Expansion and Exclusion:
Race, Gender and Immigration in American Politics

By

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Abstract

The United States’ population is rapidly changing, but the ways in which political scientists measure and understand representation have not kept pace. Marginal shifts in descriptive representation over the past two decades have run counter to widely espoused ideals regarding political accessibility and democratic competition. A central assumption often made by academics, and the public, has been that groups which are otherwise disadvantaged in politics may leverage their communities’ numerical size as a political resource to gain influence. To this end, many studies of racial descriptive representation find that a larger minority population is associated with a higher likelihood of a racial minority running for and/or winning. However, these positive relationships between population growth and descriptive representation are tempered by an extensive literature documenting limits on racial minority groups’ political incorporation. Moreover, current frameworks for understanding group competition or patterns of descriptive representation are silent about whether shifts in racial demographics may also have an effect on the balance of representation between women and men.

These contradictions in debates over representation, and how groups gain influence, undermine the notion that eventually, marginalized groups will be fully incorporated into politics. White women have had de jure access to the voting franchise in the United States since 1920. In the intervening period, women have made up approximately half the population, and outnumbered male voters in every presidential election since 1964. Yet, women have held a quarter or less of all state legislative seats across the country for well over two decades, and only reached 100 members of Congress in 2014.

The case for eventual incorporation is similarly dubious when we consider the racial composition of elected bodies. The racial balance of American communities is in flux largely due to Asian and Latina/o immigration, which will continue to be the case into the foreseeable future. Presently, Asian Americans and Latina/os make up 23 percent of the U.S. population and are the two fastest growing racial groups in the country. Members of these immigrant communities hold less than ten percent of all state legislative seats, and a similar fraction of seats in the 115th Congress. Taken together, these yawning gaps between presence in the population and representation in elected office strongly suggest that “time” alone may be an insufficient remedy for underrepresentation.

Moreover, for those who are living in the United States now, the current demographic makeup of state legislatures—which includes over 7500 elected seats nationally—raises doubts about their representative legitimacy. Asian American and Latina/o women and men typically have socioeconomic experiences, political perspectives and policy priorities that are distinct from that of their most likely descriptive representative—a White man. At the same time, state legislatures have been veritable policy engines for bills and resolutions related to immigration and immigrants in recent years. The National Council of State Legislatures reports that in 2015 state legislatures enacted 216 laws and passed 274 resolutions related to immigrants and immigration. Even as these bodies write, debate, and pass legislation targeting immigrant communities, Asian Americans and Latina/os are rarely in the room. Researchers increasingly point to the scarcity of female or racial minority candidates as a key explanatory factor, but seldom examine issues related to race and gender at the same time. As a result, the extant scholarship obscures the outsized effects that White men’s candidacies have in defining American elections, and overlooks the distinct challenges that women of color face in getting on the ballot.

This dissertation examines the intersecting roles of race and gender in elections, with particular attention to how they may be changing as immigrant communities become a larger proportion of the American population. I analyze the Gender Race and Communities in Elections
dataset, which encompasses all state legislative general election winners and candidates from 1996-2015, and includes demographic information for candidates and their district populations. This original dataset provides the first opportunity to simultaneously analyze descriptive representation in state legislatures, for women and men in the four largest racial groups, at the national level. I also present the results of a national survey of state legislators, and in-depth interviews with political elites, in order to reveal race-gendered, informal, processes of candidate development and deterrence.

I also show that practical opportunities to compete in elections are sharply, and simultaneously, constrained by candidates’ race and gender. These constraints are most evident in the lopsided distribution of racial populations across districts, the uneven candidate development efforts of civic and political organizations, and the dominance of men in elite political networks, across racial groups.

Based on my examination of Asian American and Latina/o candidates in elections, I advance a Race-Gendered Model for understanding the persistence of underrepresentation in state legislatures. I conceptualize elections as competitions for descriptive representation, and account for the disparate social and political experiences of women and men from different racial groups. Within this framework, race and gender simultaneously constrain potential candidates’ access to elections, producing a frequent absence of competition for descriptive representation. This model uses an intersectional approach to explain why Asian American and Latina/o women and men do not run more often, and why the majority of ballots are made up exclusively of White male candidates.

I demonstrate that the increasing “strength in numbers” of Asian American and Latina/o communities has primarily served as a resource for increasing the racial diversity of men in statehouses—to the limited extent that racial diversity has increased at all. I also show that the most advantaged descriptive group, White men, benefits from an absence of competition in most electoral contests. At the same time, the fastest growing groups of women—Asian Americans and Latinas—are also the groups most frequently excluded from competing.

The Race-Gendered Model expands the intellectual terrain available to answer longstanding questions in the study of women and racial minorities’ underrepresentation. Along the way, I argue that it is necessary to simultaneously consider why White men’s overrepresentation is similarly persistent. More broadly, the theory of competition presented in this dissertation shifts away from a central focus on the advantages and disadvantages groups face during election campaigns. Instead, I argue that the choices voters face in electing a descriptive representative are limited long before election day.
To Letty, Mariedavie, & Ella
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In the campaigns leading up to the United States' 2016 presidential election, anxieties and opportunities related to a “changing” America were central themes. A woman might have been elected President. Immigration and migration were altering the racial balances of American communities. Workers worried about how, and with whom, they could compete. These issues tap into deep shifts in the American population that occurred in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement, the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965, and the women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, within the halls of nearly every state legislature, scant evidence exists that the United States has become more racially diverse, or that women are active participants in politics. The persistent underrepresentation of women and racial minorities raises questions about their prospects for political incorporation, the overall robustness of group competition (Dahl, 1967) in American politics, and the representative integrity of legislative institutions.

The United States’ population is clearly changing, but the ways in which we measure and understand representation have not kept pace. Marginal shifts in descriptive representation over the past two decades have run counter to widely espoused ideals regarding political accessibility and democratic competition (R. P. Browning, Marshall, & Tabb, 1986a; Dahl, 1967; Fowler, Merolla, & Sellers, 2014) c.f. (Wong, et al., 2011). A central assumption often made by academics and the public has been that groups which are otherwise disadvantaged in politics may leverage their communities’ numerical size as a political resource to gain influence (R. P. Browning et al., 1986a; Dahl, 1967). To this end, many studies of racial descriptive representation find that a larger minority population is associated with a higher likelihood of a racial minority running for and/or winning office (Branton, 2009; B. L. Fraga, 2013; Gay, 2001b; Juenke, 2014; Preuhs & Juenke, 2011a). However, these positive relationships between population growth and descriptive representation are tempered by an extensive literature documenting limits on racial minority groups’ political incorporation (Dawson, 1995; L. R. Fraga, Hero, Garcia, Jones-Correa, & Martinez-Ebers, 2011; Hardy-Fanta, Lien, Pinderhughes, & Sierra, 2006; J. Wong, Lee, Junn, & Ramakrishnan, 2011). Moreover, current frameworks for understanding group competition (R. P. Browning et al., 1986a; Dahl, 1967; Hero, 2010) or patterns of descriptive representation¹ are silent about whether shifts in racial demographics may also have an effect on the balance of representation between women and men.

These contradictions in debates over representation, and how groups gain influence, undermine the notion that eventually, marginalized groups will be fully incorporated. White women have had de jure access to the voting franchise in the United States since 1920. In the intervening period, women have made up approximately half the population, and outnumbered male voters in every presidential election since 1964 (Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute, Rutgers University, n.d.). Yet, women have held a quarter or less of all state legislative seats across the country for well over two decades, and only reached 100 members of Congress in 2014. The case for eventual incorporation is similarly dubious when we consider that the two fastest growing groups of women are Asian Americans and Latinas (Cohn, 2015). The racial balance of American communities is in flux largely due to Asian and Latina/o immigration, which will continue to be the case into the forecastable future (Cohn, 2015). Presently, Asian Americans and Latina/os make up

¹ See (Lawless, 2015a) for a recent review of research on women’s underrepresentation, and (Juenke,
23 percent of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts: Population estimates, July 1, 2014, (V2014), n.d.). Members of these immigrant communities hold less than ten percent of all state legislative seats, and a similar fraction of seats in the 115th Congress (Marcos, 2016). Taken together, these yawning gaps between presence in the population and representation in elected office strongly suggest that “time” alone may be an insufficient remedy for underrepresentation.

Moreover, for those who are living in the United States now, the current demographic makeup of state legislatures—which includes over 7500 elected seats nationally—raises doubts about their representative legitimacy. Asian American and Latina/o women and men typically have socioeconomic experiences, political perspectives and policy priorities that are distinct from that of their most likely descriptive representative—a White man (Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Schmidt, Hero, Aoki, & Alex-Assensoh, 2009; J. Wong, 2008). At the same time, state legislatures have been veritable policy engines for bills and resolutions related to immigration and immigrants in recent years. The National Council of State Legislatures reports that in 2015 state legislatures enacted 216 laws and passed 274 resolutions related to immigrants and immigration (Lam, 2016). Even as these bodies write, debate, and pass legislation targeting immigrant communities, Asian Americans and Latina/os are rarely in the room.

By examining Asian American and Latina/o candidates in elections, this dissertation develops a Race-Gendered Model for understanding the persistence of underrepresentation in state legislatures. I conceptualize elections as competitions for descriptive representation, and account for the disparate social and political experiences of women and men from different racial groups. Within this framework, race and gender simultaneously constrain potential candidates’ access to elections, producing a frequent absence of competition for descriptive representation. This model uses an intersectional approach to explain why Asian American and Latina/o women and men do not run more often, and why the majority of ballots are made up exclusively of White male candidates. The Race-Gendered Model “expands where we go looking” (Cohen, 1999) to answer a longstanding question in studies of women and racial minorities in elected office: “Why so few?” Along the way, I argue that it is necessary to simultaneously ask of White male representatives: “Why so many?”

**Descriptive Representation as a Measure of Political Incorporation**

Descriptive representation is an immediate, and often visible, indicator of political incorporation for elites and constituents alike (Atkeson & Carrillo, 2007; Barreto, 2007; Gay, 2001b; Reingold & Harrell, 2010; Rocha, Tolbert, Bowen, & Clark, 2010; Tate, 2003). Long-running disciplinary debates have been waged over the merits of descriptive v. substantive representation as indicators of the health of democratic processes and the incorporation of particular groups. This has produced a rich empirical literature showing that, on balance, socially and politically marginalized groups benefit from descriptive representation. A robust connection between descriptive and substantive representation for racial minorities and women has been observed at multiple levels of government (Celis, Childs, Kantola, & Krook, 2008; Dovi, 2007; Hawkesworth, 2003; Hero &

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2 For this dissertation, I rely on Williams’ definition of marginalized ascriptive groups, which have four characteristic features: “1) Patterns of social and political inequality are structured along the lines of group membership, 2) membership in these groups is not usually experienced as voluntary; 3) membership in these groups is not usually experienced as mutable; and 4) generally, negative meanings are assigned to group identity by the broader society or the dominant culture.” (Williams, 2000)
Tolbert, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999; Mendelberg, Karpowitz, & Goedert, 2013; Preuhs, 2006; Sapiro, 1981; C. Swain, 1993) (c.f. Cameron & Epstein, 1996; Lublin, 1997; C. Swain, 1993). Furthermore, increasing the descriptive representation of women and racial minorities increases the diversity of perspectives informing policymaking; legislators from underrepresented communities exhibit distinct policy positions, agendas, and approaches to legislating (Barrett, 1995; Bratton, Haynie, & Reingold, 2006; Minta, 2011; Preuhs, 2007; Reingold & Smith, 2012; Rocca, Sanchez, & Uscinski, 2008; Tate, 2003; Thomas & Welch, 1991).

Several scholars have argued that focusing on descriptive, instead of substantive representation, may be a misleading indicator of how well represented certain group’s interests are in elected bodies. Two points have been central to these critiques. The first, is that descriptive representatives may be no more likely to enact the substantive interests of their constituents than non-descriptive representatives. This may be due either to the means by which descriptive representation is achieved, such as racially gerrymandered majority-minority districts (Cameron & Epstein, 1996), or because partisanship is a more robust predictor of a legislator’s voting record than their race or gender (Diamond, 1977; C. Swain, 1993). However, legislators’ partisanship itself is not a random occurrence, but is shaped in part by racial group histories and public debates over women’s roles (Dawson, 1995; Elder, 2012; Frymer, 2010). The second point of critique is that emphasizing descriptive representation is an invitation to essentialize a group, either based on stereotypes, or the wishes of an especially vocal subgroup (Kymlicka, 1996; Young, 2011). Arguably, increased descriptive representation is the best guard against essentialism, as a larger number of representatives can presumably better encompass the internal heterogeneity of a group, than say, one lone Asian American man might (Mansbridge, 1999).

While not a perfect mechanism for ensuring political incorporation, movement towards American electoral institutions that look more like the American public signals, and may even enact, a “mutual understanding” (Dovi, 2003) between those who govern, and the governed (Gay, 2002). For this reason, descriptive representation is also suitable as a measure of incorporation for communities in which there may be a substantial proportion of non-voters, or even those who are ineligible to vote. Elected officials’ constituents encompass every person in their districts, regardless of their vote history (Ginsburg, 2016), and as such, even those who are non-citizens, or non-participants, are among the “governed.”

Finally, while scholars of Asian American and Latina/o political activism and civic participation, particularly those focused on the political activities of women, have made a strong case for the importance of non-electoral methods of incorporation (García Bedolla, 2005; Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Pardo, 1998; J. Wong, 2008), as Browning et al (1986) put it: “protest is not enough.” Elected representatives have access to, and decision-making authority over, budgets, policies and the development of state-sponsored institutions. While there is power in advocacy (Strolovitch, 2006), and in developing political leverage within ethnic or racial political communities (Hero, 2010), laws are not signed by non-profit leaders. Descriptive representatives are a tool for underrepresented groups to have a voice in the rooms that matter—the floor of the state Assembly, or Senate, or House of Delegates.

There are an estimated 1.6 million undocumented Asian Americans and 7.6 million undocumented Latina/os living in the United States (Center for Migration Studies, 2014). Among the population of Asian Americans and Latina/os who are eligible to vote, rates of participation in presidential elections are lower than other racial groups (Ramakrishnan, Wong, Lee, & Lee, 2016).
The current political science literature on how groups compete for descriptive representation provides limited theoretical or empirical guidance for understanding how underrepresentation is shaped by race and gender simultaneously. There are robust literatures that explore the institutional and structural barriers to the election of African Americans, Latina/os and Asian Americans. A vibrant literature also investigates the underlying causes of women’s persistent underrepresentation. Indeed, the extant empirical scholarship on the descriptive representation of women and racial minorities has repeatedly called into question the “optimism” of classic pluralist frameworks of groups competition. In Chapter 3 I discuss more extensively how this applies to the growth of populations specifically, but for now, it is sufficient to note that the race and ethnic politics, and women in politics literatures, have consistently shown that the value of “slack and diffuse” political resources, as well as the electoral playing field itself, is not even across groups (R. P. Browning et al., 1986a; Dahl, 1967). However, when it comes to understanding how women and men of different races compete for descriptive representation, or explaining why women of color are elected at lower rates than all other groups, these literatures often resemble ships in the night. They speak past each other, and rarely recognize how the central concerns of one might inform the other.

The race and ethnic politics literature has frequently focused on how the electoral context, and specifically the concentration of racial minorities within a district, shapes the likelihood of a group electing a descriptive representative. The emphasis on group, or district-level, conditions is driven in part by the structural boundaries and barriers to political incorporation for African Americans, Latina/os and Asian Americans that have been repeatedly delineated and documented (Dawson, 1995; Hero, 2010; Lien, 2001; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). The gap between the population and the electorate is much larger among communities of color (for reasons that vary by race and ethnicity) than it is among Whites (Arvizu & Garcia, 1996; Geron & Lai, 2002; Griffin & Newman, 2007; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Lai, Cho, Kim, & Takeda, 2002; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Lien, 2015; Preuhs & Juenke, 2011b; Segura & Woods, 2006). In spite of the systemic challenges that have hindered the mobilization of African Americans, Latina/os and Asian Americans as voters, scholars in this literature have consistently argued that the size of a racial minority population within a district can serve as a resource for their ability to influence politics through elections (Barreto, Segura, & Woods, 2004; Canon, 1999; Casellas, 2009; Griffin & Newman, 2007; Rocca et al., 2008; Segura & Woods, 2006). Districts with larger racial minority populations are also more likely to have a co-racial candidate on the ballot, or representing the jurisdiction in elected office (Branton, 2009; B. L. Fraga, 2013; Gay, 2001b; Gonzalez Juenke & Shah, 2015; Juenke, 2014; Preuhs & Juenke, 2011a). While this literature is empirically rich, most of the extant scholarship on racial minorities’ electoral success provides little to no guidance for considering whether expectations surrounding population size and district composition hold for both women and men.

In sharp contrast, the women and politics literature has often focused on issues tied to individual candidates’ decisions to run (or not), even while acknowledging that those processes are likely linked to larger social systems and expectations (Lawless, 2015a). An ongoing debate in this literature is over a repeated finding by Lawless and Fox (2005) that women possess a dearth of political ambition in comparison to men. Several authors have agreed with this general finding, but argue that ambition does not play as central a role as previously thought (Fulton, Maestas, Maisel, & Stone, 2006a), or that women’s decision to run for office is tied more closely to their immediate relationships than men (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). While some, earlier, scholarship considered the “political culture” of the context in which women run for office, much of the recent debate has narrowed the focus of candidate emergence research to the individual, and the concerns and considerations within her immediate personal proximity. Additionally, the bulk of observations in
this scholarship have been of White women, but racial variations in the effect of these considerations on candidates’ strategic calculus is rarely considered. More generally, the degree to which this literature has focused on candidates’ personal and immediate lives has partially occluded the social and political context in which they are deciding to run. Across both literatures, the emergence and presence on the ballot of descriptive representatives has been identified as a linchpin of underrepresentation (Branton, 2009; Darcy & Schramm, 1977; Lawless & Fox, 2005; Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Walsh, 2010; Shah, 2014a). This is driven by two strains of empirical work on the likelihood of electoral success for women and racial minorities who are already on the ballot. The first encompasses repeated findings showing that voter bias by White voters against women or minority candidates is difficult to detect, perhaps because other information signals, like partisanship, outweigh the candidate’s personal characteristics in voter’s decision-making process (Bejarano, 2013; Dolan, 2004; Funk, 1999; Herrnson, Lay, & Stokes, 2008; Reingold & Harrell, 2010). The second strain of research shows that despite additional challenges and difficulties during the campaign, women and men win at the same rates as men (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Darcy & Schramm, 1977; Lawless & Fox, 2005), and that African Americans and Latina/os (Branton, 2009; Juenke, 2014; Shah, 2014a) win at the same or better rates than Whites, all conditional on their presence on the ballot. On balance, this body of work shows that if women and racial minorities are on the ballot, there is little reason to think that their ultimate electoral outcomes will differ from the majority of candidates. Thus, explaining variations in the rate of candidate emergence from different groups, including women and racial minorities, has occupied an increasingly central role in the literature on descriptive representation.

The political science literature on women’s presence on the ballot extends back several decades (Darcy & Schramm, 1977), but scholarship on the emergence of candidates of color is still in a nascent stage (B. L. Fraga, 2013; Juenke, 2014; Lizotte & Carey, 2009; Maisel & Stone, 1997; Shah, 2014a). Up to this point, the candidate emergence stage of electoral competition has been approached by both of these literatures in a manner that renders women of color largely invisible (Montoya, Hardy-Fanta, & Garcia, 2000) and to an extent, obscures the unique position of White men in American politics. More generally, because women and racial minorities are each treated as somewhat monolithic groups, a theoretical basis for understanding why women and men from different racial groups get on the ballot and compete for descriptive representation at different rates has thus far remained elusive.

*An Intersectional Framework of Electoral Competition*

Race and gender shape social structures and political power in different ways, (Schwindt-Bayer & Kittilson, 2008; Htun, 2004), and the interaction of those forces varies across groups. In order to ground my theorizing and analysis of descriptive representation in that variation, I focus this dissertation on groups that I label as “race-gendered.” My use of this term is a modification of Mary Hawkesworth’s concept of “racing-gendering,” which she describes as an attempt “to foreground the intricate interactions of racialization and gendering in the political production of distinctive groups of men and women. Racing–gendering involves the production of difference, political asymmetries, and social hierarchies that simultaneously create the dominant and the subordinate (Hawkesworth, 2003).” A focus on race-gendered minority candidates is salient, particularly when the candidate and the voter are of the same race-gender group (Barreto & Pedraza, 2009; Gay & Tate, 1998; Manzano & Sanchez, 2010; Philpot & Walton, 2007).
groups has the practical advantage of helping to resolve several of the “missed connections” between literatures studying the emergence of woman and racial minorities as candidates. For example, the central arguments in the women and politics literature on candidate emergence are largely driven by observations of the experiences of Whites. With notable exceptions, the literature on minority descriptive representation does not distinguish between genders. As a result, empirical observations of the experiences of women of color, are often treated as “deviations” or outliers—if they are separated out from those of White women and men of color at all. Theorizing based on that empirical approach is incomplete, because it is most relevant to, and at times only accurate for, the most dominant group (Cohen, 1999; Strolovitch, 2006). Cohen’s “Boundaries of Blackness” exemplifies the potential perils of failing to recognize and fully account for the experiences of marginalized subgroups when studying race and politics (Cohen, 1999). Her research shows that the dominant political voices in Black politics during the AIDS crisis obscured and subverted the issue priorities and needs of subgroups of African Americans with less access to mainstream political power. Cohen’s findings point to the necessity for scholars of politics to “expand where they go looking” to understand inequality in political power. They also underscore the potential for improving analytical accuracy by viewing descriptive representation through an intersectional, as opposed to White-centered, lens.

Intersectionality theory intervenes into political science debates over identity, groups and political access by questioning the underlying formulation of identities as additive “components” that an individual may choose to subtract, add, highlight, or hide in their social interactions. Instead, intersectionality theorists argue that multiple group memberships interact simultaneously, and that group identities are mutually constituted. This renders individuals’ identity-related experiences incapable of being separated into standalone components (Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991; García Bedolla & Scola, 2006; Hancock, 2007a; McCall, 2005); e.g. “this is what she experiences as a Latina, and this is what she experiences as a woman” is an untenable and unrealistic understanding of how a Latina experiences the social and political world.

Consistent evidence shows that the political experiences of women and men within, and across, different racial groups are distinct. An illustrative empirical example is Gay and Tate’s finding that Black women’s consciousness of their race and gender identities are jointly reinforced, and that awareness of those identities increases Black women’s engagement in politics in tandem (Gay & Tate, 2003). A significant body of research shows that the utility of certain political resources, or access to electoral and mediating institutions, are likely to be different for African American women and men, Latinas and Latinos, and Latina and White women (Cohen, 1999; Crenshaw, 1991; Gay & Tate, 2003; Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2016; Hawkesworth, 2003; Jones-Correa, 1998; McCall, 2005; Williams, 2000; Young, 2011). Thus, when evaluating the efforts of groups to elect a descriptive representative, or achieve political influence more generally, it is necessary to expand binary comparisons (e.g. men v. women, Latino v. Black) and instead delineate race-gendered groups. For the purposes of this dissertation, I identify eight: African American women, African American men, Asian American women, Asian American men, Latina women, Latino men, White women, and White men. By assessing descriptive representation through an intersectional lens focused on race and gender, this analysis allows for a more theoretically coherent set of explanations for persistent patterns of underrepresentation to emerge.

There is a rich literature on Black women as candidates and legislators (N. E. Brown, 2014; Gay & Tate, 1998; Hawkesworth, 2003; Philpot & Walton, 2007; Smooth, 2006), and scholarship originating in the Gender and Multicultural Leadership Project, which surveys women and men of color across the country (Hardy-Fanta, Lien, Pinderhughes, & Sierra, 2016).
I propose a race-gendered model of competition for political influence, which clarifies the processes underlying patterns of descriptive representation. An intersectional model of electoral competition accounts for a wider array of social and political experiences in a diverse polity (Hancock, 2007a; McCall, 2005) than previous frameworks that attempt to explain how groups seek and achieve political influence. The primary outcomes of interest in this model are the presence of descriptive representatives on the ballot and in the legislature, but it is also speaks to more general debates over how race and gender simultaneously constrain, or limit the efforts of some groups to gain political influence.

As mentioned earlier, a growing body of evidence indicates that race, and gender, disparities in electoral outcomes result primarily from significant differences in what types of people run for office in the first place (Branton, 2009; Carroll, 2009; Lawless & Fox, 2005; Juenke, 2014; Palmer & Simon, 2010; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2010; Shah, 2014a). Previous scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated that when they run, women win as frequently as men (Burrell, 2014; Carroll, 1994; Lawless, 2015a) and that African Americans and Latina/os win as frequently as White candidates (Branton, 2009; Juenke, 2014; Shah, 2014b), when they run.6 Scholarship on voter attitudes has also repeatedly shown that voter bias against female candidates is not a significant factor in women’s underrepresentation, including women of color (Bejarano, 2013; Huddy & Carey, 2009; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a; Philpot & Walton, 2007; Sanbonmatsu, 2002a). Thus, many scholars now interpret the divergence in electoral outcomes among men and women, and within and across racial groups as indicative of differences in their presence on the ballot (Lawless & Fox, 2005; Juenke, 2014; Shah, 2014a).

The disparity in ballot presence is also borne out in data on state legislative elections in 2012 and 2014—87 percent of general election candidates were White, and 65 percent of general election candidates were White men (Women Donors Network, 2016). According to data on state legislative election candidates collected by the Women Donor Network, White men were on 78 percent of all general election ballots in 2012 and 2014. Half of the general elections during that same period were contests between White men exclusively (Women Donor Network, 2016) This lopsidedness in the types of candidates on the ballot underscores that candidate emergence is a key determinant of the likelihood of descriptive representation. The framework I propose begins from this premise, by treating competition for descriptive representation as a two-stage process (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Shah, 2014a) in which the emergence of candidates from a race-gender group is a central factor in determining that group’s possibilities for electoral success.

Four groups are central to this account: White men, White women, men of color (Latino, Asian American and African American men), and women of color (Latina, Asian American and African American women). This identification of groups is not an assertion of uniformity in the electoral experiences across minority racial groups, but reflects the discrete gap between White and non-White electoral success detailed in Chapter 3. Each of these groups compete to reach a central point of mainstream political influence—in the current analysis, through descriptive representation. The first feature of the Race-Gendered Model is that the field for political competition is smaller, and much more constrained than in either the “Classic” (R. P. Browning et al., 1986a; Dahl, 1967) or Revised (Dawson, 1995; Hero, 2010) pluralist models that have been previously advanced, due to the dearth of realistic and/or perceived opportunities for

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6 This is also the case for Asian American candidates who run as Democrats. The majority of Asian American candidates run as Democrats. See Appendix: GRACE Candidate Emergence and Success.
Figure 1.1: Models of Group Competition for Political Influence

“Classic” Pluralist Competition

Race and Ethnic Politics Revisions of Pluralism

Race-Gendered Model of Competition
non-Whites to compete electorally in the vast majority of districts. As I demonstrate in Chapters 3 and 4, most state legislative districts in the United States encompass a White majority population. Non-White candidates rarely win in districts with a White majority population, and strategic candidates of color take the racial makeup of the population into account when deciding where and when to run (Branton, 2009). I depict these limitations in Figure 1.1 with a rectangle denoting that the field of competition is smaller in the Race-Gender model than in either the Classic or Revised Pluralism models. The only groups who are entirely within this constrained field are White men and White women. Their strategic opportunities for descriptive representation, as members of the politically dominant and typically most numerous, racial group, are relatively unfettered.

The second feature of the race-gendered model is that each group’s “position” (Bourdieu & Johnson, 1993; C. J. Kim, 1999; Young, 2011), relative to the institutions and individuals at the powerful center of mainstream political influence, is distinct, and shaped by socio-economic and political processes (Amuedo-Dorantes, Bansak, & Raphael, 2007). In Figure 1.1, arrows signify how these positions create differences in the political “distance” that each group must traverse in order to reach influence. The location of each group’s circle indicates their distance from political influence relative to other groups, and how frequently they face strategically realistic opportunities to run.

Both groups of men have less distance to cover than their female racial counterparts. Significant gender differences exist in political practice and modes of activism, orientations towards formal political institutions, and access to mediating institutions (Gay & Tate, 1998; Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Jones-Correa & Leal, 1996; Montoya et al., 2000; Pardo, 1998; Takash, 1993). There is also evidence that within a wide array of political institutions, organizations, and movements that are organized around other social identities and groups, women’s (particularly women of color) interests and voices are often marginalized (Cohen, 1999; Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Strolovitch, 2006).

The result is that men are often more visible and available as potential candidates for office than women from the same racial group. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, men are physically more visible more often than women to key donors, political elites and other gatekeepers, due to their privileged positions in civic and professional organizations (Cohen, 1999; Pardo, 1998; Sanbonmatsu, 2006c; Strolovitch, 2006; Takash, 1993). Men may also be more psychologically visible as viable candidates, because of their membership in a group that is much more prevalent in office-holding and among political elites (Niven, 1998).

Men are also more available to run for office; they are more likely to be openly ambitious and see electoral politics as a venue for activism, and less likely to face social pressures regarding domestic arrangements than women (Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Lawless & Fox, 2005). Thus, men have less “distance” to cover in order to reach political influence, relative to co-racial women. As a result, they are more frequently in an effective position to access political contests, and leverage key political resources. In Chapter 3, I demonstrate this inequality with a central political resource: a growing or large co-racial district population.

Within the Race-Gendered Model, White men are uniquely positioned in close proximity to political influence (Figure 1.1). White men are not a uniform group—as Schattschneider observed, the “heavenly chorus sings with an upperclass accent (Schattschneider, 1975).” However, at a group level, White men are not required to overcome systemic challenges in political competition related to their race and/or gender faced by others. White men’s historical dominance of, and current overrepresentation in, elected government plays a key role in shaping the field of political competition for other groups—they are most of the incumbents. This is due to marginal growth in the number of total opportunities for representation, and the electoral benefits that often come with incumbency (Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2002).

While White women typically compete in the same political space as White men, extensive evidence (Carroll, 1994; Fox & Lawless, 2010; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Sanbonmatsu, 2006c)
indicates that they are comparably less visible and available as candidates. Research showing that women tend to have lower levels of ambition for electoral office, feel less qualified to serve (Lawless & Fox, 2005) and are reluctant to engage in the activities and scrutiny of campaigns (Kanthak & Woon, 2015) suggests that White women are less likely than White men to present themselves as potential candidates or seek out opportunities to run (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). Thus, White women have a greater distance to cover (Figure 1.1) than White men in reaching mainstream political influence.

Men of color are frequently outside of the field of political competition due to the distribution of White populations across districts. In the relatively few majority minority districts I identify in Chapter 3, men of color are distinctly visible and available as political competitors (Cohen, 1999; Gallagher, 2007; Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Pardo, 1998; Takash, 1993). Thus, in those rare districts, men of color are relatively well positioned to leverage and capitalize on a sizable co-racial population in order to win elections. In majority White districts, men of color may still be visible as potential competitors, but their access to the benefits of a shared racial group in the electorate will be reduced, and political elites’ incentives to support a racial minority candidate may be diminished as well (Gay, 2001b).

Women of color are the least visible and available group, and most likely to be positioned in a space completely outside of the field of political competition. Their visibility is limited in part by men of color who achieve mainstream political influence and are viewed as speaking “on behalf” of all members of their racial group. As racial minority groups struggle to achieve and maintain mainstream political influence, relatively privileged “representatives” of those groups often render marginalized subgroups, like women, and their interests, invisible (Cohen, 1999; Dovi, 2003; Strolovitch, 2006). The scarcity of “minority” seats in state legislatures may exacerbate these processes of secondary marginalization (Cohen, 1999) in the election of descriptive representatives, as male dominated groups of elites and donors plan and negotiate to maintain or win the one or two “Latino” or “Asian” or “Black” seats in a state or metropolitan area. (I show in Chapter 5 that this is the case among Latina/o Democrats in Los Angeles). The practical result is that women of color are excluded and obscured such that they can rarely access the field of political competition (Figure 1.1).

Women of color's limited availability as candidates for office stems from the intersection of systemic factors that pull women and people of color away from electoral politics. Potential female candidates may not run for office for many of the reasons related to gendered conceptions of political activism, ambition, or social pressure around domestic arrangements discussed earlier. For women of color, those issues may intersect with political marginalization within their racial communities, (Cohen, 1999; Jaramillo, 2010; Pardo, 1998; Takash, 1993) and feelings of inaccessibility, inefficacy and distrust towards the political process linked to their membership in racialized groups (Dawson, 1995; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Masuoka, 2007; Williams, 2000). This intersection of factors positions women of color farther from the “center” of power and political influence than any other group in this analysis, and renders the terrain they must cover to close the distance distinctly fraught with opportunities for exclusion. Positioned beyond the field of political competition, and in many instances, occluded by co-racial men, women of color face a set of interactive challenges that limits how frequently or effectively they are able to leverage co-racial populations as an electoral resource. I indicate the particular barriers to competition that women of color face in Figure 1.1 with a wavy, dashed line.

The Race-Gendered Model delineates an electoral field defined by three characteristics. The first and most primary is the frequent absence of competition for descriptive representation for White men. The second is that race serves to practically shrink the size of the field of competition such that men and women of color rarely have access to electoral contests, and as a result,
opportunities to become descriptive representatives. The third is that women of color face a distinct level of potential exclusion from electoral competition.

Empirical Analysis: Asian Americans and Latina/os in State Legislative Elections

I test the Race-Gendered model’s explanatory power in a national study of Asian American and Latina/o candidates in state legislative elections. I analyze the first-of-its-kind Gender, Race and Communities in Elections (GRACE) dataset, which encompasses all state legislative general election winners and candidates from 1996-2015, and includes demographic information for candidates and their district populations. I also examine a national survey of state legislators that I conducted in 2014, and in-depth interviews with political elites. The final piece of original data is a qualitative case study of Asian American and Latina/o candidate emergence in Los Angeles.

This study demonstrates that the increasing “strength in numbers” of growing Asian American and Latina/o communities has primarily served as a resource for increasing the racial diversity of men in statehouses, to the limited extent that racial diversity has increased at all. I also show that practical opportunities to compete in elections are sharply, and simultaneously, constrained by candidates’ race and gender. These constraints are a product of the lopsided distribution of racial populations across districts, the uneven candidate development efforts of civic and advocacy organizations, and the dominance of men in elite political networks, across racial groups.

These results support the Race-Gendered Model’s contention that analyses of descriptive representation benefit from expanding beyond analyses of the advantages and disadvantages groups face during campaigns. This study demonstrates that the choices voters face in electing a descriptive representative are limited long before election day. The most advantaged descriptive group, White men, benefits from an absence of competition in most electoral contests. At the same time, the fastest growing groups of women—Asian Americans and Latinas—are also the groups most frequently excluded from competing.

The choice to center this research on Asian American and Latina/o women and men is driven by their theoretical suitability as test cases for theories of group competition, and the opportunity to build on and expand the current empirical literature on descriptive representation. The bulk of the existing scholarship on descriptive representation, and particularly the representation of women of color, has been, and continues to be, focused on African Americans. Intersectionality scholarship itself has its foundations in the scholarship on Black women’s participation in politics, and there is a robust and growing literature that investigates the distinct experiences of Black women as candidates and elected officials (N. E. Brown, 2014; Collins, 2002; Hancock, 2007a; Hawkesworth, 2003; Jordan-Zachery, 2006; Smooth, 2006). The theoretical and empirical approaches of this study are informed in large part by the theoretical advances of that scholarship.

Even as the literature on African American descriptive representatives has continued to grow, there have been few large-scale investigations into how race and gender shape the experiences and success of candidates from other communities of color (the primary exception to this is the Gender and Multicultural Leadership Project and scholarship stemming from that data collection). This dissertation’s focus on Asian Americans and Latina/os expands the data and analytical tools available for understanding how intersecting racial and gender identities affect access to political influence. More broadly, this research also contributes to a growing literature on immigrant political incorporation in the United States by demonstrating that trajectories of incorporation vary both between and within racial groups.
Additionally, this study situates Asian Americans and Latina/os within a changing population context. By using this approach, I account for the ways in which other groups are shaping the conditions of electoral competition, even as Asian Americans and Latina/os are reshaping the population itself. The United States’ transition to a majority minority population will continue to be driven by first- and second-generation immigrants and their families (Cohn, 2015), and this dissertation enhances the tools available in political science for understanding how the changing racial context is altering social and political processes generally.

State legislative elections serve as the primary unit of analysis for most of this dissertation because they offer the breadth necessary for an intersectional research design, and are situated in an arguably pivotal position on the “political ambition” ladder. As I discuss in the next chapter, one of the key challenges of intersectional research on a large scale is that the individual-level data on race and gender is difficult and time-consuming to obtain, particularly with a methodology that accounts for the selection and social biases that can make “intersectional” candidates more difficult to enumerate. Another challenge is that because an intersectional research frame requires accounting for the contexts in which the outcomes of interest occur, it is also necessary to assemble data that allows for a consistent indicator of the social and political context across all observations. The state legislative election dataset I have developed resolves both methodological concerns. The GRACE combines general election return data from two decades of elections from all 50 states with race and gender identifications of candidates and winners that have been hand-verified. I also added district-level demographic data to each observation, accounting for changes over three rounds of U.S. Census-based redistricting in every state. The resulting dataset is large enough to allow for side-by-side statistical analyses of all eight race-gendered groups, including the groups that are generally sidelined as too small or inconsequential to include or separate out in other research—Asian American and Latina/o women and men. It also includes a measure of the social and political context that is consistent across all observations—the racial makeup of districts.

