

# Does Ending At-Large Elections Encourage Racial Minorities To Run For Office?

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## Introduction

Why do racial minorities remain underrepresented among office-holders, particularly at the local level? Previous research on descriptive representation attributes a lack of minority candidates to voter bias. At the same time, given findings that at-large elections can diminish racial minorities' political power and candidates selectively run in favorable political landscapes, institutional electoral rules might contribute to the persistent disparity in racial representation among candidates.

## Research Questions

- Does electoral reform promote descriptive representation by *constraining voter bias*, or by *promoting candidate emergence*?
- Does ending the use of at-large elections encourage racial minorities to run for local office?
- How does local diversity moderate these effects?

## Methodology

I employ a two-way fixed effects (TWFE) approach to identify the effects of the CVRA on three outcomes: 1) the proportion of minority candidates, 2) the raw count of minority candidates, and 3) proportion of minority candidates who successfully won office. Data is drawn from the American Local Government Elections Database, aggregated at the city-year level.

## Results and Discussion

Table 1: Effect of Adopting By-District Elections on Latino Candidate Emergence

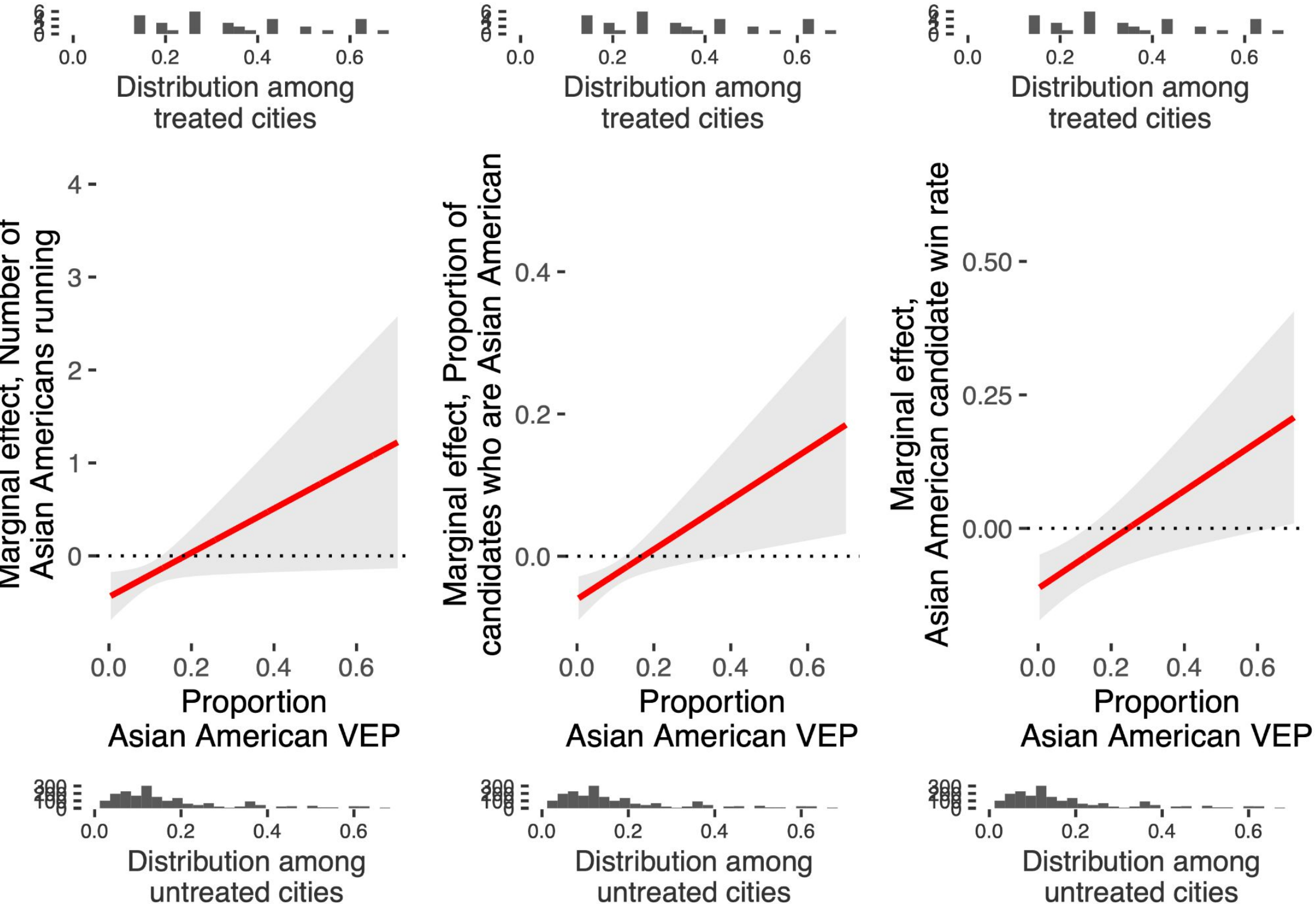
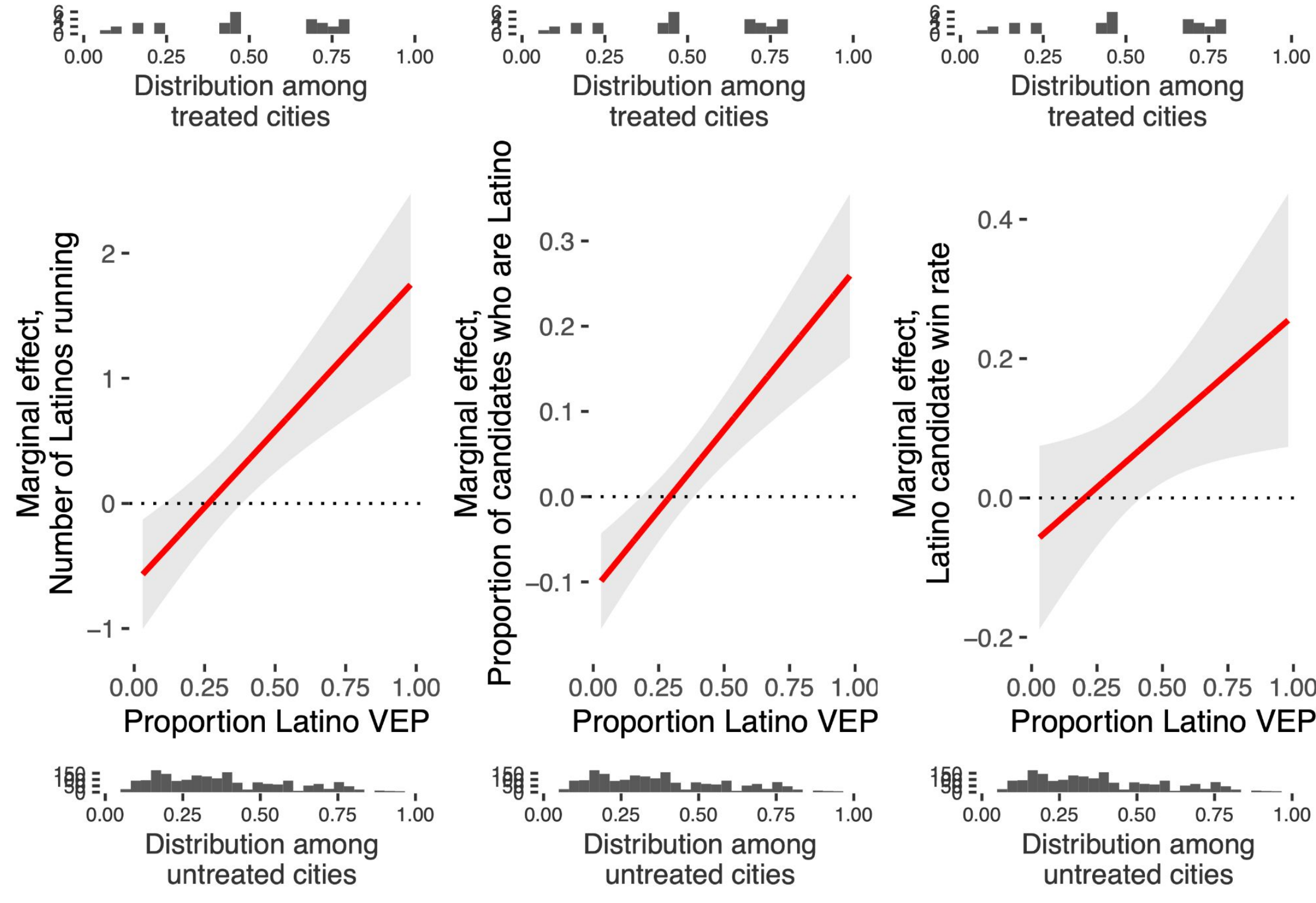
	Number of candidates	Percent of candidates	Win rate
Adopting Districts Under CVRA	0.374** (0.126)	0.047** (0.016)	0.070* (0.035)
Num.Obs.	2148	2148	2148
R2	0.005	0.004	0.002
RMSE	1.07	0.14	0.30

