Women’s Role in the Rainbow: Electoral Coalitions, Competition, and Descriptive Representation in American City Governments

Adrienne R. Smith
University of Tennessee
adrienne.smith@utk.edu

Abstract: Do historically excluded groups work together to further their electoral interests or do they primarily compete for a limited number of spots not absorbed by dominant interests? A growing body of work examines the dynamics of electoral coalition building versus competition but fails to incorporate fully the complexities of group identification or address how women fit into this puzzle. Applying an intersectional approach and focusing on American cities, I propose that women’s memberships in and collaboration with racial and ethnic minority groups influences their ability to gain government posts. Given their common experiences of exclusion, non-minority women, minority women, and minority men oftentimes join forces to win municipal elections. Minority women, in particular, use their crossover appeal to develop strategic electoral partnerships. I present case material from Atlanta, GA and Houston, TX and then analyze a new data source on California’s city elections to gauge the accuracy of the proposed hypotheses. The qualitative material is used to provide a nuanced conceptualization of inter- and intra-group coalition building. The findings from the quantitative analysis suggest that, particularly at lower levels of representation, non-minority and minority female political leaders form partnerships to win municipal legislative elections in California.
Well into the 21st century, women occupy far too few elected and appointed positions at all levels in the American political system. Currently, women hold just 18 percent of the seats in Congress and 24 percent of state legislative seats nationwide, which means that their representation is far from equal to that of men’s. This persistent disparity is troubling because it calls into question the openness of our political system to disadvantaged groups and may undermine government responsiveness to women’s interests. Therefore, understanding the causes of women’s descriptive (numerical) representation or lack thereof is important for reasons both empirical and normative. Many of the factors hampering women’s election to government positions may overlap with the reasons why other marginalized identity groups are underrepresented in American politics. Shedding light on the determinants of women’s descriptive representation may uncover broad trends in the electoral fortunes of various groups.

Furthermore, the numerical presence of different disadvantaged groups, such as women and racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, is necessarily interrelated. Since elections are competitions over a limited number of government posts, the election of one group means that another will be excluded from those same slots. Given the zero-sum nature of electoral contests, political scientists in various subfields have investigated when marginalized groups will engage in electoral competition and when they will instead collaborate (Arriola 2013; Birnir and Satana 2013; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Kaufmann 2003; Lijphart 1969; McClain and Karnig 1990; Meier and Stewart 1991; Rocha 2007). Do disadvantaged groups work together to further their electoral interests or do they primarily compete for a limited number of spots not absorbed by dominant interests? On the one hand, groups may form electoral coalitions because they have jointly been excluded from the political system and share interests and ideological stances. However, competition over scarce resources, such as elected offices and public goods, often pits these groups in competition (McClain and Karnig 1990; Meier and Stewart 1991).

To date, evidence from the comparative municipal context suggests that marginalized groups are more likely to engage in electoral competition than they are to be collaborators (de la Garza 1997; McClain and Karnig 1990; Meier and Stewart 1991; Mindiola, Niemann, and Rodriguez 2002; Rocha 2007). However, part of the reason for these findings is that existing studies fail to fully acknowledge the complexity of identity group affiliations in theory building and testing. Studies tend to apply a “single-axis” lens (Crenshaw 1989), treating race, ethnicity, and gender as separate and distinct social forces and categories of analysis. In contrast, I propose
using an intersectional approach to help address the puzzle of why groups sometimes engage in electoral competition and other times cooperate. As defined by Hancock and applied here, intersectionality “refers to both a normative theoretical argument and an approach to conducting empirical research that emphasizes the interaction of categories of difference (including but not limited to race, gender, class, and sexual orientation)” (2007, 63-64) as they affect individuals, social interactions, politics, and policymaking (Dhamoon 2011; McCall 2005; Simien 2007).

An intersectional approach argues against thinking of identities “in terms of strict dichotomies—either black/white or male/female” (Simien 2007, 266). Instead, taking into the account the ways that race is gendered and gender is racialized (Simien 2007, 266), the intersectionality paradigm (Hancock 2007) elucidates important differences that lie within broad categories such as “women” or “Blacks.” Such an approach also incorporates the unique positions of minority women and others who are “multiply burdened” (Crenshaw 1989, 140) by racism, sexism, and other forms of bias. Existing research on electoral politics has focused narrowly on bi- and multi-racial cooperation and conflict. However, an intersectional framework could shed light on why coalitions form in some instances but not others and also how women fit into these dynamics, thereby offering gains in explanatory power.

Applying an intersectional perspective and focusing on American cities, I propose that women’s memberships in and collaborations with racial and ethnic minority groups influences their ability to gain government posts.¹ Non-minority women, like racial and ethnic minority groups (both men and women), have historically and continue today to be underrepresented in municipal policymaking positions (Johnson and Stanwick 1976; Smith, Reingold, and Owens 2012; Trounstine and Valdini 2008). Given their similar experiences of exclusion, these groups may forge partnerships with and rely on one another’s support to mount electoral campaigns. Likewise, minority women may use their multiple, intersecting identities to build cross-group coalitions, partnering with both non-minority women and their co-ethnic/racial male peers (Bejarano 2013; Fraga, Martinez-Ebers, Lopez, and Ramirez 2008). Such partnerships yield larger numbers of minority and non-minority women in elected offices. Yet despite good reasons to suspect that coalitions will enhance women’s descriptive representation, there are also reasons

1 This study focuses on localities because it is the level at which the foundation for increasing marginalized groups’ numerical representation is arguably built. Additionally, cities exhibit wide variation in their demographic compositions, making them useful units for examining hypotheses about intersectionality and coalition building.
to predict an alternative outcome. In particular, minority women who face the combined discrimination of racism and sexism may find that rather than facilitating collaboration, these biases make access even more difficult for them (Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005).

The opportunities for coalition building may be enhanced or hampered by the electoral institutions present in cities. A long line of research on electoral structures posits that women benefit from the multi-member setting of at-large legislative elections (Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Bullock and MacManus 1991; Karnig and Walter 1976; Karnig and Welch 1979), while racial and ethnic minorities, particularly those that are geographically concentrated and unified in their policy views, are assisted by district-based elections (Bullock and MacManus 1993; Davidson and Grofman 1994; Davidson and Korbel 1981; Leal, Martinez-Ebers, and Meier 2004; Welch 1990). Notably, this research fails to devote attention to the intersectional positions of women of color (but see Trounstine and Valdini 2008) and overlooks whether electoral structures condition the opportunities for partnerships between various identity groups. Notably, this paper tests the proposition that electoral structures where candidates are selected by the city at-large facilitate partnerships to a greater extent than district-based ones.

I present case material from Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas in the 1970s and ‘80s to develop the theoretical contribution and analyze a new data source, the Local Elections in America Project (Marschall and Shah 2013), to gauge the accuracy of the hypotheses. The case material is used to explicate how women’s successes in gaining influential posts in Atlanta and Houston have been due, in part, to their alliances with and membership in other disadvantaged groups. While each group focused on obtaining advances for their own communities, their efforts helped open up these local political systems generally. The qualitative material is used to offer a nuanced conceptualization of inter- and intra-group coalition building. The quantitative analysis of data on California city council elections from 1995 to 2011 tests the coalitional hypotheses. Analyzing the data via a Seemingly Unrelated Regression approach, I find that at lower levels of representation, the percentages of council seats won by non-minority and minority women are positively associated, indicating mutual support between these groups. In contrast, the percentage of seats won by minority men negatively predicts women’s presence as council members, indicating that competition for a finite number of positions disrupts the possibility of coalition formation. Furthermore, institutions where one groups’ loses do not result directly in another groups gains facilitate a greater degree of electoral collaboration. By taking into account the
complexity of group identities, the results complement and extend growing bodies of work on intergroup cooperation, competition, and women’s election to American governments.