State legislative elections also occupy a particular position between local and municipal offices and federal offices, including Congressional seats. At the level immediately below state legislative office, in school boards and small to mid-size City Councils, the gender and racial balance of representatives is less skewed, and includes many more women of all racial groups (Hardy-Fanta et al., 2016). The scope of legislative power and budget size is also typically smaller as well. At the federal level, Congressional seats are physically larger than state legislative districts and often demand much greater resources to win in an open election, and encompass oversight over much larger budgets. The offices themselves are also in many ways, more prestigious than most (though not all) state and local seats, including their level of salary, staff resources, and the prospect of perpetual incumbency and all the benefits that it renders (Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2002; Mayhew, 1975; Squire, Jewell, & Moncrief, 2001). Another definitive feature of the U.S. Congress is that it is even more heavily skewed towards White men than state legislatures. Situated between these two poles of power and electoral resources, state legislative elections allow insights into a mainstream political arena that enacts wide-reaching policy outputs, but which also encompasses significant variation in the race and gender of winners and candidates.

The policy products of state legislatures also make them a theoretically relevant unit of analysis for a study focused on two immigrant communities. As mentioned earlier, state legislatures have recently produced legislation related to immigrants and immigration at rates that are a stark contrast to the U.S. Congress’ lack of movement. Several authors have shown that this raft of recent state level legislation is not merely bluster and rhetoric, but carries material and tangible consequences for the targeted communities (Hero & Preuhs, 2007; Lam, 2016). At the same time, legislatures have also increased their output of bills that disproportionately and adversely affect low-income women, among whom Asian Americans and Latinas are overrepresented (Ahmad &
Iverson, 2013; Finzel, 2015) These patterns raise the salience of underrepresentation, and possibly the stakes as well.

The empirical chapters of this analysis present a multi-method approach to answering the following questions: How do race and gender shape Asian American and Latina/o women and men’s access to electoral competition? How are patterns of descriptive representation informed by race-gendered social and political processes and institutions? And, finally, how does the social and political positioning of other racial groups affect the competitive context that Asian American and Latina/o candidates face in elections?

Chapter 2 begins laying the theoretical and empirical groundwork for an intersectional analysis of Asian Americans and Latina/os in state legislative elections, and the race-gendered conditions of electoral competition more broadly. The first half of the chapter presents an empirical framework for operationalizing intersectionality theories in political science research, and contributes to ongoing debates about how best to mobilize the complexity and simultaneity of intersectional research in the service of key disciplinary questions. The second half of the chapter presents a demonstration of this framework in a discussion of the research design and data collection processes I used to build the Gender Race and Communities in Elections dataset. In the concluding sections of the chapter, I present the patterns of descriptive representation for all eight race-gendered groups simultaneously for the first time, and illustrate the ways in which race-gendering the analysis of descriptive representation can lead to more accurate interpretations of data.

The third Chapter also utilizes data from the GRACE to show that the relationship between population size and descriptive representation varies across race-gendered groups. Increases in the size of Asian American and Latina/o populations within state legislative districts have had minimal effect on the overall race and gender balance of state legislatures over the past two decades. The primary group that has benefited from increasingly large communities of color has been men of color. In several cases, I show that the relationship between population growth and descriptive representation is negative for women of color. This chapter’s analysis concludes by arguing that it is necessary for scholars to depart from prior assumptions in the race and ethnic politics literatures, as well as scholarship on group competition, that treat population size as a pluralistic “resource” that is consistently and evenly available and beneficial for group members.

Chapter Four advances a framework for understanding how different race-gendered groups’ visibility and availability shape candidate emergence, and their prospects for descriptive representation. This framework moves away from treating individual-level and social-group level concerns in isolation as factors in potential candidates’ decision-making calculus. By integrating the intimate and the social, this approach allows for variation in the salience of both dimensions of a potential candidate’s life in their decision to run for office. I demonstrate the effectiveness of the visibility and availability approach by using responses to a national survey of state legislators that I fielded in 2014. The dataset includes the largest collection of responses from Asian American and Latina/o women and men in this area of research to date. I show that women are less visible and available as candidates than men, but that the degree and underlying reasons vary by race.

The case study of Asian American and Latina/o pathways to office in Los Angeles County that I present in Chapter Five is an in-depth demonstration of the ways in which race-gendered networks, informal processes and electoral structures facilitate divergent outcomes for descriptive representation among women and men, and between racial groups. Los Angeles’ non-White population growth has occurred in tandem with the racial diversification of men in the state legislature—and a rapid decline in the presence of women from all racial groups, particularly Asian Americans and Latinas. I use data on Los Angeles County primary and general elections, media coverage and in-depth interviews with local political leaders and candidates to shed light on the opaque processes of candidate development and emergence. These data reveal that as Latina/os
have in many ways replicated the powerful political machines of prior eras, Latinas often face systematic exclusion from candidate development processes and campaign resources. I also show that Asian Americans’ low levels of descriptive representation are rooted in an ongoing interaction between political elites’ divergent conceptions of the utility of pan-ethnic identity, and an electoral structure that necessitates aggregating resources as widely as possible.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation draws together the empirical evidence presented, and connects it to the Race-Gendered Model of electoral competition. I then outline future directions for intersectional research into group competition for political influence, and identify several emergent areas of scholarship that this model is particularly well suited to, including the representation of low-income and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer communities of color. Finally, Chapter Six discusses how the race-gendered limits on access to electoral competition identified in this study speak to ongoing debates in political science and the general public about ensuring access to democratic processes in a changing American electorate. These include legal and policy options for increasing descriptive representation, reforming electoral systems to ensure representation through voting, and the overall prospects for improving marginalized groups’ access to democratic processes in coming years.
CHAPTER 2

Intersectional Approaches to Empirical Research Designs

What makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term “intersectionality,” nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations. Rather, what makes an analysis intersectional… is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power.

This framing… emphasizes what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is.

Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013)

Chapter 1 argues for the reconceptualization of descriptive representation analysis through an intersectional lens. In this chapter, I advance a framework for operationalizing that intersectional lens in empirical political science research. Following a brief review of the existing empirical intersectionality scholarship, I outline the six organizing principles that structure the research design and analysis of this dissertation. These principles build on, and extend, earlier efforts to establish a practical framework for intersectional empirical studies, and resolve theoretical issues that limit the scope of the extant literature on descriptive representation. I draw illustrative examples from a national survey of state legislators, and the case study of candidate emergence in Los Angeles presented in Chapter 5, and dataset of state legislative election winners. Using these organizing principles, the second half of the chapter presents the data collection methods and descriptive statistics for the Gender, Race and Communities in Elections (GRACE) dataset. I show patterns of descriptive representation across eight race-gendered groups from three different analytical vantage points, and demonstrate the ways in which an intersectional framework produces a more accurate, and informative picture of the degree to which state legislatures reflect the populations they serve.

Operationalizing Intersectionality in Political Science

An oft-raised critique of intersectionality research is that it is difficult to pin down how a theory rooted in complexity can produce clear, parsimonious, empirical accounts of the mechanisms driving political outcomes (McCall, 2005). Explanatory parsimony is not a goal that is altogether congruent with the theoretical underpinnings of intersectionality, but a robust body of scholarship has emerged demonstrating that intersectional research methodologies can produce studies that clarify complex systems and reveal new causal processes.

Much of the intersectional empirical work on representation in American politics has taken the form of close studies of Latina (Jaramillo, 2010; Takash, 1993) or African American (N. E. Brown, 2014; Githens & Prestage, 1977; Hawkesworth, 2003; Smooth, 2006) candidates or elected officials. This scholarship has shown that political institutions that were once assumed to be neutral or shape action uniformly across actors—legislative committees, election procedures, party structures, e.g.—impact Latina and African American women elites in distinct ways. These analyses are focused on dynamics within groups that are understudied in the discipline and underrepresented in politics, and also reveal previously invisible constraints on the representative capacity of political institutions.
Research that uses an intersectional framework to conduct comparative analyses within and across groups has rarely been conducted in political science (c.f. Hardy-Fanta et al., 2016). Ongoing debates over operationalization include questions of whether looking at multiple groups is in keeping with the historic focus of intersectionality on Black women, or serves to reify categories of difference that diminish the texture and granularity of experience that intersectionality was developed to bring to light (S. Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Jordan-Zachery, 2013; McCall, 2005; Simien, 2007). As a growing literature, there is ample research space and necessity for continued research on the inner workings of groups whose members are marginalized in relation to more than one dimension of their identity, like women of color. At the same time, Cho et. al, McCall, Hancock and others have identified intersectional research practices and paradigms that respect causal complexity and also allow for the comparison of multiple groups in the same analysis. The empirical approach of this study proceeds in that vein. Analyzing multiple groups allows for the examination of both “advantage and disadvantage explicitly and simultaneously.” (McCall, 2005), and is theoretically suited to electoral competitions’ often zero-sum structure (as in single member districts, for example). The overall methodology I employ is intersectional in its “analytic sensibility,”(S. Cho et al., 2013)—simultaneity, context, dynamism and constant attention to inequalities undergird my data collection efforts and analysis. The decision to focus this research on race-gendered groups draws on McCall’s argument for the “strategic” use of existing categories, as publicly understood markers that help identify, but do not bound, points of intersection and analytical interest.

The functional form of each piece of data collection and analysis in this study relies, and builds, on Hancock’s seminal delineation of intersectional research practices (Hancock, 2007b). Her emphases on the dynamic relationship between categories, and an integrative analysis of individual and institutional level factors, in particular, are central to my analysis of how groups compete for descriptive representation. In the proceeding paragraphs, I lay out the central tenets and organizing principles of the empirical approach undertaken by this study. Each of the six components of empirical research that I discuss address specific limitations in the extant descriptive representation literature’s capacity to address the diversity of groups seeking representation in elected office. These components also build on earlier work that seeks to develop a generalizable approach to intersectional empirical analysis of complex political and social processes.

Simultaneity

As discussed in Chapter 1, a central concern of intersectionality research is exploring the lived reality of individuals and groups who hold multiple, marginalized, social identity group memberships. One key component of that reality is that a Latina woman, for example, does not in one moment have the ability to choose to be either Latina/o or a woman in society—she is, at all times, both. This simultaneity necessitates the understanding that experiencing the world as a Latina, is entirely distinct from being a Latino man, or a woman or man of any other race. It also undermines the additive notion that women of color, in particular, have a political “advantage” over women who are “just” women (presumably White women), and men from the same racial group (Bejarano, 2013). Previous scholarship has often discussed Latina state legislators, for example, using additive frames to explain how identities “work” in building political power and voter support. This is rooted in an empirical focus on isolated choices about presentation, or emphasis, of aspects of an individual’s identity in a campaign or legislative strategy. These political “moments,” however, are dwarfed by the implications of the broader social and political positioning of women of color.

This study recognizes and accounts for simultaneity by conceptualizing the competition for descriptive representation as occurring between eight race-gendered groups, as opposed to four racial groups and two gender groups. Outcomes for the eight race-gendered groups in the quantitative analyses of this project are also individually modeled, in order to avoid statistical
assumptions about whether one group or another is the default category, or whether women of color “are” the interaction of being female and a racial minority. The analysis of survey responses is structured as a simultaneous comparison of eight groups of legislators. These strategies do not negate the possibility of linkages and similarities between men and women of the same racial group, or between women or men of different races. Instead, the beginning assumption of the research is that each race-gendered group is a distinct social and political group, with accordingly distinct, though possibly related, experiences that are open to investigation.

*Socio-political context and positioning*

Groups competing for descriptive representation are not isolated from each other; they are living and working in the same jurisdictions, and they are attempting to reach the same center of mainstream political influence. Each group is positioned in a proximity to the center of political influence that reflects their relative power and advantage vis a vis other groups. Moreover, it is often the case that in single member districts (which comprise the vast majority of state legislative seats), descriptive representation is a zero sum game—the presence of one group necessitates the absence of direct descriptive representation for another.

Yet, in both the race and ethnic politics literature on underrepresentation, and in the women and politics literature, the most numerous and politically dominant group—White men—are often largely invisible, and their impact on the institutions and individuals under study is seldom acknowledged (Bejarano, 2013; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2016; Lawless & Fox, 2005; Kanthak & Woon, 2015; Sidorsky, 2015). This invisibility has the potential to bias understanding of the processes these authors are attempting to illuminate—there is no explicit accounting for the forces produced by operating in a context dominated by White men. Additionally, other aspects of the political context, such as racial composition, shape practical access to electoral competition, and the institutions and structures in place to facilitate the participation of particular groups. Discussions of the electoral success of Asian Americans, for example, without a concurrent discussion of the distribution of the Asian American voter population, make little sense for developing a reality-based understanding of the conditions of that group’s political prospects.

The research design of this project accounts for the political context and socio-political positioning of individuals and groups in a number of ways. The theoretical conceptualization of a field of political positions that I describe in the first chapter is reflected in the content of my survey and interview instruments, whereby I ask respondents to talk about “where” they are located in political space, not simply what they do or have done. My data collection processes more broadly recognize that social structures shape, and re-shape categories (Hancock, 2007b). Thus, the GRACE dataset, as described later, incorporates indicators of the social and political context, including the changing racial composition of districts. The qualitative data in later chapters captures how socioeconomic and civic arrangements constrain or enable candidates from different groups. More generally, in the analysis phase, I consider how each group’s data “speaks” to the others. If members of one group, for example, consistently respond that they thought of running for office entirely on their own, I assess that in light of whether that group is socially visible to others who report that they often engage in candidate recruitment.

*Equally informative experiences*

Two common research practices in the representation literature often limit its relevance to understanding non-White groups of men and women. The first is treating a majority group within a specific population, as the definitive group for that population. For example, in Carroll and Sanbonmatsu’s analysis of their survey of state legislators, the authors acknowledge that women of
color may face “distinct obstacles” in the pathway to office (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). However, they limit their discussion of the responses collected from women of color specifically to a chapter subsection focused on Democratic officeholders. Those “distinct obstacles”, are not treated as informative cases in the development of their theory of candidate emergence. The theory they develop is based on analysis of the most frequently occurring responses from women in their survey, and the largest response groups by far were White women and men. As the vast majority of women serving, it is in some ways understandable that Carroll and Sanbonmatsu and others theorize about female candidacy based on their (White female state legislators) experiences, and note the conflicting reports from women of color as aberrations from the norm. However, this limits the external validity for applying their framework for candidate emergence to groups other than White women.

Thus, this scholarship would be more accurately described as an analysis of White women’s emergence as candidates, instead of as a study of women’s emergence more broadly.

In a related vein, treating observations of members of marginalized groups as deviations from the observed behavior of members of the dominant group is an empirical strategy that can distort analyses and further reinforce privileged perspectives (García Bedolla, Monforti, & Pantoja, 2007; Hancock, 2007a; Junn, 2009). This bias results from a shift in what is being measured. If for example, a regression model explaining the likelihood of winning an election is formulated with a series of dummy variables and White men as the omitted category, the coefficients for those dummy variables are not explaining anything about the electoral prospects of the dummy groups. Instead, the dummies are indicating how similar to, or different from, the likelihood of White men’s success those group members are.

The current study treats the experiences of numerically small or multiply marginalized social identity groups as equally relevant to the empirical analysis of descriptive representation. Descriptive statistics and models are distinct for each of the eight race-gendered groups in the study. Each piece of the analysis also clarifies the limitations on its explanatory reach, based on the treatment and scope of the underlying data.

**Dynamism**

Hancock argues that in empirical intersectional inquiry, categories of difference are equally important, but that their relationship should remain an open empirical question (Hancock, 2007b). That emphasis on dynamism has particular resonance for studies of candidates and elected officials. The personal and public salience of identity categories may change as candidates move through different political circles, and engage with different segments of the community. Shirley Chisholm, for example, famously maintained that when dealing with elites, from local party politics to the U.S. House of Representatives, her gender was a greater political challenge than her race. At the same time, she identified strong linkages between her struggles within the national feminist movement leadership and her status as a Black woman, and saw clear parallels and intersections between anti-racist and feminist activism (Chisholm, 1970; 2015).

Changes in the composition of a jurisdiction itself may also shift how salient different group membership categories are, to candidates themselves and to the public they seek to represent. In order to create analytical space for this dynamism between categories, and attempt to clarify how race and gender simultaneously shape processes, I use two approaches to the relationships between identity categories. For the broad quantitative analysis of patterns of descriptive representation, I use a static coding scheme—every observed candidate is either an African American man or woman, or an Asian American woman or man, etc. The context itself varies in those observations, as populations seeking representation change over time. In contrast, the qualitative instruments for this study allow respondents to identify when, how and where different aspects of their identity matter, if they are conscious of it at all. Survey and interview questions also allow respondents to incorporate
other marginalized group memberships, like nativity, in their conception of their identity, both personal and public.

Multiple Methods

Many central pieces of scholarship in both the race and ethnic politics, and women in politics literatures, stress the benefits of multiple methods research. The emphasis on simultaneity and dynamism in intersectionality frameworks underscores the value of multiple empirical methods. For studies of descriptive representation, multiple empirical methods facilitate understanding of how localized and within group processes are related to broader state and national patterns of underrepresentation. Statistical analysis can begin to unearth the relationship between populations and their representatives, and provide comparative snapshots across jurisdictions of the state of representation. Case studies and in-depth interviews are also required for delineating the complexity of the causal processes driving quantitative results.

Qualitative techniques are also necessary in order to differentiate which factors matter to which groups, and whether those factors matter in the same way. As an example, a common topic of inquiry has been the impact of term limits on women, or racial minorities’ representation in state legislatures (Carroll & Jenkins, 2001a; Kousser, 2008; Schraufnagel & Halperin, 2006). National analyses of whether term limits have “worked” to diversify legislatures have typically looked at whether racial representative parity, or the share of seats held by women, is significantly different in states with term limits. Those analyses assume that term limits work the same way across groups—an additional open seat is an additional opportunity for all groups seeking representation through elections. That premise ignores asymmetries in the state of candidate recruitment institutions across groups, and access to funding networks, and a host of other factors that suggest that an increased number of open seat elections will have the greatest possible impact on those groups that are already well-situated to run for office. Additionally, these studies also tend to overlook how the positive impact of term limits for some groups may be related to a negative impact from term limits for others. To understand why term limits have or have not resulted in significant differences in the number of women and minorities in office, close studies of these often informal and interpersonal factors are necessary.

Including both “large-N” and in-depth, more narrowly focused qualitative research enriches intersectional empirical work because of the assumed interconnection between larger social processes and trends, and the political systems and relationships within marginalized groups. One operationalization of this principle in the present analysis is the use of several types of evidence to illuminate how the relationship between district populations and the candidates that emerge to represent them varies by race-gender: local election data aggregated at the national level, legislator survey data from 40 different states, and interviews with candidates.

Multiple, integrated analytical frames

Causal complexity, and the accurate array of relevant factors in political processes, can be obscured by the use of a single, or overly narrow, analytical frame. Additionally, analyzing data from multiple vantage points, but failing to integrate those viewpoints, may also bias empirical interpretation (Hancock, 2007b). Frequent emphases on women’s deficit of political ambition as a key explanatory factor in their underrepresentation is an illustrative case of this point. Repeated studies by Lawless and Fox, and their coauthors, have demonstrated that women in their datasets exhibit less independent interest in running for and holding elected office than men (Lawless & Fox, 2005; Lawless, 2015b). Most of the respondents to Lawless and Fox’s Citizen Ambition surveys are White women and men. In contrast, the Gender and Multicultural Leadership Project’s survey
focused on elected officials of color across the United States does not consistently show that women of color exhibit significantly less ambition than men of color (Hardy-Fanta et al., 2016). This raises the possibility that characterizing political ambition as a gendered phenomenon is inaccurate—it may only be a critical factor for White women relative to White men. However, that distinction is impossible to make in empirical studies that only proceed through a single, binary comparison. The empirical methods in this study use multiple analytical lenses, and deploy comparisons of women across racial groups, men across racial groups, and women and men within racial groups, and at times, racial groups, inclusive of men and women. Additionally, in the case study sections, groups of women, and groups of men, within the Asian American and Latina/o communities are compared. This minimizes the risk of results that are an “artifact” of the frame, and provides a means for revealing how the institutions and systems that link and divide these groups are structured.

These six organizing principles form the empirical scaffolding of this study. Their identification and designation is not meant to imply that research that does not adhere to each of these factors in every aspect of its design and implementation fails to be truly “intersectional.” On the contrary, they are meant to serve as signposts for constructing and evaluating intersectional studies. Carrying out empirical research that foregrounds the complexity of social and political processes is by its nature a project that invites practical challenges that are distinct from those in research with a “unitary” frame (Hancock, 2007a), and which are not always surmountable. To illustrate, in order to expand beyond binary comparisons (e.g. men v. women, Latino v. Black) in the study of descriptive representation, and focus on race-gendered groups, it is necessary to include robust, systematic data on African American women, African American men, Asian American women, Asian American men, Latina women, Latino men, White women, and White men. This lengthy list of groups to include indicates one of the chief hurdles of intersectional research approaches with quantifiable data—the individual-level data required (race and gender of election winners in this case) is difficult to collect and must include enough observations for reasonable tests of significance. Additionally, because institutional and social contexts influence the way power is experienced and wielded between groups (Frymer, 2005; Hancock, 2007b) an intersectional research framework also requires an indicator of variations in the social and political context that is relevant across all groups.

In this study, the relevant and widely available indicator of contextual variation is also a key explanatory variable in the descriptive representation literature—proportions of racial populations in state legislative districts. The next section details how I implemented the principles outlined above in order to develop a dataset that joins district demographic data with that of candidates in elections. The resulting dataset is specifically intersectional in its design and contents, which in turn facilitates an analysis that coherently evaluate complex socio-political processes.

The Gender Race and Communities in Elections Dataset

The Gender Race and Communities in Elections (GRACE) dataset encompasses every state legislative general election in the United States between 1996 and 2015. This covers a period of rapid change in the racial composition and dispersion of the American population. It begins 30 years after the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act, and encompasses communities with longstanding immigrant populations, as well as communities considered “new destinations” (Iceland, 2009; Massey, 2008) for immigrants. It is the first dataset of its kind to capture changes in district populations across all four of the largest racial groups, in concert with changes in how they are represented in state legislatures.
The names, party affiliation, incumbency, and vote totals, for all state legislative general election candidates were obtained from the State Legislative Election Returns Database (Klarner et al., 2014). I then added demographic information, for candidates and districts, to every candidacy observation.

**District Demographics**

The GRACE spans three different rounds of Census-based redistricting. There are 99 legislative chambers in total, and each state has a distinct system of naming conventions for labeling districts. The U.S. Census Bureau asked states to submit their state legislative district boundary information for the first time following the 2000 Census. While a number of states complied, two of the state with the largest immigrant communities—California and Texas—did not. For the 2010 Census, all states complied. Thus, the district demographic data—income, education levels, unemployment rates and proportions of Asian Americans, African Americans, Latina/os and Whites—have been collected from three separate sources. For data from 2011 forward, I downloaded 2010 Census data from the National Historical Geographic Information System maintained by the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota (“National Historical Geographic Information System,” n.d.). For election years reflecting post-2000 Census redistricting, I utilized Census data tabulated by Eric Juenke at Michigan State University from Census block districts (Juenke, n.d.). Finally, for election years reflecting redistricting following the 1990 Census, I used data collected by Eric Juenke and Rob Preuhs from the CQ Press Almanac of State Legislatures (Lilley, DeFranco, Bernstein, & Ramsby, 2007).

Since each state, and in many cases, each legislative chamber, has a unique timeline for implementing new district boundaries following the Census (due to statutory requirements, data availability and legal challenges), I used Justin Levitt’s All About Redistricting website to create a directory of the months and years in which each of the 99 legislative chambers switched from one set of district boundaries to the next following each Census (Levitt, n.d.). I then used that directory to match district demographic data to each candidate, in each election contest.

**Race**

Information regarding racial identities for each candidate falls into two categories: that of winners and that of people who have never won (never-winners). While limited, the information available on winners is relatively more complete and accessible on a national basis than that of never-winners, because there are non-profit and academic organizations in existence for whom tracking elected officials from certain minority groups and/or women is a central component of their mission. These include the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (African Americans), the National Association of Latino Appointed and Elected Officials (Latina/os), the Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers University (women) and the National Asian Pacific American Political Almanac series (Asian Americans). Lists compiled by these organizations were used as a starting point for coding the race and gender of winners in the GRACE dataset. From there, I worked with a team of researchers to confirm those identifications and code individuals who had not been previously identified by the organizations listed above. I relied on

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7 The list of data provided by states for the 2000 Census is available at the U.S. Census’ website: https://www.census.gov/geo/maps-data/data/tallies/2000vtdtally.html
For never-winning candidates, I utilized a process that was initiated by automatic name matching (Juenke, 2014). The consensus across several disciplines (Elliott et al., 2009; Lauderdale & Kestenbaum, n.d.; Mateos, 2007; Harris, 2015) is that while challenges remain, automatic name matching is most effective for identifying Asian Americans and Latina/os, and less accurate for African Americans and Whites. I used the U.S. Census Bureau list of Hispanic surnames which have a 70 percent or higher match rate from the 2000 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), and a list of surnames and given names developed by Lauderdale and Kestenbaum for public health research on Asian Americans (Lauderdale & Kestenbaum, n.d.). After the auto matches, I used the list of winners with Latina/o and Asian American racial identifications as one method for assessing the accuracy of the auto match. The Hispanic surname accurately matched 75 percent of Latina/o winners, and the Asian American surname and given name matches accurately matched 58 percent of Asian American winners.

Following the auto-match, I hand checked for false positives among the matched candidates using internet research. I also identified several false negatives among the winning candidates by doing an auto-match with more expansive name lists, and hand checking each positive result. The final descriptive statistics for the dataset are presented below (Table 2.1) and combine the final identifications from both the list-initiated and auto-match initiated processes. For African Americans and Whites, surnames are insufficiently accurate for use in auto matching, and thus the only racial identifications of never-winning candidates are for Asian Americans and Latina/os.

A key challenge of building a dataset of this scale is in minimizing errors related to the ethnic and racial diversity that is central to its design. Selection bias in candidate racial identifications may occur in several respects. Asian Americans, Latina/os and African Americans are identified by organizations which compile lists based on word of mouth, media coverage, internet research, and phone calls. I used similar methods to confirm or identify false positives among the auto-matched candidates. Candidates who are not identified by local media outlets as being a member of a minority group, or who choose not to explicitly discuss their ancestry in public, are more likely to be miscategorized as false negatives in this dataset. In a related fashion, White or African American women who marry someone with a frequently occurring Asian American or Latina/o last name, or candidates whose parents include a White or African American father are also more likely to be miscategorized.

One possible result of this selection bias is that there may be an under or overcount for Asian Americans and Latina/os in particular. If there is an undercount, those who are missed are likely those who have left the lightest “public” trail of their identity as an Asian American or Latina/o. This is not to say that they have not lived their lives, or experienced society and political life, as an Asian American or Latina/o, only that their public, political identity has not been as explicitly tied to their racial heritage. If there is an overcount, the false positives are most likely comprised of women who have married Asian Americans and Latina/os and changed their surnames, or individuals whose families have lived in the United states for multiple generations (e.g. candidates who identify as White in New Mexico, with Hispanic surnames).

An identification challenge that is particular to the Asian American case combines two issues—the ethnic categories that are included in the designation “Asian Americans,” and the geographic concentration of the plurality of Asian American candidates in Hawaii. For the purposes of this study, I use the term Asian Americans to include people whose ancestry is rooted in Asia and the Pacific Islands. There are often vast differences in the political and social experiences of immigrants from across these ethnic groups (Wong, et al., 2011; Lien, 2001) but there is also growing evidence that there is a tendency for members of these groups to share some core political
viewpoints as well (Phillips and Lee, forthcoming). Furthermore, for many Asian Americans in Hawaii whose families have multi-generational roots in that state, their ancestry includes both Pacific Islander and Asian heritage. This may also help to explain the lower rate of matching winners’ names from the Lauderdale-Kestenbaum list—that list is based on studies of Asian Americans in the continental U.S. from the six largest Asian American ethnic groups. Thus, names that are more common among those with Pacific Islander heritage may occur less frequently.\(^8\) To minimize errors in this vein, I also hand-checked the lists of candidates from Hawaii for names indicating either Asian or Pacific Islander heritage.

Finally, Whites and Native American/American Indians represent opposite poles of descriptive representation in American state legislatures. Whites (particularly men) have historically been and continue to be the modal candidate. The National Caucus of Native American State Legislators reports that Native American/American Indians currently hold 71 seats total.\(^9\) This project’s empirical focus did not permit an extensive coding and analysis effort that included Native Americans or Whites. While Native Americans/American Indians are a vocal political minority in numerous states, they are excluded from this analysis. For all winning candidates not identified as belonging to any of the previously discussed racial groups, I assume that they are White. Among never winning candidates, I assume that all candidates not identified as Asian American or Latina/o are White, Native American/American Indian, or African American, and cannot distinguish between them in the data. Thus, analyses of the GRACE dataset based on winning candidates are based on all four of the largest racial groups in the United States, while analyses encompassing non-winning candidates are based only on Asian Americans and Latina/os.

**Gender**

In a fashion similar to the protocol for coding race, I employed distinct processes to code winning and never-winning candidates’ genders. I use a binary construction of gender across the data, and assume that if someone is not identified as a woman, that person is a man. For winning candidates, I used two procedures to code for gender. First, I relied on the Center for American Women and Politics’ lists of female elected officials (Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute, Rutgers University, 2014) to initially identify women and men. Second, I ran an auto-match of all winners with a list of female names from the SSA (Administration, n.d.). To accommodate a wide age range of candidates, I compiled the Social Security Administrations’ (SSA) annual lists of applicants’ first names from 1930 forward, and ran an auto match with every name that had more than 750 female applicants at any time during that period (Administration, n.d.). In checking the results of the raw automatch against the gender coding of winners, it yielded 86.5 percent positive matches. I then hand checked the names of winners who had been identified as women through both processes, and found a small handful of false negatives.

For never-winning candidates, I initiated the process with an auto-match of the female names list from the SSA. I then hand checked candidates whose names also frequently occur on the SSA’s list of male names (Charlie, Michael, Joshua, e.g.) using internet research. The SSA lists are less reliable in identifying first names common among Asian Americans and Latina/o, so I also

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\(^8\) I have also run this process with the Census API surname list, with similar results.

individually checked the Asian American and Latina/o lists of never-winning candidates to code for gender.

The scope of the GRACE dataset allows, for the first time, a national view of the vicissitudes of descriptive representation for women and men across all eight race-gendered groups, over a significant time period. The raw percentages of election victories achieved by members of each race and gender group are an initial illustration of the imbalance in descriptive representation in the American states. During the course of 66,764 state legislative general election victories recorded over the span of nearly two decades, nearly 90 percent were won by White men or women. Across every racial group, women won elections less frequently than men of the same race. These two social identity groups, and their intersection, form the central axes of this analysis.

Table 2.1: Descriptive Statistics of All State Legislative General Election Victories, 1996-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of All Election Wins</th>
<th>Election Characteristics</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>66.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>50.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incumbent</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>74.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenger</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>25.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overview of the dataset in Table 2.1 confirms earlier work on the types of candidates who tend to win state legislative elections. Incumbents won much more often than challengers, and opportunities to run in open seats occurred in less than one-fifth of the elections in the dataset. This broad view of election victories in the aggregate suggests that the most lopsided characteristics of state legislative election winners are related to their race, gender and incumbency. I will return to the possible connections between those characteristics in later chapters, but for now, it is worth noting that partisanship, a central factor in many studies of electoral success, seems to have been as consequential as a coin flip. Democrats and Republicans, in the aggregate over twenty years, won equally frequently. In Chapter 5, I consider partisanship’s role in descriptive representation more extensively. In that section, I argue that given the social and political histories of the parties, analyses of electoral success that treat partisanship as an isolated variable are likely distorting the role of the parties, particularly among candidates of color.
### Table 2.2: Number of State Legislative General Election Wins by Race-Gendered Group, 1996-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Total</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/o Total</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>1389</td>
<td>1422</td>
<td>1385</td>
<td>1285</td>
<td>1327</td>
<td>1417</td>
<td>1431</td>
<td>1432</td>
<td>1458</td>
<td>1235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>4284</td>
<td>4305</td>
<td>4200</td>
<td>4137</td>
<td>4066</td>
<td>4223</td>
<td>3982</td>
<td>4227</td>
<td>4051</td>
<td>4047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Total</td>
<td>5673</td>
<td>5727</td>
<td>5585</td>
<td>5422</td>
<td>5393</td>
<td>5640</td>
<td>5413</td>
<td>5659</td>
<td>5509</td>
<td>5282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Three Perspectives on Descriptive Representation

The aggregate descriptive statistics for the GRACE dataset are likely unsurprising to most scholars of elections, race and ethnic politics, and women and politics. It has been documented repeatedly at specific points in time, or in specific states, that women, and particular minority groups, are far below representative parity relative to the population (Darcy, Hadley, & Kirksey, 1993; Griffin & Newman, 2007; Jones, 1997; Scola, 2006). This new data provides an opportunity to explore changes in descriptive representation at a much broader scale, and over time. This scale is not only relevant to understanding national patterns of a central democratic expectation, it also permits an intersectional and quantifiable, analysis of descriptive representation. In the following section, I present an analysis of longitudinal changes in representation, and document the tradeoffs in approaching this type of data from the unitary and additive perspectives most typical in the political science literature.

Figure 2.1 is a set of snapshot of descriptive representation that stems from a common treatment of identity groups in the literature—women and men are compared to each other on the left side and racial groups are compared on the right. The most straightforward reading of this stark figure is that men, and Whites, are the dominant descriptive representatives in most legislative seats. The advantages of this rendering of the data are related to its simplicity. There are very few components to each bar graph, which allows the lack of change between 1996 and 2014 to stand out. This presentation of the data makes it clear that the types of people who were most frequently elected in 1996 were not very different from the types of people who were elected in 2014.

It is less clear whether these snapshots are an aberration, or typical of the data in the intervening years. This figure lumps all men together, and suggests that men, regardless of other
characteristics are more likely to be representatives than women. Similarly, this figure lumps all
Whites, Latina/os, Asian Americans and African Americans together, without consideration by
subgroup. To be clear, there is value in these simple comparisons—race and gender are socially and
politically salient categories, and there are explicit histories of discrimination and institutional
obstacles to representation for both types of groups. However, the cost of this simplicity is that
subgroups, with distinct and pervasive histories and experiences of their own, are obscured.

Fig. 2.1: Race and Gender of State Legislative Election Winners, 1996 and 2014.

Figure 2.2 is another cut of the data that reflects a common approach in the extant literature
(Darcy & Hadley, 1988; Pachon & DeSipio, 1992; Scola, 2006), which attempts to address some, but
not all of the limitations in Figure 1. Each line in the dataset illustrates the percentage of elections
won by women from each racial group, out of the total number of elections won by members of
that racial group. This reflects a frequent practice in political science of first slicing data by race, then
looking within that slice at gender. Figure 2 allows us to see the vicissitudes of descriptive
representation year by year over the span of the dataset, and the trends and trajectories of each
group. This approach to the data is often used to compare women from different racial groups to
each other, and has been used to make arguments about a “puzzle of success” for Latinas and
African American women in particular (Bejarano, 2013; Darcy & Hadley, 1988). However, I argue
that this treatment obscures more than it reveals.

Figure 2.2’s presentation of the data places racial identity in the analytical foreground. The
type of analysis for which this approach might make the most sense would be a study of, for
example, Latinas specifically as a subgroup of Latina/os more broadly. If, however, the goal of the
analysis is to understand how Latina electoral success compares to White women’s electoral success,
or to Latino men’s electoral success for that matter, this presentation’s utility is quite limited—the
denominators for each data plot are vastly different, in size and implication. It is also inaccurate to
infer from this graph that African American or Latina women enjoy some sort of advantage over
White women, given the lopsided nature of the raw numbers of Latinas, African American and
White women in Table 2.2.
This study’s empirical framework is grounded in the expectation that the political experiences and social positioning of women and men from different racial groups are distinct in significant ways (Cohen, 1999; Crenshaw, 1991; Hawkesworth, 2003; McCall, 2005; Strolovitch, 2006; Williams, 2000; Young, 2011). That intersectional vantage point requires an assessment of descriptive representation that treats groups of women and men from each race as distinct, but related, groups of electoral competitors. Figure 2.2 obscures the relative electoral success between women and men in each racial group, and restricts our ability to compare women and men across races (Burns, 2007; García Bedolla & Scola, 2006; Hancock, 2007a). It makes a normative assumption that African American women, for example, are competing only against African American men in elections, for “Black” seats.

While the next chapter investigates racial differences in practical access to state legislative election contests, there are no de jure eligibility requirements regarding the race or gender of potential state legislative candidates. Members of all four of the largest racial groups live in all 50 states. Figure 2.3’s assessment of the success of race-gender groups competing for descriptive representation takes these considerations at face value. The graph presents the percent of wins achieved by members of eight race-gendered groups, out of all state legislative general elections each year. In Figure 2.4, I report the same descriptors for non-White groups only, on a scale with a maximum value of five percent, which makes distinctions between the groups with the smallest shares of election victories easier to view. This approach shifts the baseline expectation about which seats members of each group are competing for from only those seats won by members of the same racial group, to all available seats in a given election year.  

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10 Louisiana, Virginia, New Jersey and Mississippi hold some or all of their state legislative elections in odd-numbered years. Thus, results from those states are not included in the data in Figs. 2.3 and 2.4.
In this configuration, several patterns in the data underscore the need for an analytical approach to descriptive representation that considers multiple dimensions of identity. First, women’s win percentages are much lower than those of men, across all racial groups. The size of the gap between men and women varies, it is within a range of 1-2 percentage points for African Americans, Latina/os and and Asian Americans, and roughly 40 points for Whites. The extensive literature on women in politics has explored this gap at several points in time, but what is striking about this graph is its vertical and longitudinal persistence. Within racial groups, there is nothing about the
trajectories to suggest that the gender gap is narrowing to a significant degree. Across time, the ranges for each group of men and women change very little.

