African American students.

## List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – School Districts Types and Change Dates

Appendix 2 – School District Demographics

Appendix 3 – School Board Members

Appendix 4 – School District Analysis Python Code

Appendix 5 – School District Board Member Analysis Python Code

All of these, and more, can be found at <https://github.com/sdcosta8/PS-120-research-project>

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