**Cooperation, Conflict, and Women’s Descriptive Representation**

A robust line of research investigates the potential electoral gains produced when two or more racial or ethnic groups form alliances as well as factors that may impede coalition development in cities. This research seeks to understand when different racial and ethnic groups will join forces based on shared interests and ideologies and when their strategies may instead put them in conflict. Among the earliest treatments of this subject was Browning, Marshall, and Tabb’s (1984) canonical work on minority incorporation in ten California cities. Their study suggests that Blacks can achieve strong incorporation by partnering with liberal whites and that Latinos are most likely to enter government when they ally with Blacks and progressive whites.

Los Angeles during Tom Bradley’s 20-year mayoral administration has been touted as a leading example of the political successes that African Americans can achieve by engaging in a biracial coalition with liberal whites (Sonenshein 2003, 1993). Like Blacks in L.A., Jews had been excluded from political and economic elite circles for most of the 20th century. This feeling of exclusion, combined with the Jewish community’s progressivism, served as a basis for its coalition with the Bradley administration (Sonenshein 2003). While a shared liberal ideology, common political interests, and strong leadership were the bedrock for success, support from junior coalition partners, such as Latinos, was important as well (Geron 2005).

Despite these examples of successful coalitions, there have been many local elections that appeared ripe for collaboration where partnerships nonetheless did not form (Kaufmann 2003; McClain and Tauber 2001). This is especially the case with regard to potential partnerships between Latinos and African Americans (Kaufmann 2003). This empirical puzzle has spawned a collection of studies addressing when shared interests may prompt intergroup collaborations and when such coalitions are instead hampered by competition (McClain and Karnig 1990; McClain and Tauber 2001; Meier and Stewart 1991; Rocha 2007). Scholars note that groups may join forces because of their similar political views, shared interests, and joint exclusion from the local political system. For instance, Blacks and Latinos may work together because of their persistent economic disadvantages compared to whites, experiences with discrimination, and preferences
for a larger social safety net. On the other hand, competition over resources, including jobs, education, and housing, often pits these groups in conflict.

Missing from this line of inquiry is attention to coalitions that have emerged between identity groups understood in their full interdependence and the role that women play in these coalitions. The research thus far tends to treat race, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity as mutually exclusive and independent categories of analysis. The “single-axis” focus (Crenshaw 1989, 129) on bi- and multi-racial coalitions ignores the diversity, large number, and contingency of identity group categorizations that exist, and the implications for electoral politics. In contrast, an intersectional approach and analysis (Hancock 2007) would center attention on the ways that overlapping and intersecting identities affect the prospects for cooperation. Moreover, acknowledging these diversities may provide a key to addressing the puzzle of why coalitions have formed in certain cities and time periods but not others.

To this point, little attention has been paid to the coalitions forged between women and other disadvantaged groups. Two types of partnerships involving women are relevant. First, women who are not sexual, racial, or ethnic minorities may join coalitions with members of other disadvantaged groups. In U.S. cities, women of all backgrounds were excluded from meaningful participation in local politics and officeholding before the 1980s. In the mid-1970s, for instance, women made up a measly five percent of mayors and municipal and town council members in the U.S. (Johnson and Stanwick 1976). Other disadvantaged groups were similarly locked out of positions from which they could influence decision-making (Browning et al. 1984; Button, Wald, and Rienzo 1999; Karnig and Welch 1980). Because of their shared experience of exclusion, non-minority women joined forces with members of other disadvantaged groups in order to disrupt the white heterosexual male domination of municipal governments. The unequal representation of women continues today; in 2006, just 29 percent of council seats in the nation’s largest cities were held by women and 13 percent had female mayors (Smith et al. 2012). These disparities and experiences of exclusion mean that non-minority women may partner with minority groups to mount campaigns for municipal legislative and executive positions.

Second, women who are situated at the nexus of multiple disadvantaged groups (e.g., lesbians, African American women, and Latinas) may use their membership in these groups to gain authoritative positions. While earlier studies trace the rise of racial and ethnic minorities, particularly men, in city governments (Browning et al. 1984; Eisinger 1980; Geron 2005;
Sonenshein 1993), they overlook an important corollary of this development, namely the increasing number of female identity-group peers who entered government too. In a recent study, Luis Fraga and colleagues (2008, 158) theorize that Latina state legislators “are uniquely positioned to leverage the intersectionality of their ethnicity and gender in ways that are of strategic benefit” in the policymaking process. Latinas enjoy a “multiple identity advantage”: their identity as both female and an ethnic minority position them to build “cross-group coalitions” that attain needed levels of legislative support for policy proposals (p. 157). Because of their multiple identities, they have “crossover appeal” (Bejarano 2013, 6) and can effectively collaborate with other, non-Latina women and their Latino male colleagues. In a similar fashion, minority women may use their multiple identities to build electoral coalitions with non-minority women and with their co-racial/ethnic male peers. These coalitions will help minority women in campaigning for municipal elections, securing appointments, and rising to influential posts.

Intersectionality theorists advocate for approaching categories of difference and their impact on political phenomena as “open empirical question[s]” (Hancock 2007, 64) rather than fixed one way or another. This suggestion means that the analysis ought to consider and test various potential relationships between partnerships, competition, and descriptive representation. Working from this perspective, it is possible that members of identity groups and the segments therein view and experience municipal positions as zero-sum. That is to say, as the percentage of seats on a city council held by minority women increases, for example, there are fewer seats available for non-minority women or any other group. The relationship can be increasing at low levels of representation for minority women, but as the number of seats held by minority women approaches the total number of seats on the council, the relationship must be negative. Despite minority women’s overlapping identities and crossover appeal, to a large degree, this is still a zero-sum game. Therefore, I hypothesize that non-minority [minority] women’s descriptive representation in local elected positions will be greater when more minority men and women [minority men and non-minority women] hold such positions and are present in the population. Given the zero-sum nature of municipal positions, the effects of representation will be non-linear, increasing at lower levels and decreasing at higher levels (H1).

There is reason to anticipate, however, that minority women’s combined disadvantages may impede their descriptive representation, even when engaged in coalitions. Since biases such as sexism and racism are “interrelated systems that create ‘multiple barriers’ to power” (Hughes
2011, 604; Crenshaw 1989; McCall 2005), minority women may have to surmount steeper obstacles to gaining office than their white female and racial/ethnic male peers. In theory, minority women could benefit from partnering with minority men or with non-minority women but in practice, because they are doubly marginalized, they may benefit from neither (Hancock 2007; Hughes 2011). Instead, dominant members of disadvantaged groups (e.g., white women and Black men) make electoral gains through coalition building, while non-dominant group members (e.g., Black women) trail behind. Based on these two lines of reasoning, an alternative hypothesis is non-minority [minority] women’s descriptive representation in local elected positions will be reduced when more minority men and women [minority men and non-minority women] hold such positions and are present in the population (H\textsubscript{a}).