The key characteristic when viewing this graph through an exclusively gendered lens is persistence—but not necessarily sameness. Challenges and obstacles to the descriptive representation of women have been cataloged in an array of domains—voter bias, institutional structures, social norms, etc. Over the course of two decades, it is reasonable to expect that some of those challenges may shift in their focus, and increase or decrease in their intensity. For example, an oft-cited change at the individual voter level is the increasing acceptance of the notion of women in public office (Dolan, 2004; Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, 2015). At the institutional level, this period also ushered in term limits in more than a dozen state legislatures. These policies were ostensibly designed to create greater access to office holding, but at different points in time post-implementation, evaluations of their effectiveness have returned mixed results (Carroll & Jenkins, 2001a; Casellas, 2009; Schraufnagel & Halperin, 2006). This is not an exhaustive list, but it underscores the need to accommodate causal mechanisms that are variable in their relevance over time when assessing longstanding patterns of underrepresentation.

The second feature of note in Figure 2.3 is that White men, and White women, are in a category of their own as a racial group. Together, they win nearly 90 percent of all elections over the entire span of the study. Women and men from all other racial groups combined contend for roughly 10 percent of all electoral victories. This pair of results raises important questions about what expectations for direct descriptive representation are tenable for most constituents of color, and women of color in particular. Moreover, this pattern reiterates the necessity of differentiating between the political incorporation of women, and men, from different racial groups. Men of color’s presence in state legislatures is nowhere near that of White men, and the same can be said for women of color and White women. The extent of this racial gulf also suggests that development of a more expansive model of descriptive representation requires exploring whether there are structural limits on the level of competition for descriptive representation that Whites, and White men in particular, face.

Figure 2.3 also illustrates that White men are the largest single group of winners by a large margin. The clarity of this result, particularly in a dataset of this scope, suggests that, at a minimum, the electoral experiences of White men are distinct from those of all other groups, including White women. Additionally, Figure 2.3 illustrates that when White men are literally “out of the picture” as they were in Figures 2.1 and 2.2, their outsize rate of electoral success is obscured. The inner political and social workings of racial groups are understudied, and much more research that is closely focused and specific to those dynamics is necessary to understand underrepresentation. However, those processes are not occurring in a vacuum, and they are often, in large part, a response to the political conditions created by White men’s overrepresentation. White men dominate state legislative general elections, but their “invisibility” in analyses of descriptive representation may also be limiting disciplinary understandings of the terms of electoral competition.

One illustration of this possibility is apparent in the emphasis in the elections literature on the value of incumbency (Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2002; Cox & Katz, 2002; Fiorina, 1989). The descriptive statistics in Table 2.1 underscore that incumbents, as a group, generally face favorable odds—they win roughly three-quarters of all elections and run in roughly 80 percent of all general elections. Several authors have also argued that in addition to the direct benefits incumbents enjoy—name recognition, access to unpaid media coverage, etc., incumbents are often capable of deterring high quality challengers (Jacobson, 1981; Stone, Fulton, Maestas, & Maisel, 2015) from running. Most of the studies in this literature do not mention that the vast majority of incumbents are White men. The invisibility of race and gender in the elections subfield may be mischaracterizing the power of incumbency; several studies have shown that the received wisdom on the benefits of incumbency
are most applicable to understanding the electoral success of White men (Cain & Kousser, 2005; Palmer & Simon, 2010; Schwindt-Bayer, 2005).

Moreover, by not accounting for, or even mentioning, candidates’ races and genders, scholars of incumbency risk underplaying a substantial, structural political advantage that one group of men holds far more frequently than any other group. In some respects, this treatment renders incumbency a “black box” (T. Lee, 2008a) phenomenon, despite ongoing, detailed attention to how it benefits and disadvantages candidates. In the elections literature, incumbency is simply enjoyed, or not. Without asking who enjoys it, and how its operation differs depending on the beneficiary, studies showing that incumbency increases the odds of election by “x percent” gloss over the processes and electoral underpinnings that produce incumbents in the first place. Moreover, White male incumbents’ status goes a long way in shaping the competitive landscape for potential candidates of all race and gender groups, but incumbency of White men as a race-gendered group is rarely treated as a relevant consideration in the literatures on the underrepresentation of women or racial minorities.

Finally, the general flatness of every line in the graph raises urgent questions for a rapidly diversifying electorate such as the United States: are there ceilings on descriptive representation, and have we reached them? Or is it unreasonable to expect that the underrepresented groups at the center of this analysis, women and people of color, would see a more than marginal change in representation over the course of two decades?

Table 2.3: Percent of All State Legislative General Elections Won by Race-Gender Group, By Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3 reports the underlying data depicted in Figures 2.3 and 2.4 (the percent of all elections won by members of eight race-gendered groups in each even-numbered year between 1996 and 2014). The table format allows for a closer look at how little variation there is year to year, and from the beginning to the end of the dataset. Comparing the first year of data to the last in Table 2C, the groups with the largest negative difference are White women (1.9 percentage points lower in 2014 v. 1996) and White men (1.8 percentage points lower). The group with the largest positive difference, by a substantial margin given the general range for members of racial minority groups, is Latino men (1 percentage point higher in 2014 v. 1996).

American political institutions are frequently described as slow to change, or fairly static, by scholars and pundits alike. The descriptive statistics presented in this chapter reflect that sentiment to some extent. However, these data are merely the most visible endpoints of numerous dynamic
processes that occurred over a substantial time period in the United States. They encompass three rounds of redistricting in each state, and a reduction in the White share of the U.S. population by ten percentage points. This period also saw the enactment of term limits in states, and a diminishing capacity for non-incumbents to competitively fundraise for their campaigns (Holden, 2016). Given this kinetic context of social and political shifts, it may be that characterizing the membership of American legislative bodies as “static” is incorrect. “Stagnant” may very well be a more accurate description.
CHAPTER 3

Nowhere to Run: Shifting Populations and Constrained Electoral Opportunities

The descriptive data in Chapter 2 begin to illustrate the extent to which descriptive representation in state legislatures has failed to keep pace with changes in the population. In this chapter, I show that the growing “strength in numbers” of communities of color has primarily served as a resource for increasing the racial diversity of men in state legislatures—to the limited extent that racial diversity has increased at all. Contrary to expectations, in some cases, the relationship between population growth and descriptive representation is negative for women. I also demonstrate that the overrepresentation of White men has been fairly impervious to growth in non-White communities over the last twenty years. By aggregating district-level population data covering three re-districting cycles, it becomes clear that the distribution of White populations across districts may both hinder the practical opportunities for non-Whites to run for state legislative office, and insulate White (particularly male) candidates and incumbents from racial competition for descriptive representation. These results stand in sharp contrast to the widespread assumption that, within limits, the growth of a population will facilitate its members’ political incorporation. I depart from prior theories in the race and ethnic politics literature, as well as scholarship on group competition, that treat the population size “resource” as consistently and evenly beneficial.

My discussion of these results further develops the model of group competition for representation that I introduced in Chapter 1, and simultaneously accounts for the racially constrained opportunity context potential candidates of color face, and the ways in which race and gender structure the institutional and organizational processes leading up to candidacy. These two key features of electoral politics have not been linked in earlier scholarship, thus obscuring the structural impact of White men’s overrepresentation on the electoral opportunity context for all other groups. The intersection of these dynamics sharply limits the extent of racial group competition, and effectively excludes women of color, in particular, from competing for descriptive representation in all but the rarest of cases.

The Optimism of Pluralism

The relationship between a distinct population’s size and its political influence is a common indicator in pluralist analyses of American politics. The classic pluralist model of group competition emphasizes the presence of slack and evenly disbursed resources, legal institutions to ensure equality of opportunity, and a single, accessible competitive field for political influence (R. P. Browning et al., 1986a; Dahl, 1967). Dahl and others assert that a single group cannot dominate American politics and policymaking, in part because resources—including a group’s size—are diffuse. For political “newcomers” the acquisition of these resources has often been described as a relatively linear process (R. Browning, Marshall, & al, 1986b; Dahl, 1967). First, “newcomers” are disadvantaged in comparison to other, more established groups when they begin their efforts to influence politics. Second, over time they assimilate into the political and social mainstream, and acquire the resources necessary to (third) become politically incorporated (Browning, 1984). Fourth and finally, once the previous newcomers are incorporated, they have meaningful political influence. In its most distilled form, this framework heavily values chronology: “Eventually, you/they/us will get there.”

However, as political time passes, processes of socioeconomic and political incorporation are occurring simultaneously among the groups that compete for influence, but not necessarily in
Many of the socioeconomic resources that are often assumed to increase political capacity (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) are accumulated by immigrants, for example, in processes that are frequently segmented by race and gender (Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2007; Browne & Misra, 2003a; Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Jones-Correa, 1998; Powers, Seltzer, & Shi, 1998; Zhou, 1997). Among native-born residents, there is also extensive evidence that the accumulation of material resources, and access to mediating institutions and professional networks are stratified along race and gender lines (Combs, 2003; Frymer, 2010; Sanbonmatsu, 2006a; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011). Thus, it is likely that the development—and deployment—of political resources is similarly race-gendered, resulting in differentiated means and opportunities for influence among women and men, within and across racial groups.

Pluralism’s “optimistic” framework has been undermined by critiques in the race and ethnic politics literature. Structural boundaries and barriers of political incorporation for African Americans, Latina/os and Asian Americans have been repeatedly delineated and documented (Dawson, 1995; Hero, 2010; Lien, 2001; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). As an example, a central consideration that has emerged from this area of scholarship is that the electorate and the population are not identical (Arvizu & Garcia, 1996; Geron & Lai, 2002; Griffin & Newman, 2007; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Lai et al., 2002; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Lien, 2015; Preuhs & Juenke, 2011b; Segura & Woods, 2006). Systemic challenges hinder the mobilization and full participation of racial minority citizens and non-citizens alike (Dawson, 1995; Hero, 2010; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993; Uggen & Manza, 2002; Weaver & Lerman, 2010; J. Wong, 2008).

Even while acknowledging these limitations, researchers have often pointed to the size and growth of racial minority populations as a resource for building political influence from a disadvantaged position (Barreto et al., 2004; Canon, 1999; Casellas, 2009; Griffin & Newman, 2007; Rocca et al., 2008; Segura & Woods, 2006). We know to expect that generally, larger minority district populations are more likely to have an African American or Latina/o representative and/or candidate on the ballot (Branton, 2009; B. L. Fraga, 2013; Gay, 2001b; Gonzalez Juenke & Shah, 2015; Juenke, 2014; Preuhs & Juenke, 2011a). However, little empirical basis exists from which to develop expectations about whether this is equally true for female and male candidates and election winners, from any racial group.

With a notable exception (Hardy-Fanta et al., 2006), the literature on women’s representation generally does not address population size directly as a primary explanatory variable—presumably because most of the time, women are assumed to be roughly half of the population. Instead, debates have most often focused on challenges that limit women’s individual inclinations to run—a deficit of ambition for office-holding (Fox & Lawless, 2014; Lawless & Fox, 2005), perceived under-qualification (Fox & Lawless, 2010), party recruitment (Crowder-Meyer, 2013; Pearson & McGhee, 2013; Sanbonmatsu, 2002b), and broader social pressures (Rule, 1981). Despite the richness of these literatures, they yield very little theoretical guidance for interpreting the patterns of descriptive representation discussed in Chapter 2. Co-ethnic and co-racial populations have been regarded as a central, if uneven resource for racial groups, but scholars of descriptive representation and pluralism have tended to treat racial groups as monolithic when considering the impact of population size. The rest of this chapter begins building an empirical case for the Race-Gendered Model of Competition advanced in Chapter 1. After reviewing the broad contours of changes in the U.S. population during this period of study, I present data and analyses from the

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This assumption may be particularly troublesome for analyses of racial minority populations, due to gendered patterns of immigration and incarceration among some groups. See (Jones-Correa & Leal, 1996; Pettit, 2012).
GRACE dataset that accounts for the ways in which race shapes access to district elections, and for the differential impacts that populations have on the representation of women and men, within and across racial groups.

Contours of Racial Change in the American Population

The scale of population change in the United States in the past two decades provides an opportunity to evaluate claims that groups may leverage their communities’ size as a political resource to gain influence (R. P. Browning et al., 1986a; Dahl, 1967). The United States’ transition to a majority non-White population has been well underway since 1965 (Table 3.1), and population projections indicate that first and second-generation immigrants will continue to play a central role in that transformation (Cohn, 2015). By 2065, one in three Americans will either be an immigrant themselves, or have at least one parent who is an immigrant.

The geographic dispersion of Asian American and Latina/o communities necessitates a national study of descriptive representation that also accounts for state level variation in key areas. New Mexico and Hawaii are in some ways, unique political jurisdictions, in that they are home to majority minority populations that are largely composed of a single racial minority group (Latina/o and Asian Americans, respectively). But they are far from the only locales where Asian Americans and Latina/o are politically visible, or salient to discussions of descriptive representation.

Table 3.1: Historic and Projected Racial Makeup of the U.S. Population, Percentages.

Source: Pew Research Center 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Asian American</th>
<th>Latina/o</th>
<th>Other Races</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2035</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2045</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2055</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2065</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The geographic dispersion of Asian American and Latina/o communities necessitates a national study of descriptive representation that also accounts for state level variation in key areas.
The growth of immigrant communities is not confined to areas of the country that may have previously been considered “traditional” gateways, or large cities on the coasts. According to the Pew Research Center, of the ten U.S. counties with the largest Latina/o populations in 1990, all but three continued to be among the ten largest in 2014 (Table 3.2). These counties were concentrated in California, Illinois, Florida and Texas. Two counties in New York were among the top ten in 1990, but were absent from that list in 2014. There is little overlap between these states, which are often considered among the “traditional gateways” for immigrant communities, and the states where the highest rates of Latina/o population growth have recently occurred. From 1990-2000, the states with the fastest growing Latina/o populations by county were Alabama, Illinois, Tennessee, South Carolina, Missouri, Kentucky, and Georgia. However, from 2000-2014, the highest rates of growth had shifted to counties in Virginia, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Mississippi, and Georgia.

Similarly, Asian American communities have experienced the fastest rates of growth outside of the states where the largest populations reside (Table 3.3). Asian Americans also currently have the same level of state population concentration as Latina/o—roughly two thirds of both racial groups’ populations live in five states (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, 2014). The ten counties with the largest Asian American communities are in California, Hawaii, New York, Illinois and Washington (and it is worth noting that Harris County, Texas’ Asian American population is less than 3000 individuals smaller than that in Kings County New York) (Ramakrishnan, n.d.) Overall, Asian Americans as a racial group are the fastest growing in the United States (undefined author, 2012) and much of that growth has occurred in southern coastal states, and the mountain west.

Broadly speaking, even as Asian American and Latina/o communities have been growing in an array of states, levels of residential segregation have increased for most racial groups (African American levels of residential segregation have decreased slightly) (Denton & Massey, 1988; Iceland, 2004; Iceland, Weinberg, & Hughes, 2014). Thus, even as Whites, African Americans and Native American/Indians represent decreasing shares of the American population, it is not necessarily the case that they are living in neighborhoods that look very different, in terms of racial composition, than they did in the 1990’s. The same might also be said for the racial composition of state legislative districts.

Table 3.2: Latina/o Population Growth, Top Ten Counties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source: Pew Research Center 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin County, Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cass County, Illinois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamblen County, Tennessee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gilmer County, Georgia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jasper County, South Carolina</td>
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<tr>
<td>McDonald County, Missouri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelby County, Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb County, Alabama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedford County, Tennessee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon County, Georgia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.3: Asian American Populations by Size and Percent Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles County, California</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honolulu County, Hawaii</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Clara County, California</td>
<td>Utah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County, California</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queens County, New York</td>
<td>Idaho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alameda County, California</td>
<td>Delaware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego County, California</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook County, Illinois</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King County, Washington</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kings County, New York</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of Racial Group Populations in State Legislative Districts

The impact of the changing American population detailed in the last section is difficult to discern in the distribution of racial group populations across state legislative districts. The manner in which racial communities are arrayed across districts serves as an informative context for assessing the effectiveness of population size as a resource for increasing political influence (via descriptive representation). The extant descriptive representation literature places great weight on the size of minority communities in electoral jurisdictions. Racial demographic data also reflect possible contours in the partisanship and representation demands of a district's constituents, give a snapshot of who may or may not be mobilized to vote and participate in elections, and provide a window into the opportunity landscape that potential candidates face when deciding whether to run for office (Branton, 2009).

In most state legislative districts, most of the time, White populations are the overwhelming majority of district residents. The histogram in Figure 3.1 illustrates the distribution of White district populations in all of the state legislative general elections from 1996-2014. Two-thirds of all district elections included in this analysis were held in districts that were 75 percent or more White at the time. One third of all districts were 90 percent White or more.  

\[12\] The mean Asian American population proportion within districts is 3.2 percent; the mean Latina/o population proportion in 8.9 percent. The mean African American population proportion is 10.4 percent.
This lopsidedness is also a current feature of state legislative districts nationally. Following the 2010 Census, the median White proportion of state legislative districts is 73 percent. In all but a handful of states, more than 60 percent of all state legislative districts encompass a majority White population (Table 3.4).

The practical implication of these distributions of White populations is that in most districts, most of the time, potential candidates must account for a majority White population in calculating their chances of electoral success. Branton and others find that district racial composition is a central determinant of the presence of African American and Latina/o candidates (Branton, 2009; Juenke, 2014; Shah, 2014a). For minority Democrats who have considered candidacy, awareness of the strong correlations between race and partisanship for Whites and African Americans (and for Asian Americans and Latina/os and Democratic voting in the last two presidential elections) (Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identities of Voters, 2004; Ramakrishnan, 2016) may discourage them from running in a majority White district. The absence of other factors positively related to majority minority districts, such as economies of scale for outreach to minority voting populations (J. Wong, 2008), and an added sense of political empowerment (Bobo & Gilliam, 1990; Gay, 2001a) may serve as a disincentive for local party leaders and political elites to develop minority candidates in majority White districts.

The exact mechanisms of minority candidate emergence in White majority districts are discussed in later chapters, and it is plausible that majority White populations dissuade certain candidates of color from running more than others. However, Figure 3.1 and Table 3.4 make clear that in most districts, White potential candidates do not have to account extensively for their ability to appeal to constituents who do not share their racial background. Thus, Whites, in comparison to non-Whites, are relatively unfettered by race in their ability to access electoral contests for descriptive representation.

13 Juenke (2012) argues that Latina/o candidates may fare better in districts with lower Latina/o proportions of the population than those in which most currently run and win. That is plausible, but the pattern of the last two decades suggests that fairly few Latina/o candidates, and/or local party leaders, have thus far been willing to take that risk.
Chapter 2 raises the notion that since members of all eight of the race-gendered groups in this study live in all 50 states, it is theoretically possible that descriptive representatives from any of the groups could be elected in a wide array of districts across the country. In practice, however, even casual observers of politics may discern that some districts tend to foster the election of certain types of candidates over others, above and beyond partisanship. Women and men tend to win elections in which they share a racial background with a significant proportion of the district (Table 3.5). As a standalone idea, this is not new. However, the data have not previously been available to demonstrate the extent to which it is true. In Table 3.5, I report data from the GRACE dataset showing the mean proportions of the district population that share winning candidates’ racial backgrounds, and the mean Non-White population proportions.

Table 3.5: Mean Racial Population Proportions for Winning Candidates, Open Seats, 1996-2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Group</th>
<th>Co-racial Population Percent</th>
<th>Non-White Population Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>48.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within each racial group, women and men tend to win in districts that are quite similar in their racial composition (Table 3.5). This undermines the notion that women of any race are more likely to be “crossover” candidates due to their gender somehow “softening” (Bejarano, 2013) voter concerns related to their race, or because women strategically use married last names that indicate a
racial background other than their own (Casellas, 2011). Moreover, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latina/os of both genders are typically successful when non-White populations comprise roughly half or more of the district population. These patterns are mirrored in similar data reporting presence on the general election ballot for Asian Americans and Latina/os (Table 3.6), and earlier work on Latina/o and African American candidates (Shah, 2014a).

Table 3.6: Mean Racial Population Proportions for General Election Candidates, Open Seats, 1996-2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Co-racial Population Percent</th>
<th>Non-White Population Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino men</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, having a district wherein people of color make up a significant proportion of the population appears to be a necessary condition for both women and men of color to run for and win elections, on average. While a White majority population does not legally or absolutely preclude a person of color from running for state legislature, over the course of two decades of elections, less than three percent of all open state legislative seat election victories by people of color occurred in majority White districts (GRACE).

White women and men win in districts where the non-White population is less than 20 percent of the population, on average. Two-thirds of all elections occurred in districts with a White population that made up 75 percent of the district or more. Thus, the raw number of districts with a co-racial population at or above the mean listed in Table 3.5 is vastly larger for Whites than non-Whites. Race matters for all groups of election winners in this study, but the scope of districts which meet the conditions that make winning more likely—a large co-racial population—is heavily skewed.

Given the centrality of district racial composition in the prospects for electoral success, the distribution of White populations across districts serves as a central feature of the electoral opportunity context, or “field” of electoral competition. In this sense, the data reported in Table 3.4 regarding White majority districts can be interpreted as markers of the national landscape of electoral opportunities for members of each race-gender group. Figure 3.2 translates the data in Table 3.4 into a map depicting the share of state legislative districts, in each state, that currently include majority White populations. There are three states in which less than half of the districts are majority White—California, Hawaii and New Mexico. In every other state, opportunities to run in districts that do not encompass a majority White population are relatively sparse. This is especially the case in the 19 states with the lightest shading—90 percent or more of the districts in those states

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14 Juenke (2012) argues that Latina/o candidates may fare better in districts with lower Latina/o proportions of the population than those in which most currently run and win. That may be the case, but the pattern of the last two decades suggests that fairly few Latina/o candidates, and/or local party leaders, have been willing to take that risk.
include majority White populations. This subset of states encompasses nearly 40 percent of the total number of state legislative seats in the nation (2841 Assembly and Senate seats).

The roots of this racially lopsided configuration are an active subject of debate within the discipline (Canon, 1999; Feng, Aoki, & Ikegami, 2002; Levitt, n.d.), and require a broader discussion of redistricting processes than is possible here. While there have been a handful of high profile forays into reforming redistricting, in all states except Arizona, California, Idaho and Washington, state legislators or their appointees determine state legislative district boundaries (Levitt, n.d.). Given current levels of activity around reform, it appears unlikely that patterns of racial composition across states will change significantly in the near term.

Racial population distributions are a key factor for potential candidates to consider, and the map in Figure 3.2 may also be used as a window into what potential candidates see when they consider the strategic calculus related to entering a particular race at a particular time (Fulton, Maestas, Maisel, & Stone, 2006a; Maestas, Fulton, Maisel, & Stone, 2006). Practically speaking, there are few district populations that meet the necessary conditions for most candidates of color to be successful. It is also worth noting that the necessary conditions for White male potential candidates are not a perfect reflection of those for candidates of color—White men have won more open seat elections in majority minority districts over the past two decades than any other group (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: Open Seat Election Victories in Majority Minority Districts, 1996-2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Wins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3.2: Majority White State Legislative Districts, Post-2010 Census. Percent.
All groups are competing for influence in the same legislature in any given state—Latina/os, for example are not attempting to influence “Latina/o” politics—their descriptive representatives are a means of influencing policies and politics in their state’s Assembly and Senate chambers. Thus, the limited availability of viable districts for non-Whites constrains the practical field of electoral opportunities. There are swaths of the country in which the descriptive representation of women and men of color is highly unlikely, in part because the racial composition of most districts makes running for office a strategically tenuous choice for people of color, particularly Democrats. In contrast, White women and men generally have the run of the field of electoral opportunities across the country. Their strategic opportunities for descriptive representation, as members of the politically dominant and typically most numerous racial group within any given district, are relatively unfettered. This effectively shrinks the electoral landscape to one in which White women and men are the only groups with full access.

This discussion of the distribution of racial group populations establishes a foreground of lopsided racial expectations for my analysis of the relationship between populations and descriptive representation. It does not however, establish any expectations for women and men, from any racial group. Women make up half of the U.S. population, and have voted at rates equal to or exceeding those of men since at least 1980 (Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton

15 It is worth noting that this discussion and the GRACE dataset, rely on resident population data. Using citizen voting age population (CVAP) data, instead of resident populations from the Census, is a common practice in the Latina/o politics literature in particular. There is ample evidence in the race and ethnic politics literature of systematic differences between the size of the electorate and the size of the population. Studies of Latina/o and Asian American voter behavior have highlighted the importance of accounting for racial differences in citizenship status and access to mediating institutions like parties, (Arvizu & Garcia, 1996; Geron & Lai, 2002; Griffin & Newman, 2007; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Lai et al., 2002; Leighley & Vedlitz, 1999; Lien, 2015; Preuhs & Juenke, 2011b; Segura & Woods, 2006) within immigrant-based communities. African American politics scholars have argued that the effects of policy-based disenfranchisement are widespread enough that they may tangibly affect election outcomes (Uggen & Manza, 2002; Weaver & Lerman, 2010). This body of scholarship suggests that careful consideration must be applied in assessing the relationship between a group’s presence in the population and their political influence via descriptive representation.

While this caution is warranted, the potential benefits of analyzing the relationship between population and elected descriptive representatives outweigh the limitations in this case. The very limited availability of CVAP data at the state legislative district level would drastically shrink the number of states and years that could be included in this study. One of the chief limitations facing previous scholarship on race and gender in descriptive representation is embedded in the research subject itself—there are relatively few women and minorities elected in a given state in a given year. By using resident population data, I am able to leverage the rich variation in institutions and outcomes across states, and evaluate the effects of particular populations at different points in time. The use of resident population data on the right side of the analytical equation facilitates a more robust dataset on the left side.

Finally, the use of population data instead of CVAP does not undermine the central theoretical concerns motivating this analysis. For example, if I were to use CVAP instead of population data, the distribution of White v. non-White populations would appear even more skewed towards White majorities. Thus, using resident population data is a conservative means of assessing the opportunity landscape for candidates of color.
Institute, Rutgers University, n.d.). Moreover, there is scholarship showing that in certain areas of the country, the number of women of color who are eligible to vote in elections outnumber men of color (Browne & Misra, 2003b; Weaver & Lerman, 2010). While legislative districts are arguably drawn with many factors in mind—partisanship, racial group populations, and raw size, among others—gender balance is not one of them. Thus, based on the distributions of racial group populations reviewed here, and the extant literature on minority candidate emergence, pluralist accounts would generate the expectation that the relationship between the size of a racial group within a district, and the likelihood of electing a member of that group are positive, and (among race and ethnic politics scholars) possibly more robust for Whites. However, when the analysis is broken out by race.gendered group, those expectations are only partially met, and in the case of certain groups of women, contradicted.

Race-Gendered Relationships Between Populations and Descriptive Representatives

In districts where members of their own racial group are most often elected, the likelihood of women’s election benefits less than that of men from increases in the size of the co-racial population. Figure 3.3 utilizes all 18 years of election return data in the GRACE dataset to plot a local polynomial regression line of the average proportion of each racial group population, on the probability that either a man or a woman from each racial group will be elected. The solid lines show the probabilities for men, the dashed lines for women. Shading around each line indicates 95 percent confidence intervals. The local polynomial regression allows for an analysis of the relationship between population size and likelihood of election that is less restricted by statistical assumptions about the underlying distribution of the data (Cleveland, 1979). Moreover, it reflects a popular conception in mass politics and the discipline—that the larger a racial group population, the greater the likelihood that a member of that racial group is elected as the representative.

Rug plots at the bottom of each graph (Figure 3.3) depict the frequency of wins by any member of that racial group, for different district population proportions. Each hatch mark in the rug plot indicates that a member of the given racial group won in a district with that co-racial proportion of the population; more dense portions of the plot indicate that members of that group win more often in that type of district. By restricting the rug plots to only depict districts wherein a descriptive representative won, we can see that the scope of district populations where Whites have been successful is much wider than for other racial groups. This supports my earlier contention that Whites access a much wider field of political competition than other racial groups.

The relationship between population proportion and probability of being elected is much more robust for men than women across racial groups, and the likelihood gap is most consistent in districts where members of each racial group are frequently elected. None of the groups of women have a probability of election that is higher than that for co-racial men, given the same co-racial population proportion. The extent of this similarity across African Americans, Asian Americans, Latina/os and Whites illustrates a previously unexplored gender difference in the effectiveness of a key resource for group political competition—the group itself.

Several notable race.gendered differences also appear across the four sets of plots. The maximum probability of election for Asian American and White women hovers around .2 and both groups of women are estimated to have that probability when the co-racial population reaches roughly 50 percent. However, Asian Americans are 50 percent of the population or greater in a
A miniscule number of districts, and the opposite is the case for majority White districts.\textsuperscript{16} This pair of results demonstrates the central importance of incorporating the limits on practical access to elections in analyses of representation. Without it, our understanding of the effects of population size on probability of election for Asian American women would be distorted.

Figure 3.3: Local Polynomial Plot of Probability of Election and Racial Group Proportion of Population, Women and Men, By Race

Latinas and African American women have higher maximum probabilities of winning, and share some similarity in the downward trajectory of their plot lines when the co-racial population is between the mid 60s to nearly 80 percent.\textsuperscript{17} Along that same stretch of the x-axis, Latino and African American men’s probabilities are the opposite image, and exhibit sharp upward slopes. One interpretation of this pattern that merits further empirical study is that in heavily African American or Latina/o districts, where both candidates in the general election are from the majority group, it is less likely that one of those candidates is a woman than in other types of districts. There is some evidence underlying the polynomial plot that is suggestive this may be the case, though for different reasons among African Americans and Latina/os.

\textsuperscript{16} Of the 6,344 general elections for state legislature held in 2012, 36 were for seats representing a district with more than 50\% Asian Americans.

\textsuperscript{17} Asian American women have a similar downward trajectory at the same points along the x-axis, but the change in slope is much smaller, and the number of districts which fit the criteria of having more than 60 percent Asian Americans is quite small.
In the plot range between roughly 65-80 percent African American proportion of the district (N=1312), two-thirds of all of the elections take place in Georgia, Mississippi, New York, Maryland and Alabama. None of these states have enacted term limits, and in this range, African American women have a slightly lower incumbency rate (77 percent, vs. 79 percent over the entire range). African American men, however, have higher rates of incumbency over that same section of the observed data (85 percent vs. 80 percent over the entire range). Thus, we can infer that in districts wherein African Americans are 65-80 percent of the population, African American men are on the ballot more frequently than they are in other districts, and African American women might be on the ballot as much or slightly less.

For the Latina/o case, race-gendered patterns of partisanship may be playing a more central role. In the plot range wherein women’s likelihood of success exhibits a negative trajectory—districts that are between 70-78 percent Latina/o proportion of the population—three-quarters of the observed elections (N=299) took place in four states: California, Texas, New Mexico and Florida. Additionally, Latinas are a much smaller share of the total number of Latina/os elected in this subset of districts than in other types in the dataset (24 percent of Latina/o winners vs. 42 percent of Latina/o winners overall). This may be in large part due to the interaction between Latina/o race-gender groups and partisan networks. While Latino men win as Democrats most of the time, Latinos run as Republicans more often than Latinas, and that gap widens in this range of the election data. Jaramillo’s work on Latina/o candidate emergence in Texas (Jaramillo, 2008), and the interviews and survey data I detail in the next chapters suggests that Latinas have relatively more visibility in and access to Democratic-leaning (as opposed to Republican-leaning) political networks. That likely militates against their presence on the ballot in Republican-leaning, heavily Latina/o, districts such as those found in New Mexico, Texas, Florida and the central valley region of California.

Another striking pattern across all three groups of men of color is the sudden shift in trajectory in very high density co-racial population districts. This is generally due to the very small number of observations going into the local polynomial regression models at the extreme right end of the x-axis, and how they are grouped in the plot. For Asian Americans, the area where the slope becomes negative for men encompasses 8 total elections in Hawaii, in which three different people were elected. Two of those people were Asian American women. The Latina/o area of the plot that becomes negative for men includes 60 observed elections, and of which Latinas won eight. Those eight wins, however, are clustered in three data points, for districts that are 92, 93 and 94 percent Latina/o proportion of the population. To illustrate, there were 19 elections included in the plot point for 93 percent Latina/o proportion, including one Latina incumbent who won four times (Assembly Member Norma Chavez, D-El Paso) and one Latina who won won in the same district twice (Assembly member Naomi Gonzalez, D-El Paso).

Finally, the slopes for African Americans also exhibit a similar inflection point for men, but they are more flat than in the previous two cases, and encompass 107 elections. The proportion of women winning with an African American proportion of the population that is greater than 90 percent is no higher here than in other ranges, but the share of women who are incumbents is slightly higher, and five points lower for men. It is also worth noting that these observations all occurred before the most recent round of census-based redistricting; in other words, these types of elections, wherein African Americans make up 9 out of 10 district residents, no longer exist. Further empirical study into these extremely high density districts is necessary to fully understand the causal roots of the inflection point in all three plots for men of color. However, even in these districts, and given those unknown dynamics, men still have a higher likelihood of winning.

Unlike other racial groups, once the White proportion of the population reaches a majority, it appears there is little to no likelihood that anyone but a White man or woman will be the
representative. While it is possible that a non-White representative can run and win in a majority White district, this analysis shows that it is exceedingly rare in practice. This also supports the race-gendered model’s formulation of a field of competition largely closed to the descriptive representation of minority racial groups, outside of a small number of majority minority districts.

Figure 3.3 provides a preliminary answer to the central question raised earlier in this chapter—there are significant race and gender differences in the relationship between the size of a population and the likelihood of electing a descriptive representative. This relationship will be more instructive for our understanding of the effective functioning of group size as a political resource when evaluated with controls for district demographics, state variation in term limits and other dimensions that distinguish each state’s unique political context. Additional statistical models will also help illustrate how and if the contours of the relationship between population and descriptive representation are affected when other racial groups are included in the analysis (C. J. Kim, 1999).

I estimate three models predicting the likelihood that the winner of a state legislative general election is a member of one of the eight race-gendered groups. The first model utilizes pooled data on winning candidates from all state legislative general elections from 1996 to 2014. The second and third models explore whether the relationships between population size and descriptive representation may themselves be variable over time, and are each cross-sectional analyses using data from elections in the late 1990’s and early 2010’s, respectively. For each model, I perform ordinary least squares regression separately for each race-gendered group. For the pooled model, standard errors are clustered by year.

The main independent variables of interest are each racial group’s proportions of the district population. District level controls are included for unemployment and educational attainment rates, as well as a measure of district Republican voting strength relative to the state median in each legislative chamber (Juenke, 2014). I also include scores from Squire’s index of legislative professionalization (Carroll & Jenkins, 2001a; Hogan, 2016; Schraufnagel & Halperin, 2006; Scola, 2006; Squire, 1992), which includes features such as number of legislative staff, salary and required time in legislative sessions. A dummy indicator for whether the election is in a state with term limits in effect is also included. Term limits have been a frequent focus of study in research examining women and minorities’ underrepresentation. After term limits were enacted in many states in the 1990s, evaluations of their effect on the demographic character of legislatures returned mixed results (J. M. Carey, Niemi, Powell, & Moncrief, 2006). In the 15 states that have had term limits in place over the last two decades, the share of seats held by Whites is quite similar to national figures. Between the late 1990s and 2014, 26 percent of non-incumbent winners in state legislative general elections were women, a share similar to those reported in all elections in Figure 3.1 (GRACE dataset). During the same period, 77 percent of non-incumbent winners are White—somewhat lower than the proportion of
whether it is an open seat, or a multi-member district (Preuhs & Juenke, 2011a; K. E. O. Swain & Lien, 2016), and how many candidates are running for each available seat (Juenke, 2014). Finally, I include a dummy variable indicating candidate partisanship.

The OLS regression models confirm the earlier finding that population size has been a less effective resource for the election of women than men, across all four racial groups. More generally, these models also show that the likelihood of electoral success for women running in state legislatures is less tied to racial group populations than it is for men. For African Americans, Asian Americans and Whites, this gender gap is not noticeably smaller in more recent years as compared to the late 1990's (among Asian Americans, it is larger). The gender gap in the size of coefficients for Latina/o proportion of the population on election of Latinas or Latinos is smaller in more recent elections, but this is due in large part to a reduction in the size of coefficients for men--the Latina/o population coefficient for Latina women changes very little in the two cross sectional models.

Wide variation exists among groups of women in the size and significance of co-racial population coefficients. The African American population correlates for African American women are larger, and track more closely with the coefficients for African American men, than the results for other groups of women. For Asian American women, the effects of increases in the size of the co-racial population are similar to those for Latinas in the pooled model. Moving from the late 1990’s model to the 2010’s model, the co-racial population coefficients for African American women grow appreciably, and contrast sharply to those of Asian Americans (which shrink) and Latinas (which stay the same).

With two exceptions, the negative effects related to the growth of other racial groups are minimal across the models for all three groups of women of color. In the 1990s model for African American women, the negative effects for other groups are smaller in size than those for African American men, but relative to the size of positive effects for increases in the African American population, they are notable. Among Asian American women and men, the negative effects of increases in the proportion of other racial groups are roughly the same size in the 2010s model. However, for Asian American women, those negative effects are also approximately the same absolute size as the positive effects for Asian American population increases.

The results for White women stand apart from those of other women. They exhibit the smallest, and least consistently significant co-racial population coefficients. Like Asian American women, the sizes and significance of the negative coefficients for other racial group populations in the models for White women are relatively substantial, but have divergent implications given the scarcity of Asian American majority districts, and dominance of White majority districts. The population distributions outlined in Table 4.4 sharply circumscribe the impact of the coefficients related to growth in Latina/o, African American and Asian American communities.