Note: ^ ^ \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

Table 2: Effect of Adopting By-District Elections on Asian American Candidate Emergence

	Number of candidates	Percent of candidates	Win rate
Adopting Districts Under CVRA	-0.099 (0.067)	-0.010 (0.010)	-0.046 (0.027)
Num.Obs.	2148	2148	2148
R2	0.001	0.001	0.002
RMSE	0.57	0.09	0.23

Note: ^ ^ \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001



I estimate that city council elections in cities that switch to by-district elections under the CVRA have, on average, 0.37 more Latino candidates running for office (p=0.003). I also estimate that Hispanic candidates for city council are, on average, a 5 percent greater share of the total candidates in cities that adopt by-district elections (p=0.004). I estimate that Hispanic candidates for city council also win office at rates 7 percentage points higher following CVRA-based redistricting (p=0.04). I also plot the marginal effects of adopting by-district elections conditional on a city's racial diversity, and find that these effects are driven by cities where the Latino voting population is at least 25 percent of the total population. I do not find any effects of adopting by-district elections on increasing the number of Asian Americans running for city council, or their overall win rate. This is driven by the fact that there are very few cities where Asian Americans comprise a meaningfully large size of the population.

## Works cited

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## Further information

A working paper is available on my personal website: [https://zacharylhertz.github.io/files/ESRA\\_2024.pdf](https://zacharylhertz.github.io/files/ESRA_2024.pdf). This project is a work in progress, so any comments, questions, or feedback are greatly welcomed over email at [zachary\\_hertz@berkeley.edu](mailto:zachary_hertz@berkeley.edu).

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful for support from the Program Committee and the Charles and Louise Travers Department of Political Science in making this presentation possible. I also thank Sarah Anzia and Clayton Nall for helpful comments and feedback.