**Conceptualizing Inter- and Intra-group Coalitions**

What, precisely, does it mean for identity groups to engage in electoral partnerships with one another? What do these coalitional relationships look like in practice? Case material centering on women’s election and ascendance in the municipal governments of Atlanta, GA and Houston, TX is used to conceptualize how coalition building comes about and is sustained.\textsuperscript{2} Experiences in both cities suggest that coalition building involves several mechanisms.

\textsuperscript{2} Here, I focus on Atlanta and Houston because both are contexts in which women have enjoyed a high degree of numerical representation in recent years. In the mid-2000s, both ranked in the top 20 percent of cities with populations of 100,000 or more in terms of women’s presence on the council. At that time, women held over 56 percent of the council seats in Atlanta and 40 percent in Houston. Atlanta was one of only 32 (out of 239) with a female mayor (Smith et al. 2012). Houston currently has a female mayor. I selected cases with high values on the dependent variable because the goal is to trace the process through which women gained prominent positions in city government in order to conceptualize how coalition building works in practice.

I develop the case material from original fieldwork in Atlanta and Houston in 2011. I conducted close to 50 semi-structured interviews with current and former city officials and civic leaders, including mayors, council members, high-level bureaucrats, and leaders of business organizations, philanthropies, and non-profit organizations. Respondents were selected because they currently hold or have in the past decade held an important position in municipal government or other local enterprises. Important positions include all council posts, appointed department heads, the mayor, and people who local academics and others in city government identified as part of the mayor’s core team. Respondents were promised anonymity. Interviews are cited with random numbers and the interview date. Respondents were asked: “As you may know, in Atlanta/Houston, women hold many council seats and positions in the bureaucracy (e.g., Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, etc.). Why do you think women hold a significant number of public offices in this city? In Atlanta/Houston, women are not simply
First, group members that form coalitions may court each other’s likely constituents and/or provide an entrée for their partners to engage with their own constituents. For example, one of Atlanta’s first white female council members, Barbara Asher was involved in neighborhood affairs, which started her political career and allowed her to connect with different constituency groups and politicians (JWAOHP 1985). A former elected official said that Asher “was very close to a lot of Black elected officials and businesspeople” (Interview 273, 19 July 2011), which was critical to her success in running for a council seat. Asher’s connections can be viewed as part of a larger unfolding of Black-Jewish cooperation in Atlanta, rooted in both groups’ engagement in the Civil Rights Movement (Hatfield 2007). Asher explained, “Part of the political dues that you pay in the city of Atlanta is to go to Black churches when you’re on campaign” (JWAOHP 1985). When she ran for the council, Black elites and voters supported Asher because of her experience in and connections to the community (Interview 273, 19 July 2011), illustrating how non-minority women may partner with minority men and women to win elections.

Maynard Jackson, Atlanta’s first African American male mayor, similarly solicited support from the city’s white and minority female leaders and residents when he ran for office. Jackson reached out to women of different races, as evidenced by endorsements from the Black Women’s Coalition and the mostly white Feminist Action Alliance, various campaign speeches and events, and notes on the campaign’s strategy (Holmes 2011; Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records). In turn, he built an alternative coalition to the one that had yielded all white and male mayors and majority white and male councils to that point.

Second, group members that form coalitions may provide support for one another’s campaigns in the form of staff and volunteers, contributions, and similar resources. For instance, in the 1970s and 1980s, women in Houston harnessed the support, burgeoning numbers, and organizational structure of the gay and lesbian community to win elections. The Gay Political Caucus (GPC) formed in 1975 to advocate for Houston’s LGBT community. The GPC present in public offices; they also hold or have held some of the most powerful policymaking positions. What factors explain this?” Additional material comes from local newspapers, scholarship, and other secondary sources and primary sources, including archived interviews and officials’ private papers.

Although the quantitative analysis focuses on racial/ethnic minority groups, the theory can easily be conceived of more broadly to include sexual minorities.
informally supported Kathy Whitmire, a white heterosexual woman, in her race for city controller in 1977 (Goins 2010). In 1979, the city elected its first two female council members. One of these women, Eleanor Tinsley, was the first candidate of either sex to welcome the gay community to work openly in a campaign. Tinsley later explained,

> In elections before that one, gays had certainly participated but they were never allowed to be, sort of, in the front room or be where they were shown at all. Other politicians that had them be in the background somewhere [sic]. But my attitude was that they should be wherever their talents put them, just like anybody else.

And so, using the gay community was a step forward for them and for me (Houston Public Library 2007).

The GPC endorsed Tinsley over incumbent Frank Mann, who had worked against gay causes during his tenure on the council (Goins 2010). Mann and other detractors called Tinsley’s supporters “oddballs and queers.” The GPC printed t-shirts that read, “Oddballs and Queers for Tinsley,” thereby turning the insult into a fundraising tool (Alvarez 2009). Following Tinsley’s lead, Kathy Whitmire won the 1981 election for mayor and four more with the GPC’s backing, volunteers, and contributions (Interview 93, 16 November 2011).

Third, group members seeking to forge coalitions may appeal to common policy goals. Oftentimes these goals include opening up city governments to more diverse groups of people. For instance, Kathy Whitmore explained that increasing the diversity of local government was a dominant issue in her first mayoral campaign:

> [People] wanted to see local government do a better job meeting its responsibilities, but they also wanted to feel that it was not controlled just by a handful of people who were looking out for themselves, but that there was recognition of the broader community… So we were beginning to see the city grapple with its own growth and the need to recognize not only the demands of the local community for a well-run city, but also the need for recognition of the diversity of the city (Houston Public Library 2008).

A coalition of progressive whites, Blacks, the LGBT community, some Latinos, and organized labor propelled Whitmire to victory (Murray 2011).

In Atlanta, Maynard Jackson similarly attempted to highlight the policy initiatives he shared with non-minority and minority women’s groups and constituents. Indeed, one piece of
campaign literature featured an article titled “Maynard Recognizes Women’s Rights” in which a campaign worker explained that Jackson “knows that the woman on welfare is often humiliated because of her economic dependency and how the divorced suburban housewife is discriminated against trying to obtain credit [sic]” (quoted in Grady-Willis 2006, 191). The campaign strategically constructed the candidate as a politician who was sensitive to the needs of the underserved and underrepresented, including women. In a campaign speech to the Black Women’s Coalition, Jackson said,

[When] I am elected mayor of this city I do not intend to be a man for all men. I intend to be a man for all people. And no matter what some backward male chauvinists might try to tell us, that most certainly includes a lot of women… As mayor of this city, I promise you that I will be looking for talented people, regardless of race or sex, who will be willing to join with me to work toward the kind of city where everyone receives an equal chance (Jackson 1973).

Fourth, group members engaged in coalition building may trade electoral support for the promise of bureaucratic appointments in the case of victory. This type of positional logrolling was quite common in Atlanta and Houston. In exchange for their votes, Maynard Jackson rewarded women with increasingly significant slots in Atlanta’s government. Throughout his tenure, he was adamant about increasing the diversity of municipal government. During his first term, women comprised 36 percent of the appointments to special boards and commissions and 11 percent of the top management appointments (Jackson campaign 1977), a significant improvement from the almost negligible representation of women to that point. Jackson appointed numerous women, both Black and white, to prominent posts. For example, he appointed Emma Darnell as commissioner of administrative affairs (Holmes 2011). Future mayor Shirley Franklin, who led the Women for Maynard Campaign Committee, became commissioner of parks, recreation, and cultural affairs (Holmes 2011). In a similar way, Mayor Whitmire in Houston endeared herself to African Americans by appointing the city’s first Black police chief, Lee Brown, who would eventually become mayor (Belkin 1990).