White women are the only group for whom the largest covariate is not population related (the coefficient for a one percent increase in the portion of the district that is college educated is .37 and significant at p>.001). The size of the college education coefficient for White women is larger than the co-racial population coefficients for Latinas and Asian American women, and similar in size.
Table 3.8: OLS Models for Likelihood of African American Women and Men Winning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pooled</th>
<th>1990s</th>
<th>2010s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women β/SE</td>
<td>Men β/SE</td>
<td>Women β/SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>0.353***</td>
<td>0.594***</td>
<td>0.272***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Americans</td>
<td>-0.077***</td>
<td>-0.093**</td>
<td>-0.062*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/os</td>
<td>-0.039***</td>
<td>-0.068*</td>
<td>-0.045*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>-0.056***</td>
<td>-0.072*</td>
<td>-0.065**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.036***</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term Limits</td>
<td>0.011***</td>
<td>0.010**</td>
<td>0.009**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative Professionalism</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.036***</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Republican Strength</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>-0.036***</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Seat Election</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Member District</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
<td>0.013***</td>
<td>0.007*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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* p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Table 3.9: OLS Models for Likelihood of Asian American Women and Men Winning

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* p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001
Table 3.10: OLS Models for Likelihood of Latina/o Women and Men Winning

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* $p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$
Table 3.11: OLS Models for Likelihood of White Women and Men Winning

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<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.104</td>
<td>-0.798***</td>
<td>-0.007**</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.180)</td>
<td>(0.190)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
<td>(0.000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.705***</td>
<td>-0.204**</td>
<td>1.067***</td>
<td>0.157**</td>
<td>0.611***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.050)</td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
<td>(0.080)</td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
<td>(0.070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-Squared</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>61638</td>
<td>61638</td>
<td>12124</td>
<td>12124</td>
<td>11871</td>
<td>11871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05, **p<0.01, *** p<0.001
to the African American population coefficient for African American women. This result suggests
that while White women face distinct barriers related to their gender, their race-gender group
membership may allow them to have access to a different set of electoral resources than other
groups.

While all models predicting the election of men produced larger positive co-racial population
coefficients than those for women from the same racial group, the results for White men also
suggest a degree of insulation for current patterns of descriptive representation against changing
demographic conditions. For White men, the effects of increases in the co-racial population are
larger and more robust in more recent elections. The 2010s election models for White men also
result in significant and negative coefficients for other racial groups, but they are smaller and/or less
frequently significant than in the models for elections during the late 1990s. There are similar
patterns throughout the models for African American men. The implications of these results are that
African American and White men running for state legislature are, in recent years, less susceptible to
adverse outcomes as a result of increases in the size of racial groups other than their own. However,
as before, the practical interpretations of these models, as they relate to changing patterns of
descriptive representation, are lopsided. If the current number of African American male
incumbents remains largely stable, despite the growth of Latina/o and Asian American populations,
will affect a much smaller number of districts, and therefore representatives, than if the current
number of White male incumbents remains largely unchanged.

For Latino and Asian American men, more recent elections show less promising results for
leveraging growing co-racial populations as a political resource than in the late 1990s. The
coefficients for their respective racial groups are substantial, but smaller in the 2010s models than in
the 1990s models. Most of the negative coefficients for other racial groups grow larger for Latino
and Asian American men in more recent elections as well. Even as Latina/o and Asian American
populations have grown, the effectiveness of that increasing size as a resource for the representation
of Latino and Asian American men appears to be less pronounced than in previous periods.
Notably, for Latino men, the largest negative coefficients are related to the growth of the Asian
American proportion of the population. The same is the case for Asian American men and the
growth of the Latina/o proportion of the population, and the magnitude of the negative effects is
about ten points apart in the 2010s model. This may be driven in part by the fact that much of the
growth of Latino and Asian American male descriptive representation has been occurring in
California in the last decade. In two of the three major regions of the state—Southern California and
the San Francisco Bay Area—Asian American and Latina/o populations have grown quickly and in
close physical proximity to one another in recent decades. The implications of these dynamics in
California are explored in more depth in Chapter 6.

On balance, the results of these models, and the polynomial plots in the preceding section,
indicate that women and men’s electoral success are not related to co-racial populations in the same
manner. There are several different ways to interpret the implications of this finding. The first might
be that women are more “free” to run in districts that are not necessarily dominated by members of
their own racial group. Indeed, in many of my interviews for other portions of this study, and in
some political science scholarship (Bejarano, 2013; L. R. Fraga, López, Matinez-Ebers, & Ramírez,
2006; Scola, 2006), women of color are often characterized as potentially excellent “crossover”
candidates. However, this additive approach assumes that somehow women’s racial identities are
diminished in favor of their gender identities. While women may have less to gain from co-racial
populations, that does not preclude the notion that a large co-racial population is necessary for most
women to be electorally successful. Moreover, this is contradicted by the data I have presented
showing that women and men within each racial group tend to win in districts with very similar
racial compositions. Generally speaking, if women were so unencumbered by their racial identities, it would follow that we would expect women of color to be relatively more successful in electoral politics than has been the case.

Another view of these results is that the constrained electoral opportunity context limits both women and men of color’s access to competition for descriptive representation, and places unique political and social pressures on the relatively few districts where people of color are a majority of the population. Those districts are largely driving the regression models’ results in this chapter, which demonstrate that the positive effects related to an increased co-racial population are substantially diminished for women of color.

More generally, this analysis demonstrates that notions of a growing population of Latina/os or Asian Americans, or of newly drawn districts with majority non-White populations, as safeguards or reassurances of democratic group competition, may be inaccurate. This misinterpretation of the prospects for descriptive representation is especially distorted for women of color. Their experiences of multiple dimensions of limited incorporation are reflected in disparate electoral outcomes over time, and in the much weaker benefits that growing populations of color appear to contribute to their chances of election. In the next chapter, I show that even as race serves to effectively constrain the broad electoral opportunity context for women and men of color, race-gender identities are also simultaneously positioning women less advantageously as potential candidates within districts. As a result, women of color are less able to leverage the electoral benefits related to a large co-racial population.
CHAPTER 4

Coming Out of Nowhere:
Visibility and Availability in Candidate Emergence

“People were really dismissive because I was to them, coming out of nowhere and it’s like, ‘Well, I’m not coming out of nowhere’...The problem is that I didn’t come out of nowhere. The problem is that these individuals weren’t paying attention.”

-- Mari Mendoza, Latina State Legislator

The structural absence of competition for descriptive representation is at the root of continuing underrepresentation for women and men of color. The political science literatures on women and racial minority candidate emergence have rarely contemplated integrating individual level considerations about running for office with the race-gendered institutions that foreground American elections. As a consequence, current theories explaining who runs and why are overly narrow in their scope, and bereft of guidance for understanding the continued underrepresentation of women of color.

In this chapter, I further develop an intersectional framework for understanding how different race-gendered groups’ visibility and availability shape candidate emergence, and in turn, prospects for descriptive representation. Visibility is the product of social and political processes that influence whether members of particular groups are likely to conceive of themselves as candidates, as well as whether they are physically or psychologically visible to consequential political elites as viable potential candidates. Availability is driven by candidates’ personal, professional and social considerations as they weigh the costs and benefits of running and serving in office. For all candidates, considerations that affect their immediate circles of relationships are relevant to the decision to run. However, the concerns of those immediate circles are more likely to have a deterrent effect on running for women than men. More broad concerns related to representing groups that have been marginalized in American politics are also a component of availability that is important to candidates who see themselves as members of a marginalized racial group, but which have not been sufficiently accounted for in previous scholarship.

The visibility and availability framework allows us to integrate candidates’ individual-level concerns with larger political systems and institutions that are shaped by social identity. It also illustrates the need for more precise empirical approaches to account for the mechanisms and structures that limit access to candidacy for many groups. Using a new survey of sitting state legislators that encompasses African American, Asian American, Latina/o and White women and men, I show that women are less visible and available as potential candidates for elected office than men—in ways that vary across racial groups. As a result, they are less well-positioned to become candidates when an opportunity—a newly drawn district, a rapid period of growth in the co-racial population, a special election, e.g.—arises.

In contrast to earlier scholarship, I demonstrate that lower levels of self-perception as a potential candidate are not the exclusive province of women across all racial groups. Additionally, I find that consideration of the effects of running for office on immediate relationships is more

21 Mari Mendoza is a pseudonym.
central to the decision calculus of certain groups of men than women. More broadly, by comparing reported experiences across all eight groups of women and men simultaneously, this study reveals that the pathways to office are distinctly race-gendered.

Candidate Emergence: Integrating the Personal and Social

The emergence and presence on the ballot of descriptive representatives has been identified as a potential linchpin of underrepresentation (Branton, 2009; Darcy & Schramm, 1977; Lawless & Fox, 2005; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2010; Shah, 2014a). However, this key stage in the electoral process has been approached by the race and ethnic politics, and women in politics literatures in a manner that renders women of color largely invisible (Montoya et al., 2000) and to an extent, obscures the unique position of White men in American politics.

The study of candidate emergence among people of color is a nascent, but growing body of scholarship (B. L. Fraga, 2013; Juenke, 2014; Lizotte & Carey, 2009; Maisel & Stone, 1997; Shah, 2014a). The political science literature on women’s presence on the ballot extends back much further (Darcy & Schramm, 1977). In recent years, studies of women’s emergence as candidates in the United States have often emphasized the weight of women’s personal spheres—particularly their understandings of themselves as candidates and their immediate relationships—in their decisions to run or not. Lawless and Fox (2005), have repeatedly argued that women are underrepresented in political office because they suffer from a deficit of political ambition in comparison to men, resulting in lopsided gender patterns among emerging candidates. Fulton et al have offered an important qualification to Lawless and Fox’s claims about individual ambition, arguing that while women’s ambition to run is, in the aggregate, lower than that of men, their decision to run is more influenced by their evaluation of their likelihood of success, and not ambition alone (Fulton, Maestas, Maisel, & Stone, 2006b).

Carroll and Sanbonmatsu move away from a sole focus on individual ambition to argue that “more for women than for men, running for office is a ‘relationally embedded’ decision.” (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). Central to their account is that women’s decisions to run are shaped more than men’s by their perceptions of the feelings and “needs” of the people with whom they have close relationships: family members, acquaintances in their political party and others in their immediate social sphere. While Carroll and Sanbonmatsu widen the social and political terrain available for understanding what women face and consider in getting on the ballot, their emphasis on personal relationships constrains their theorizing to a focus on the individual, which is a similar limitation of Lawless and Fox’s claims regarding ambition. By narrowing the analysis of candidacy decisions in this way, these theories fail to fully recognize women as members of at least one marginalized group—even as they try to explain their political marginalization.

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22 This is much less the case in the comparative politics literature on representation. Krook, Htun, Piscopo, and others show that electoral institutions, particularly quota systems, make a tangible difference in women’s representation, but not always without serious tradeoffs for less privileged women. (Krook, 2009; Htun, 2004; Piscopo, 2015).

23 I rely on Williams’ definition of marginalized ascriptive groups, which have four characteristic features: “1) Patterns of social and political inequality are structured along the lines of group membership, 2) membership in these groups is not usually experienced as voluntary; 3) membership in these groups is not usually experienced as mutable; and 4) generally, negative meanings are assigned to group identity by the broader society or the dominant culture.” (Williams, 2000)
To be clear, the authors in this debate recognize that women’s orientations towards their personal relationships, and conceptualization of themselves as capable leaders are to an extent a product of social and political structures. However, race and gender shape social structures and political power in different ways, (Schwindt-Bayer & Kittilson, 2008; Htun, 2004), and the central arguments in this body of research are largely driven by observation of the experiences of Whites. Theorizing about women’s underrepresentation that does not account for racial differences may fail to recognize what Dovi calls “the inclusion problem;” that increasing the inclusion of some women in political processes may come at the cost of excluding other types of women (Cohen, 1999; Dovi, 2007; Junn, 1997; Young, 2011).

Moreover, Hardy-Fanta, García Bedolla and others (García Bedolla, 2007; Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Takash, 1993) have shown that the manner in which leaders or representatives orient their individual concerns about serving, relative to those of a broader group, can vary; for some the concerns of the larger group take on a greater weight, but might not be a consequential factor for others. Thus, the generalizability of earlier models of women’s pathways to office is limited in two ways. One, they do not consider how group orientations and conceptualizations of self may vary across races and genders. Two, the racial context, either within the district or more broadly, is not meaningfully considered as a factor in or foreground to emergence.

I conceptualize candidate emergence as the product of processes that are simultaneously tied to membership in broad social identity groups, and concerns about individuals’ immediate and intimate relationships. These processes shape two characteristics of potential candidates: their visibility and availability (Table 4.1). The relative weights of these processes and their component parts on the decision to become a candidate across different race-gender groups is an “open empirical question” (Hancock, 2007a). Additionally, different factors will push potential candidates towards greater visibility or availability in certain situations, and pull them back, in others. While being a leader in an organization may, for example, make a person more visible to political elites, it may also diminish their availability to run for office if they feel that organizational leadership accomplishes a greater range of their personal and political goals than office holding might. The net result of the processes and factors delineated in this framework is a candidate’s positioning as a potential candidate, relative to potential candidates from other groups. Potential candidates who are more visible and available are in a better position to get on the ballot when a strategic electoral opportunity becomes available.

Visibility encompasses both internal recognition of a person or group’s potential to be an officeholder, and external visibility to political stakeholders as a potentially viable candidate. Internal visibility components can include factors like individual ambition, or viewing yourself as qualified enough to serve in office (Fulton, 2012). Additionally, “seeing yourself” in office is also a reflective behavior—White men, who regularly see people who share their demographic characteristics in office, presumably have an easier time conceptualizing themselves as officeholders more than most other groups, including women of color, who are the least represented in elected office.
Table 4.1: Dimensions of Visibility and Availability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Availability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-perception as a viable, qualified candidate and elected official.</td>
<td>Open about the desire to run for office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership in organizations that funnel people into politics.</td>
<td>View electoral politics as a useful venue for activism or professional goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership in organizations that funnel people into politics.</td>
<td>Domestic arrangements that can accommodate campaigning and part-time legislative occupation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit the demographic profile of the modal candidate from that area.</td>
<td>View running and serving as advancing broader goals related to marginalized group membership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

External visibility includes physical visibility. This can be fairly straightforward for potential candidates: Do the people who matter run into you at meetings and events? Do you have a public platform or other means of generating name recognition? Have you made public appearances or gestures that suggest you are someone who could run for office? Evidence from the women in politics literature emphasizes that political elites engaged in candidate development tend to restrict the networks they look to for potential candidates to those that have already yielded candidates (Krook & Norris, 2014). Thus, having civic and professional networks that include political gatekeepers and key donors, or a prominent profile in the types of organizations that tend to funnel candidates into appointed or elected office, are likely to make a person or group more visible in this framework. As one interview respondent described it, visibility requires that potential candidates are among the list of names people throw out while they “stand around at cocktail parties and pretend they have inside information about who is running for things.” In order to improve the odds that their names are among those being batted around, potential candidates need to circulate within the networks of other elites who are active in electoral politics.

Several intersectionality scholars have shown that as marginalized groups (like racial minorities) struggle and advocate in order to achieve mainstream political influence, the issues and voices of subgroups—particularly women—are often rendered invisible by relatively privileged group members who act as “representatives” (Cohen, 1999; Pardo, 1998; Strolovitch, 2006). This may result in decreased visibility for members of those marginalized subgroups. To illustrate, it may be the case that a city’s planning commission, which is not very racially diverse, needs to recruit a member who can speak to issues in historically Latina/o neighborhoods undergoing rapid gentrification. Members of that planning commission may reach out to Latina/os they are familiar with from other political or professional work. If the most visible Latina/os in city politics tend to be men, those seeking a Latina/o perspective may be satisfied that those men are sufficiently positioned to speak for and represent the entire Latina/o community. Thus, the limited opening for a “Latina/o” presence in government (and a highly visible position in local politics) is occupied by a Latino man, who is seen as a sufficient representative of the entire racial group.

Visibility also encompasses a psychological dimension. Individuals who do not fit the demographic profile of political elites engaged in candidate recruitment are less likely to be viewed as viable candidates (Niven, 1998). Women and people of color are much less numerous than White men among political elites and elected officials. Thus, they may suffer from an “outgroup bias,”
because recruiters tend to prefer people ascriptively like themselves. Women and people of color may also be subject to what Niven calls a “distributive bias,” because they have less of a track record of electoral success as groups, and may appear to be less of a sure bet in an election.

At its simplest, availability is rooted in how well electoral politics fits into a person’s life. State legislative politics may be a particularly difficult level of government to fit into a typical person’s financial, professional and personal arrangements. All but three state legislatures (California, New York and Pennsylvania) do not provide compensation equal to that of a full-time job that reasonably enables members to live in the state (Kurtz, Moncrief, Niemi, & Powell, 2006). While most state legislative members receive a salary akin to that of a part time job, most members estimate that they spend more than 50 percent of their time working as a legislator—even in states where the legislature meets every other year, or for short periods every year (Kurtz et al., 2006). The part-time nature of most legislatures requires not only financial flexibility for members, but also impinges on the ability of members to have other full-time work that may also be relevant to their personal and political goals.

As a determinant of candidate emergence, availability entails two sets of considerations: those related to immediate and intimate relationships, and considerations related to membership in a broad social identity group. Concerns related to immediate and intimate relationships are not entirely divorced from many of the issues related to visibility as a candidate. If individuals or groups are less likely to be openly ambitious about running for office, it is possible that they are also less likely to have their personal and professional lives arranged in a way that facilitates running for a part time job in a state legislature at some point. For example, economic and social structures may exert biased pressures on domestic arrangements regarding family life, that in turn produce race-gendered differences in availability.

However, it is inaccurate to characterize the weight of domestic arrangements and close relationships as either larger or smaller, or more or less relevant, for particular groups (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013). I argue that all potential candidates have a personal and professional life that matters to them, but men tend to be in an economic and social position such that their domestic arrangements are a positive force in their availability as candidates (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). The opposite is more often true for women—domestic arrangements are likely to be a negative factor in their potential availability as candidates more frequently, because they continue to be responsible for a larger share of domestic responsibilities, across racial groups (Pew Research Center, 2015), and thus the degree to which their home lives must be rearranged in order to run and serve is typically greater.

Availability may also be shaped by whether an individual or group sees running for political office as an appropriate or effective venue for their leadership and political activism. Gender differences have been identified in types of political practice and modes of activism, orientations towards formal political institutions, and access to mediating institutions (Gay & Tate, 1998; Hardy-Fanta, 2003; Jones-Correa & Leal, 1996; Montoya et al., 2000; Pardo, 1998; Takash, 1993). For women of color, those differences may intersect with political marginalization within their racial communities, (Cohen, 1999; Jaramillo, 2010; Pardo, 1998; Takash, 1993) and feelings of inaccessibility, inefficacy and distrust towards the political process linked to their membership in racial minority groups (Dawson, 1995; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Masuoka, 2007; Williams, 2000). Thus, availability may be shaped in part by whether electoral politics seems practically worthwhile, in light of individual and broader goals.

A final component of availability is explicitly derived from potential candidates’ perceptions of themselves as members of politically marginalized racial groups (or not). Previous studies have shown that elected officials who see themselves as members of a racial group that is historically underrepresented often include representing the interests of group members outside of their direct
constituency in their legislative agenda (Minta, 2011; Tate, 2003). For these legislators, membership in a broad social identity group that is politically marginalized is salient to the way they construct their role as an elected representative. Thus, it is likely that when they were in the candidacy stage, membership in a marginalized group also informed their decisions to run.

In this formulation, the salience of membership in a marginalized group exerts a positive force on the decision to run, even as the actual status of membership in that same group does not. It may serve as an additional motivation to create space in a person’s life for candidacy. Awareness and investment in marginalized racial group membership may also help potential candidates perceive a specific benefit of increasing representation that may be achieved simply by running, winning, and/or serving. The salience of membership in a marginalized racial group makes a particular perceived benefit available to people of color who are deciding whether to run, that is not available to Whites. However, it is worth noting that as potential candidates calculate the strategic costs and benefits of running in a particular race, this dynamic is one of many factors.

At the same time, women of color may face limits on their availability as candidates that stem from the intersection of systemic factors that pull women and people of color away from electoral politics. Potential female candidates may not run for office for many of the reasons related to gendered conceptions of political activism, ambition, or social pressure around domestic arrangements discussed earlier. For women of color, those issues may intersect with political marginalization within their racial communities, (Cohen, 1999; Jaramillo, 2010; Pardo, 1998; Takash, 1993) and feelings of inaccessibility, inefficacy and distrust towards the political process linked to their membership in racial minority groups (Dawson, 1995; Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Masuoka, 2007; Williams, 2000).

Earlier scholarship by women in politics and intersectionality scholars strongly suggests that the determinants of availability and visibility I have outlined will be race-gendered in their strength and scope. I expect that the net effects of these two sets of processes will be that women typically face more challenges in being visible and available as candidates than men, and that women of color will be, on net, less visible and available than White women, White men and co-racial men.

Data: The American Leadership Survey

To test these expectations, I fielded a national survey of sitting state legislators, the American Leadership Survey (ALS), during the first five months of 2015. An explicit goal of the survey was to collect enough responses from African American, Asian American, Latina/o and White women and men to allow for simultaneous comparison across all eight groups. Previous surveys focused on candidate emergence have included very few Asian American and Latina/o legislators in particular, thus precluding an intersectional analyses informed by their experiences (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013; Crowder-Meyer & Smith, 2015). In order to overcome this limitation, the ALS included three sampling frames: first, all sitting state legislators (N=7388); second, all Asian American and Latina/o state legislators (N=421); and third, a systematic sample stratified by legislative chamber, of legislators from all other racial groups in proportion to the number of Asian Americans and Latina/os in that chamber (N=1231).  

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24 According to the National Conference of State Legislators, there are 69 members of the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators in 2015.

25 For each Asian American and Latina/o member of a legislative chamber, I randomly selected one Republican and one Democratic member within that chamber to include in the stratified sample.
All legislators received several email invitations to take an online survey administered via Qualtrics. Paper surveys were also mailed to members of the stratified sample and all Asian American and Latina/o legislators. A telephone survey research firm, Braun and Associates, also placed calls to Asian American and Latina/o legislators. The overall response rate for the survey was 7.3 percent. The response rates among Asian Americans and Latina/os are 33 and 25 percent, respectively. The number of African Americans who responded is fairly small, in light of their overall presence in state legislatures nationally. While the small number of observations on particular questions sometimes poses challenges for determining statistical significance, the analytical methodology for this survey is oriented towards a comparison of patterns across groups over the course of several questions in the survey questionnaire.

Table 4.2: American Leadership Survey Respondents, Race and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race and Gender</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Survey Respondents</th>
<th>Percent of Election Wins 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Percent of ALS Respondents by Race and Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Northeast</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>Midwest</th>
<th>West</th>
<th>Pacific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Americans</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina/os</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of responses from Asian American and Latina/o legislators is the largest to date in any study focused on state legislative candidate emergence. Despite this, the survey reflects a reality in the geographic distribution of state legislators of color that was underscored in Chapter 3—they do not serve in as wide an array of states as Whites. Nearly half of all Asian American state legislators are in the West, while Whites are spread across all regions.

The stratified sample included legislators from every state except: Alabama, Iowa, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Carolina, and South Dakota.
legislators serve in Hawaii and Alaska, and another twenty percent in the Western states; similar percentages of Asian Americans in the ALS are from those states as well. The other thirty percent of Asian American survey respondents are evenly distributed throughout the South, Midwest and Northeast; regions that are home to substantial, as well as emerging, Asian American communities in metropolitan areas like Chicago, Atlanta and New York.

Latina/o survey respondents are similarly concentrated in two regions—the West and the Northeast—as are Latina/o state legislators generally. One limitation of the dataset is the relatively low number of Latina/o respondents from the South, in Florida and Texas in particular. Nearly one quarter of all Latina/o state legislators serve in this geographically expansive region; 7 percent of Latina/o ALS respondents are from the South. To a similar, but lesser extent, African American legislators are also more numerous in the South than in other regions, and that is reflected in nearly half of African American responses coming from legislators in that region.

These geographic concentrations present both opportunities and challenges for this analysis. With the exception of Latina/os in southern states, the distribution of survey respondents allows for an analysis of the pathways to candidacy in places where they have been most likely to happen. This analysis’ ability to shed light on candidate emergence in places where African American, Asian American and Latina/o populations are particularly sparse is more limited. However, as the previous chapter demonstrated, candidates of color have very rarely been successful in those types of districts.

Finally, the proportion of Democrats among ALS respondents (64 percent) was larger than the share of Democrats in state legislatures nationally (45 percent). African American, Asian American and Latina/o legislators sitting in 2015 tended to be Democrats much more often than not. The majority of Republican respondents were White men (55 percent of 259 White male respondents).

Table 4.4: Party Affiliation of ALS Respondents, Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democrat</th>
<th>Republican</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ALS survey questionnaire focuses on legislators’ experiences during their first run for the state legislature. Most questions relate to legislators’ civic and professional activities before running, the conditions and considerations surrounding their decision to run, and the campaign.
itself. The results underscore that the processes and attributes that determine potential candidates’ visibility and availability are quite different across race-gender groups. Additionally, the responses illustrate that previous disciplinary understandings of the roles that potential candidates’ race and gender play in shaping self-perceptions about serving, and interactions with political elites, require revision.

Results: Visibility

Potential candidates’ external and internal visibility are shaped in part by where and how different groups are socio-politically positioned before running for the state legislature. The ALS asks respondents to describe many aspects of their positioning, including previous office holding, professional work outside of politics, and their most intensive civic and organizational activities. These components of a candidates’ social life provide a window into how visible he or she may be to other political elites and activists. Overall, there are several areas of overlap across most groups, which we might expect since the survey respondents were all winners. However, there are also distinct patterns for several groups, particularly Asian American men and Latina and Asian American women, which suggest that these groups carve out pathways to office that depart from those undertaken by groups that are more frequently represented in state legislative office.

Previous office holding is a classic indicator in political science of candidate quality, and has been the subject of a number of studies showing that women tend to enter electoral politics or higher office—holding more “highly qualified” than men (García Bedolla, Tate, & Wong, 2005; Lawless & Fox, 2005; Lawless & Pearson, 2008). Authors have interpreted this finding as a signal that women hesitate, or wait longer, to enter contests for office for the first time or for higher office, than men due to feelings of inadequacy regarding their capacity to successfully run or serve (Lawless & Fox, 2005; Lawless & Pearson, 2008; Pearson & McGhee, 2013). Fulton’s examination of the gender-based candidate quality gap suggests that this “hesitation” may be at least partially strategic—women suffer from a support disadvantage among voters when they are not more qualified than men (Fulton, 2012).

Nearly half (47 percent) of all ALS respondents report holding a previous elective office before running for the state legislature for the first time. In keeping with expectations from the extant literature, African American, Asian American and White women reported holding a prior office before running for the state legislatures slightly more frequently than White men. However, the different frequencies reported are not statistically significant for any of the groups in Table 4.5. In a related vein, 47 percent of respondents also reported being involved in explicitly political organizations, with a slightly greater degree of variation across groups. Asian American men appear to be the largest outlier group; their lower level of involvement in political organizations is statistically significant from the overall mean at .05 percent. The frequency of Latinas reporting levels of involvement in political organizations is the same as that of White men.

28 Mo has recently demonstrated that this disadvantage may only be present among voters who explicitly prefer male candidates, and that other voters who express more egalitarian views more often choose the most qualified candidate (Mo, 2015).

29 Similar proportions of legislators reported being active in explicitly political organizations, 47 percent of respondents overall. However, Asian American men reported involvement with the party fairly infrequently (14 percent).
Table 4.5 Previous Office Holding and Political Organization Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Previously Held Office</th>
<th>Involved In Political Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These findings suggest two alternative theories to the notion that women tend to wait to run for higher office until they feel they are more qualified. First, it is possible that the degree to which women have lower self-perceptions of being qualified varies across racial groups. Second, it is also possible that women and men across racial groups have roughly equal self-perceptions of their qualifications, but that for some groups, that self-perception is less relevant than other concerns motivating them to run. For example, data presented later in this chapter show that Latinas and White women identify quite different motivations for running, suggesting that for some women, personal assessments of being qualified are outweighed by other concerns.

Regardless of how we might interpret previous office holding as an indicator of “internal” visibility for potential candidates, it is a reasonable supposition that holding political office would increase a potential candidate's external visibility to others. Given results from earlier in this study regarding the effects of a seemingly neutral factor like population size, it is also prudent to assume that the degree to which prior office holding raises candidates' visibility may vary across race-gender groups. Put another way, political experience, and the investment of significant amounts of time, may yield qualitatively different levels of external visibility to other elites, depending on roles undertaken, and the way those efforts are perceived depending on social identity group memberships.

Paid work outside the home is another facet of a candidate's social life that can yield benefits like professional prestige, expansive personal networks, and income to subsidize curtailed work time during a campaign, among others (Squire et al., 2001). These benefits (or the perception of these benefits) may not apply equally to all who have the same “public profile” before running, depending on their social position Niven's study of party leader perceptions of candidate quality as influenced by their gender showed this to be the case; his results suggest that a woman who works in a job traditionally ascribed to men in politics, such as being an attorney, may cause party leaders to consider her less appealing as a candidate than a male attorney (Niven, 1998), see also (Fulton, 2013). Professional occupations have often figured in academic discussions of the scarcity of women in the political pipeline for higher office holding. The logic of much of this research has been that since

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30 Several of Takash’s Latina informants, for example, stated that as candidates and elected officials, they felt they had to be smarter than the men and more qualified than non-minorities (Takash, 1993).
most male members of Congress worked in the fields of law, business, politics (and to a lesser extent, education), women’s increasing presence in those fields may boost their presence in elected office (Burrell, 1996; Fox & Lawless, 2014; Gertzog, 2002). However, recent research focused on women of color in elected office has shown that while the “traditional” fields that make up the eligibility pool in earlier studies is fairly accurate for White women and men, their relevance to understanding the emergence of candidates from other race-gendered groups varies (García Bedolla et al., 2005; Hardy-Fanta et al., 2016). Occupation reports from ALS respondents support the latter view (Table 4.6). Due to the small number of Asian American women respondents, and the wide array of occupation response options, I also used internet research to collect data on the occupations of all 37 Asian American women serving in state legislatures at the time the survey was fielded, and present that data in Table 4.6.

Across most race-gender groups, a small cluster of occupation types encompass roughly half of the responses, and a wider array of occupations are held by the other half. Similar to Hardy-Fanta et al’s findings (2016), African American women exhibit a larger concentration of legislators with an education background than other groups, but education is also among the top occupations for African American men, Latina/o women and men and White women and men. Among Asian American women and men, however, education is not among the top professional categories. However, educators are overrepresented among White men; nationally, about 7 percent of men in legislatures are educators, (Kurtz, 2015; Sanbonmatsu, 2006b). Two categories that have not been previously identified as key “feeder” industries are tech/engineering and non-profit and other related social work. Substantial percentages of Asian American and Latino men report working in tech/engineering. Non-profit work is the largest single category for Asian American women and Latinas, and a sizable category for African American women as well. If this data was aggregated by race or gender only, these two categories would not be as prominent.

One implication that can be drawn from this data is that prior studies examining the professions that form the “pipeline” to candidacy and elected office may be overly narrow, and most relevant to groups that have longer histories of higher office holding (most studies of the pipeline are based on members of Congress and state legislatures). Another possible implication is that potential candidates of color, and women in particular, may be less professionally visible than other groups. Party recruiters and others who develop candidates tend to draw from their own professional and civic networks. Thus, while women of color who are attorneys, small business owners, educators, or work for the government may have overlap within their political networks with political elites, that is less likely for leaders of non-profits. The same might be said for Asian American and Latina/o men in tech or engineering fields. It is worth recalling that this data is potentially revealing the tip of the iceberg—further research is required to understand how many potential candidates are in these sectors, who did not run, or win.

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31 Hardy-Fanta et al (2016) have a more extensive discussion of the ways in which earlier studies of the “eligibility pool” such as the Citizen Ambition study by Lawless and Fox, may suffer from selection bias, because of their failure to account for race-gendered variation in the types of occupations that foster candidacy.

32 However, the presence of Asian American, Latina and African American women in these professions does not necessarily mean that the degree to which they are visible to political elites is equal to that of men. Within each of these industries, there is extensive documentation that women of color face greater barriers to advancement and discrimination than similarly situated men of color (Acker, 2006; Alston, 2000; Vallejo, 2009).
Table 4.6 Occupational Industries of ALS Respondents, Percent
(*Figures reported for Asian American Women are for all group members serving in 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>58</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Owner (Other)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney/Law</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Profit/Social Work</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Employee (Other)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate or insurance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tech/Engineering</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement/Military</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Employed (Other)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not work outside the home</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On a related note, professional networks are also a key source of fundraising opportunities. Fundraising prospects are a central consideration for most candidates in evaluating whether to run for office. Women of color who work in the “traditional” fields may readily visualize raising money related to their professional networks—attorneys in large firms, teachers’ unions, small business associations, etc. This may also be the case for men of color working in tech. However, there are fewer organizational networks for non-profit organizations, and by definition, their leaders and members likely have fewer liquid assets available for campaign contributions.

Profession based organizations are also among the top four types of civic activities legislators reported spending the most time on before running for office. The other three were school or education related organizations, religious organizations, and ethnic or cultural organizations (Table 4.7). Approximately one quarter of African American, Asian American and White men reported being very active with profession-based associations. Women from those groups reported significantly lower rates of involvement. This may amplify the relative lack of professional visibility that some groups of women of color, and Latino men, may experience based on their industry. However, African American women, who report the highest rates of working in education, also frequently report involvement in school related organizations. In contrast, Asian American men, who reported working in education relatively infrequently, are among the most often involved in education related associations and activities.

Table 4.7: Types of Civic Activities of ALS Respondents, Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Religious</th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking across all four types of civic activities, Latina women’s patterns of involvement are distinct. As mentioned earlier, Latinas did not report especially frequent involvement with profession-based or education related associations. Women generally report similar or slightly lower frequencies of involvement in religious organizations than co-racial men, a gap that is particularly pronounced among Latina/os. The single most frequently reported type of civic activity among all groups is involvement with cultural or ethnic associations among Latinas. Taken together, these results support earlier scholarship demonstrating that Latinas may be most frequently engaged in cultural and ethnic community-based associations. However, the cultural associations that legislators named in the survey are not typically oriented towards electoral politics, and likely do not provide the same degree of visibility for potential candidates and other types of associations. The sample size for Asian American women is quite small, but it is worth noting that a similar pattern is also present for the results from that group.
The data on social positioning from the ALS suggest that while candidates across all groups have similar levels of political experience, they do not necessarily have the same degree of visibility to other political elites. There is less overlap between the civic activities of Latina women in particular, and other groups. The contours of visibility are an important context for interpreting how successful candidates make the decision to run for office, and the role of external recruiters and motivation, as well as discouragement, in that process.

The ALS replicates a question originally developed by Moncrief et al (and further developed by Carroll and Sanbonmatsu) that attempts to discern what percentage of candidates thought of running on their own, and what proportion had never thought of themselves running for office until someone else suggested it (Fig. 4.1). Survey respondents were asked to choose between three choices to describe their decision: “It was entirely my idea to run,” “I had already thought seriously about running when someone else suggested it,” and “I had not seriously thought about running until someone else suggested it.” The combined percentage of respondents who chose either of the first two choices indicates how frequently each group reported that the idea to run was self-generated.

Figure 4.1: “Which of the following most accurately describes your decision?”

When describing the decision to run, groups of men do not consistently report that they thought of running on their own more frequently than women. African American women report that they thought of running on their own at roughly the same rate as Latina/o men, and more frequently than African American and Asian American men. Latinas report thinking of running on their own at rates similar to Asian American and African American men. For White women, the
frequency is similar to Asian American men as well. Asian American women are the only group who considered running on their own less frequently than all groups of men. These results indicate that gender, by itself, is not a clear indicator of the likelihood of “seeing yourself” as a potential candidate or elected official.

The results also raise the possibility that previous emphases in the women in politics literature on women’s “deficit” of ambition may be partly rooted in methodology. White men report independently seeing themselves in office more frequently than any other group. If this analysis were primarily based on the responses of Whites only, it would appear that gender makes a difference in the likelihood that someone reports latent political ambition. White men see themselves in office so frequently that (even though White women’s responses are about evenly split between the first two responses and not thinking of running until someone else suggested it) White women appear to have pre-existing visions of office-holding far less frequently.

Likewise, within other racial groups, women often (but not always) report thinking of running on their own less often than men, but it is erroneous to characterize that as simply a gender difference. The social and political experiences of groups of women and men across races are distinct (Cohen, 1999; García Bedolla & Scola, 2006; Pardo, 1998), and the finding that some groups of women see themselves running for office more often than some groups of men is further evidence of that. Thus, the likelihood that potential candidates view themselves as such is more accurately characterized as varying by race-gender.

As to the other facet of visibility—being seen by others as a candidate—the responses depicted in Fig 4.1 indicate that there may be an internal and external disconnect for some groups. The key difference between the first and second response choices are whether the respondent thought of running on their own entirely, or whether they thought of running, and had that idea externally validated. Moncrief, et al. (the originators of this question) labeled those who select the second response the “encouraged.” The consequences of being encouraged are likely not determined in isolation, or uniform across groups. Among groups that “fit” the profile of the modal candidate in their state, such as White men in most states, for example, encouragement may matter less to the decision to run. For others, who are less well represented, encouragement may matter more because it conveys that certain resources and benefits might be available during the campaign, or simply that others accept the idea of a candidate from a particular group as legitimate. Even that encouragement may be discounted in potential candidates minds, as recent research has shown that women do not believe that recruiters encouraging them to run will provide the same degree of material support during the campaign as they will give to men who run (Butler & Preece, 2016).

Among African Americans and Latina/os, the splits between thinking of running on your own and being encouraged are quite distinct between women and men. For Latina women, half the respondents who said they thought of running on their own said it was entirely their own idea, and half said they were encouraged. In contrast, Latino men who thought of running disproportionately reported that they were encouraged. African American women said that they were encouraged much more frequently among those who thought of running on their own, and the opposite is true for African American men.

Latinas and African American men apparently see themselves running, but do not have that idea reflected back to them as frequently as other co-racial group members. It is not necessarily the case that the similarity in their results implies identical underlying mechanisms or consequences. To illustrate, respondents were asked whether they were discouraged from running by a leader in their political party. Latinas stand apart from all other groups, reporting being discouraged much more frequently (Table 4.8). The relative deficit of encouragement that Latinas receive, in combination with higher levels of dissuasion from the party, suggest that while Latinas envision themselves running fairly frequently, others in their immediate networks do not necessarily share that view.
Table 4.8: Discouragement by a Party Leader, Percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pattern of results across the battery of visibility questions for Asian American men is also noteworthy, but in a different vein than that for Latinas. Asian American men report lower levels of involvement in political organizations before running for the state legislature than all other groups. They also number among the groups reporting that they thought of running on their own least frequently. Yet, despite a relative lack of experience in political organizations and government work, and self-perception of themselves as candidates, Asian American men are apparently viewed by others as potential office holders fairly often. The caveat to this result is that most of the Asian American male respondents to the survey are from Hawaii—but so are the Asian American female respondents, and they do not exhibit the same patterns. A large share worked in government and had more frequently reported being very active in political organizations. Taken together, this suggests that in the rare context of a large co-racial population, Asian American men may not need to have an internal vision of themselves as candidates—it is sufficient that they “look” like a potential office holder to people around them.

Results: Availability

The questionnaire also provides an opportunity to evaluate the motivations and considerations that state legislators weigh while deciding to run, and illustrates that availability is shaped by both immediate relationships and broad social identity group concerns. The mix of factors that inform an individual’s actual and/or perceived ability to fit a campaign and office-holding (which in all but seven states, is officially a part-time job) into their life are likely intertwined to a considerable extent, and difficult to disaggregate. Both of the questions targeting availability force respondents to prioritize one or several factors among a wider array of choices.

The survey asks respondents to identify the single most important reason they ran for the state legislature, other than having an ability to affect policy. The choice, “I was asked,” (Table 4.9) places the relationship between the respondent and their recruiter at the center of their motivation to run. Being asked was chosen most frequently by White women and Asian American men, who also had the highest rates of reporting that they did not think of running until they were asked in the earlier question describing the decision to run. While this supports the notion that recruitment is important to the emergence of some groups as candidates (Carroll & Sanbonmatsu, 2013), there is no consistent gender pattern among those who identify being asked as more important.
Table 4.9: “What was the single most important reason that you ran?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>&quot;I Was Asked&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Represent: Historically Marginalized&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Represent: People Like Me&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American Women</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American Men</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In light of the preceding discussion of encouragement and discouragement, it is also worth noting that zero Latina legislators responded that being asked was most important. This highlights the necessity of allowing for similar measures to have varying meanings across groups—being asked may be suggestive of the importance of close relationships for some, and indicative of a structural absence of outreach to others.

Other than influencing policy, wanting to represent others is arguably the most socially desirable response when asking elected officials why they ran for office. In order to elide differences in how legislators conceptualize who or what they are representing, the question on motivation to run offers two response choices regarding representation. One choice says “I wanted to represent communities that have not traditionally had a strong voice in government,” and cues historically marginalized groups. The other choice: “I wanted to make sure that people like me have a real say in government,” cues the respondent’s own identity and group membership. For respondents who see themselves as members of marginalized groups, these answers may read as quite similar, except that “people like me” explicitly includes the interests of the person reading it in those being identified for representation, and the “Historically Marginalized” answer does not.

The most concentrated response frequencies overall for this question are found among groups of respondents who identified representation of historically underrepresented communities as the primary motivation for running—Latinas, and African American women and men. Regardless of whether respondents in these groups included themselves in the “historically underrepresented,” the lopsided rates of this choice suggest that politically marginalized groups are particularly salient in the decision to run for African American and Latina women, and African American men. Potential candidates for elected office—particularly those included in this survey sample—more often than not already have lives full of professional, civic and personal responsibilities and activities. Choosing to run for office involves trading off time from other pursuits that may be more immediately lucrative and encroach less on personal activities. The reasons for running identified in this question reveal that the factors motivating busy and successful individuals to make themselves available to run for office are more expansive for some groups than previously considered.

Recruitment is reported as central to the decision to run more frequently for White women and Asian American men, but the opportunity to represent historically marginalized groups appears key to understanding the emergence of Latinas and African American women and men. These motivations may provide an additional—and necessary—perceived benefit to groups that face a long list of factors that tend to reduce their availability for campaigning and office-holding.
Respondents were also asked to identify the top four considerations that pushed them towards, or pulled them away, from affirmatively deciding to run for the state legislature (Fig. 4.1). The four most frequently selected choices by group are listed in Table 4.10. Responsibilities and priorities related to domestic arrangements and immediate personal relationships were included in the most frequent choices for all groups. Asian American and Latino men reported a particular emphasis on this domain of considerations. Latinas and African American women reported concerns in this area least frequently.

Table 4.10: Top Four Considerations When Deciding to Run, Percent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African American Women</th>
<th>African American Men</th>
<th>Asian American Women</th>
<th>Asian American Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Voice (91)</td>
<td>Job Time (75)</td>
<td>Spouse Approve (91)</td>
<td>Spouse Approve (64)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy (72)</td>
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<td>Strong Voice (64)</td>
<td>Job Time (61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Money (46)</td>
<td>Spouse Approve (45)</td>
<td>Family Time (55)</td>
<td>Family Money (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Time/Shared Race (36)</td>
<td>Shared Race (45)</td>
<td>Campaign Money (46)</td>
<td>Campaign Money (46)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latina Women</th>
<th>Latino Men</th>
<th>White Women</th>
<th>White Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong Voice (67)</td>
<td>Spouse Approve (64)</td>
<td>Job Time (63)</td>
<td>Job Time (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Time (62)</td>
<td>Job Time (52)</td>
<td>Spouse Approve (61)</td>
<td>Spouse Approve (65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Race (52)</td>
<td>Family Money (40)</td>
<td>Strong Voice (56)</td>
<td>Strong Voice (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy (38)</td>
<td>Strong Voice (40)</td>
<td>Policy (54)</td>
<td>Policy (48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Which of the following considerations were most important to you when you were deciding whether to run? Choose up to four.

- Having sufficient financial resources to conduct a campaign.
- Approval of my spouse or partner.
- Ensuring that I have time to meet my family commitments.
- Having sufficient financial resources to support my family.
- Having an occupation that would allow me the time and flexibility to run for office.
- Having a shared racial, ethnic or cultural background with many of my constituents.
- Making sure that people like me have a strong voice in government.
- Being able to address a key public policy issue.
- Other ________________________”

In light of longstanding disparities in the numbers of women and men (across and within racial groups) who run for office, a possible interpretation of these results is that gendered social structures and pressures determine whether immediate and intimate relationships and their related concerns exert a negative or positive influence on the decision to run. Men may be concerned about their spouse’s approval, for example, for many reasons, including that a spouse may be required to take up a larger share of domestic responsibilities (both financial and care-based) when men run.
For example, among married heterosexual couples, there is extensive evidence that women do much more domestic work than men (Bianchi et al., 2000; Pew Research Center, 2015) even though they work outside the home at similar rates. Thus, when men run, the time required to campaign and serve may not frequently require as much of a shift—personal and family systems are likely already in place for their wives to take on the majority of the burden of domestic life. For women who run, however, being available to run and serve may require some upheaval of current systems already in place surrounding domestic life. Thus, while men and women may hold concerns about immediate relationships and their personal worlds with similar frequency, the practical impact on availability likely tends to be more negative for women, and positive for men.  

Latinas and African American women and men include “Having a shared race or cultural background with my constituents,” quite frequently in their top considerations. Additionally, African American and Latina women place a greater emphasis on considerations outside of their immediate relationships than other groups. This underscores a continuing pattern in the results among these three race-gender groups—the heightened salience of membership in a marginalized racial group and a de-emphasis of immediate and individually oriented concerns as the primary influencers of candidacy. For these groups, the concerns that shape practical, and perceived, availability to become candidates include both personal and more broad based issues.

When viewed in total, legislators’ overall responses to the survey strongly suggest several race-gendered patterns. White men appear to see themselves as candidates quite clearly and are encouraged in that regard by those around them. White women see themselves as candidates less frequently than White men, but that is the case for all other groups as well. White and Asian American women frequently report becoming candidates after receiving encouragement to do so from others. However, White women report being motivated by that recruitment much less than Asian American women, who cite representation concerns at higher rates.

Asian American men, and Latinas, appear to have particularly distinct, and opposite, pathways to candidacy. Latinas appear to face numerous socio-political and potentially structural challenges in becoming candidates. They report envisioning themselves as candidates often, but are encouraged to run less than Latino men, and discouraged more frequently than anyone else. The sources of that discouragement are key—hearing from leaders in your own party that you should not run may be interpreted as a signal of diminished support and resources during the campaign. It is worth noting here that these impediments are being reported by people who ran and won, and thus are likely conservative sketches of these obstacles. A possible clue as to why Latinas persist as candidates in spite of these challenges may be seen in the consistent salience of membership in a marginalized racial group in their responses. Scholars of Latina/o political activism have emphasized a “community uplift” motivation present among Latina women active in politics that is less clearly prevalent among Latino men (Hardy-Fanta, 2003).

Asian American men’s responses exhibit patterns that set them apart from other groups, in reduced levels of seeing themselves as candidates and consistent emphasis on immediate and intimate relationships and concerns. They report never thinking of themselves as candidates until recruitment approximately as often as African American men, but unlike African American men,  

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33 More research is needed to determine whether this dynamic is as relevant when considering the candidacies of individuals with same-sex partners, or who are not married, regardless of sexuality. Interview data from other parts of this study shows that some groups of women of color who are unmarried have to contend with extended family obligations to an extent that may limit their availability as candidates in a manner that is similar to married women with dependents.
Asian Americans do not report thinking of running completely on their own nearly as often. Asian American women were the only group that reported substantially more frequently that they had not thought of running for office at all. Asian American men also report that being asked was the most important reason for running nearly as often as White women. Taken together, this implies that being asked to run is necessary for Asian American men to consider running for office, and that recruitment is meaningful to their ultimate decision. In other words, Asian American men are being asked and being asked is important to their decision to run as well.

Within each racial group, there are several striking points of similarity and dissimilarity between men and women. Latinas and Latinos appear to be quite dissimilar in their pathway to candidacy across all of the measures of visibility and availability reported here, to an extent unlike men and women in the other groups. As mentioned earlier, while White women envision themselves as office-holders less frequently than White men and emphasize recruitment less than White men, they report very similar sets of considerations that are relevant to the decision to run. Asian American women and men both report seeing themselves as candidates less frequently than many other groups, but Asian American women report representation as a motivation to run much more frequently than Asian American men. Finally, African American men and women repeatedly report strong orientations towards marginalized group representation as a source of motivation and key consideration for running.

All of the minority women and men share a distinguishing factor that shapes candidate emergence—a scarcity of opportunities to run in districts where their own racial groups or other communities of color in combination are the majority (Branton, 2009). Whites are uniquely positioned as candidates with regard to the racial context; in all but three states, more than half of all districts are majority White (NHGIS, 2016). The salience of the broader racial context is apparent in the candidacy deliberations of African Americans and Latina women, and a central factor in the motivations that shape their availability. Among Asian Americans and Latino men, their personal connection to a racial minority community appears less explicitly salient to the decision to run in this analysis. Taking the results of Chapter 3 into account, this implies that while a large co-racial population may be an important factor in the candidacy decisions of most people of color, the reasons for its centrality, and how it informs candidate emergence, is not the same across race-gender groups.

Conclusion

The ALS results demonstrate that the visibility and availability framework’s integration of immediate/personal concerns and issues related to membership in a marginalized community is a more accurate approach to explaining electoral outcomes, such as candidacy, that are driven by socio-political processes. This chapter shows that candidate emergence theories focused on women’s individual self-perceptions and immediate relationships reveal only part of the strategic calculus for candidates, and are most relevant to understanding the emergence of White candidates. A deficit of ambition, or limited vision of oneself as a potential candidate, is not uniformly or universally central to the less frequent emergence of women from all racial groups as candidates. Additionally, responses to the ALS demonstrate that all potential candidates give substantial weight to concerns about their immediate and intimate relationships when deciding to run, and that some women and men of color also consider a set of concerns related to membership in a broader social group related to their racial identity.

Correctly identifying the aspects of candidate emergence processes—both behavioral and institutional—that are most relevant to particular groups has bearing on continuing debates over the
types of reforms and remedies that will increase race and gender diversity in governing institutions. As an example, the two fastest growing groups of women in the United States are Latinas and Asian American women, and they represent the two smallest shares of both candidates for and office holders, in state legislatures. Going forward, programs that are designed to increase the number of female candidates, or the number of candidates of color, may exacerbate underrepresentation if they do not address issues of visibility and availability on a race-gendered basis. National candidate recruitment programs often focus on increasing women’s confidence in running for office, and expanding recruitment networks. However, if they do not also address the particular issues related to race and ethnicity that clearly motivate, and challenge, female candidates of color, programs focused on boosting ambition or confidence may be most successful for White women, and do little for others.

One of the potential limitations of the data in this chapter is that it captures the experiences of a very select group—winners. Arguably, the respondents to the American Leadership Survey reached a high threshold of visibility and availability in order to run and win a state legislative seat in the first place. Thus, it may be the case that the survey is a conservative portrayal of the invisibility of some groups, particularly Latina women. It may also be the case that the additional motivation tied to membership in a marginalized social group that Latinas and African American women and men demonstrate were sufficient to help the winners in the survey overcome other issues related to their availability and get on the ballot, but that it was insufficient for other members of those groups who did not run. On balance, the survey’s focus on winners allows us to see only a proportion of the challenges that potential candidates face in getting on the ballot. Future research drawing on “candidate pools” will be able to speak to these issues if it is designed with a greater focus on the professions and social groups that legislators of color, particularly women tend to emerge from (Hardy-Fanta et al., 2016; Lawless & Fox, 2005). However, the ultimate goal in electoral politics is to win elections, and by understanding the experiences of winners, the survey allows for insight into what it takes to become a candidate who can win.

Another approach to understanding how the responses of winners fit into the broader range of individuals who consider becoming candidates, or who become candidates and lose, is to conduct further qualitative research focused on pathways to office. Chapter 5 undertakes this task, by using quantitative analysis of candidacy patterns, and qualitative analysis of media reports and in-depth interviews, to inform a case study of pathways to candidacy for Latina/os and Asian Americans in Los Angeles County. The in-depth interviews in particular, further substantiate the patterns of invisibility and complexities of availability suggested by the survey, and establish that there are clear ties between socio-political positioning, and the visibility and availability of potential candidates.
CHAPTER 5

Race-Gendered Pathways to Elected Office in Los Angeles County

The Los Angeles metro area encompasses the largest immigrant community in the United States. Roughly 6 million Latina/os and 2 million Asian Americans call it home. Together, these two groups mark Los Angeles as a place where nearly two-thirds of residents are immigrants or the children of immigrants. In this respect, one way to view Los Angeles’ political landscape is as a preview of the future of the United States, wherein the population is largely people of color, and growth is driven by immigrants and their families (Pew Research Center, 2016; Ramakrishnan, n.d.).

In another respect, Los Angeles’ politics also bear characteristics of a racial history that is shared with other regions of the United States. While Los Angeles has been heralded as a stronghold for Latina/o elected officials, White men continue to play a dominant role in electoral politics. They are the majority of electoral candidates, and among the key gatekeepers in Democratic and Republican circles. Historic waves of African American migration to the area helped to define a central piece of the Democratic coalition, but the African American population contracted in size amidst ongoing growth within immigrant communities. And, as in many other parts of the country, most state and federal political jurisdictions encompass White majority populations, and women from every racial group are elected at much lower rates than co-racial men.

This chapter leverages Los Angeles’ dual position as a region defined by racial political histories, and an immigrant majority future, to demonstrate that race-gendered electoral and political institutions can limit access to competition for descriptive representation. I use data from 30 in-depth interviews with candidates, campaign professionals, donors and other political leaders to examine the pathways to office for Asian American and Latina/o women and men in Los Angeles county. I also use a new dataset that tracks the race and gender of all state legislative general and primary election candidates in the county, from 1996-2016, to illustrate that, as in the national case, Los Angeles’ non-White population growth has occurred in tandem with the racial diversification of men in the state legislature—and a rapid decline in the presence of women from all racial groups, particularly Asian Americans and Latinas.

The Los Angeles case also allows for an examination of the differences in the trajectories of political incorporation for two large, and growing immigrant communities. Asian Americans and Latina/os have both had a long history in the county, and share many characteristics of political incorporation: substantial shares of the population are non-citizens, numerous challenges related to voter registration and turnout, and ongoing waves of new arrivals. However, there are also clear differences in political outcomes for these two racial groups: Latina/os, particularly men, are leading figures in Democratic politics, and have a strong track record of electoral success. Asian Americans have rarely been elected above the school board level, and most of the recent winners have been Republicans.

Prior political science scholarship on Los Angeles has rarely compared these two groups (but see Kim and Lee 2001), but the prospects for racial cooperation in the city and county were a frequent topic in other social science disciplines in the wake of the 1992 civil unrest following the acquittal of Los Angeles police officers who beat motorist Rodney King (Chang, 1993; Park, 2001; Sonenshein, 1993). Conventional wisdom among local political actors often attributes much of the

34 The New York Metropolitan area, which encompasses counties from four states, has an Asian American population that is estimated to be fairly close in size to that in the Los Angeles Metropolitan area.
difference to distinctions between the two populations: Latina/os are numerically larger, predominantly from one national origin group (Mexico) and live in more ethnically dense enclaves around the county. Asian Americans are more ethnically heterogeneous, more residentially dispersed and much smaller in number than Latina/os. While these differences are correct and relevant, I argue that this analytical frame, which treats Asian Americans and Latina/os as political “apples and oranges,” is overly narrow. It fails to account for the institutional and socio-political limits on access to electoral competition that all race-gender groups, except White men, face in Los Angeles.

Similarly, many of the male political figures that I interviewed for this study attributed the lower rates of Asian American and Latina women’s success and emergence as candidates to issues among women themselves: either that there was no such thing as “women’s solidarity” to draw voters, or that women lacked some emotional component—ambition, a desire for the spotlight, confidence—necessary for candidacy. The responses from women in both groups were a sharp contrast. Many described candidate development processes in Los Angeles as simultaneously racialized and gendered, albeit to different degrees, reflective of the difference in the level of political organization within both communities.

These findings represent the first in-depth, and side-by-side, analysis of the descriptive representation of the two largest urban immigrant communities in the United States. They also speak more broadly to the peril of assuming that populations will eventually “get there” in terms of descriptive representation and meaningful mainstream political influence. Even in what is arguably the most racially diverse, and politically progressive, major urban center in the United States, the electoral field of opportunities is sharply constrained by race and gender.

Los Angeles County: Lasting Structures, Shifting Coalitions

As the geographic boundary for studying the emergence and success of Asian American and Latina/o candidates, Los Angeles County encompasses several advantages over a political jurisdiction, such as a state legislative district. Chief among them is the ability to track the activities of Asian American and Latina/o political elites and candidates across districts and levels of office. Term limits and high barriers to entry for most seats in the city, county and state levels create the conditions for what is commonly referred to in Los Angeles as “musical chairs:” politicians typically move from an Assembly seat, to a City Council seat, to a county Supervisor seat, and so on. Thus, while individual districts and the communities they include and divide are important, looking only within one or two would be akin to explaining the movement of a bicycle by only looking at the pedals.

In broad political terms, the county can currently be described as a Democratic stronghold, where several racial and interest groups regularly contest for power, and in which organized labor often plays a decisive role in election outcomes. This current configuration has come into being during the last two decades, but departs from Los Angeles’ political history in several ways. Since the end of predominantly Mexican settlement in Los Angeles in the late 1860s, groups other than White conservatives faced political exclusion for most of the 20th century (García Bedolla, 2016; G. J. Sanchez, 1995; Sonenshein, 1993). African Americans were able to gain some economic traction, particularly in comparison to African Americans in other cities, during the land boom period in the late 1800s and again during World War II. However, those gains were undermined and challenged by restrictive housing covenants and other segregationist measures enacted by allied groups of conservative White landowners and more recent White migrants from the Midwest and South (Sonenshein, 1993).

At the same time, Chinese and Japanese American population growth was severely curtailed by anti-Asian sentiment, and policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the enactment
of new immigration restrictions in 1924. The internment of Japanese Americans further disrupted and dispersed Asian American communities in the mid 20th century.

African Americans and liberal Whites began forming political alliances that yielded electoral gains beginning in the 1960s, and established a Democratic coalition that was most closely identified with Tom Bradley’s twenty year tenure as mayor, ending in 1993 (Sonenshein, 1993). These alliances were repeatedly tested during the mid 1990s, which encompassed dramatic events and ensuing shifts in the political landscape: the 1992 uprising following the Rodney King verdict, divisive campaigns leading up to the passage of Proposition 187, and the election of White conservative Republican Richard Riordan as Mayor.

Against this backdrop of multiracial politics, scholars of Los Angeles have identified pro-business and development organizations and individuals as a long-standing seat of power in the county (Davis, 2006a; Sonenshein, 1993). The activities and interests of this segment of Los Angeles’ political elite have often been racialized. For example, at one point in the city’s history, the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency was widely nicknamed the “Chicano Removal Agency (Villa, 2009).” Displacement of Chinese, Mexicans and other ethnic groups from enclaves in and around downtown Los Angeles have been ongoing since the earliest days of the city’s founding (Davis, 2006a; L. T. Saito, 2009; G. J. Sanchez, 1995; J. Wong, 2008). Up to the present day, as Los Angeles continues to be a county defined by population growth and diversity, real estate development interests play a central role in a wide range of policy debates and elections.

As in other Western metropolitan areas, party organizations are not woven into the fabric of political influence in Los Angeles. City and county elections are officially nonpartisan, and voters have been frequently described as having an “anti-machine-politics” posture towards government (Sonenshein, 1993). However, partisanship matters deeply among political elites, and there are highly organized political operations. One of the most widely discussed machines, the Waxman-Berman machine, was organized around two Democratic members of Congress, Henry Waxman and Howard Berman. Their support, and suppression, of candidates and issues is largely credited with shaping electoral politics in the San Fernando Valley and areas west of downtown Los Angeles for nearly four decades. The Waxman-Berman machine formed a key linchpin in the political alliance between African Americans and liberal, often Jewish, Whites (Sonenshein, 1993). Interview respondents also highlighted other, more recent circles of what they described as “machines” based around individuals, particularly around Latino Democrats Art Torres and Antonio Villaraigosa, and Asian American Democrat Judy Chu.

Organized labor began to emerge as a major mobilization force in the mid 1990s, and unions rose in electoral prominence in tandem with Latina/o immigrants. Changes in the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor’s (the Fed) leadership shifted the organization’s engagement mode from primarily “checkbook politics” to voter turnout, (Frank & Wong, 2004) and a more direct role for labor in shaping who is on the ballot. Miguel Contreras’ election as chair of the Fed in 1996 ushered in a period of unions working strategically with long-time allies to help elect “labor warriors” to powerful local seats and the state legislature, who would in turn champion policies focused on worker and immigrant community priorities (Frank & Wong, 2004). These allies were not merely card-carrying Democrats, or willing to visit union shops for photo opportunities. A number of candidates at the city and state level were, and continue to be, former organizers and union staff members, or longtime non-profit and community partners who assisted with union organizing drives. Once in office, they provided public support for union organizing campaigns, and policy initiatives targeting immigrant and low income communities.

Local outposts of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HERE) union, in particular, began shifting greater resources towards election campaigns and new organizing efforts. This shift extended beyond fundraising and voter
mobilization, establishing a new integration of electoral work with unions’ internal leadership development and incorporation of new members. One longtime labor leader described it as a period of cultural change within unions, which also altered the political landscape of L.A.

Miguel [Contreras] completely harnessed the energy of this growing organizing strength in L.A. labor, chiefly the hotel workers and the janitors.
Under his leadership, all the union leaders, all the union staff, all the union rank and file activists were mobilized. And so, he totally flipped the culture where you couldn’t find a parking space in any of the union buildings for the weeks leading up to an election. Because everybody was phone banking. Everybody was out doing precinct walking. And if you weren’t there, there's something wrong with you—then you’re not really a union leader.

Through this process, staff and worker leaders in both unions began gaining technical expertise in Getting Out The Vote (GOTV), and exposure to political elites. While there is variation in the political skills and mobilization capacity of individual unions in the County, the endorsement of one of the large constituent service unions, or the Fed as an umbrella organization, is widely perceived by political practitioners as a consequential factor in many elections. As a result, unions are at the center of Democratic politics in Los Angeles—and Democratic politics is, in many parts of the county, the only game in town.

Los Angeles’ Electoral Context: The Walls are High, the Path is Narrow

Extensive mobilization of fiscal and human resources is often necessary to mount a credible election campaign in Los Angeles. Institutional arrangements elevate the barriers to entry for holding elected office at the city and state level (Culbert, Sonenshein, Mitchell, & Brown, 2014; L. Saito, 1993; Sonenshein, 2005; J. Wong, 2008). Los Angeles has a relatively small Council for a city of its size; 15 seats for a population of approximately four million people in 2016. Likewise, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has five members who run in districts with nearly two million residents each. Geographically and numerically large districts raise the costs of mounting successful campaigns. Districts with large immigrant communities also necessitate extensive voter mobilization efforts. Winning a city or county election is a particularly coveted prize due to the size of city and county seats, and their budgetary portfolios. State legislative seats are located in the middle of the top tier in terms of prestige, and are the most numerous type of elected seat above the local level.

Interview respondents often emphasized the role that term limits have played in keeping well-connected and experienced candidates circulating through seats around the city and county. At the state legislative level, term limits have been in place since the early 1990s. State Assembly members elected before 2012 are permitted a total of six years in that body, State Senators are allowed a total of eight. Revisions to term limits for the state legislature were enacted in 2012, and legislators may now serve a total of 12 years in both chambers, in any configuration. City elected offices are term limited as well. The impact of term limits on descriptive representation has been the subject of extensive academic debate, and twenty years into the widespread adoption of term limits, most empirical work has uncovered minimal effects (Cain & Kousser, 2005; Carroll & Jenkins, 2001b; Schraufnagel & Halperin, 2006). The findings in this chapter show that for political newcomers in Los Angeles, or those operating outside of an organized political network, term limits do little to ease access, and may increase the number of bargaining chips that powerful elites are working with as they negotiate with potential candidates.

One respondent summarized candidate pathways in Los Angeles this way: “there are really
only four or five ways into winning a seat in LA. No one wins if they don’t go through one of those routes, and there are many people in front of them on the road.” Successful candidates are often clearly identified as emerging from one of the groups discussed thus far, even if they also attempt to neutralize or incorporate others. When describing this pattern to me, a prominent donor recounted a series of questions he put to a candidate who asked for his support. The candidate had assiduously avoided attaching the campaign to a particular interest or group: “I said: Are you a developer? No. Are you Latino? No. Are you Black? No. Are you from labor? No. Are you a tree-hugging hippie environmentalist? No. Then what the fuck are you?!” This terse encapsulation illustrates the narrow scope of options candidates have for identifying themselves with a group, and the frequent necessity of those ties for a viable campaign.

Previous studies of race and politics in Los Angeles have often evaluated incorporation and political representation by comparing electoral victories of each of the four largest racial groups ("Top 100 Elected Officials Database," 2016). Table 5.1 presents data on state legislative general election winners in the county over eleven election cycles, from 1996-2016. The seats included in the data are all California State Assembly and Senate seats for which the Los Angeles County Clerk administers elections in that year. All Assembly seats are up for reelection every even-numbered year; half of the State Senate’s total seats are up for re-election every even-numbered year. In the overall political hierarchy of state, federal, county and city offices, state legislative seats are roughly in the middle; more prestige and larger budgetary authority than Los Angeles Unified School District school board seats or the Mayor of Long Beach, but not as much individual power as a City Council or County Supervisor’s seat ("Top 100 Elected Officials Database," 2016). As such, and given that they are more numerous than Council, Supervisor or U.S. Congressional sets, state legislative elections are an informative focal point for assessing which groups are able to access contests for descriptive representation, and how that access may have changed over time.

Table 5.1 undermines the notion that Los Angeles has become an increasingly multiracial, politically inclusive metropolis since the mid-1990s. The mobilization of Latina/o immigrant communities, and the lasting power of the Black/White liberal coalition extolled by scholars of Los Angeles is hard to detect in these data. Instead, in the 20 years following the 1996 elections, the racial balance of the Los Angeles state legislative delegation has remained fairly static. When looking at racial groups only, variation appears quite limited for African Americans and Asian Americans, particularly after the redistricting cycle following the 2000 U.S. Census. Among Latina/os and Whites, there is more variation between cycles, but if elections are compared every four years, the results are fairly stable.

The descriptive representation of women and men in Los Angeles has typically been studied separately, and much less frequently than that of racial groups. Yet, Table 5.2 shows that there is significant variation over time in the numbers of men and women who win state legislative seats. Women win less frequently in more recent election cycles. Men typically win roughly three times as many seats in a given year as women. In 2016, men won more than five times as many seats.

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35 The Loyola Marymount Center for the Study of Los Angeles collects annual data on a group of 100 political offices they have identified as the most powerful in Los Angeles, based on prestige, budget and constituency size. Within that dataset, the authors categorize election winners along five categories, counting Jewish people separately from Whites.

36 Other than tracking female and male elected officials in the Top 100 study by Loyola Marymount, there are no other academic studies of gender and descriptive representation specific to Los Angeles of which I am aware.
Table 5.1: LA County State Legislative Seat Election Winners, by Race: 1996-2016

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<th>Asian American</th>
<th>Latina/o</th>
<th>White</th>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>2012</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 5.2: LA County State Legislative Seat Election Winners, by Gender: 1996-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When I asked interview respondents about this gender pattern, several said that it was regrettable, but possibly an artifact of my choice to focus on state legislative data. They pointed to the current prominence of women on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, arguably one of the most powerful elected bodies. In 2016, three White women, one Latina, and one African American man held the five seats on the Board. While that is a notable watermark in representation, it is an isolated occurrence. Each of the fifteen seats on the Los Angeles City Council is a politically powerful position, and there have been multiple years during the period of this study when zero, or one woman have served on that body. City Council seats are among those that a Loyola Marymount University study has deemed the “Top 100” most powerful political offices in Los Angeles County. Women’s performance within that group of elected offices over time and in 2016 mirrors that of state legislators, not the County Board of Supervisors (“Top 100 Elected Officials Database,” 2016).

The frequent focus on racial group politics in Los Angeles by scholars of coalitions and urban politics has obscured the extent to which patterns of representation are race-gendered. When state legislative election data is broken out into eight race-gendered groups, the clear ascent of Latino men, and the slow, at times minimal, changes in the number of White men emerge. Figure 5.1 shows that the vicissitudes of descriptive representation in Los Angeles mirror those of the country in several key ways. In contrast to Table 5.1, Figure 5.1 shows an increase in racial diversity—among men—that fits well with the expectations generated by increased political organizing and mobilization by communities of color in Los Angeles. As in the national data reported in earlier chapters, Figure 5.2 also shows (which reports the same data as Figure 5.1, excluding White men) that over time, men of color are gaining increasing traction and moving away from the levels of success experienced by co-racial women. This gap is less pronounced among African Americans, which is also similar to national patterns.

With the exception of the 2014 election cycle for African American men, the trajectory of electoral victories for men of color is in a positive direction overall. The same cannot be said for women of color. Latinas’ share of electoral victories peaked in 2006, and has not fully recovered. Similarly, Asian American women’s proportion of election victories moves in a negative direction.
from 2008 forward. Oscillating between one or two representatives at any given time, African American women appear to be holding relatively steady in terms of electoral success. White women in Los Angeles exhibit dissimilar patterns from those of White Women as a national group. Their rates of election still surpass those of all people of color except Latino men in recent cycles, but White women’s representation as a proportion of all representatives, has recently declined. White men far outnumber all other groups, but on a slightly reduced scale than in the rest of the country. Whereas White men won in similar proportions to national figures as late as 1996, since then, they have won roughly half or just under half of all seats in Los Angeles County.

Figure 5.1: State Legislative Election Victories, LA County: 1996-2016
Whereas descriptive outcomes in Los Angeles mirror those of the rest of the country in some ways, the population contexts within districts are quite different. The distribution of White populations is much less lopsided than in most other areas of the United States (Figure 5.3). The median White proportion of district populations across all state legislative elections from 1996 to 2016 is .34—nationally, that figure for the same period is .73. Los Angeles County is also home to the only Asian American majority population district outside of New York and Hawaii. Latina/o populations are widely distributed throughout the county, in substantial numbers (Figure 5.3). The median Latina/o proportion of district populations is .39.

These population distributions, particularly the predominance of Latina/o communities throughout the county, are what pundits and scholars have often referred to when characterizing Los Angeles as a preview of the future of the United States. As mentioned in earlier chapters, immigrant communities are expected to continue driving population growth in the U.S. into the next few decades. However, in terms of descriptive representation, the future has not yet arrived in Los Angeles (Figure 5.4).

37 California Assembly District 49 was created after the 2010 U.S. Census-based round of redistricting, which was also the first time a citizen’s redistricting commission was charged with drawing district lines in California.
Figure 5.4 brings together population and electoral outcomes data to show how frequently members of each race-gendered group have won in districts with varying proportions of populations of color. Each dot depicts the general election victory of a man in a district, and each X stands in for an election win by a woman. The different colors denote membership in different racial groups. Dots and Xs above the red reference line are victories that occurred in districts with a proportion of people of color in the population above 50 percent.

White men outnumber all other groups of winners throughout the period covered by the dataset, and their representation exhibits marginal decline in the face of immigrant community growth. Moving forward in time, the gold dots representing wins by White men shift from being largely below the majority minority mark to mostly above it in 2016. As the number of districts with majority minority populations increases, so does the number of White men winning in majority minority districts. No other group exhibits this degree of mobility. White women won most of their group’s victories in districts that had relatively large White populations. The number of districts that are majority White decreased substantially after the 2000 Census redistricting round, and only slightly after the 2010 round. While White women appear to have had some success in majority minority districts after the 2000 Census, they won very rarely in any type of district during the most
recent election cycles.

African American men and Latino men consistently win in districts where less than 25 percent of the population is White. Exceptions to this pattern are especially rare after the 2000 Census round of redistricting. For African American and Latina women, who won fewer races each year than co-racial men, the elections after 2006 yielded fewer descriptive representatives, in districts within a smaller population range. All but one of the sparse wins for Asian American women occur above the majority minority proportion line, but do not appear to be consistently tied to any particular districts. Asian American men, in contrast, win much less often than other men, but appear to be winning the same districts in consecutive cycles.

This data suggests that an electoral dynamic similar to the national picture outlined in previous chapters, is also occurring in Los Angeles. White men are relatively unconstrained in where they run and win state legislative office. Even in a city heralded as a center of Latina/o political power (Decker, 2010), the increasing proportions of people of color in districts has not resulted in a significant increase in the number of winners who are not White men (Table 5.3). Notably, the number of winners who are not White men is somewhat lower than it was during the elections from 2002-2010. White men’s descriptive representation exhibits resilience to population change that does not appear to also extend to White women—it is an explicitly race-gendered pattern.

Table 5.3: Number of State Legislative Election Wins, by Race-Gender

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>African American Women</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Except White Men</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meanwhile, as Figure 5. 4 shows, every other group is often contending for a narrower array of districts with regard to the racial makeup of the population. Within that smaller band, women of color have either had a minimal presence throughout the years covered by the dataset, or, as in the case of Latinas, lost ground since the early 2000s. This also reflects my earlier argument that within the racially constrained context, women of color face the narrowest range of opportunities to compete and win descriptive representation. Despite outward appearances, Los Angeles’ political context shares many attributes with other areas of the country. Population change has done little to advance the racial diversity of women’s descriptive representatives, and impinged little on the descriptive dominance of White men in electoral politics.

Los Angeles’ immigrant communities occupy a share of the population that will become increasingly common in other states in coming years. If Los Angeles is a potential preview of what
may unfold in other areas as immigrant communities grow, the forecast for descriptive representation tied to racial population change in districts is grim. A rich scholarship exploring racial politics and the representation of African Americans and Whites in Los Angeles has emerged in the past two decades. But it does not fully contend with the political contexts that are emerging there, and in Houston, Chicago, New York and other cities: immigrant-dominated communities of color, who may or may not be in political coalitions with relatively smaller African American and White communities. Nor does that scholarship offer any theoretical tools for understanding how women’s representation has developed as populations have changed.

The following chapter investigates the electoral politics and candidate emergence pathways of Asian Americans and Latina/os in Los Angeles. They show that each community, as a pan-ethnic group, encompasses political institutions that contribute to divergent paths of political incorporation. Additionally, as suggested by the national evidence in earlier chapters, I show that as both groups increase their access to mainstream political power in Los Angeles, women face particularly pervasive marginalization in attempting to compete for descriptive representation. In this respect and others, the underlying mechanisms driving descriptive representation of Asian Americans and Latina/os in Los Angeles reflect both opportunities, and cautionary tales, for the expansion of access to electoral competition in other parts of the country.