The case material from Atlanta and Houston suggests that there are several mechanisms and elements of coalition building, including courting and granting access to one another’s constituencies, providing support and resources, highlighting shared policy goals, and
exchanging electoral support for the promise of administrative positions. The quantitative analysis of data on Californian cities provides a test of the coalitional hypotheses, as described above. Before proceeding to the analysis, however, it is important to consider how electoral institutions mediate the opportunities for electoral partnerships.

**Electoral Institutions and Coalition Building**

The effect of electoral structure has been a hallmark of existing research on women and minorities’ local representation. A consistent finding in the urban politics research is that single-member district-based elections produce greater numbers of racial and ethnic minority council members, particularly Blacks (Bullock and MacManus 1993; Davidson and Grofman 1994; Welch 1990) and Latinos (Davidson and Korbel 1981; Leal, Martinez-Ebers, and Meier 2004). However, scholars suggest that since women are neither a unified voting bloc nor are they geographically concentrated within localities like racial and ethnic minorities, they will not be benefitted by district-based council elections (Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Bullock and MacManus 1991; Karnig and Walter 1976; Karnig and Welch 1979). Rather, as Karnig and Walter (1976) first hypothesized, the multimember setting of at-large systems (those where candidates are selected by the city as a whole) makes them more likely than district-based or mixed ones to attract and support women’s candidacies. They and others (Bullock and MacManus 1991; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994) reason that women’s descriptive representation will be enhanced by at-large elections because in those settings, women are not the only possible winners nor do their victories come directly at the expense of men. In at-large systems, then, a norm of diversity may cause elites and/or voters to choose women. Curiously, however, arguments about the non-zero-sum nature of at-large elections could be applied to racial and ethnic minorities but have not been (Trounstine and Valdini 2008).

The reasoning behind the effect of electoral structure on women’s representation is plausible, but empirical evidence of it at the local level has been quite mixed. Some studies find that at-large systems increase women’s representation (Darcy et al. 1994; Trounstine and Valdini 2008; Karnig and Welch 1979) while others report null findings (Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Bullock and MacManus 1991; Karnig and Walter 1976; Smith et al. 2012). At the same time, scholars have noted that the effect of electoral structures may be different for minority women since minorities are expected to benefit from district-based elections while women may be aided
by at-large elections (Karnig and Welch 1979; Trounstine and Valdini 2008). Indeed, Trounstine and Valdini (2008) find that the type of electoral system affects the numerical representation of Black male and white female councilors, but not African American women or Latinas.

The analysis presented here adds to the conversation on the impacts of electoral structure by incorporating the dynamics of coalition building. In particular, it seems likely that the opportunities for coalition building should be contingent upon the type of electoral structure in a city. In a fully at-large setting, the more minorities and women that run, the greater the chance that at least one will succeed because such settings are not strictly zero-sum in nature. However, if all seats are elected by district, and minorities are typically concentrated into minority districts, then such contests will not necessarily produce a greater number of minority council members. Since at-large settings are less zero-sum in nature than single-member district-based elections, they will enhance the opportunities for partnerships between identity groups. In an at-large setting, a minority woman, for example, will not necessarily see the candidacy of a non-minority woman as a potential obstacle to her own election. Therefore, I hypothesize that non-minority women’s descriptive representation on city councils will be greater when more minority men and women hold such positions and a greater percentage of seats are elected at-large (H₂).

**Data, Measurement, and Models**

In the analysis, I first examine trends in women’s descriptive representation as council members across California’s municipalities. Then, multivariate models explore how inter- and intra-group coalitions affect women’s presence on local councils. I investigate the hypotheses using a time-series cross-sectional dataset on all city-level elections in California from 1995 to 2011. The unit of analysis is a council-election year. Data from the Local Election in America Project (LEAP) (Marschall and Ruhil 2013) are supplemented with information from the

---

4 According to the 2010 American Community Survey, the localities range in population from 112 to 3,792,621. The mean population size is 64,431.

5 The analysis focuses on council elections because the majority of mayors in CA are selected by the council or rotated among its members rather than elected directly by voters, meaning that the positions are not captured in the LEAP. In 2011, of the 217 CA cities that responded to the ICMA Form of Government survey, 67.3 percent did not have directly elected mayors. Likewise, the LEAP data excludes administrative appointments. Future studies on this topic should incorporate executive and administrative officeholding.
International City/County Management Association’s (ICMA) Form of Government surveys, the American Community Survey, and the decennial Census. Summary statistics and sources for each variable are found in the appendix.

Cities within California are the focus for several reasons. First, the cities in the California dataset exhibit about average levels of women’s representation, meaning that this is an appropriate context in which to assess the hypotheses’ generalizability. In the years covered in the dataset, the mean percentage of council seats won by women was 30.4, which is close to the national average of 28 percent of council seats held by women in 2001 and 2006 in cities with populations of 100,000 or more (Smith et al. 2012). Second, the analysis hinges on the availability of data that identifies city officials by gender and race/ethnicity, considered together. Commonly used data sources count separately the number of officeholders who are minorities and who women, underscoring the complexities of conducting empirical research from an intersectional perspective (Hancock 2007). I rely on the LEAP, a significant advance in data collection on local elections, as a source of data on the gender and race/ethnicity, taken together, of council members. Finally given that California is the most populous state in the country, attention to its cities is certainly warranted.

**Dependent Variables**

The dependent variables measure the percentage of posts in a given council election that were won by non-minority women, minority women, and minority men respectively. These variables were aggregated to the council-election year from probability estimates of the race/ethnicity and gender of individual winners. Following a growing body of research (e.g., Butler and Broockman 2011; Fryer and Levitt 2004), candidates’ first names were used to estimate the probability that they are men and candidates’ last names were used to estimate the probability that they are white, non-Hispanic. Thus, *percent non-minority female winners* is the

---

6 Similarly, in 2013, the percentage of CA’s state legislative seats held by women (26.7 percent) is close to the national average of 24.3 percent. The state currently ranks 19th out of 50 in terms of women’s state legislative representation (CAWP 2013). In the city level data from 1995 to 2011, the average percentage of council seats won by minority women was 10.5 and by non-minority women was 19.9. There are no comparable data on women’s representation on councils broken down by race and ethnicity nationwide.

7 I draw data from a study that uses “a simple Bayesian framework to compute the probability that each candidate was male and white/non-Hispanic conditional on having a given
estimated percentage of council seats won by non-minority (white) women, *percent minority female winners* is the percentage of seats won by minority women (African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics), and *percent minority male winners* is the estimated percentage of council seats won by minority men.