Comparing Candidate Access and Success in Los Angeles

Twenty-five years ago, the acquittal of White police officers, who were filmed beating Rodney King, sparked several days of unrest, destruction, and violence in Los Angeles. That event, and the election of Mayor Tom Bradley twenty years earlier, serve as frequent touchstones in the literature on race and politics in Los Angeles. In political science, earlier scholarship had long centered on African American and White relationships in city politics (Davis, 2006b; Sonenshein, 1993). More recently, several authors have focused on Latina/o (García Bedolla, 2005; Sonenshein & Pinkus, 2002; J. Wong, 2008) and Asian American (J. S. Wong, 2004) political incorporation, separately. Wong’s analysis of Asian American and Latina/o civic organizations and political mobilization is the only extensive analysis of both communities in the discipline. At the same time, a rich literature on multiethnic politics, that includes both Latina/os and Asian Americans in Los Angeles, has developed in sociology (Bloemraad, Ramakrishnan, ramak, 2008; Chang, 1993; G. L. Ochoa & Ochoa, 2005; Pardo, 1998; L. Saito, 1993).

Comparing Latina/o and Asian American access to descriptive representation in Los Angeles provides an opportunity to evaluate the role that political and electoral institutions play in immigrant political incorporation. In interviews with political practitioners and candidates, respondents commonly emphasize how different Asian Americans and Latina/os are as pan-ethnic communities: nearly 80 percent of Latina/os in Los Angeles are of Mexican descent (Pew Research Center, 2016), whereas the three largest Asian ethnic groups combined (Chinese, Filipino and Korean) comprise roughly two-thirds of the Asian American population (Ramakrishnan, n.d.). This distinction is key, but not conclusive, as an explanation for the lopsided levels of descriptive representation each racial group has achieved.

Los Angeles County’s electoral “architecture” has also contributed to the production of divergent trajectories of incorporation and access to mainstream political power for both groups. The informal and civic political infrastructures in the Latina/o and Asian American communities are different in their shape, scope, and effectiveness in developing winning candidates. Latina/os have worked with labor unions to recreate, in certain jurisdictions, a version of the political machine processes that were once the exclusive province of liberal Whites and small communities of African Americans. Along the way, Latina/o political elites have also replicated practices that tend to exclude
women. Asian Americans’ internal political institutions are focused around a handful of key actors and civic institutions that are, with some exceptions, oriented around specific ethnic groups and voter mobilization. As a pan-ethnic community, Asian Americans’ low levels of descriptive representation reflect a multiplicative set of challenges related to voters’ ethnic and immigrant generation heterogeneity, and persistent struggles in creating processes for candidate development.

Despite these differences, Latina/os and Asian Americans share several relevant characteristics: high levels of residential segregation (Iceland et al., 2014), low levels of participation in elections, underrepresentation in the highest levels of government, and particularly low representation for women. Leveraging these similarities and contrasts reveals how seemingly neutral, or even progressive political institutions, such as term limits, or the number of city council seats, can serve to reinforce anti-pluralist tendencies in a given political context. Additionally, both cases highlight the persistence of women’s limited access to electoral competition for descriptive representation. A handful of high profile Latinas and Asian American women have been elected in Los Angeles in the last two decades, but they are anomalies in the most powerful elected offices across the county. The candidate emergence patterns of women from both groups confirm that as racial minority groups contest for descriptive representation in racial terms, even through very different means, men’s representation levels are often the primary beneficiary.

Latina/o Candidate Emergence and Success: Coalitions, Solidarity, and Exclusion

Latina/o Democratic elites in Los Angeles have developed a sophisticated network of candidates, campaign professionals and donors across the county. Among Latino men in particular, interview respondents and media reports are in consensus that while surprises occur, candidates who become eventual frontrunners are identified long before open seat elections are announced. Many of the current central players in Latina/o Democratic politics were themselves staffers and campaign volunteers for earlier “machines,” centered around Latino politicians in East Side politics and the White liberal Waxman-Berman machine on the West Side. However, the informal systems today are not carbon copies of previous eras of Latina/o politics or Black Democratic politics. Over the past two decades, a key, stabilizing force has emerged in tandem with increased Latina/o electoral power: politically engaged labor unions have widely expanded their role in elections and candidate emergence.

A high degree of facilitation and candidate coordination is in one sense necessary, given that Latina/os in Los Angeles are realistically contending for a constrained set of electoral opportunities, based on race. As described in previous sections, the range of district populations that are represented by Latina/os has changed little over the past two decades, whereas the range for White men has shifted as the percentage of residents from immigrant communities has increased.

One aspect of prior eras’ machine politics that has been replicated along the way is the near exclusion of Latina women from negotiations over candidate succession, development pipelines, and access to the high level of resources necessary to run and win election campaigns for top offices. The recent candidacies of Latina women for the state legislature and Congress were often described as occurring in spite of the ambivalence, or opposition, of the Latino political establishment. Given the high barriers to entry for candidates in Los Angeles, the effective result has been that Latina women who emerge as candidates are required to clear significant electoral hurdles, even while deflecting discouragement from other Latina/os associated with (what respondents commonly referred to as) “the leadership.”

As scholars of voter turnout in Los Angeles have repeatedly documented, these processes occur in a complex context of Latina/o voter mobilization. Latina/os’ share of the electorate has remained smaller than their share of registered voters in every election since 2000—with the
exception of Villaraigosa’s first mayoral win in 2005 (Culbert et al., 2014). A wide array of civic and labor organizations devote substantial resources to the mobilization of Latina/o voters during elections (Michelson & García Bedolla, 2012; J. Wong, 2008). However, Latina/os in Los Angeles face persistent challenges to political participation and incorporation (García Bedolla, 2005; G. L. Ochoa & Ochoa, 2005; Pardo, 1998; Sonenshein & Pinkus, 2002; J. Wong, 2008), even after accounting for residents who are ineligible to vote. When the media turns its attention to Latina/o underrepresentation in elected office, journalist accounts often turn to low rates of voting first (Linthicum, 2015). Elected officials' public statements and efforts related to Latino representation often mirror this emphasis (Moreno, 2016; The Status of Latinos in California, 2015). The current analysis does not discount the importance of voter participation. Instead, I argue that for Latina/os in Los Angeles, as in the rest of the country, race-gendered processes of candidate development and access to competition circumscribe voters’ choices.

Community Political Profile: Latina/os in Los Angeles

“I represent nine cities. Five of those cities have former public officials in prison. I won my primary with 6,100 votes. There was someone in West Los Angeles who received 41,000 votes – and finished fourth. My communities are not engaged, have traditionally not been engaged.”
—Anthony Rendon, Speaker of the California Assembly (Rojas, 2015)

Although immigrants from other Latin American countries have arrived at increasing rates in recent years, the political histories of Los Angeles and its Mexican-American residents are inextricably tied. Following the arrival of large numbers of White residents in the late 19th century, Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles contended with ongoing policies and practices of residential segregation, deportation, and exclusion from political and economic opportunities (G. J. Sanchez, 1995; Torres, 2005; J. Wong, 2008). By the 1930s Mexican migrants were the core immigrant workforce powering many of Los Angeles’ key industries, including agriculture, food packing and canning (Torres, 2005). During that period, predominantly Mexican-American neighborhoods were established in downtown and East Side neighborhoods (G. J. Sanchez, 1995).

In the wake of the Great Depression, amidst rising tides of nativism and xenophobia, deportation and “voluntary” repatriation efforts by the federal government targeted Los Angeles residents of Mexican descent, citizens or not. One frequently cited statistic in historical accounts of this period illustrates the extent to which the entire community was targeted: 60 percent of children from Los Angeles who were “repatriated” to Mexico were U.S. citizens (Torres, 2005). By some estimates, the area lost a third of its Mexican immigrant population (G. J. Sanchez, 1995) as a result of these programs.

The Latina/o population continued to grow in the postwar period as unauthorized migrants and former Bracero program participants sought better jobs in Los Angeles and other California destinations. Latina/os, still predominantly of Mexican heritage, also began moving to neighborhoods farther from downtown, in the San Gabriel Valley and Glendale (L. T. Saito, 1998), in part due to economic discrimination and racial housing covenants. When housing restrictions were abolished under the Open Housing Act in 1968, Latina/os also established new enclaves in mostly-White suburban areas like Long Beach, the San Fernando Valley, and El Monte (J. Wong, 2008).

Economic turmoil in Mexico in the 1980s changed the composition and nature of Mexican migration—more migrants began staying in the United States for longer periods, and for the first time, a significant share had attended college and were lower-middle class (Torres, 2005). Larger populations of Central American migrants, often fleeing political violence, also began arriving,
fostering the rise of Salvadoran and Guatemalan enclaves near Macarthur Park and Pico-Union (Zentgraf, 2002). By the time Proposition 187 (Prop 187) unfolded in the 1990's, Los Angeles’ increasingly diverse Latina/o population was dispersed in large, but highly segregated, communities across the county.

Prop 187 was the first of three statewide propositions passed by California voters in the 1990s aimed at sharply curtailing immigrants’ access to public services. The ballot initiative aimed to restrict undocumented residents of California from utilizing any non-emergency health, education and other public services, and sought to compel members of certain occupation classes to report the possible presence of undocumented persons to federal authorities. The campaigns and public advocates for passage of Prop 187, including Governor Pete Wilson, made clear that it was aimed at the growing Latina/o community, which at the time comprised nearly a third of the state’s population. These three propositions “reflected an overall environment of racial threat toward Latinos,” of which they were cognizant, and on a number of occasions, experienced through violence and direct threats (García Bedolla, 2005). According to exit poll data, 77 percent of Latina/o voters opposed the measure (Tolbert & Hero, 1996).

Voter turnout among native-born and newly naturalized Latina/os increased during elections in the wake of Prop 187, leading many to conclude that the ballot initiative and overall political environment motivated Latina/o residents to participate in politics at higher levels (Pantoja, Ramírez, & Segura, 2001; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2006; Tolbert & Hero, 1996). García Bedolla finds that responses to Prop 187, in terms of interest in politics or naturalization, tend to vary with dimensions of identity and the social context (García Bedolla, 2005). Even with heightened interest in politics among at least some Latina/os, turnout rates among Latina/o registered voters were well below those of registered voters overall during elections in the late 1990s/early 2000s (Barreto, 2005).

Among Latina/o political elites and organization leaders in Los Angeles, Prop 187 created an opening for political mobilization in immigrant communities. Several candidates and leaders I interviewed spoke about protesting and organizing during and after the passage of Prop 187 as their initial forays into politics. Rallies in front of City Hall during the weeks leading up to the 1994 election were the largest in the region since the Vietnam War (Milkman, 2006). Newly prominent elected officials and labor leaders, such as then-Assembly Member Antonio Villaraigosa, were determined to translate Latina/o community members’ energy around anti-immigrant ballot propositions into electoral power and immigrant-based workplace organizing.

As younger leaders were building grassroots mobilization strategies and increasing the technical capacity for turnout in elections through unions, members of the “old guard” also saw an opportunity to expand the number of seats held by Latina/os. Richard Polanco, who was part of the previous generation of Latina/o elected leadership (and what many respondents called the Art Torres, and Ed Roybal machines) served in both houses of the state legislature in the 1990s, and eventually became Speaker of the Senate. Polanco came up frequently when interview respondents described the evolution of the system of succession and coordination among Latina/o candidates. As one longtime political consultant described it: “Polanco drew the line in the sand. He said, ‘We’re gonna double the size of this [Latino] caucus.’”

Throughout the late 1990s and into the 2000s, evidence of a new era in Latina/o descriptive representation in Los Angeles appeared. Latina/os, particularly men, began winning seats that had previously been held by members of other racial groups, and as one prominent donor put it “established beachheads,” by maintaining Latina/os in most of those seats moving forward. Data from The Top 100 study from the Center for the Study of Los Angeles shows that while Latina/o representation has had a generally positive trajectory since the 1960s, Latina/os share of these key seats jumped sharply upward in the 1990s ("Top 100 Elected Officials Database," 2016). The
election of Antonio Villaraigosa—a former union leader—as Mayor in 2005 drew national attention to the rise of Latina/os in Los Angeles politics. News outlets and commentators speculated that Villaraigosa’s victory heralded a new brand of coalition politics for African Americans and Latina/os working together in urban settings (Broder, 2005).

Another milestone occurred in 2005, albeit one that is much less widely reported. In that year, the California state legislature included the highest number of women of color in its history, and to date. All but a handful of the 16 women of color serving that year were Latinas, largely from Los Angeles County. In the following two elections for state legislative seats, the number of Latinas dropped precipitously, even as the number of Latino men elected to the state legislature continued to grow apace (Table 5.4). In 2016, Latina representation in the state legislature appeared to rebound, increasing from five members statewide to ten. However, only one of those newly elected Latinas came from Los Angeles County. The decline of Latinas representing Los Angeles raises questions about where, and if, Latinas fit into the highly orchestrated game of “musical chairs” that Latino Democratic men run.

Holding the Line in the Sand: “Latina/o” Seats in Los Angeles

A number of interview respondents described the process of candidate emergence and success among Latina/os, and African Americans, in Los Angeles as a game of musical chairs. The description is partly accurate, in that there are a set of players (Democratic potential candidates from those two racial groups) who are essentially circling a fixed set of electoral seats. Term limits in many of the top seats keep the game going, round after round, with increasingly experienced candidates moving from the legislature, to the City Council, to the Board of Supervisors, or Congress.

However, the musical chairs metaphor is also illusory, in two respects. First, there is relatively little that is random about how potential candidates circle the seats—in the next section I discuss in detail how the succession/candidate pipeline for Latina/os is closely facilitated. Second, the metaphor also implies that everyone is scrambling over seats, but in reality, only Latina/os, African Americans, and to a limited extent, Asian Americans, are circling endlessly. Whites, particularly men, are contenders in a much wider array of districts than the other groups. Thus, while there is a high level of orchestration over a limited number of seats, that limit is not exclusively the product of competition among communities of color—it is also a result of a lack of competition and electoral access in districts that are more than roughly 20 percent White residents (Figure 5.4). Whereas Latina/os run, and win, in an array of district populations that are fairly limited, Whites are not similarly restricted in where they compete.

In most legislative, City Council, County and Congressional seats in Los Angeles, potential candidates must account for a substantial Latina/o resident population. As an illustrative example, state legislative winners from all four racial groups are elected, in all but a handful of instances, from districts that are at least 25 percent Latina/o population (Figure 5.5). The left side of Figure 5.5, which shows the Latina/o district population frequencies for Latina/o and African American winners, alludes to a frequent topic of debate in the discipline over coalition-building and competition between these two communities in urban politics (R. P. Browning et al., 1986a; Jones-Correa, 2001a; Mollenkopf, 1986). There are clear Latina/o super-majority districts, with populations that are two-thirds Latina/o or greater, and those are most often won by Latina/os. However, there are also a number of election victories by African Americans in districts that are over 50 percent Latina/o or more. These districts, and others like them in Congressional and city races, are a central feature of the Democratic coalition in Los Angeles.

Villaraigosa’s mayoral victory in 2005 drew widespread national attention, in part, because of his ability to draw African American support away from his White opponent, Mayor James K. Hahn.
Eighty percent of African American voters chose Hahn in the 2001 mayoral race in which he beat Villaraigosa (Broder, 2005). In 2005, the two candidates won roughly equal shares of the Black vote (according to exit polls, Hahn won 52 percent and Villaraigosa won 48 percent) (Pinkus & Sonenshein, 2005). While notable, Villaraigosa’s ability to divide the community’s support was derived in part by backlash to Hahn’s decision to fire African American police chief Bernard Parks (Pinkus & Sonenshein, 2005).

Evidence of the Democratic African American/Latina/o coalition is much more explicit in the negotiations over candidate emergence and support. The ability of Latina/o Democratic leaders to work with African American Democrats in ensuring electoral cooperation was raised by most interview respondents as a critical component of the circulation of candidates in Latina/o supermajority seats. Latina/o leaders regularly account for the emergence of African American Democrats in certain seats during negotiations and planning for future candidates. Several candidates described the situation African American candidates face as a race against population change. One respondent said:

You look at the numbers, the Black political world is holding on by their fingernails in so many different areas because everything is becoming Latino or it's gonna be Asian…Their [African American] numbers are declining. These are not Black districts. And people are trying to hold on.

In seats that have historically been held by African American representatives (all of which are now majority Latina/o population), a balance of trust, and enforcement, enables cooperation between political elites over candidate emergence and support. Some interview respondents attribute the trust to a history of African Americans and Latina/os working together on policy in the legislature, or on civil rights issues in the 1960s and 1970s. Those issues were also discussed as part of a pragmatic concern for keeping African American representatives in Sacramento—they are often liberal Democratic votes that the Latina/o leadership can count on for legislation. Others argued that the trust component of the coalition is derived from a broader sense of responsibility among elite players for maintaining African American descriptive representation in Los Angeles, given the area’s history and the ongoing challenges faced by the current African American population. A longtime organization leader described that sensibility this way: “It wouldn’t be a good thing for civic dialogue; it wouldn’t be a good thing for political incorporation of any of the groups, so let’s avoid that. The political elite of L.A. are like, ‘It won’t be good for L.A. to have very little Black representation.’”
The other half of the cooperative balance between African American and Latina/o elites is enforcement, or the expectation of enforcement, which comes in the form of endorsements, support, and efforts to pull support away from candidates. The internal system of succession and pipeline building is powerful in part because it encompasses a number of politicians who individually have their own political power and resources. Thus when a decision by “leadership” (as many respondents described the small group of Latina/o political elites who coordinate much of the candidate rotation) is made, many Latina/o and African American political actors are expected to move in support of that decision, either through public support, or by staying quiet if they have a conflict that prevents them from making an endorsement. One prominent donor described long-term political consequences for politicians or leaders who do not move with leadership this way:

If you piss off a Black politician, you better get ten Black politician friends to cancel them out, because that wound can be deep! Then, the next time we go in the Black community he’s like, “You’re the guy.”

This sense of collective discipline within the African American political community was echoed among a number of respondents. Candidates and elected officials who were not African American discussed this dynamic as an expectation, and an understandable response by African
Americans. One candidate said that in a race where he tried (and largely failed) to gain the support of Democratic Party delegates against an African American candidate, “most of the delegates are African-American. And everybody's playing ethnic politics. Me included. So I understood that.”

The degree of African American solidarity at the political elite level is not monolithic or impervious; there have been several high-profile contests between prominent African American elected officials in the county in the last two decades. However, the expectation by elites outside of the African American community is that African Americans will be united if one of the historic seats is targeted. There is also a widespread assumption that once Latina/o Democratic leaders have come to an agreement with African American politicians over who will run, and whether Latina/os will stay out of a race in a historic seat, other Latina/os will also fall in line. The process was described in ways similar to this in every interview where this topic came up:

There’s also, at the…political elite level – where people stake out a position and say, “Hey, that’s a black seat or an Asian seat or Latino seat,” and you see it very effectively with African Americans where there would be a seat that’s vastly majority Latino population, even majority Latino registration, and the Black political elite will say, “That’s a black seat. Always has been. Needs to continue to be.”

They will then get many of the Latino political elite to agree with them. More importantly, labor and all that. Then…it becomes a consensus that we need to recruit some African American to be the candidate there, so that any Latino that runs is gonna go up against that whole system.

Balancing trust and enforcement has been a primary strategy of Latina/o political elites for the past two decades, in negotiating what many respondents described as a “transition” period for African Americans in Los Angeles politics. However, younger candidates and organization leaders sometimes evinced a sense of discomfort around the fighting and negotiation over historic seats that had been “claimed,” either by African Americans or Latina/os: “I feel bad. I mean, I feel bad when I have to say, ‘Well, that’s a Latino seat. Why are we letting another person take it?’ Right? Because politics is still very territorial.”

Additionally, this balance rests in a fairly closed ecosystem of Latina/o and African American Democratic leaders. Many of the interviews for this study were conducted in the months after an upset Congressional race, wherein Nanette Barragan, a Latina who respondents said was recruited to run by Latina elected officials, beat Isadore Hall III, an African American member of the State Assembly. All of the respondents who spoke about the race described Barragan’s emergence as a surprise to Latina/o and African American elites, and said that both communities had long been lined up behind Hall, due to an agreement around his candidacy that had been forged several election cycles earlier. Thus, while the cooperation that Latina/o leaders have carried out with African Americans has generally kept insiders from both communities in office and with minimal cross-racial strife at the elite level, it has not prevented candidates who are willing to go “up against the system” from moving historic African American seats into the Latina/o column.

Even as Latina/o leaders negotiate and refine coalitions around candidates with African Americans and Asian Americans in a relatively defined set of seats, White candidates run and win in a much wider array of districts. They are not playing the game of musical chairs. Several respondents told me in interviews that the mix of candidates of color in districts with substantial Latina/o populations is carefully orchestrated, and elites work to keep promises of support and resources to overcome any hurdles along the way—but that a White candidate could get in at any time, and make it to the runoff, if not win. The reasons they offered for White candidates’ viability in a wide range
of seats were varied.

Two of the campaign professionals I interviewed attributed it to White voters acting as swing votes in districts with a plurality of ethnicities in the population. By their reasoning, White candidates can enter many races because they can count on pulling White voters, whose turnout is reliably high, away from whichever candidates of color are contesting the seat. One respondent discussed a hypothetical, but recently typical, Congressional race in which one or two Asian American candidates, and multiple Latina/o candidates, run. That respondent characterized the hypothetical situation as an opportunity to undermine ethnic voter bases: “If multiple Latinos have jumped [into the race], they have cut their base and then you have Whites determine the winner….Then it'll leave the Whites up for grabs. Unless a single White woman entered that race.” By this account, the race would change dramatically if one White candidate entered, because they would quickly consolidate White voter support. Other political leaders and former candidates suggested that White candidates continue to run and win in districts that are majority non-White, because districts that have been held by liberal Whites are simply not included in the electoral plans of Latina/o political elites.

While interview respondents did not agree on one definitive reason for Whites’ sustained levels of descriptive representation, state legislative election data suggests that it is in part because White men are running at higher rates than other groups. (Table 5.4). Thirty-six percent of all state legislative primary candidates in the last decade were White men. Both White women and men have among the lowest rates of ultimate success, but White men are on the ballot so frequently that their share of overall wins is also disproportionately large compared to their presence in the population. This does not appear to be the case for White women—they run less than White men, but more often than all other groups except Latino men—and win relatively infrequently. This finding requires future research into the mechanisms behind White men and women’s emergence as candidates in Los Angeles, and why they may be producing different results in terms of success than have been found in other studies.

Table 5.4: Primary, General Election Candidates in State Legislative Races, 2006-2016, Percent.\textsuperscript{38}

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<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Primary Candidates</th>
<th>General Election</th>
<th>Overall Win Rate</th>
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<td>African American Women</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>Asian American Men</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Women</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Men</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
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</table>

For the current analysis, it is sufficient to note that White candidates’ presence on the ballot

\textsuperscript{38} The Overall Win rate in Table 5.4 refers to the percent of primary candidates from each race-gender group who go on to ultimately win the seat in the general election. The data in this table covers six election cycles between 2006 and 2016. The primary candidate data is most reliable for that period. However, the general election candidate and winner data is available for 1996-2016, and results in the same general pattern.
is widespread in state legislative races. White men and women make up roughly half of all primary and general election candidates, which suggests these candidacies are not clustered into a small subset of crowded primaries. There are only a handful of state legislative districts in the county that encompass populations that are less than 40 percent non-White. Thus, the racial makeup of districts is likely less of a constraint on White candidates’ entry into electoral contests (particularly men), as it is for other groups. The spread of White male election winner data points in Figure 5.4, and interview respondents’ explicit discussions of how candidates from immigrant and African American communities choose where to run, strongly suggest that this is the case.

The effort by Latina/o Democratic leaders to facilitate candidacies in a select group of seats and offices—the “game” of musical chairs—demonstrates their growing political power, but also highlights the comparative freedom that White candidates possess. In the next section, I explore the manner in which candidate development processes are orchestrated by Latina/o leaders. That aspect of Los Angeles’ patterns of candidate emergence may be distinct to the region; there are few U.S. cities where Latina/os have achieved the mix of political resources and allies present in Los Angeles. But the overall dynamic, whereby communities of color contest a limited number of “Latino” or “Black” seats, while Whites continue to run in a wide array of districts with varying populations, is not. As Latina/o and Asian American populations grow in metropolitan areas like Houston, Atlanta, Raleigh/Durham, as well as in longstanding immigrant communities like Seattle and Chicago, it is likely that Democratic coalitions of color will have to repeatedly consider whether they are playing a game of musical chairs, or getting played.

**Organized Labor As a Stabilizing Force in Latina/o Candidate Development**

Within the subset of districts and offices that have been understood or “claimed” as “Latino seats” in Los Angeles County, Latina/o leaders facilitate a tightly controlled process for signaling favored candidates—sometimes years in advance of an open seat election. One key factor, whose weight is magnified by the level of voter mobilization resources required in many Los Angeles districts, is the stabilizing force that organized labor plays in elections. The Los Angeles County Labor Federation (County Fed) and its constituent unions, particularly the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and teachers’ unions, potentially provide endorsed candidates with a level of support that can determine the terms of electoral contests. Due in part to intertwined personal histories among key political and labor leaders, and the history of organizing in Los Angeles in the past two decades, the support of major labor organizations, and the preferences of Latina/o Democratic leaders in elections, are rarely out of sync. Labor’s effectiveness in making “the union difference” in elections sends a signal to potential candidates throughout the Latina/o political community that one candidate described as “a reality for L.A….If Labor’s not supporting you, you’re not going to win… That was just the rule of thumb.”

The extent to which potential candidates arrange their lives around running for a particular seat in a particular time was a common topic in the interviews I conducted. While moving to a particular district, or changing jobs were common strategies mentioned by legislators that I interviewed or surveyed in other states, the specificity and lengths to which many winning candidates go in Los Angeles are distinct. The Latino male elected officials who discussed their decision to run in interviews, or whose trajectories other respondents described, frequently made a series of similar moves before becoming candidates. They attached themselves to a particular leader within the legislature or city politics; and served on the staff of that leader or another leader with whom they work closely. If they did not already have a robust track record of working for union-backed candidates or working directly for a union, they actively sought out opportunities to do so.
Additionally, many carried out informal favors for central players by pitching in on campaigns, or delivering bad news to hopeful candidates who are not getting the nod from the leadership. These are a common set of “boxes to check” as several candidates described it, in order to be considered a team player.

The status of being a favored candidate is highly coveted among those considering a run for office. Among many Latina/os who have thought about running for a particular seat in a specific cycle, gaining that status is often a defining factor in whether they throw their hat in the ring. Especially after arranging your life to complete the processes detailed above, the stakes for potential candidates are very high: if you get the nod, there is a clear path to victory, barring any surprises.

One campaign professional describes the benefits of getting the endorsement of the Latina/o Democratic leadership thus:

When they go to you and they say, “You're the one,” … you don’t do too much other than what you’re told, right? It’s not that hard. I mean, you have to make the calls; you have to do what the [leadership says is required]—but the fields have been cleared out, so you’re gonna be the man. Your barriers to entry are – once you’ve cleared that out… you get anointed by it being cleared out. It was literally done like that: ‘These are the ones we’re gonna work on. This is where that infrastructure’s going.’

The words “anointed” and “chosen” were used to illustrate the favored position of candidates who received this support in nearly every interview I conducted, including among those who had been the beneficiaries and contributors of that support.

The implications of not being chosen are significant as well. Many respondents reported that those candidates are almost universally told: “its not your turn,” even though the reasoning behind that decision could vary widely. The negative impact of not being chosen can be severe, as one respondent illustrated by describing the options facing potential candidates:

You tie yourself to a patron, to a sponsor, and that sponsor is going to have ten to 20 individuals that he or she are sponsoring. Every time a position comes up, that sponsor’s only gonna be able to tag one and so that if you’re not the one that’s chosen, you have to go up against your whole network and then you turn around and it’s like, “Where is my other network?” Just makes it very difficult. You want to run. You think you’re better than the one they got…but it’s like you have to either quickly move to another network and for somehow finagle being that network’s candidate or you got to go do it on your own, which is virtually impossible without resources.

Given the number of term limited offices, the tenure of many Latina/o Democratic leaders in public life, and the scope of Los Angeles County, these processes of selection and discouragement have been repeated many times. Part of the reason that so many potential candidates continue to invest in it, and “check the boxes” is because the potential payoff is a seat, and possibly a career, in public office. Labor unions help to maintain that high level of certainty in the payoff by mounting large, successful campaigns for those candidates they endorse. They also serve an important role in the informal processes that determine who runs, and who receives the support of the Latina/o Democratic leadership.

Several respondents described organized labor’s role as “facilitating.” Others called it “controlling.” As a central piece of the Democratic coalition in Los Angeles County, the largest labor unions and the County Fed play a role that stabilizes leading Latina/o Democrats’ power to shape ballots and direct campaign resources. All respondents agreed that while it is not a guarantee
of success, labor union support can help determine close races, or turn close races into landslides by discouraging competition. Labor unions’ influence on who runs in which elections is well integrated with that of the Latina/o Democratic leadership—most respondents vacillated when I asked whether Latina/o leaders were following labor’s lead or the other way around. Some believe that labor’s informal power stems from the Los Angeles County Fed’s ability to act as a central conduit for information and endorsements across several branches of the Democratic coalition—liberal Whites, African Americans, Latina/o and to some extent, Asian Americans. One organization leader, who is not affiliated with unions, described it this way:

While...The Latino elected officials, collectively, I believe, are more powerful than Rusty Hicks (who’s the head of the unions) individually, they’re not. The unions have a way of dealing with you, individually, whether in terms of political contributions today or whatever you’re gonna run for, next time.

You go to his office, he’s got a gigantic map of L.A. County with all the political boundaries with every senate assembly – every state Senate, or Assembly, congressional, the different cities. The different councils. He knows intuitively what the balance is. He knows what seats are coming up. He knows what seats are really important for unions to play in. What are irrelevant because they’re so pro-union, no matter who comes out, they’ll be pro-union or there’s too many resources to really impact this so let’s leave it alone…He’s in the middle of all the information of everybody who’s thinking about running…He’s got more pieces of information about potential career movements about all the – in every single district than anybody else.

With that information, they’re able to juggle things around and make deals.

When I asked union and labor organization leaders how they would characterize labor’s role, most (but not all) tended to describe it in pragmatic terms. They often emphasized that their main interest was ensuring that officials who have a demonstrated commitment to workers and immigrants are elected and advancing the right policies. Sometimes, as they and others described it, that means getting in and making a big electoral push for a candidate, and other times, it may mean staying out of a race because, as one director put it “anyone who wins is good for us.” Because labor’s support, or neutrality, can make a significant difference in outcomes, labor leaders also play an important role in “convincing” potential candidates that “its not their turn.” Most of the union officials I interviewed stated a variation of the idea that their job is not to tell people who should run when, but to give potential candidates the lay of the land, and a blunt picture of what they could face if they are not willing to “wait their turn.”

I’ve never told anyone, “You cannot run.” I think explaining to people the reality that they are facing and the likelihood of the outcome can push people in one direction or the other. If you sit down and you’re told, “Hey, everybody can run, but this is your first time out… and this other candidate’s been around for quite a while and there’s a lot of people who are going to line up with him, so you’re going to be standing by yourself.” Some people will say, “Screw you, I’m running. I don’t give a shit about this ‘turn business.’” And then, the outcome is the outcome.

Within the political ecosystems in Los Angeles, hearing this from a union leader—that you
will be standing by yourself—carries with it the weight of past large scale independent expenditure campaigns, and voter mobilization efforts. It also, often, carries the suggestion that the Democratic leadership will decline to support the candidate in question and possibly also mobilize their coalition against them. The concentration of electoral resources among a small group of leaders, as well as the promise of future opportunities down the road due to term limits, raises the incentives for highly qualified, well-positioned candidates who might otherwise run, to wait. In this way, labor's demonstrated track record of electoral strength in the county, combined with wide recognition of a close degree of collaboration with the Latina/o Democratic leadership, helps to keep the latter's influence on the candidacy decisions of political hopefuls consistently and strongly felt.

The close relationship between the current group of key Latina/o Democratic leaders in Los Angeles, and labor unions, stabilizes the leadership's capacity to develop candidates and be on the winning side of many elections. It has also facilitated organized labor's ability to raise the bar for candidates hoping to get an endorsement, in terms of support for their policy priorities and demonstrated commitment to workers and workplace organizing. Several respondents described that they themselves, or other candidates, had to be a “labor warrior” in order to have a chance of getting official support from unions. The criteria behind that title include being a former staff member within a union, working directly on union organizing or independent expenditure political campaigns, or having an extensive family background connection to unions. One former candidate described it as having to show that you are in the “labor family” and demonstrating a willingness to be “in the trenches” with unions. Among those who did not meet that standard, but had some signals of support from legislative leaders, several former candidates told me that they considered it a small victory when they were able to at least neutralize labor, and convince them not to actively campaign against them. The necessity of being a labor warrior was repeatedly described as stemming in part from the intertwined histories of Latina/o legislative leaders, and prominent union officials.

If you do a webbing exercise and connect the dots on who are the current crop of elected officials and at what point they staff for the former generation of elected officials….It's very much a relatively small network of Latino activists….there was definitely a web of Latino leaders who understand the power of the labor movement and how they need to get Labor’s endorsements in order to succeed in the state of California. And there are very few Latino leaders who have succeeded without the support of them.

One example of these longstanding connections can be traced through the past three leaders of the County Fed. Rusty Hicks, the current head of the labor umbrella organization, is a relatively new public face for labor, but he has been connected to a powerful circle of Latina/o Democrats and labor leaders for nearly a decade. He served as the Political Director under the previous County Fed leader, Maria Elena Durazo. She and her husband, Miguel Contreras, who steered the County Fed into more proactive and immigrant-oriented political engagement in the 1990s, have longstanding relationships with many of the central figures most often mentioned as forming the core of the Latina/o Democratic leadership: Antonio Villaraigosa, current President Pro Tempore of the State Senate Kevin de Leon, City Council member and former state legislator Gill Cedillo, former Speaker of the Assembly Fabian Nunez, and others. Those relationships were forged in the course of working together on workplace organizing campaigns, and mass mobilizations against Prop 187 and other anti-immigrant measures.

Labor in Los Angeles is not monolithic, but its collective political activity tends to be dominated by the interests of the large service worker and teacher union chapters. Individual unions
in the building trades, public safety, or other sectors can go their own way on endorsements, and several candidates described successfully countering a lack of support from the Democratic leadership and most powerful unions by peeling off smaller constituent unions’ endorsements. Additionally, even when there is a coordinated effort among organized labor, there have been several high profile cases where their efforts have fallen short. However, even given those limits, most respondents I interviewed said that avoiding the “uphill battle” of not having labor’s support was a key concern for most people who thought about running for office in Los Angeles.

Another byproduct of the stability of the Latina/o Democratic alliance with labor is that a fairly small, but concentrated network of electoral resources and actors has become central to the ballot composition of many of the elections occurring in one of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States. For insiders, respondents widely acknowledged that the network is self-reinforcing, as favored members of the “machine” move from office to office, and signal their preferred replacements. Within those cycles of negotiation, planning and “anointment,” many respondents also stated that Latina women are scarcely present. The frequent absence of Latinas from the “chosen” Latina/o Democratic candidate pipeline stems in part from the structure of the network itself, ongoing reliance by leaders on criteria for inclusion that fewer Latinas than Latinos in politics meet, and an apparent distinction by some actors between Latinos and Latinas as legitimate or capable carriers of Latino representation/able to hold beachhead seats.

Not Part of the Plan: Latina Candidates as Outsiders in Latina/o Politics

“This was the stunner.”

–Los Angeles Democratic Party Chair describing Assembly member Patty Lopez’ 2014 defeat of incumbent Raul Bocanegra. (Mason, 2014)

The system of succession and long term planning facilitated by Latina/o Democratic leaders has elevated the representation of Latino men, but it has also contributed to the declining representation of Latinas. When leaders and candidates negotiate who will “wait their turn” and take a seat in an election cycle down the road, or who will replace someone looking to move up the political ladder, women are very rarely part of, or participants in, the conversation. There are clear criteria for being included: being a trusted relative, former legislative staff member or union colleague, and proving your commitment to the coalition by working on special projects and election campaigns. Among Latina/o state legislators in Los Angeles County, over three-quarters of men who have served in the past two decades meet those requirements. Only four of the 15 Latina state legislators from that period have similar backgrounds. As a result, Latinas have had more limited access to the ballot as viable candidates, and those who have been successful have often emerged as surprise candidates (to the Latina/o leadership), largely outside of the City of Los Angeles proper. Because these successful Latina officials are frequently not part of the long term planning by leaders, and are instead more likely to be seen as disruptive, they are also less likely to have their preferences incorporated into the succession, and their seats more frequently are won by members of other racial groups than other seats held by Latino men.

It is worth noting that there are several exceptions to the general pattern of Latina women’s exclusion from the inner workings of Latina/o candidate succession efforts by the leadership. During interviews, if the respondent had not already raised gender differences during the course of our conversation, I asked whether they had noticed or thought about the decline in the number of women getting elected, and whether they thought it was related to what we had been talking about. Several male respondents said that they had not thought about it, and that the recent composition of
the Board of Supervisors (a very powerful, small group of officeholders) being four women and one African American man showed that there was “no issue.” Other men also ticked off women who have been known to have influence in Latina/o political circles, like Gloria Molina, Gloria Romero, and Hilda Solis. However, these women’s names were not raised when, earlier in the conversation, I asked respondents to specifically identify who “the leadership” was that everyone talked about as central figures in candidate emergence.

Moreover, I never had to explicitly ask about the differences between women and men in Latina/o politics when interviewing Latinas—most talked about it as inherent to their journey as candidates, or as a key aspect of the trajectory of candidates they had known or observed. While several women have been elected who were part of the leadership’s trusted network—Hilda Solis is a frequently raised example, who was a close associate of Miguel Contreras and Maria Elena Durazo, among others—they are outliers. This dynamic raises questions about the costs of race-based solidarity and coalition-building in electoral politics for marginalized subgroups like women. Los Angeles is renowned as a place where Latina/os have risen as powerful figures in politics. But it is more accurate to claim that Latinos have gained that position, while Latinas continue to fight for access from the outside.