**Independent and Control Variables**

To investigate H₁, when the dependent variable is the percentage of council seats won by non-minority women, the coalitional variables for group representation are *percent minority female winners* and *percent minority male winners*. When the dependent variable is the percentage of seats won by minority women, the representation variables are *percent non-minority female winners* and *percent minority male winners*. And when the dependent variable is the percentage of seats won by minority men, the representation variables are *percent non-minority female winners* and *percent minority female winners*. The representation variables are squared since their effect is predicted to be non-monotonic, increasing in the first term and decreasing in the second. The models also incorporate lagged dependent variables to address the possibility that group descriptive representation exhibits a positive temporal dependence, becoming more common over time. The models include demographic population variables to proxy a given group’s voter registration and turnout, with the expectation that more non-minority and minority women will be elected in places where they make up a larger segment of the population (Marschall et al. 2010). Additionally, if coalition building is at play, the size of these respective populations should be positively associated with one another’s electoral success, as H₁ posits. Therefore, the models contain measures of the *percentages of the population that are minority and female* (including Blacks, Latinas, and Asians) and *non-minority and female*. 

---

8 Ideally, the dependent and key independent variables would be broken into particular racial and ethnic groups by gender. I know of no existing time-series cross-sectional source that provides data on local elections that is disaggregated in this way.

9 Because the percentage of the population that is minority and female is so highly correlated with the percentage of the population that is minority male (r = 0.94), I am essentially measuring both. Including both variables in the models would produce multicollinearity.
The second hypothesis holds that a larger percentage of minority and non-minority women will hold office when potential partners are present as officeholders and when electoral institutions provide a favorable environment for coalition building. I include a variable measuring the percentage of council seats elected at-large and, later in the analysis, interact this variable with the representation variables for a group’s potential partners. I expect the interaction terms to positively predict the three dependent variables.

The models control for a variety of factors that previous studies have found to influence women and minorities’ descriptive representation at the local level. Women and minorities are more likely to win elections for offices when they can draw upon a larger store of socioeconomic resources (Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Darcy et al. 1994; Karnig and Walter 1976). These resources can be important in two ways. First, as the proportion of women with high levels of education and income in an area increases, so too does the pool of women with characteristics common among candidates. Second, with more resources, women become better able to support their own campaigns and the campaigns of other women and coalitional partners. Therefore, I therefore include women’s socioeconomic resources, a factor score combining the percentage of women with at least an Associate’s degree and female median income.10

Previous research has found that the urban political context affects the incorporation of historically excluded groups. One important factor is a city’s political ideology. Municipalities with liberal electorates have greater gender and racial diversity in their governments than those with conservative electorates (Browning et al. 1984; Smith et al. 2012; Trounstine and Valdini 2008; but see Marschall, Ruhil, and Shah 2010). Previous studies tend to use indirect proxies of a community’s ideology, such as the percentage of the (white) population with a college degree (Marschall et al. 2010) or the percentage of the county (rather than city) level presidential vote going to left-leaning candidates (Trounstine and Valdini 2008). An advantage of focusing on

---

10 A principal components factor analysis was used to generate the factor score. The loadings were 0.95 for both female median income and college-educated women. I use the factor score rather than its individual components because from a practical standpoint, the individual measures are strongly correlated with one another. Including them individually in the same model would yield multicollinearity. Also, the factor score captures the broader underlying concept of women’s socioeconomic resources. Finally, there is no theoretical reason to expect the two measures to have different effects on the dependent variables. Ideally, the resources variable would be broken down for non-minority versus minority women. The 2010 ACS does not have full coverage of the two components disaggregated in this way for smaller cities.
cities in California is it is one of few states that make presidential vote returns available at the
city level. Liberal ideology thus measures the percentage of the city-level vote that went to the
presidential elections. A higher score indicates that the electorate is more liberal.\textsuperscript{11}

Term limits and their potential for ousting entrenched white male incumbents once held
much promise for women and minorities. Although the research on state legislative elections
suggests term limits have failed in this respect (Carey, Niemi, Powell, and Moncrief 2006;
Moncrief, Powell, and Storey 2007), one study finds that term limits have a significant, positive
effect on the numbers of white and Black women serving on city councils (Trounstine and
Valdini 2008). Thus, whether term limits influence women’s election remains debatable and so
the models include council term limits, a dichotomous indicator of whether there are limits on the
number of terms members may serve.

Scholars have long argued that the less prestigious and powerful the position, the more
likely women would be to hold it (Diamond 1977; Karnig and Walter 1976). They reasoned that
positions with longer terms, fewer seats, more responsibilities, and more authority are more
prestigious and thus attractive to men who are looking to make an impact in their communities or
to build a foundation to run for higher offices. Anticipating greater competition, potential female
candidates may shy away from entering races for desirable slots. Women running for prestigious
positions may also find that voters are reluctant to cast ballots in their favor.

I use four variables to capture the desirability of city legislative offices. The first, strong
mayor, is a scale of whether the mayor has the power to (1) develop the annual budget, (2) veto
council passed ordinances, and (3) appoint department heads. The scale ranges from 0, indicating
that the city has a council-manager form of government and the mayor does not have the power
to develop the budget, appoint department heads, or veto the council (and thus the council has
more power), to 3, indicating a mayor-council form of government, wherein the mayor possesses
all of the aforementioned powers (and thus the council has less power). The models also control

\textsuperscript{11} The publically available file for the 1996 presidential election is illegible. Thus, I use
2000 vote returns for the years including and around 1996, assuming that ideology is a relatively
stable predisposition and cities’ collective ideologies did not shift much from 1996 to 2000.
Also, presidential vote returns are not ideal proxies for ideology. However, evidence at the state
level suggests that the positive relationship between partisanship and ideology has strengthened
and stabilized since 1988 (Erickson, Wright, and McIver 2006).
for the number of council seats on each body and total population (logged). If seats in more populous localities have correspondingly more power and prestige, I expect them to be more desirable. Local legislative bodies with a smaller number of seats, by virtue of dividing power among fewer officeholders, may also be more desirable (controlling for population size). I also include council term length in years. I expect the proportions of women and minority winners will be higher in legislative bodies that may be less prestigious, with less policymaking authority, more seats on their legislative bodies, shorter terms, and representing smaller populations.\(^{12}\)

**Modeling Strategy**

The number of seats on a given council is fixed and so the more seats that one group holds, the fewer there are for other groups. The three dependent variables are thus compositional data, whose numerators and denominators contain common parts. Therefore, the empirical models cannot be estimated via individual regression equations (Katz and King 1999) since the error terms would certainly violate the independence assumption. Instead the analysis employs a seemingly unrelated regression (SUR) approach where all three dependent variables are estimated simultaneously. Furthermore, the SUR framework coheres with the intersectionality research paradigm (Hancock 2007) and its call for investigating outcomes for various identity groups simultaneously rather than one by one.

**Results**

The bar graph in Figure 1 illustrates the average percentages of city council winners and percentages of the population that are minority women, non-minority women, minority men, and non-minority men in California from 1995 to 2011. The figure shows that women’s representation is not on par with their presence in the population. In the localities included in this study, the percentage of the population that is minority (Asian, Black, and Hispanic) and female was 22.6. In contrast, the average percentage of council seats held by minority women in these

\(^{12}\) Many previous studies (e.g., Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Smith et al. 2012; Trounstine and Valdini 2008) find that the proportion of women on the council increases in more populous cities, though the reasons for such a relationship are unclear. Based on the logic of the desirability hypothesis, larger cities should have more powerful legislatures, meaning that women’s descriptive representation should be lower. In any case, given the continual statistical significance of population size in existing models, it is included in the analysis.
same places between 1995 and 2011 was 10.5—a striking 12 percent gap. Likewise, non-minority women are underrepresented compared to their presence in the population. Whereas they make up 27.8 percent of the population, they held on average 19.9 percent of council seats. Minority and non-minority men fare better. Minority men make up about 23.1 percent of the population and occupy 22.5 percent of council seats. Non-minority men are overrepresented compared to their presence in the population. Whereas they comprise 26.5 percent of the population, they have held 47 percent of council seats—a 21-percentage point difference. What factors produce such disparate levels of legislative representation? This is the question to which the multivariate analysis turns.

**SUR Analysis of Coalitions and Competition between Identity Groups**

Model one, presented in Table 1, regresses the three dependent variables—percent non-minority female winners, percent minority female winners, and percent minority male winners—on the sets of independent variables. Considering each equation of the model one at a time, several factors appear to influence non-minority women’s presence on city councils throughout California. According to H1, non-minority women’s descriptive representation will be greater when more minority men and minority women hold such positions. But the effects are predicted to be non-linear, increasing at lower levels of representation and decreasing at higher levels. The first equation of model one lends some support to this line of reasoning. All else equal, as the percentage of minority female winners increases so too does the percentage of non-minority female winners, up to a certain point, whereupon this relationship changes course. Figure 2A illustrates this finding along with its 95 percent confidence interval, holding all other independent variables constant. \(^{13}\) When the percentage of minority female winners is at zero, the predicted percentage of non-minority female winners is 17.3. The prediction increases to 22.6 when the percentage of minority female winners is at its mean value (10.5 percent). After that, the prediction decreases. When the percentage of minority female winners is at its 95th percentile value in the data (at 45 percent), the predicted percentage of non-minority female winners is 19.7. Especially at lower levels of representation, when first breaking into local legislative politics, non-minority women’s descriptive representation is driven, in part, by their partnerships with minority female politicians.

\(^{13}\) All point predictions and graphs follow this pattern of varying values of a certain independent variable while keeping the others constant.
While the first equation of model one lends support to H1 with regard to the percent minority female winners, it provides contradictory evidence in another respect. Specifically, the percentage of council seats won by minority men is negatively associated with the dependent variable while its squared term is positively associated with it. This finding is consistent with H_a and indicates that competition between two groups for a finite number of council seats impedes coalition building. Given that the coefficient on the first term is much larger than the one on the second term, the effect of minority male winner’s representation is largely negative. The predicted percentage of non-minority female winners decreases from 31.9 to 9.3 when the minority men representational variable goes from its 25th to 75th percentile value in the data (from 6.5 to 32.8 percent). Since minority men hold a larger percentage of council seats to begin with (see Figure 1), they may forgo forming partnerships with non-minority women. The logic of H_1 for non-minority women is that groups that have similar experiences of exclusion will form coalitions to break into the political system. But since non-minority men have generally had success in attaining council seats in California’s cities, the dynamic between these two groups is likely one of electoral competition rather than collaboration.

The demographic variables emerge as significant in equation one, lending more support to the first hypothesis. The percentages of the population that are white and female and minority and female both positively impact the percentage of non-minority female council winners. Figure 2B depicts the association between minority female population and the first dependent variable. The predicted percentage of non-minority female winners increases from 17.4 to 21.5 when the percentage of the population that is minority and female increases from its 25th to 75th percentile value in the data (from 10.4 to 31.6 percent). When more minority women are present in the population, they provide electoral support for non-minority women, as H_1 holds.

In terms of the control variables, the lagged dependent variable is not significant in the first equation. Non-minority women’s past electoral victories and losses does not appear to cast a shadow upon their current performance in council elections. The equation also fails to provide support for the notion that women’s representation will be more common in localities where they have greater stores of socioeconomic and professional resources. Having a larger pool of women with the resources necessary to mount and support campaigns does not influence non-minority women’s presence as council members. As anticipated, cities that have more liberal electorates elect greater percentages of non-minority women to their councils. Although it is perhaps
unsurprising that liberal cities elect more female council members, these results are among the first to validate this relationship empirically (see also Smith et al. 2012).

The percentage of council seats elected at-large fails to achieve significance. Although not in line with expectations, this finding comports with the mixed findings regarding electoral structure in earlier research (Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Bullock and MacManus 1991; Darcy et al. 1994; Karnig and Walter 1976). The other variable dealing with electoral institutions, term limits, is significant and its coefficient is in the predicted direction. In cities that do not limit the number of terms council members serve, the predicted percentage of non-minority women council winners is 19.1. This prediction increases to 21.7 in cities that observe term limits. Term limits therefore pose some promise for increasing the gender diversity of local councils.

Two of the four variables measuring the desirability of council slots are significant in equation one, but in the opposite direction as earlier scholarship theorizes. According to this analysis, city councils with more seats have fewer non-minority women serving on them and more populous cities have a greater percentage of non-minority women on their councils. These findings contradict the logic of the desirability hypothesis but are consistent with earlier empirical findings, especially with regard to population size (Alozie and Manganaro 1993; Smith et al. 2012; Trounstine and Valdini 2008).

Equation two of model one presents the effect of the independent variables on minority women’s success in California’s municipal legislative elections. The goal is to understand how partnerships and competition with other disadvantaged groups affect minority women’s descriptive representation. The model provides additional support for H1 with the percent non-minority female winners variable, which is positive and significant, and its squared term, which is negative and significant. As non-minority women’s victories increase so too do those of minority women, up to a certain point whereupon the relationship reverses course. This indicates a degree of electoral collaboration between the two groups. As depicted in Figure 2C, the predicted percentage of minority female winners increases from 9.9 to 11.4 when the percentage of non-minority female winners goes from its 10th percentile to median value in the data (from 0.07 to 14.3 percent). The prediction then decreases once more, to 10.2 percent, by the time the

---

14 Given the overriding interest in the effects of electoral partnerships, I limit discussion of results for the control variables in the rest of this section, noting only the instances in which the findings diverge from what equation one suggested.
percentage of non-minority female winners increases to its 90th percentile value (48.2 percent). Taken together, equations one and two indicate that there is a degree of electoral collaboration between minority and non-minority women in their quest to win council seats in California.

Similar to model one, here, there is some support for the alternative hypothesis. The variable measuring minority men’s council representation is negative and significant while its squared term is positive and significant (but small in magnitude). In California’s recent elections, these two groups may have been in competition over a limited number of council seats. It is important to note, however, that the magnitudes of the effect of minority men’s council representation and its squared term are much smaller in the second equation than they are in the first. The logic behind H1 held that as members of two identity groups, minority women would have crossover appeal to non-minority women and minority men. The fact that the coefficient on minority men’s representation is much smaller in the second equation than in the first lends some support to this line of reasoning. The degree of competition between minority women and men is less pronounced than it is between non-minority women and minority men.

Only one of the demographic population variables is significant in equation two, namely the percentage of minority women in the population. The predicted percentage of minority women winners increases from 4.8 to 15.4 when their presence in the population moves from its 25th to 75th percentile values in the data (from 10.4 to 31.6 percent)—an over 10.5 percent increase. This large substantive change underscores the importance of demographic trends in understanding the election of underrepresented groups to political offices (Marschall et al. 2010). However, the fact that the percentage of white women in the population fails to reach standard significance levels means there is less support for the population element of H1.