The extent to which Latina women are not part of the succession and candidate development plans of the Latina/o Democratic leadership has been quite public on occasion. When Patty Lopez first challenged Assembly Member Raul Bocanegra for his San Fernando Valley seat in 2014, she was written off. She funded the campaign with small dollar donations and by holding tamale sales in grocery store parking lots with her comadres. Los Angeles’ political world was openly shocked when she won. The Chair of the Democratic Party was quoted in the Los Angeles Times describing her victory as a “stunner (Mason, 2014).” Two years later, the leadership closed ranks around Bocanegra to help him retake the seat—Latino members of the legislature actively campaigned against Lopez, one of their current colleagues, often from neighboring districts. One political consultant quoted in the local press predicted the opposition Lopez would face: “When the caucus ‘green lights’ Bocanegra, Lopez is going to scream bloody murder (Aron, 2015).”

The descriptive representation patterns of individual Assembly seats over time are an illustrative example of Latina women’s periods of office-holding as relatively anomalous, particularly in light of the representation patterns within seats held by Latino men. Figure 5.6 shows the race and gender of each Assembly Member elected in Los Angeles County between 1996 and 2016. The color coding denotes the race-gender identity of the winning candidate: African American men are red, African American women are pink; Asian American men are dark green, Asian American women, light green; Latinos are dark blue, Latinas are light blue; White men are dark gold, and White women are yellow. It is notable that men tend to have longer unbroken stretches of their assigned color, than women, and that White men’s contiguous lines are more numerous than any other single group.

However, Latina/os are the racial group that is generally described as having a system—a machine—in place to ensure that once a Latina/o wins a seat, it becomes a “beachhead.” That is much more the case among Latino men than women. The lighter blue sections indicating office-holding by Latinas are more spurious than those of Latinos, as all but one were replaced in three cycles or less by a Latino man or a member of another racial group. This indicates that when individual Latinas win, they are not preceded or followed by other Latinas when they are termed or forced out. That is the opposite of the case for most Latino men who served in the Assembly.

Nell Soto and Norma Torres’ tenures in District 61 are the exception to this general pattern—that seat was held by Latinas for 12 years. Other seats won by Latinas did not remain that way for long. In District 39, Assembly Member Cindy Montanez left to run for a State Senate seat, lost, and a long series of Latino men held the seat until Patty Lopez’s single term in 2014. Montanez has since left electoral politics. Gloria Romero replaced Diane Martinez in District 49 in 1998, and
Figure 5.6: Race and Gender of Assembly Members, by Seat

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when she moved up to the state Senate in 2000, she was replaced by Judy Chu. Following Martha Escutia’s election to the state Senate in 1998, Marco Firebaugh held her former Assembly seat for three full terms until his death. He was a longtime associate of Polanco, and his own staffers have gone on to hold legislative offices, including Assembly District 50. No Latina/os have held Jenny Oropeza’s former seat in District 55 since her death in 2004. Sally Havice (District 56) and Grace Napolitano (District 58) were both succeeded by Latino men for five cycles or more.

Interview respondents’ descriptions of Latinas’ candidacies in recent cycles strongly suggest that these patterns are evidence of their not being incorporated into concerted efforts to maintain or gain “Latina/o” seats in the legislature. Many Latinas’ recent elections to the legislature were described by Latino men I interviewed as “coming out of nowhere.” When I asked one legislator whether that rang true for her, she responded:

“I was told not to run because … ‘we have deals carved out for these districts and you’re screwing it up.’ People were really dismissive because I was to them, coming out of nowhere and it’s like, ‘Well, I’m not coming out of nowhere. I grew up in this community.’ …The problem is that I didn’t come out of nowhere. The problem is that these individuals weren’t paying attention.

Them telling themselves that I came out of nowhere is convenient for them that… they’re putting the blame someplace else and choosing to have no self-reflection. I think that that’s actually the bigger problem and I think a lot of it is because… I was a woman. That rhetoric is something that’s really convenient for them and for how they operate and not taking any responsibility to the system they help create and that they help perpetuate.

Most respondents’ mentions of Latinas getting on the ballot and winning were described as stories of outsiders and disruptors, disturbing carefully facilitated plans and negotiations of the Latina/o Democratic leadership. In discussing one race in particular, several respondents talked about the emergence of a Latina candidate (at the prompting of a Latina elected official acting on her own) after a longstanding agreement to support someone else was enacted, as her “swooping” in unexpectedly:

That was the deal that they put together because then everybody gets to move up. Everybody gets a seat in the whole thing. Then, [Latina Candidate] comes up on the side and ruins that whole thing.

Among the respondents who saw a wider issue with Latinas not gaining traction in elected office at the same rate as Latinos, most were frank that when Latina/o leaders were deciding who to tap for a race, or begin talking up as a potential candidate down the road, they rarely chose women. One respondent said that:

I think of that as part of this – the process in which people become candidates. The infrastructure that puts the – we just talked about the Polancos [Torres’, and Martinez’s] and all that. They were pulling their staffers up. By and large, they were pulling men, weren’t they? Yeah. They were pulling men and then the labor unions themselves are pulling men, generally.

The central reason for women not being part of the pipeline, that emerged repeatedly
throughout the interviews, was that very few were part of an inner circle of elected and political leaders that is defined by who has worked together as political staff or union directors, and in some cases, family ties. Based on my interviews, I find that the exclusion of Latinas from these inner circles stems from an interlocking set of factors that renders them less visible as potential candidates, and available to run. The informal criteria for inclusion in the inner circle overlaps most with the professional trajectories of Latino men already active in politics and organizing; Latinas have a lower likelihood that they have arranged their entire lives to run for a particular office, for a number of strategic reasons; and among some leaders, Latinas are seen as representatives of women, but not as standard bearers for Latina/os as a racial group.

Close relationships between labor, immigration activists and Latina/o Democratic leaders have defined who has the greatest influence on the support candidates receive, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Those connections also shape the avenues for gaining sponsorship from prominent political leaders. When viewed in their totality, the gender differences in professional and familial backgrounds of Latina/o legislators elected since 1996 strongly suggest that there are structural limits on Latina’s access to possible political patrons. Tables 5.5 and 5.6 list every Latino and Latina who has been elected to the California State Assembly or Senate from 1996-2016. Next to each member’s name, I indicate whether that member has been a senior staff member for another legislator (Staff), a senior director for a labor union (Director) or has a close family connection to another Latino elected official (Relative). If they do not have any of those ties in their background before being elected to the legislature, I list their most relevant political or professional experience.

Table 5.5: Political Backgrounds of Latina Women in the State Legislature; 1996-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latina Women</th>
<th>affiliation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martha Escutia</td>
<td>Private Law Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cristina Garcia</td>
<td>Community Activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally Havice</td>
<td>Community College Instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connie Leyva</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patty Lopez</td>
<td>Community Activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Martinez</td>
<td>Relative (Father)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy Montanez</td>
<td>San Fernando City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grace Napolitano</td>
<td>Mayor of Norwalk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gloria Negrete Mcleod</td>
<td>Chaffey Community College Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny Oropeza</td>
<td>Long Beach City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria Romero</td>
<td>Academic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blanca Rubio</td>
<td>Baldwin Park School District</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hilda Solis</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nell Soto</td>
<td>Relative (Husband)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norma Torres</td>
<td>Mayor of Pomona</td>
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Table 5.6: Political Backgrounds of Latino Men in the State Legislature; 1996-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latino Men</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dante Acosta</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Alarcon</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe Baca</td>
<td>PG&amp;E</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rudy Bermudez</td>
<td>Norwalk City Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raul Bocanegra</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louis Caldera</td>
<td>Counsel for LA County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron Calderon</td>
<td>Relative (Brother)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ian Calderon</td>
<td>Relative (Son), Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom Calderon</td>
<td>Relative (Brother)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tony Cardenas</td>
<td>Real Estate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gil Cedillo</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward Chavez</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hector Delatorre</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin de Leon</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marco Firebaugh</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dario Frommer</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Felipe Fuentes</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Gallegos</td>
<td>Baldwin Park City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jimmy Gomez</td>
<td>Staff, Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ed Hernandez</td>
<td>Mayor of West Covina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roger Hernandez</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ricardo Lara</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tony Mendoza</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fabian Nunez</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Pacheco</td>
<td>Walnut City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alex Padilla</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Perez</td>
<td>Director, Relative (Cousin)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Polanco</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anthony Rendon</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freddie Rodriguez</td>
<td>Pomona City Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miguel Santiago</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antonio Villaraigosa</td>
<td>Director</td>
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Among the 32 Latino men elected to the state legislature during the period of this study, all but nine were either senior legislative staff for another Latino elected official, a senior director with a labor union, or the close relative of a Latino elected official. The ratio of individuals who fall into that category is reversed among Latina legislators; only four of the 15 were on the staff of a Latino
elected official, a union director, or closely related to a Latino elected official. This divergence underscores that the pathway to office-holding for Latinas is qualitatively different from that of Latinos serving in the same legislative body, from the same county. Latinas’ socio-political positioning is farther from the center of mainstream political power than that of Latinos, and as a result, they have less access to contests for descriptive representation than most other groups. As the rest of this section will demonstrate, these differences also increase the potential roadblocks and opportunities for exclusion that Latinas seeking to become elected officials must face.

Before exploring the reasons that interview respondents offered for why the inner networks of Latina/o leadership are gendered, it should be noted that the consequences for Latinas’ exclusion are manifold—beyond the simple fact of lower levels of descriptive representation. These dynamics render Latinas less visible, or even invisible, to those who actively recruit and support Latina/o candidates in at least two ways. Latinas are not “on the lists of people that are brought up at fundraisers and cocktail parties” as potentially running for this seat, or that, as one respondent put it. They are physically less visible.

Additionally, if Latinas are not serving on legislative staffs, or working at a high level on union campaigns, they are missing opportunities to build trusted relationships with power brokers over time. In turn, they are less frequently turned to and asked to perform political favors and tasks that are important tests of commitment to the coalition. Thus, they are also less psychologically visible as possible candidates, since they are less proven as what several candidates and elected officials called “good members of the team.”

When asked why there appeared to be fewer Latina women than Latino men included in the leadership’s candidate pipeline, some respondents stated that it was for fairly straightforward reasons—the leaders pick people they know and have worked with, and women just happened to not work for them. Two respondents noted that Latina women are not as prevalent as Latino men in the senior staffing positions in legislative and city council offices from which favored candidates often emerge. Others noted that while Maria Elena Durazo was a prominent organizer who also happened to be a Latina woman, her first priority was advancing union candidates—not “women candidates”—and very few of the directors of the major constituent unions were women of any race. Studies of legislative staff hierarchies (Koseff, 2017; Tabakman, n.d.), and the composition of corporate boards (Terjesen, Sealy, & Singh, 2009) and senior staff in organized labor (Kaminski & Yakura, 2008) show that the lack of women in organizational and staffing leadership is not unique to Latina/os or Los Angeles politics.

Several respondents probed further into why Latinas were not considered part of the line up of favored candidates, and offered variations of the idea that women were less willing to declare that they wanted a seat, and arrange their lives around running for office, to the extent that men were. One respondent described the political resume of a Latina candidate to illustrate this point: “If you look at her bio, she’s been plotting since she was six years old to run…She has been incredibly thoughtful about checking her boxes [working in different sectors, building relationships with coalition partners]... and, all of that, she’s been able to pull together and now make her case. ‘I can raise the money,’ the whole deal. I haven’t seen as many female candidates be as methodical about it in that way, as guys are, who are just ambition.”

This description fits in with the political journey many of the Latino male candidates related to me in interviews. The implication that Latinas are less politically ambitious does not correspond with either my interviews with Latinas in Los Angeles, or national data from the American Leadership survey discussed in Chapter 4. The same respondent went on to elucidate how another aspect of women’s dispositions may also be partly underlying their absence from the ballot.

There are certainly some ambitious women that are out there, but the kind of common
refrains that you hear about the differences between men and women, it plays itself out in political campaigns. Dudes will step forward and say, “I’m running,” when they don’t know shit about what they’re running for. I have found very few women that will do that. There is generally a second guessing of, “Is now the right time? Do I know enough?” They’re much more thoughtful in general.

And then, when a female candidate will say, “I’m running,” they’re kind of scrutinized for being too ambitious, being too about the seat.

Men having a lower threshold for feeling they are qualified for office, and women (correctly) assuming they must meet a higher bar are patterns that have been detected in the extant political science literature on female candidates. However, these explanations do not integrate Latina women’s personal motivations and proclivities with the structural choices and institutional challenges that may reinforce or promote them. Latina candidates that I interviewed tended to bring either broader social expectations, or the network of Latina/o Democratic leadership, and their influence on choices, back into the conversation repeatedly.

As an example, all but one of the Latino men who were candidates or former candidates that I interviewed focused primarily on the series of “boxes” they checked and the political opportunities they faced, when asked to describe their decision to run. The Latina candidates and former candidates also discussed their political resumes, but they also universally addressed how their family structure played a role in their ability to run. Several viewed having a family life that they saw as “untraditional for a Latina” as giving them more freedom to run than other Latinas. Another respondent raised the same point when talking about several prominent Latinas who had been elected:

If you look at [Latina Elected Official A], who was on a mission, there was a lot of innuendo about what her personal life was like, [Latina Elected Official B]; these people or these women haven’t had a traditional boundary. They may have made sacrifices, in that regard, but they were – they’re both very committed to a sense of community and why they’re doing it. They put their community above.

Latina candidates also discussed how their professional focus on local issues and community activism, instead of working as council or legislative staff, was often viewed as a negative mark in the eyes of the most powerful Latina/o leaders, because it made them less active or invested in being part of the “team.” One candidate described this as a direct connection between why Latinas were underrepresented, and the types of work and social expectations Latinas were engaging.

Having someone who has been in the community who’s talented and qualified and has a base be told that it’s is not their time is not unique. It’s even less unique when it’s a woman. It’s never our time because we are never in that line because we’re busy being the caretakers, the teachers, the community activists doing the work and not kissing the pinky finger. So it’s never our time. So we’re never at the top of the list.

Another candidate said that her attention to local politics and her own upward political mobility independent of the “machine” made Latina/o Democratic leaders unsure of her motivations and loyalties, and that as a result, she was not “chosen,” and effectively blocked form receiving major endorsements.

Finally, another possible explanation emerged from a handful of respondents who argued
that Latinas are “not in the mix” of potential favored candidates to the extent that Latino men are because they see Latinas as “women candidates,” and not as “Latina/o candidates.” This dynamic manifested itself in interviews in several different ways. An organization leader explained to me, at length, that Latinas were not as successful as men in getting recognition from the leadership and being elected because there is no voter base for a Latina woman to win with, or to support the possibility of a series of women holding a seat. In his words:

I just think in general regarding women is that there is no such things as female districts…I would make the argument that there is an 80 to 90 percent chance that when that incumbent leaves…that a co-ethnic will win that seat. We can make a lot of those seats out, right? That same calculation doesn’t work for women, obviously, right?

There’s no such thing as female-sustained representation. This idea that women need women, and not that they can appeal based on race. Or take a seat that a man has. Women, female representation, cannot be built on top of female representation, like Blacks, Latinos, or Asians or Jews, even.”

This respondent argued that Latinos could be counted on to win a district, but that women could not. When I attempted to clarify whether he thought that Latina women were included in the group of Latina/os who could win a district, he responded that they could, as Latina/os, but not as women. Although we were talking in circles to an extent, this portion of the interview resonated with comments I heard from other respondents, about “women’s districts.”

Latina candidates’ positioning as frequent outsiders, vis a vis the Latina/o Democratic leadership’s candidate pipeline, is also physically manifested by the geography and demography of the seats they contest and win. Many of the districts where Latina legislators have recently won were described to me by respondents as “crossover” districts, or “marginal” districts. In terms of where those districts are located, many of the legislative seats held by Latinas have been on the outskirts of the county, outside of the city Los Angeles itself. As Figure 5.4 shows, they have also tended to be in districts that encompass majority Latina/o populations. However, those majorities are often smaller than the Latina/o majorities present in longstanding “Latino” seats held by Latino men. This dynamic was discussed by a Latino male respondent as evidence of Latinas’ “advantage” in electoral politics.

They’re not sustainable as Latino seats. As soon as the [Latinas] left, all of them, stopped being Latino. Latinas have that advantage…It takes a Latina to win those marginal—plurality, but marginal—Latino seats.

While this explanation has also been echoed elsewhere in the political science literature, it rings hollow in this case. If Latinas are so advantaged, their “crossover appeal” should also be an asset for running and winning in larger Latina/o population districts as well. That has not been the case. Additionally, the “crossover” seats have not been held by Latinas in the long term, but many have been won by Latino men at some point, as well. Given this context, the more likely explanation for why Latinas have won primarily in districts that have more of an ethnic plurality population, farther from the historic Latina/o core neighborhoods of Los Angeles, is that these districts provide openings for Latinas that are otherwise elusive in areas closer to the center of the County that are more tightly controlled by leadership.

One set of opportunities that the outer areas of the County provide to Latinas (and Latinos,
for that matter) who may be operating outside the “musical chairs,” are the mid-size cities in which to build a political brand. The barriers to entry for electoral politics in communities like Baldwin Park, West Covina, Pomona and Norwalk are lower than they would be in making a run for the City Council, or even school board, in Los Angeles. Tables 5.5 and 5.6 show that for those Latinas and Latinos who are not directly connected to the inner circle of Latina/o and union political leaders, working in local government in those types of communities can be an effective launching pad for potential candidates.

In a similar vein, while the “leadership” still has influence in these exurban areas, the weight of their endorsements, and the impact of labor’s mobilization efforts, is less consistently powerful in these communities, relative to areas closer to downtown Los Angeles. This is reflected in the electoral fortunes of several winning Latina legislators. Blanca Rubio won her seat with some unions’ support, but not all, in spite of what one respondent called “a tiff” with the teachers’ unions. Christina Garcia split the support of organized labor with her opponents, who were part of a political dynasty in the area, and emerged the victor. Patty Lopez won her first election in part because there was little concerted voter mobilization against her, and the raft of endorsements held by the incumbent apparently did not deter the voters in a particularly low turnout election.

Nevertheless, the Latina/o and labor leadership in central Los Angeles does consider these communities that border other counties as part of their electoral purview. This was apparent from interviews with those who are key figures in that leadership group, as well as in my conversations with those who consider themselves outsiders. Respondents generally described Latinas who have run recently, and won, in these areas as having gone up against the machine. One respondent who is closely tied to the leadership described recent Latina candidacies this way:

There’s no one formula to get there….You know, coming and getting Antonio [Villaraigosa], getting us, it’s more like getting an ego thing, an ego boost, and to me that is essential, when everybody fucking tells you no, no, no, no. You need a validator to say, like, am I doing the right thing. It’s important. I’m not going to discount that, but is it essential?

No, because the women who I think have been successful are the ones that have said, “I don’t need you. I’m gonna do this. And that worked for them. [Latina Candidate E]. She took on the establishment, and she did it. …She really broke the mold and said, “I’m gonna do this regardless of what anybody says.”

A campaign professional described the dynamics of recent Latina candidacies in a similar fashion: “The infrastructure’s pulling the men. Most of the women are running despite that fact.” These descriptions fit in well with Latina candidates’ own stories of running despite being told to wait their turn, and the consequences they faced once they committed to running. One candidate listed off the ways that campaigns could be hampered by members of the leadership moving parts of the political infrastructure out of candidates’ reach:

They called Treasurers and every Treasurer I called like, “Will you take me on?” they’d tell me, “No,” because they were told not to take me on.

They called consultants to make sure they didn’t take me on. They called people to make sure I couldn’t hire people…They were like “Let’s make sure no one picks her up as a client.”

According to respondents, more overt tactics of dissuasion and detraction from outsiders’
campaign efforts were also employed by coalition leaders and their associates. One former candidate stated: “the other thing is a lot of it here is bullying. So I’m gonna bully you or if you’re gonna run against me I’m gonna run a really negative campaign against you even if it’s not true.” Another candidate described what he saw as the “machine at work” against a Latina woman who was asked to sit out a race, and persisted anyway:

I was one of the few people that were friendly to [her]. She was a good, young woman. But she would go to these places I'd go. I'd get to speak. They wouldn't let her speak because [the favored candidate] was there. They would – people were just blocking her out constantly. She was everywhere. Complaining, "How come I – how come you don't introduce me?" Complaining to everyone.

Oh God. She was tenacious.

As a result of these dynamics, generally speaking, many of the Latina candidates outside of the City of Los Angeles who are successful ran their campaigns despite powerful opposition from the Latina/o political leadership, in an area a bit further from their most concentrated areas of influence, based on political brands built through local politics. A byproduct of these conditions is that some of the Latinas who have won express little interest in suddenly becoming an electoral team player, even if they are supportive and agree on the leadership’s policies and legislation. They are, by dint of the process they must overcome in order to win, very independent, or at least independent from the Latina/o Democratic and union leadership coalition. One Latina, whose candidacy had been opposed by the leadership, explained how her independence had been forged. She said “One of these things I think they wanted me to lose so they could go ‘see without us, you can’t win.’ And then guess what I’m learning? I don’t need you. I’m doing this on my own.”

The female candidates and elected officials I interviewed described varying degrees of effort on the part of the leadership to incorporate them into policy and political work—some have found it useful to “join the team” to a certain extent. Others have said that they cannot trust people who engaged in the tactics levied during their campaigns, and are uninterested in “being on the team” just long enough for the leadership to find someone to run against them in the next cycle. Finally, although every Latina candidate and former candidate I spoke to said something to the effect that they regret there not being greater collective strategizing by Latinas and women of color more generally in the legislature and in local offices, many also said that because most of them had to fight the system to reach elected office, they had a hard time seeing strategic ways to work in solidarity with each other.

The patterns of centrally facilitated, at times exclusionary, candidate emergence and support efforts on the part of the Latina/o Democratic leadership in Los Angeles are widely acknowledged in their effectiveness and pivotal role in shaping the electoral landscape of the county for the past two decades. However, they are not necessarily determinative, or static. One respondent emphasized to me that the leadership could make a run for office difficult without their blessing, but not impossible, particularly given the number of seats that are being contested in any given cycle. He described it as a simple question of “capacity,” wherein the leadership has to be strategic about staying out of races wherein any of the leading candidates would be supportive of their policy agenda.

Another respondent also noted that the current array of leaders and powerbrokers may change as political gravity for Latina/os shifts away from the City of Los Angeles to broader parts of the county, and to the legislature in Sacramento. The respondent also described a potential
generational tension around race-based politics as it was advanced by earlier cohorts of Latina/o leaders:

Respondent: All these ethnic caucuses to me are kind of dated. And I think we’re going to move to a place where everybody’s going to be multi-ethnic, multi-racial…and I think it’s important for those Californians to see themselves in positions of power, so I think that’s the future, in my opinion. And I think we move away from this territorial politics of, like, “Oh, that is a Latino seat. That is an Asian seat. That is a Black seat.” … It worked for us in the 70s, 80s, 90s, but now, with this new generation, this has its expiration date.

I don’t think the new generation of folks are as worried about this ethnic representation, how we were…But I also understand that we need to maintain some sort of identity in this process. I know, I know. I’m conflicted.

Interviewer: Are you?

Respondent: I am conflicted with the previous question about still trying to fight for seats and still trying to be part of this new wave of thought…But there’s the Polancos, Al Torres that are still holding me, like, wait, you’re one – So I want to be part of this ethnic revolution, but then I see – Yeah, I’m conflicted.

Throughout the interview, a key concern for this respondent was how Latina/os would grow as a political community, in harmony with and alongside, other growing groups of people of color. Part of that growth may be shaped by younger, rising Latina/o politicians, who are less invested in the coalitions of previous eras based on civil rights coalitions with African Americans, or immigration or labor activists from the turbulent 1990s. Several respondents pointed out that Latina/o political figures who fit that description were emerging more frequently in communities like the San Gabriel Valley, where they were competing in ethnic plurality communities, and had to make a case to voters that extended beyond race-based politics. The necessity, and effectiveness, of working in cross-racial coalitions in order to maintain and increase Latina/o descriptive representation may acquire renewed importance in these areas. For Asian Americans in those same neighborhoods, cross-racial coalitions have long been part of the formula for achieving representation, with mixed results.

Asian American Candidate Emergence and Success: Identities and Entrepreneurs

The descriptive representation patterns of Asian Americans are a sharp contrast to those of Latina/os in Los Angeles. The small number of elected officials who have been successful in the most consequential levels of government in the county—Congress, the Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles City Council, and the state legislature—is readily apparent in the handful of winners whose names were raised repeatedly in interview after interview. Most respondents began our conversations by detailing the extent to which these results are a product of the ethnic diversity of the Asian American community in Los Angeles. However, many also raised significant issues related to civic and political institutions that further challenge the Asian American community’s capacity for
developing and supporting viable candidates. Structural barriers to political incorporation limit the “promise” of an Asian American voter base that candidates can count on; the current architecture of racial electoral politics leaves few jurisdictions where an Asian American candidate can run without disrupting existing Democratic coalitions; and political elites have rarely advanced electoral strategies or capacity-building measures that are based around an Asian American pan-ethnic identity.

As a result, Asian Americans have not developed a clear model or infrastructure for building their political power and levels of descriptive representation in Los Angeles. Replicating the “majority minority,” race-based political machines of Latina/os and African Americans is untenable, given the size and dispersion of the population and its internal diversity (along several dimensions). Turning to a strategy of “cross-over” and “coalition” based candidates would require peeling off voters from other, more highly organized political communities, and may make Asian Americans’ place in California’s Democratic coalition increasingly tenuous. Given the institutional challenges facing potential candidates in Los Angeles, the likelihood of increasing their descriptive representation rests on the development of a new strategy for mobilizing the political resources of Asian American elites and voters alike.

Community Political Profile: Asian Americans in Los Angeles

The nearly 2 million Asian Americans living in Los Angeles today encompass 16 percent of the county’s resident population (Ramakrishnan, n.d.). In addition to being the largest Asian American community in the country, Los Angeles is also home to one of the most diverse. Residents with Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Cambodian and Thai heritage are more numerous in Los Angeles than anywhere else in the continental United States, and the Indian and Vietnamese American populations are just shy of 100,000 residents each. These communities are spread across the county in suburban cities, ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods, with varying degrees of segregation from other racial and ethnic groups (Iceland et al., 2014). Asian Americans make up 15-20 percent of the population in eight of the L.A. City Council Districts (Demographics of revised L.A. Council districts, 2017), and more than 15 percent of the population in nine of the 38 legislative districts in the county. The residential patterns and ethnic makeup of Asian Americans in Los Angeles have been shaped by a confluence of factors related to immigration policies, housing and economic discrimination, and a contentious history of political exclusion and internment.

The anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese exclusion movements of the late 19th and early 20th century sought to limit the number of Asians entering the United States, while still allowing for a steady supply of low-cost laborers. Policies and laws enacted during this period restricted immigration from particular Asian countries (the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Immigration Reform Act of 1924, the Tydings-Mcduffie Act, and others), and formalized limits on land ownership and the sanctity of restrictive housing covenants against individuals of Asian heritage already in the United States (California Alien Land Laws). In Los Angeles, Asian immigrants from China, Japan, and the Philippines typically lived in Chinatown or Little Tokyo, near downtown, or in smaller communities made up of farmers and gardeners such as Sawtelle and Gardena. Many of the moves Asian Americans made during this period were prompted by social and economic exclusion propagated by Whites, and they often established new neighborhoods alongside Latina/os and African Americans seeking to escape the same restrictions.

The internment of Japanese Americans left an indelible mark on Asian Americans as a community in Los Angeles. Families rushed to sell off property, belongings and businesses at a severe loss before being forcibly removed. The central civic organization for Japanese Americans, the Japanese American Citizens League, suffered lasting damage to its ability to unify and provide leadership within the community, after encouraging cooperation with the internment order (S.
Kurashige, 2010). Over a brief period following Pearl Harbor, the economic and social infrastructure that Japanese Americans had erected in Los Angeles was nearly eradicated.

After the release of Japanese Americans from Manzanar and other internment camps, many chose not to return to Los Angeles, or the West Coast, given the high levels of anti-immigrant and racist rhetoric, as well as terrorist attacks against individuals perceived to be Japanese (S. Kurashige, 2010). Those who did—a small fraction of the original population—found that while they were gone, African Americans and Latina/os had established their own communities in many of the areas that were previously dominated by Japanese residents. These conditions set the stage for parallel multiracial processes: Asian Americans often worked with and supported the efforts of African Americans and Mexican Americans for civil rights and housing rights, because they were occurring in their own neighborhoods. Simultaneously, efforts within the Japanese American community to close the door on discussions of the internment stifled activists’ attempts to build solidarity out of shared experiences of racism.

The inability of Asian Americans, African Americans and Latina/os to extract justice from the government and White political power structure often resulted in tensions within multiracial communities. These pent-up frustrations were evident in events, like the Watts rebellion in 1965, that left lasting scars within and among the racial groups living in close proximity in the central areas of Los Angeles (S. Kurashige, 2010). Some activists emerging from these eruptions were central to the Asian American Movement of the late 1960s and 70s, and worked in solidarity with leaders of the Black Freedom Struggle. However, this was a point of departure from other parts of the Asian American community, as other segments of the population followed Whites out of the city, and away from what they perceived as the danger of living as minorities in African American-dominated neighborhoods (S. Kurashige, 2010).

In the 1960s and 70s, Asian immigrants living downtown (as well as Latina/os) sought greater housing affordability and availability in smaller communities, in eastside neighborhoods and a cluster of “ethnoburbs” in the San Gabriel Valley (Li, 1998). At the same time, following the 1965 Hart-Cellar Immigration Act, inflows of new immigrants from Asia also began arriving and settling in the same areas (L. T. Saito, 1998; J. Wong, 2008). From that point, the internal diversity of Los Angeles’ large Chinese and Taiwanese communities grew along several lines. Those arriving and moving directly to the San Gabriel Valley, for example, did not experience living alongside African Americans during the civil rights struggles of the 1960s to the same extent as other Asian Americans who had been in the city since World War II. The two main venues for immigration under the 1965 reforms—family reunification and professional applications—also ushered in distinct economic and politically-oriented groups of immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (J. Wong, 2008).

By the 1990s, the San Gabriel Valley had fully transitioned from its predominantly Japanese American origins in the postwar period, to a community defined by a large, and continuously growing, Chinese population, living alongside other immigrants from east and southeast Asia, as well as a significant population of Mexican Americans (L. T. Saito, 1998). In other areas of Los Angeles, Koreatown, Thai Town, multiple “Japantowns” and other ethnic enclaves had also taken root. Outside of the San Gabriel Valley, Asian Americans were living in clusters, but not necessarily in large racially homogenous neighborhoods, when the anti-immigrant sentiments and racial tensions that marked the 1990s erupted in Los Angeles.

The civil unrest following the Rodney King verdict in 1992 shaped each racial community in Los Angeles in distinct ways (Chang, 1993; C. J. Kim & Lee, 2002; Sonenshein, 1993), and for many Korean Americans, the aftermath was a politically galvanizing moment. Several scholars and interview respondents I spoke with argue that the Korean American community recognized a need for increasing their representation in mainstream politics in Los Angeles (Oh, 1993; Park, 2001), given what they saw as an inadequate, or even neglectful, response by City government and agencies.
during the uprising. This led to the development of new civic organizations based around the political parties and rebuilding efforts, but also highlighted the challenging position that Korean Americans occupied in the political coalitions of Los Angeles. Internal tensions between conservatives and those who saw Korean American interests as aligned with civil rights struggles frequently translated into fractured alliances, and a less cohesive advocacy strategy for the Koreatown community.

Similarly, the redistricting battles fought over Koreatown following the 2010 U.S. Census also created a moment of opportunity to build political capacity, while also putting a spotlight on internal political divisions over the best way to build Korean political influence in mainstream politics. Asian American and Latina/o political elites had successfully worked as a coalition to produce a redistricting plan for the San Gabriel Valley’s Assembly seats following the 1990 Census, though not without challenges along the way (L. Saito, 1993). The Citizens’ Redistricting Commission process following the 2010 Census had included many of the groups and activists from those earlier negotiations, and established new district lines for the state and Congressional seats by the end of 2011. However, in the City of Los Angeles, Korean American activists had grown increasingly concerned that Koreatown was split among four different City Council districts, and often attributed the City’s negligence during the 1992 uprising to this “cracking” of the community (KW Lee Center for Leadership, 2011).

Many of the public faces of the effort to bring Koreatown under one City Council District were younger, second-generation Korean Americans, who publicly accused older, first-generation Korean business owners of supporting the City Council leadership’s efforts to keep the status quo in order to maintain friendly political conditions for their enterprises. As one young leader said during a city redistricting commission hearing: “I would like to welcome you to the political awakening of Koreatown. We are not going to be the quiet group that just hands out money without representation!” (Aron & Stewart, 2012)

Ultimately, the City’s redistricting commission stated that their final plan reduced the fracturing in Koreatown, but activists and many constituents saw the continuing split of the community across three districts as a defeat (Vargas, 2012). In the process, second-generation Korean American activists began developing their own political skills and public profiles. Additionally, the mobilization of community members at hearings, rallies and protests was noted by Asian American organization leaders and candidates I interviewed, as holding a promise of future political engagement. As I was conducting interviews, the ramifications of the Koreatown redistricting controversy were continuing to play out: one of the Korean American members of the City’s redistricting commission, Robert Ahn (who many respondents viewed as coming down on the wrong side of the Asian American community), had just been propelled to a runoff election for a Congressional seat against an establishment Latina/o candidate—based largely on the turnout of Asian American voters in Koreatown. Most leaders, donors and consultants that I interviewed said that getting into the runoff was an important success (even though they doubted that Ahn would ultimately win) because it demonstrated that Asian Americans were willing to mobilize to elect one of their own.

The history of political mobilization and representation in Los Angeles’ Asian American community is made up of many strands—ethnic and racial, immigrant and native born, state policies and discriminatory local industries—all within an electoral context that is structured to empower relatively few to govern many. Among those strands, Asian American women and men’s distinct sociopolitical positions and landmarks are often obscured. Recalling Table 5.4, Asian American women’s rates of primary candidacy, and ultimate success, stand out among all other groups. They have run less frequently than every other group; 1 percent of all primary candidates over two decades of state legislative races. Those few who have run have had among the highest rates of
ultimate success of any group. Most interview respondents I spoke with spoke about one woman in particular, Congresswoman Judy Chu, who is the highest-ranking Asian American elected official representing Los Angeles county. She was often discussed in the context of coalitions with labor, and Latina/os, and leftist Asian American activists, and “old school” Democratic party politics. And yet, when I asked interview respondents if they had ever noticed or thought about why Judy Chu was often the only woman mentioned, or why fewer Asian American women ran than Asian American men, or less frequently than other women, male respondents often had to pause, and then commented in one of two ways. They either said that it was regrettable, and that they were not sure why, or they reminded me that Judy Chu is a woman, and left it at that.

The Asian American women I interviewed seemed unsurprised by the question, and said that the paucity of women in politics was something they had thought about quite a bit. This was in part because they were sometimes the only woman in a room during events or meetings with Asian American political actors. Several respondents attributed the gender gap in Asian American candidacies to an interaction between Asian American women’s professional and sociocultural positions. They pointed out that women, particularly Asian American women, face discrimination and are underrepresented among partners in law firms, corporate boards and other professions where they would expect to see potential candidates emerge (C. Kim & Zhao, 2014). Additionally, the respondents returned repeatedly to the idea that Asian American women are socialized by their families and communities, to a greater extent than Asian American men, to avoid situations where they might fail publicly.

Outside of specific responses to my question about gender differences in Asian Americans’ rates of running and winning, respondents rarely discussed women and men separately when talking about the primary factors driving Asian American underrepresentation. The elements that were widely emphasized—challenges in building a voter base, the need to develop “cross-over” candidates, and racial identity issues among elites—were viewed as facially neutral on gender by respondents. Taken together, these factors have yielded an Asian American political context with little institutional support for developing candidates. The extant literature on women in politics, and other parts of this study, however, suggest that the absence of those institutions may depress the emergence of women more than men.

Building a Base: Diversity, Geography, Civic Institutions, and Incorporation

When interviews turned to the underlying issues limiting the number of Asian American candidates and elected officials in Los Angeles, respondents consistently began by emphasizing the challenges posed by the community’s heterogeneity and geographic dispersion. For the purposes of understanding Asian American descriptive representation, these two factors are compelling, but incomplete explanations. The structural challenges that are reinforced by the size and complexity of the Asian American communities of Los Angeles include a paucity of civic organizations mobilizing pan-ethnically, and low levels of electoral political incorporation among eligible residents. The interaction between these four elements—diversity, geography, civic organizations and low participation—prevents the development of an Asian American voter base that is considered reliable or substantial by most political elites, including Asian Americans. This, in turn, eliminates a potential resource for Asian Americans considering a run for office, that is central to other racial groups in the Los Angeles political landscape—voters who are willing to show up for “one of their own.”

The ethnic and linguistic diversity of Asian Americans in Los Angeles County is the tip of the iceberg in terms of internal heterogeneity. Shifts in immigration policies and home country economic and political conditions have lead to cohorts of migrants from within the same country who are demographically distinct (Lien, 2008; J. Wong, 2008). The Chinese community is the most
prominent, but not the exclusive, example of this dynamic. The Migration Policy Institute reports the difference in household income between Chinese immigrants generally, and that of immigrants from Hong Kong (most of whom arrived before 2000). Chinese immigrants as an overall group have a 19 percent poverty rate, which is above the U.S.’ national native born rate (15 percent). Immigrants from Hong Kong, however, have a higher average household income than Chinese immigrants overall, and a 10 percent poverty rate (Hooper & Batalova, 2015).