The lagged dependent variable is positive and significant in model two, suggesting that minority women’s descriptive representation is becoming more common over time. Minority women may follow role models from their identity group into the political fray. It may also be the case that voters have become more comfortable supporting minority women over time, as they are exposed to greater numbers of such candidates.

With the exception of council term limits, the number of seats on the council, and population logged, the other control variables behave as they did in the previous equation. Unlike equation one, here, the use of term limits does not appear to affect minority women’s representation, one way or the other, nor does the size of the council. Additionally, population
size appears to be negatively associated with the percentage of non-minority women who win council seats, as the desirability hypothesis would predict.

Finally, equation three considers the effects of the coalitional independent and control variables on minority men’s election as council members in California’s municipalities. Consistent with the previous two equations, the percentages of non-minority and minority female winners negatively predict minority men’s descriptive representation, although the coefficient on the squared term for non-minority female winners is not statistically significant. Since minority men are fairly well represented on California’s city councils (again, see Figure 1), it appears that they do not look for coalitional partnerships with non-minority or minority female council members. In fact, gains for these two other disadvantaged groups likely mean losses for minority men, which is consistent with the alternative hypothesis. This is not the case, however, when it comes to the demographic population variables. While the percentage of the population that is white and female does not research standard significance levels, the coefficient on the minority female population variable is positive and significant. Although caution should be used when interpreting this variable since it is highly correlated with the percentage of the population that is male and minority, this nonetheless provides some indication that minority men rely on electoral support from their female identity group peers.

Figure 2D shows the relationship between the percentage of the population that is minority and female and the minority men dependent variable. When the demographic variable is at its 25th percentile value in the data (at 10.4 percent), the predicted percentage of minority male winners is 15.3. This prediction increases to 29 percent when the population variable is at its 75th percentile value (at 31.6 percent)—an impressive almost 14 percentage point increase. The “strategic intersectionality” (Fraga et al. 2008) of minority women means that their votes are critical to the electoral success of minority men.

In terms of the control variables, council term limits once again emerge as positive and significant, meaning that such institutions hold promise for diversifying local legislative bodies. Larger legislative bodies will have fewer minority men on them, which is counter to what the desirability hypothesis predicts. Finally, unlike the previous two models, logged population does not appear to affect minority men’s representation, one way or the other.

SUR Analysis of Electoral Institutions and Coalition Building
The second hypothesis proposes that the effects of coalition building are contingent upon electoral institutions. Specifically, H2 posits that the multimember nature of at-large elections makes such settings more hospitable to coalition building between disadvantaged groups compared to single-member district-based elections. Model two, presented in Table 2, examines this proposition. Here, the key independent variables are interactions between the percentage of council seats elected at-large and group descriptive representation. Looking across the three equations, there appears to be some support for H2. In equation two, the interaction between at-large council structure and non-minority women’s representation is a positive and significant predictor of the percentage of council seats held by minority women. Similarly, the same interaction term is positive and significant in equation three where the dependent variable is minority men’s presence as council members. The other interactions between council structure and group representation fail to reach standard significance levels. However, all coefficients are in the positive direction, as predicted, with the exception of the interaction between minority women’s representation and percent elected at-large in equation three. In short, these findings suggest that at-large electoral systems enhance the opportunities for partnerships between disadvantaged groups, particularly those involving non-minority women. This finding is an important and novel addition to debates about the influence of electoral institutions on identity groups’ descriptive representation.

Conclusions

Given the chronic underrepresentation of marginalized groups at all levels of government, more attention to their representation at the local level, arguably the beginning of the pipeline, is sorely needed. This study took an important step in this direction by developing and testing expectations about the roles that inter- and intra-group cooperation and conflict play in impacting women’s representation. The insights discussed here have implications for existing theories regarding the determinants of women’s election to political offices. For example, the experiences in California’s cities, Houston, and Atlanta suggest that the incorporation of women and other disadvantaged groups are interdependent phenomena. Future research should build on this effort to model women’s incorporation in tandem with that of other groups, rather than continuing with the single-axis approaches undertaken in the bulk of studies thus far.
The findings of both electoral partnerships and competition between disadvantaged and multiply burdened (Crenshaw 1989) groups underscore the importance of moving beyond broad categorizations such as “women and men” and “Black and white” in empirical research (Hancock 2007). Earlier studies suggest that the dynamic between different racial/ethnic minority groups is more likely to be one of electoral competition rather than cooperation (de la Garza 1997; McClain and Karnig 1990; Meier and Stewart 1991; Mindiola et al. 2002; Rocha 2007). However, addressing the puzzle of whether historically excluded groups cooperate or compete depends critically on which groups, contexts, and time periods are under examination. In the 1970s and 80s, women of various races/ethnicities and minority men generally worked together to gain power in Atlanta and Houston’s City Halls. Given their crossover appeal, minority women appear most likely to be coalitional partners with other disadvantaged groups.

In the quantitative analysis, I found that, especially when women are first breaking into local electoral politics, minority women’s presence as council members positively influences the election of non-minority women and vice versa. Minority women’s presence was less of a hindrance to minority men’s election than that of non-minority women. Furthermore, minority women’s presence in the population bodes well for both their own electoral prospects, as well as those of their potential partners. Therefore it does appear that, as members of multiple disadvantaged groups, minority women have crossover appeal to potential electoral partners of the opposite sex and women of different races/ethnicities. These findings add an important wrinkle to our understanding of identity group coalition building.

In other instances, the dynamics between disadvantaged groups is likely to be one of competition rather than collaboration. In particular, since minority men have fared somewhat well in California’s municipal legislative elections since 1995, their descriptive representation is generally negatively associated with that of minority and non-minority women. Thus the prospects for electoral partnerships are contingent upon the relative successes and challenges that each group has faced in attaining local elected positions. Nonetheless, approaching the aforementioned puzzle from an intersectional perspective, which incorporates the combined and interactive effects of race/ethnicity and gender, provides more nuanced answers to how marginalized groups achieve representation and whether and when they will forge partnerships.

The findings furthermore suggest that electoral institutions condition the extent of coalition building between disadvantaged groups. At-large systems in which elections are less
zero-sum in nature enhance the prospect for partnerships between non-minority women and both
male and female minority groups. Still more attention should be devoted to understanding how
electoral institutions impact representational outcomes. It is highly unlikely that district-based
elections are good for all racial and ethnic minorities or that at-large systems are positive
features for all women, as these and other recent findings suggests (Trounstine and Valdini
2008). Instead, the effects of such structures are likely to be highly contingent—on the
availability of coalition partners, on the candidate pool, and on the historical period in question,
to name just a few potential contingencies.

The theorizing and analyses undertaken here take the intersectional approach only so far.
Gender, race, and ethnicity are not the only categories of difference relevant to electoral politics,
coalition building, and “relations of marginality and privilege” (Dhamoon 2011, 230). Other
disadvantaged groups likely play an important role in diversifying America’s governments. As
noted earlier, Houston has elected a large number of women to its top posts; it currently has a
female mayor and in recent years, women held over half of its council seats. These trends were
brought about, in part, by partnerships forged between and among women and sexual minorities
in the 1970s and ‘80s and that continue today (various interviews, 2011). The groups came
together because of similar experiences of exclusion from the municipal power structure. Future
studies should take the analysis further and deeper, expanding upon the complexities of the
groups and coalitions under examination and the contexts in which they are examined. Of course,
the ability to do so hinges on the availability of comprehensive data on local elections and
governments. As the LEAP and other efforts like it move forward, political scientists will be able
to increase the scope of knowledge about this important and understudied component of the
American political system.

A variety of factors affect historically excluded groups’ efforts to gain influence in
municipal governments. This study adds to the scholarship on where women and other groups’
representation comes from and how it is built and sustained. More research on intersectionality
and political representation in cities and beyond is sorely needed. Indeed, such research will help
address why it is that American governments look so different from those they are governing.
References


Bejarano, Christina E. 2013. The Latina Advantage. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.


Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative Records, Robert W. Woodruff Library of the AUC.


Murray, Richard. 2011. Meeting with author. 21 October, University of Houston, Houston TX.


Table 1. Determinants of Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities’ Descriptive Representation on City Councils, 1995-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority female winners</td>
<td>0.650** (0.054)</td>
<td>-0.277** (0.050)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority female winners squared</td>
<td>-0.013** (0.001)</td>
<td>-0.006** (0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority male winners</td>
<td>-1.078** (0.047)</td>
<td>-0.519** (0.039)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority male winners squared</td>
<td>0.006** (0.001)</td>
<td>0.001** (0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent non-minority female winners</td>
<td>0.154** (0.034)</td>
<td>-0.547** (0.039)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-minority female winners squared</td>
<td>(0.034)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged dependent variable</td>
<td>-0.025 (0.016)</td>
<td>0.054** (0.019)</td>
<td>0.056** (0.016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent non-minority female population</td>
<td>0.200* (0.112)</td>
<td>-0.025 (0.085)</td>
<td>0.108 (0.103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority female population</td>
<td>0.196* (0.118)</td>
<td>0.499** (0.089)</td>
<td>0.650** (0.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent elected at-large</td>
<td>-0.026 (0.016)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.012)</td>
<td>-0.009 (0.015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s socioeconomic resources</td>
<td>-0.342 (0.480)</td>
<td>-0.023 (0.364)</td>
<td>-0.420 (0.444)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal ideology</td>
<td>0.196** (0.030)</td>
<td>0.126** (0.023)</td>
<td>0.187** (0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term limits</td>
<td>2.562** (1.081)</td>
<td>1.081 (1.082)</td>
<td>3.025** (1.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong mayor</td>
<td>-0.353 (0.792)</td>
<td>0.363 (0.602)</td>
<td>-0.024 (0.733)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of council seats</td>
<td>-1.025** (0.567)</td>
<td>-0.552 (0.431)</td>
<td>-1.139** (0.525)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (logged)</td>
<td>1.545** (0.358)</td>
<td>-0.618** (0.273)</td>
<td>0.036 (0.332)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term length</td>
<td>-2.143 (2.152)</td>
<td>1.208 (1.636)</td>
<td>0.130 (1.992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>16.136 (10.783)</td>
<td>6.455 (8.197)</td>
<td>14.958 (9.980)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of observations: 2396
RMSE: 18.097, 13.597, 17.197
Chi square: 1988.861, 1203.311, 2907.904
P-value: 0.001, 0.001, 0.001

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At-large X minority female</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winners</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-large X minority male</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winners</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-large X non-minority female</td>
<td>0.002**</td>
<td>0.002**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winners</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority female</td>
<td>0.591**</td>
<td>-0.276**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winners</td>
<td>(0.100)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority female winners squared</td>
<td>-0.013**</td>
<td>-0.006**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority male</td>
<td>-1.097**</td>
<td>-0.525**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winners</td>
<td>(0.077)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority male winners squared</td>
<td>0.006**</td>
<td>0.001**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent non-minority female</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>-0.694**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>winners</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-minority female winners squared</td>
<td>-0.003**</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagged dependent variable</td>
<td>-0.025</td>
<td>0.054**</td>
<td>0.055**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent non-minority female</td>
<td>0.019*</td>
<td>-0.108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>population</td>
<td>(0.112)</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority female</td>
<td>0.193</td>
<td>0.502**</td>
<td>0.654**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>population</td>
<td>(0.118)</td>
<td>(0.108)</td>
<td>(0.108)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent elected at-large</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
<td>-0.042*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's socioeconomic resources</td>
<td>-0.351</td>
<td>-0.035</td>
<td>-0.427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.480)</td>
<td>(0.364)</td>
<td>(0.444)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal ideology</td>
<td>0.196**</td>
<td>0.128**</td>
<td>0.188**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term limits</td>
<td>2.551**</td>
<td>2.850**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.083)</td>
<td>(1.001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong mayor</td>
<td>-0.373</td>
<td>0.326</td>
<td>-0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.792)</td>
<td>(0.601)</td>
<td>(0.733)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of council seats</td>
<td>-1.004*</td>
<td>-1.022*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.567)</td>
<td>(0.527)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (logged)</td>
<td>1.556**</td>
<td>-0.617**</td>
<td>0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.358)</td>
<td>(0.272)</td>
<td>(0.331)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term length</td>
<td>-2.142</td>
<td>0.872</td>
<td>-0.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.151)</td>
<td>(1.636)</td>
<td>(1.993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>17.219</td>
<td>10.878</td>
<td>18.449*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10.934)</td>
<td>(8.489)</td>
<td>(10.086)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of observations 2396
RMSE 18.085 13.572 17.175
Chi square 1982.710 1224.623 2917.988
P-value 0.001 0.001 0.001

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05
Figure 1. Group Representation on Councils and Presence in the Population in California’s Cities, 1995-2011

Sources: Local Elections in America Project (Marschall and Shah 2013); 2000 Decennial Census; 2010 American Community Survey
Figure 2. Predicted Effects of Coalitional Partnerships on Women’s Council Representation
Appendix

Variable summary statistics and sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percent non-minority women winners(^a)</td>
<td>19.92</td>
<td>21.52</td>
<td>0-98.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority women winners(^a)</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td>0-96.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority men winners(^a)</td>
<td>22.54</td>
<td>20.47</td>
<td>0-97.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority women winners (lag)(^a)</td>
<td>10.39</td>
<td>14.97</td>
<td>0-95.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent minority men winners (lag)(^a)</td>
<td>22.07</td>
<td>19.84</td>
<td>0-96.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent non-minority women winners (lag)(^a)</td>
<td>20.07</td>
<td>21.41</td>
<td>0-98.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Hispanic female population(^b)</td>
<td>14.98</td>
<td>11.57</td>
<td>0-52.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent white female population(^b)</td>
<td>26.69</td>
<td>13.15</td>
<td>0-63.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Asian female population(^b)</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>0-35.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Black female population(^b)</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0-26.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s socioeconomic resources(^b)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-1.86-3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal ideology(^c)</td>
<td>56.58</td>
<td>15.33</td>
<td>19.53-96.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent elected at-large(^d)</td>
<td>91.48</td>
<td>27.03</td>
<td>0-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council term limits(^d)</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council term length(^d)</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of council seats(^d)</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>4-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong mayor(^d)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (log)(^b)</td>
<td>10.16</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>4.72-15.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
\(^a\) – Local Elections in American Project (Marschall and Shah 2013)
\(^b\) – 2000 U.S. Decennial Census; 2010 American Community Survey