More broadly, the Asian American population in Los Angeles County, which grew by 20 percent between 2000 and 2010, exhibits wide-ranging demographic characteristics across ethnic groups. The pan-ethnic advocacy organization, Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Los Angeles (AAJC-LA), produced a report highlighting these contrasts in 2013. The number of foreign born Asian American residents in the county is close to one million, and over a quarter of that group has arrived since 2000. AAJC-LA also estimates that approximately 130,000 Asian Americans living in the county are undocumented (AAJustice-LA, 2013). Educational attainment varies considerably among ethnic groups. As a racial group, Asian Americans are less likely than Whites to have completed high school or obtained a GED, but Taiwanese, Japanese and Filipino Americans are all more likely than Whites to have achieved that level of education.

Educational differences are also evident, but do not translate directly, in the income distributions of Asian ethnic groups in Los Angeles. Whites have a higher per capita income than any Asian ethnic group. The percentage of Taiwanese, Japanese, Filipino and Indian Angelenos living in poverty is lower than that of Whites, but Tongans, Bangladeshis, Cambodians, Laotians and Vietnamese have poverty rates above or similar to those of African Americans and Latina/os (AAJustice-LA, 2013). These descriptive statistics do not capture the social, cultural and political diversity of the Asian American community, but serve as indicators of where any organization or group of political leaders must begin when trying to mount cross-ethnic mobilizations from within, or work in coalitions with “Asian Americans” as a group from outside.

Figure 5.7: Asian American Proportion of District Populations in Los Angeles County, 2016.

The geographic dispersion of Los Angeles’ Asian American community was often raised by interview respondents as a tandem challenge, alongside internal diversity. The distribution of Asian ethnic communities across City Council districts is mirrored in the Asian population proportions of state legislative districts; Figure 5.7 lists district numbers along the x-axis, and the percent of the population that reports being of Asian descent along the y-axis. As one respondent put it: “we’ve got packing and cracking!” Wong notes that the Chinese community’s economic and generational differences intersect with their dispersion across different parts of the county, with lower-income
Chinese immigrants based in and around Chinatown, and higher income immigrants living in parts of the San Gabriel Valley (J. Wong, 2008). Most respondents who brought up this concern used it to illustrate the challenges in creating a unified pan-ethnic voter base.

Several respondents also said that being spread out across the county created practical challenges for potential candidates, and for getting members of the community to consider themselves viable candidates. The economic differences between Chinese communities in downtown and the San Gabriel Valley, for example, were raised by one respondent as an obstacle for fundraising:

Chinatown is dead. I used to go to fundraisers for Michael Dukakis at Golden Dragon Restaurant and a succession of others. That doesn’t exist, anymore. Even Chinatown is not a place where people can come to raise money at all. It is all migrated to San Gabriel. There is no community here, politically, because it’s too divided.

A donor who frequently encourages Asian Americans to run for office compared the effects of living in LA County as an Asian American interested in politics, vs. living in Orange County’s dense Vietnamese neighborhoods:

We don’t have – I mean, yeah, there’s a Chinatown but it’s dispersed. Little Tokyo is certainly not a concentrated group of Japanese. Sawtelle is no longer what it was but you do have – you have the South Asian community in Artesia. The big Vietnamese – I think that having that geographical – when you go into an area and all the restaurant signs are in a different language, then you think, “These are people who can elect somebody.” You’re not gonna get that so much in the other, older areas.

The diversity and dispersion of the Asian American community have also exacerbated two key challenges related to building a voter base: the depth and reach of civic institutions engaged in politics, and the political incorporation of residents. Wong points out in her study of Mexican and Chinese civic organizations in Los Angeles that in comparison to Latina/os, Chinese Americans’ civic infrastructure is relatively new (J. Wong, 2008). Organizations related to pan-Asian or specific Asian ethnic groups are a small fraction of all of the nonprofits operating in Los Angeles County (Bloemraad & Ramakrishnan, 2008). Nearly half of those that do exist are oriented around the Korean-American community, and one-fifth target Chinese Americans (Hung, 2008).

Interview respondents often lamented that few pan-ethnic organizations are thriving. Several pointed out that in addition to creating mechanisms for mobilizing votes, a more robust civic landscape would also help to build political capacity within the Asian American community. One respondent described the situation thus:

The only agency we have on the map is Advancing Justice. That’s about it. We need multiple. Advancing Justice is nowhere near MALDEF [Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund]. It’s about being able to have multiple platforms. Multiple advocacy groups. Multiple think tanks. We don’t even have a think tank. Just educational. Get ready for redistricting. We need someone to start raising money and start putting maps together. Stuff like that. Initiative process and all these things.

Another respondent acknowledged a need for greater pan-ethnic organizing, and was more optimistic about the prospects for organizers to move in that direction in the future:
I really take my hat off to APALA [Asian Pacific American Labor Association]....The fact they're working with...Asian-Immigrant workers, educating them about labor, progressive politics. Some groups have fallen by the wayside…. [but] there’s a lot of work going on…. I just met with a…political consultant that wants to build a new Asian-American Democratic club. There's Filipino-American Democrats. There's Korean-American Democratic club. There's individual groups but they need to come together. And I think people are starting to do that.

Respondents also noted that ethnic and Asian-oriented organizations were not the only ones capable of mobilizing and building technical political skills in the community. A few respondents suggested that the lack of a Democratic party infrastructure advantaged groups that had more resources to organize along ethnic and racial lines on their own, unlike Asian Americans. There were mixed appraisals of the efforts of the labor movement to incorporate Asian Americans during the interviews, but every respondent who brought up labor said that despite being “immigrant-oriented” in the last two decades, the reality was that much of that energy for mobilizing immigrant voters was directed at Latina/os. One respondent said that this was in part due to Latin/o leaders’ interest in building Latina/o power specifically and labor’s role in that effort:

I used to always complain Labor never reached out to Asians and they always talk about it but they never do it and all sorts of things like that. They’re still talking about it. Same thing with the Democratic Party. The thing is when you reach out to them; you got to share your power. They don’t want to share power. It’s just whoever has the power.

This is not to suggest that organized labor has not played any role in the support and election of Asian Americans in Los Angeles. There are a handful of names that respondents consistently raised as examples of “Asian Labor candidates:” Congresswoman Judy Chu, former Assembly member Warren Furutani, and unsuccessful City Council candidate John Choi. Each of these candidates’ resumes’ bears some resemblance to those of many of the Latino state legislators discussed earlier; they all had long histories as labor and civil rights organizers, or as in Choi’s case, worked directly for Maria Elena Durazo. However, even as “Labor candidates,” they also illustrate the potential limits of labor’s power to deliver for Asian American candidates—which are likely distinct from what they are for Latina/os. Both Furutani and Chu won their highest offices during special elections with very low turnout. Choi lost his election bid, despite entering the race as the clear choice of labor and a sizeable independent expenditure campaign by unions in support of his candidacy. These three candidates are the only ones that respondents identified as Asian Americans backed by labor.

Low levels of political participation, particularly as voters in elections, present a final structural challenge in developing an Asian American voter base, that is inseparable from the previous three. The underlying causes for low rates of voter turnout are well-documented in the race and ethnic politics literature, and not unrelated to the three structural issues raised in this section—lack of mediating institutions oriented towards politics, and outreach from political parties; limited access to ballots and voting materials in Asian languages; low levels of information about American elections for new immigrants; alienation from political bodies that seem to ignore the community’s interests, among others (Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Junn & Masuoka, 2004; Lien, 2006; Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2006; J. Wong et al., 2011). Respondents’ perceptions of the issues that limit
participation in Los Angeles reflected the findings in this literature. One talked about how seemingly preventable issues, like competent translation on ballots, were affecting Korean voters trying to participate in a Congressional primary a few days after our meeting:

There’s all of these people – they show up, they took the time out of their day, they show up to the polling place, and they can’t even read the frickin’ thing. That’s insane to me. The election is in…five days now. They were saying that a lot of the ballots that were sent to the Korean-American – within Koreatown – had misprinted names next to candidates. We need to do something about this. This is insane. People are going to think that they’re voting for one person and voting for another person.

These challenges are not *sui generis*, or exclusively a function of Asian Americans’ cultural backgrounds or immigrant status. Just as the geographic dispersion of ethnic groups and enclaves is related to discriminatory economic and political policy regimes, the relative youth of civic organizations is tied to the ways in which immigration policies shape migration, and the historic efforts of the state to dismantle organizations and communities (L. Kurashige, 2000; S. Kurashige, 2010; Park, 2001). Many of the underlying causes of low levels of political participation and incorporation among Asian Americans are tied to electoral and political institutions, many of which are formulated in bodies wherein Asian Americans have little to no descriptive representation.

While most respondents emphasized the structural difficulties in developing an Asian American voter base, many also pointed out occasional cases wherein Asian American voters had surprised observers with their turnout, or posited that things might change, particularly around the idea of pan-ethnic political organizing. As an example, several respondents spoke hopefully about remarkable levels of turnout from Koreatown residents during John Choi’s failed election bid, and the 2017 primary in California Congressional District 34. These comments were typically made in the context of the respondent talking about how achievable increased representation in the county could be, given the generally low turnout and a frequent situation where blanket primaries attracted many candidates. One respondent described the turnout in Choi’s race (which Mitch O’Farrell ultimately won):

With 12 people in a race and a 14 percent turnout, John got 3,400 votes and Mitch O’Farrell got like 4,000 votes and made it to the top two. 3,000 votes! John[Choi] did a 50 percent Korean-American turnout…..The Korean-American community was like, “This is a *bona fide* candidate that happens to be Korean American,” so they all went behind him, too…The Korean Americans in the primary turned out double the numbers, then, quadruple the numbers in the general!

Respondents struck a similar tone when talking about voter turnout for Robert Ahn’s second place finish in a Congressional primary in 2017. They saw promise, but were realistic about why both races still did not ultimately succeed. Asian American voters were not turning out to vote in a vacuum, and even elevated turnout levels, “presidential levels” as one respondent repeatedly termed it, were insufficient to overcome turnout from other groups who were not supporting the Asian American candidate.

The “Cross-Over” Conundrum

Many of the people I interviewed, who believed that Asian Americans can increase their
descriptive representation in Los Angeles, discussed the need for Asian Americans to become better “cross-over” candidates in order to achieve that goal. To a person, everyone who discussed cross-over candidates mentioned, or spoke at length about, Mike Woo. He was the first Asian American elected to the Los Angeles City Council, in 1983. Woo represented a district that stretched from central Los Angeles to Sherman Oaks, and estimates that when he served, the district population included about 5 percent Asian American residents (A. Walton, 2015). He was the only Asian American who had ever served on that body until David Ryu was elected in 2015. In follow-up conversations, I asked several respondents why, if the cross-over model was the ticket to representation, was everyone only ever able to name one person who had successfully used it in three decades? They typically laughed uncomfortably, or were momentarily silent, in response.

As the discussion of Asian Americans unfolded during interviews, it became clear that while Mike Woo was a cross-over candidate, the mix of communities and support he relied upon had rarely been replicated for other Asian American candidates. One respondent described it as “this kind of people of color coalition plus the west side” base, that was supported by the key Latina/o leaders at the time, like Al Torres. Among the Asian Americans who have been elected to city, state or Congressional seats in the county over the past two decades, all have come from the jurisdictions with the largest proportions of Asian Americans in the population, ranging from roughly 10 percent to 25 percent in most cases. The two who have been elected to Congress, Judy Chu and Ted Lieu, represent districts that encompass 49 and 75 percent White populations, respectively. David Ryu’s 10th City Council District has a White population that is also 75 percent of the district. Carol Liu, the only Asian American elected to the State Senate from Los Angeles County, represented a district that was 50 percent White. Of the 18 electoral wins by Asian Americans in the State Assembly over the same period, one-third were in districts with a White majority population.

The exact terms of being a cross-over candidate were difficult for interview respondents to define. Many followed a general pattern of talking about working in coalition with Latina/os, who they recognized have been and would increasingly be a significant population in most districts, then reconsidering, and then talking about Asian Americans’ abilities to garner the support of White voters. These respondents were not confused, or inconsistent, but their discussion of cross-over candidates reflected the perils and promise of that strategy for Asian Americans. Putting together a coalition of people of color poses logistical challenges, when it is likely that a Latina/o, with more extensively organized electoral resources, will also be on the ballot. Targeting Whites, or running more to the ideological right in the areas east of the City of Los Angeles, potentially puts Asian Americans in a tenuous position in the Democratic coalition and “ethnic politics” landscape of the county. In most of the jurisdictions that respondents saw as potential new seats for Asian Americans, the majority of voters are likely to be either Latina/o or White. These factors raise the stakes for Asian Americans attempting to compete in elections using a racial coalition model. One respondent’s attempt to summarize the cross-over candidate approach highlights its challenges:

It’s different because Latinos is pure numbers, right? They’re just trying to overcome with numbers. There’s no right way. I think it’s a hybrid model. It’s something like what the Jewish community, and Latino community – and that’s what we got to figure out. That’s what we got to find and that’s why it’s got to be done in the right way. Also, the Asian Americans – they’re not all progressive and liberal. I mean, I think it’s more – in California – it’s more like 70/30 but others would argue like 60/40. It’s about how you bring everybody under the tent but it’s while I want to empower Asian Americans, I also want to empower progressives and there’s all sorts of different things at play.
In many ways, Asian American candidates and consultants that I interviewed began working across racial groups in politics almost from the beginning of their careers. Many were initially inspired to get involved in politics or work for a legislator by candidates or issues emerging from the Asian American community. However, if an individual wanted to work for an elected official in the 1980s, 1990s, and even into the first decades of the 21st century, odds were low that an open job with an Asian American legislator existed. All of the respondents I spoke to who had worked in politics before their current role, had worked, often for an extended period, for a non-Asian American elected official. These roles became particularly relevant when they discussed the struggle that Asian Americans had building a potential base of voters. If an Asian American worked for a high profile Latino, for example, built relationships with the leadership, and got to know voters in the district, would they be able to translate that into support for their own candidacy? Would that elected official support the Asian American staffer, in what is presumably a winnable district for a Latina/o? Two respondents argued that generally, the answer to these questions would be no, unless the elected official in question were White. They pointed to the election of Phillip Chen, a Republican who was elected to the state Assembly, who previously worked for a powerful member of the County Board of Supervisors, Michael Antonovitch.

The ability to compete in a district with Latina/os, particularly those connected to the Democratic and labor leadership, came up repeatedly as an issue for building a coalition of voters of color, or immigrant community voters. Several campaign professionals pointed out that in districts where Asian Americans might think a quarter or third of the population being Asian American provides an opening, there is also a significant Latina/o population. That, in turn, often translates into an array of Latina/o candidates entering the primary. For the Asian American candidate in that type of district, winning the general election requires peeling votes away from those Latina/o candidates, or from an African American who might be running in a “historic” African American district. Respondents agreed that that would be very difficult, for two reasons.

First, respondents emphasized that communities of color are motivated to “stick together” because they want to see a person they trust attempt to address the issues they see being ignored by elected officials from other groups. One respondent put it this way:

The more problems you have in your community, the more you tend to stick together. They’re not gonna vote for me if there’s a Black candidate or a Latino candidate. I’d be able to peel off some because of – the thing is, even if a black community leader vouches for me and says, “Great guy,” some will vote for me but try telling the Korean-American grandmother to-- Not buying it. They don’t care. Because they just want to see someone… there should be representation. Same thing for African Americans. Try telling an African-American grandmother not to vote for Obama.

Given the racial political history of Los Angeles, and the large proportion of first-generation immigrants in the population, respondents felt that this tendency to vote co-ethnically was logical, understandable, and expected.

Second, in order to gain votes from Latina/os and African Americans, Asian American candidates would need electoral resources that can compete with the more extensive network of donors and civic organizations that those groups have built. Several organization leaders pointed to Judy Chu’s election to Congress in 2009 as a positive case—she brought deep roots in the Eastside, and her long history with labor and Latina/o immigrant organizing to bear against then-Assembly Member Gil Cedillo. One in three Latina/o voters in that election chose her over Cedillo(Tobar,
I asked several respondents whether Chu was an anomaly, or a blueprint, and each answered in a way that emphasized the singularity of that election: either that Chu was unique as a candidate, that Cedillo’s personal relationships with labor leaders were fraught, or that her standing as a leading Democrat was connected to a system that looked quite different today.

Respondents’ interpretations of the net result of these two dynamics, and whether they constitute a substantial opportunity for Asian American candidates, sometimes varied based on race. Several Latina/o leaders I spoke with talked about the cross-over districts as presumed Latina/o seats, either now or in the immediate future. An illustrative response from one leader was:

“The challenge for Asian Americans is that most of their concentration and potential political power is right adjacent to or overlaps Latino political power. For you to have an Asian seat, it literally costs a Latino seat. Every Asian Assembly member, state Senator, or Congressman could easily have been and more likely to be a Latino elected official. It has to be some type of situational – something that happens. Judy Chu only gets elected because it’s a special election in the old, two-party system where she’s the top Democrat.”

Several Asian American respondents took essentially the same tone—Latina/os were or would shortly be the largest single ethnic group in many of the districts in question, and thus it was most likely that they would take or hold those seats, as a matter of practical population-based politics.

A handful of other Asian American respondents argued that it was a mistake to consider cross-over seats as Latina/os’ to lose. Some took issue with what they saw as Latina/o leaders’ perceptions that victories like Chu’s should be considered a favor, to keep the Democratic coalition “happy.” They emphasized that this was “the tension:” that for Asian Americans to increase representation, they would have to “take it” from Latina/os.

Another common tack that respondents pursued in making the case for cross-over candidates was a move away from race-based politics, or at least race-based appeals to voters. Some described it as simply not emphasizing their racial identity, and running as a progressive Democrat, and hoping that that would convince voters from other racial groups. One former candidate described it:

Asians are gonna have to be running in areas where they’re not so – you gotta have a chance….And other ethnic communities come in and say, “No, it’s our seat. It’s our area.” And I said, “Well, look at the numbers.” They’re not. So I can run. I’m not gonna run as an Asian. I’m not gonna win as an Asian. I’m gonna raise money as an Asian.

Several respondents raised John Choi and David Ryu’s campaigns as two attempts at this strategy, with divergent results. One respondent was disappointed in Choi’s loss, and expressed skepticism to Ryu early on about his approach, saying that in Los Angeles, you have to be with a specific group so that you can turn out voters and get donors. “You say you work for everybody, that means you work for nobody.” He confessed to being surprised that Ryu won, and that it made him consider more seriously whether Asian Americans who were committed to the community could win over White voters. This respondent saw an evolution in Asian Americans’ political development; that they could cultivate candidates committed to their issues, and help them win, but not need their group identity to be front and center during the campaign.

Other respondents also saw White voter support as the key to Asian Americans winning ethnic plurality districts, but argued that it would be attainable because Asian American candidates are more willing to run from the center and center right than other people of color in Los Angeles.
So you're gonna have to make these decisions. That's why we're gonna be getting a few more Republicans elected because they're gonna be getting elected in the suburbs against white candidates. And so a lot of our building's gonna have to be more in the suburbs, not L.A. city.

This respondent viewed the move away from progressive and liberal Democratic positions as a natural fit for the largely nonpartisan, and first generation immigrant portions of the Asian American community.

Now, they've swung back to, it's up for grabs, which is really where the community should be. I think the community actually is up for grabs because the DTS [Decline to State] vote speaks volumes. Most people are registering DTS, now. I think they're coming back to where they should be. I think there was a time when it was not – because the Republicans really screwed themselves, frankly, by clinging on to all these social issues that scare away Asians. I think the open primary helped them a lot. It helped the Republicans make some of these districts more competitive. I think when you look at Phil Chen or Ling Ling [Chang] and them, they're getting a fair amount of Anglo votes, too, right?

All respondents did not accept the notion that Asian American candidates will be more successful (and numerous) by moving to the ideological center. One respondent said that given the history of Republican Asian Americans in statewide and state legislative office in California, the recent emergence of Asian American Republicans in the legislature is not all that significant. He argued that Asian Americans will have to go the way their co-ethnic base goes, and that in the last three presidential cycles, they are moving steadily in the Democratic direction.

A final complicating factor in the prospect of Asian Americans as cross-over candidates is their position as a group, within political coalitions in the county and state. As discussed earlier, running candidates who attempt to pull Latina/o or African American votes, when there is a Latina/o or African American on the ballot, can place a strain on the electoral arrangements that Latina/os and labor unions have been working to facilitate for the better part of two decades. Several Asian American candidates other than Judy Chu have attempted this strategy in recent years. In 2016, veteran Assemblyman Warren Furutani ran against another former Assemblyman Steve Bradford (who is African American), for State Senate District 35, and did not pick up the same degree of support from organized labor as in the past, and lost. John Choi’s race for City Council in 2013 created a tangle of atypical endorsements: his former boss, Antonio Villaraigosa, endorsed a Latina/o running against Choi, even as Maria Elena Durazo and organized labor poured extensive resources into what was ultimately, Choi’s losing campaign.

If Asian Americans run from the center, or the Republican party, that also puts them in the position of being the only non-White group that is not closely affiliated with organized labor, and Democratic policy priorities, in Los Angeles. This has yielded mixed results for the small handful of candidates who have attempted it. Ling Ling Chang and Phillip Chen won consecutively in Assembly District 55 as Republicans, in a district where Whites are a third of the population but a majority of voters. David Ryu did not have significant labor support or a long list of union endorsements in his successful, non-partisan City Council election campaign. On the flip side, when Ling Ling Chang ran for the State Senate seat overlapping her Assembly District, she lost to a White man who had the support of Bernie Sanders, and other high profile Democrats. In the era of Donald Trump and increasing anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy action, affiliating with the Republican party may pose increased risks to Asian Americans’ capacity for coalition building.
Additionally, as a practical matter, politics in Los Angeles is largely organized around groups, especially for people of color, in order to aggregate the resources necessary to overcome the high barriers to entry institutionalized in the county’s electoral architecture. If Asian Americans pursue a strategy where they are not tied to or building an identifiable political group, that undermines the development of a potential resource for working in that particular political context. One respondent described the issue this way:

We have to organize ourselves so that we can reach out and work with other groups. When you want to try to work with the Jewish community or the Latino community or African-American community, they’re like, “Who do we work with?” You need to form something that someone else could work with.

On balance, while a cross-over strategy for Asian American growth is frequently on the minds of political actors in Los Angeles, it is not a well-developed model. Some respondents that I spoke to agreed with that assessment, but said that it may be that Asian Americans need to wait for another round of redistricting before the cross-over strategy can become a clear pathway to increasing representation. What they said they were waiting to see was not a majority Asian American district, but one where Asian Americans and Latina/os were each a significant portion of the district, between 30 and 40 percent. In that “sweet spot” scenario:

If this is a type of race where now you’re the only Asian, you’ve just cut— if multiple Latinos have jumped, they have cut their base and then you have Whites determine the winner. In that scenario, an Asian will win, I think, because….Latinos…start to battle royale, and then it’ll leave the Whites up for grabs. You have to hav a base below the threshold where it’s turning off whites but then you have other ethnic candidates where the Whites now have to make some sort of a choice.

The underlying premise of this scenario—that if White voters are forced to choose between an Asian American candidate and a Latina/o, they will choose the former—requires further empirical study. However, the motivating premise for it is one that may be the most realistic aspect of the cross-over strategy: at some point, the population of Los Angeles County will have an even more significant proportion of Asian Americans and Latina/os, and other groups’ size will dwindle. Whether that translates into candidate choices that are dominated by both groups, as opposed to only Latina/os, is unlikely given the current framework of identity politics that most Asian American political elites are operating under.

“There’s no consensus on Asian here:” Divergent Constructions of Identity Among Asian American Political Elites

Respondents frequently spoke about the lack of an “Asian American infrastructure” among political elites and potential candidates. This term referred both to political institutions and networks—campaign professionals, civic organizations, incumbents identifying and systematically developing their replacements, etc—as well as the lack of a clear set of leaders who are working to increase political power beyond their own seat or trajectory in politics. As much as Latina/o politics in Los Angeles is a “team sport,” Asian American politicians and political leaders operate largely as individual entrepreneurs. Many of the people I spoke to said that this dynamic is rooted in differing conceptions of racial identity as a political resource among elites. As one respondent put it: “There’s no consensus on Asian here.” The result is an absence of Polanco-like leaders “drawing a line in the
sand” and building informal systems between ethnic groups and leaders. Given the ways in which other groups are organized, and the institutional hurdles built into electoral arrangements, Asian Americans in Los Angeles will likely continue to be underrepresented as long as Asian American political elites insist on going it alone.

Respondents frequently equated diversity with division among Asian American candidates, organization leaders, donors, and campaign professionals. The dimensions of diversity that mattered most to the individuals I interviewed were distinct when they were discussing political leaders, instead of voters and residents. A central difference that most respondents raised was in how much value candidates and leaders placed in pan-ethnicity, as a personal identity or a political tool. They distinguished between more recent immigrants, and the generation of activists and leaders who are also first generation, but who had lived in the United States long enough to have been intellectually and politically formed through the civil rights battles from the 1960s through the 1980s.

I think most of them were far left in the ‘60s and that was their maturation. I think in that sense they’re very akin to the Art Torreses…the Willie Browns…in terms of their own philosophical beliefs and very pro-union. They’re on the left side of the democratic party. Now, I think you see them a little bit more moderate, moving more right. Those were the people that were elected at that time. I wouldn’t say the first but the ascendency of more and more in the legislature. I mean Judy and Wilma and Mabel Teng – I think they were all very hard left in the ‘60s. I don’t think the ideology of the 60s, of the Asian-American being the minority struggler applies to new immigrants.

Leaders from the generation described above also recognized a shift away from their focus on pan-ethnic Asian solidarity, towards a more individual-based identity. Their view was that this change also corresponds with a rightward shift in political philosophy. One respondent lamented that this particular generational difference has occasionally made him more cautious about working with younger Asian Americans:

The progressive Asians that were running in this last cycle, and Mike Eng, who's gonna run for state Senate against the Latino or Latina in 2018, we're all from the movement. Mike's from the movement, I'm from the movement, Mariko Yamada's from the movement. [Republican Assemblywoman] Joanne Kim's different. She's younger, much younger. So we're from the generation that still remembers the movement or were a part of the movement more than others. This new generation of Asians running, I try to work with them. We just had an [event] about the movement. Mark did a great job. That was one of the reasons I was open to helping out because I know Mark, where he comes from.

So this new group running, not only are they gonna be running against other ethnic groups, but what's their agenda?

The respondent in this case was willing to work with Mark, a young Asian American activist coordinating the event, because he had been an organizer with Mark’s parents in the 1970s. This respondent works to cultivate leaders from Mark’s generation, in part because he is skeptical that younger activists will advance an agenda that benefits Asian Americans as a pan-ethnic group if left to their own devices.

39 Mark is a pseudonym.
Another generational difference that respondents said contributed to the lack of an Asian American political infrastructure is centered around ideology in some cases, and particular policies in others. One issue that arose repeatedly in interviews was concern that the vocal opposition to affirmative action among a small group of Chinese American activists had the potential to politically fracture not only Chinese or even Asian Americans, but also to do permanent damage to Asian Americans’ as members of the Democratic coalition. One respondent, who was empathetic to the position of more recent immigrants who were opposed to Affirmative Action, was also visibly upset over the prospect of losing support from other minority groups.

Now my observation is, the new immigrants – maybe it’s the Communist system – the average citizen does not run things, they complain, they get media coverage. They protest, and then they think the decision maker will just follow them. But that’s not the way democracy works. You protest and then don’t follow up, nobody gives a shit. You have to be at the table, you have to be directing the money, you have part of the deals. But you cannot blame the Chinese for protecting their own kids. Everybody would do the same. It’s not selfish.

All they’re asking is equal protection under the Constitution. That’s what immigrants are for. I cannot betray them with that. Do we want to sell diversity? Yes, we have to, but you can’t take away that basic core belief in the Constitution as an immigrant in exchange for something. You have to give them equal footing first, before you ask for a trade. And Asians in general are very liberal in across-the-board policies. The only thing they do is they support their own kind.

Eventually it will be referendum. Will the Chinese be ready to deal with the referendum in a productive way? I don’t know. I want to prepare them for that. There should be a way to avoid that expensive, hurtful aggressive battle. Let’s talk.

You know what my message would be? If you live in California, and you are putting your bet with the Republican party to bail you out; it’s a sure loser’s bet.

This respondent saw a tension between where Asian American recent immigrants are as a group in American society—economically marginalized, unfamiliar with the importance of electoral representation—and what is expected of them as a racial minority group in the Democratic party. That tension undermines Asian American leaders’ ability to work politically across ethnic groups, and gain leverage with political elites from other races.

Despite Asian Americans’ generally liberal political leanings (J. Wong, 2008) political differences have arisen beyond the Affirmative Action controversy, in part due to the generational socioeconomic and sociopolitical differences that are often present in many immigrant communities in the United States. Korean Americans were publicly divided over the redistricting controversy in Koreatown in 2011. Younger Korean Americans who had been educated in the United States were often at the forefront of the charge to keep the neighborhood entirely in one City Council District. Some members of that group said during interviews that older, first generation Korean Americans who owned small businesses in Koreatown, were comfortable with the idea that increased political donations ensured favorable policies around zoning and permits, and did not want to destabilize those arrangements. Other community members who spoke out, across generations, related lingering concerns about how the absence of an advocate on the City Council had affected the Korean community during the civil unrest in 1992.

These perspectives are reflective of different understandings of how a group, or community,
can have a voice in government. They mirror findings from national survey data on Asian American voters (Hajnal & Lee, 2011; Ramakrishnan et al., 2016; J. Wong, 2008), as well as research on the ways in which age, tenure in the United States, and immigrant generation shape racial identity (Espiritu, 1992; J. S. Wong, 2000). In the current example however, these differences are playing a direct role in the political strategy, or lack thereof, for Asian Americans as a group in Los Angeles.

Along a similar vein, several respondents said that the lack of a consensus around the idea, or even the utility, of a pan-ethnic political model, tends to place the development of basic political infrastructure into silos. Korean Americans, despite the preceding discussion, were widely discussed as the most likely to develop the networks and institutions necessary to increase their representation within the City of Los Angeles itself.

Asians don’t have [an infrastructure] in L.A. and what they do have now is a Korean infrastructure that got built around the riots. They do have a Korean-American – so all the politics in L.A. is Korean American. If you look at the donors, if you look at – in terms of being consolidated. People can go in to Koreatown and…come out of there with some money.

That’s the infrastructure. Beyond that, there is no L.A. infrastructure, so that’s why there’s no count. There’s no maturing. There’s no “Who are these people?”

This respondent’s depiction of political organizing in Koreatown taps into one of the challenges of political organizing that takes place within ethnic boundaries—the lack of access to other groups’ donors. Several of the Asian American donors I spoke with, and whom respondents described, donate across ethnic groups, but most agreed that the majority of donors who can be counted on to contribute the maximum, tend to be much more interested in supporting candidates from their own ethnic or national origin group. While the Korean American community encompasses small business owners and second generation professionals, respondents said that those donors were dwarfed by the fundraising potential in the Chinese immigrant community.

Respondent: I think there’s diverse avenues for raising money, and definitely, if you’re an Asian-American candidate…A Korean community fundraiser is exponentially different from a Chinese Ocean Seafood Restaurant fundraiser as well.

Interviewer: What’s different?

Respondent: The people who come out… the audience and the considerations taken in terms of planning those fundraisers, too. The Chinese fundraisers that I have been to…it has to be full to the brim for an Ocean Seafood…They’ve sold out, they’re over capacity, you have to always have [Assemblyman] Ed Chau speak, too …A lot of older Chinese wealthier immigrants – mainly from San Marino.

The Korean community fundraisers I’ve been to, I would say it’s a lot more limited in terms of those that I have been out to, but [they’re] younger.

Interviewer: So, it’s less of a concentration of max-out donors?

Respondent: Right. It’s really more of a happy hour-type thing.

Chinese Americans from the San Gabriel Valley, where Judy Chu is the current member of
Congress, are the other national origin group that respondents agreed does have some degree of internal political organization and access to donors. Chu’s husband, Mike Eng, replaced her in the Assembly when she moved up to the Congressional delegation, and Ed Chau, the current member in that seat, received their backing. However, when respondents discussed Chu and Chinese Americans gaining representation in the San Gabriel Valley, they often described it as an example of how Asian American political power is contained by ethnicity and geography. The Chinese American donors in Chu’s district may give to other candidates with Chinese heritage, but respondents gave no indication that Chu, the donors, or other leaders from that area were mobilizing those resources to other Asian Americans, or other districts.

The silos are not limited to communities with a large influx of recent immigrants, or to elites who are recent immigrants themselves. Some respondents, in the course of describing the way in which individual ethnic groups tended to support only other co-ethnics, also said that there is little interaction between East Asian political elites, and Southeast or South Asians—despite Filipino Americans being the largest Asian origin population in the county, and a sizable Indian American population living in southeast Los Angeles county. When I asked one donor who gives to candidates from an array of national origin groups whether there were many other Asian American donors with similar tendencies, the response was:

I don’t think so. Not outside of their community. I think in the community, you might be able to draw but certainly not first-generation money. First-generation money goes to your same nationality. That’s where a lot of the money is.

There’s definitely a division between South Asians and East Asians. Yeah. No question. We try and we want to be – we want to be all together but there is – I think there’s a thing that there is that division and certainly I think in terms of money for politics, there’s definitely that division. I don’t think that you would see, say, “Okay. I am Chinese American. I’m gonna go to the South Asian community and try to raise money.” There’s less a feeling that that would be welcomed. Yeah. Pretty much the other way around, too.

I mean, they are very, very different communities, outside of the whole issue of who came here a long, long time ago and built railroads and who came here last week because of Silicon Valley.

These concerns about how to bridge communities that arrived in the United States more recently, or who have roots in an earlier period of political struggle, or who have differing visions of political power, underscore the ways in which political elites’ conceptions of their own racial and ethnic identity have a material impact on the prospects for Asian American descriptive representation. There is no clear set of leaders marshaling resources, and incentivizing coalitions, akin to Rose Park and other Chinese American leaders in the San Francisco Bay Area, or Antonio Villaraigosa and other Latina/o Democrats in Los Angeles. To the central point of this analysis, there is also little evidence of a candidate pipeline, despite the presence of a number of Asian American legislative and campaign aides, community organization leaders, and access to donors in some communities.

Instead, respondents said most political mobilizations in the Asian American community, or networks of donors, tends to be built around individual candidates, instead of issues. Several lamented that this phenomenon was a missed opportunity to connect the resources and energy of different communities.

What I would say has been a little bit disappointing, quite honestly, is that there hasn’t been
a good synergy of folks working together. I wouldn’t say we all have to be on the same page per se, because… our community is not monolithic. But… for the elected officials that are in office, it’s almost like they’re in a vacuum.

[They’re] not necessarily [looking at] the bigger picture. “I made it; I don’t have to consider the overall community’s needs anymore.” You see a lot who will say, “We care about the Asian-American community,” then get into office and say, “I don’t represent the Asian-American community,” or, “My district isn’t an Asian-American community.” But, a lot of the people within the Asian-American community feel like, “Well, you need to do something at the end of the day. You being there means a lot to the community.”

Other respondents said that it was regrettable, but understandable, that candidates who had to build their campaigns and successes on their own would be less inclined to work on extensive coalitions within the Asian American community. The Korean American voters who had turned out to vote in the 34th Congressional District primary for Robert Ahn were fresh in the minds of many of the respondents I spoke with. When our conversation turned to what would happen to those newly mobilized Korean American voters, one respondent said that given the past behavior of Asian American elected officials, those voters would likely stay connected to Ahn, and not much else. The respondent extended that thought to the broader issue of how candidates work to win elections.

All of them can say – Wilma [Chan] can say she built it herself. Mike [Eng] and Judy [Chu] can say they built – when you build it yourself, you don’t necessarily want to go in and throw anything together. If you’re building it together like the Latino caucus, my sense of it is, “Let’s all do this together,” then you’re more likely to keep building together. If you built your base on your own and they build their base on their own because no one was gonna help them do it anyway. That’s kind of the chicken and the egg thing.

The demographics are gonna push it and there’s bright people – good candidates out there – but that’s despite having a collective.

This respondent’s low expectation for repeated engagement might not come to pass; García Bedolla and Michelson have shown that electoral participation can be particularly “sticky” among first time voters who are mobilized in a personal, and community-centered way (Michelson & García Bedolla, 2012), and others have argued that immigrants who go through the steps necessary to participate in elections gain a “civic education” that enables them to continue to participate (DeSipio, 2011; Jones-Correa, 2001b; Pantoja et al., 2001). However, what is plausible is that Ahn’s supporters will not necessarily be mobilized as part of a coalition with other Asian American candidates. More generally, staying with the Ahn race as an example, it is an open question what will happen to the campaign staffers volunteering on the campaign and learning technical skills like getting out the vote. In Latina/o Democratic circles, the expectation would be that they are preparing for their own race, or to be the Chief of Staff for another Latina/o, down the road. Those systems of development and collaboration run contrary to the framework of identities and entrepreneurship that currently characterize many of the Asian American political leaders in Los Angeles.

“Twenty Years Behind Latina/o?”
One of the respondents I spoke with began our conversation by telling me that in the 1980s, he used to walk around saying that “Asian Americans are just 20 years behind Latinos, politically.” I closed the interview by asking him if, nearly four decades later, he still walks around saying that Asian Americans are 20 years behind, because that comment implies that as a community, there is movement towards something different. He paused, and said “Yeah. I do. I’m actually an optimist.” Despite the challenges militating against a clear model for increasing Asian American descriptive representation significantly, that optimism was often shared by other respondents, albeit with caveats and caution. To be clear, there may be selection bias in that posture—many of the respondents are very visible leaders, and being Asian American is a key facet of their public identities. Thus, there is a vested interest in their belief that there is progress to be made in increasing the political capacity and representation of Asian Americans.

Many respondents were hopeful because they saw the state of Asian American politics in Los Angeles as part of a longer arc of the community’s evolution. This perspective often took two forms. One was that Asian Americans are an immigrant community that is fairly new that needs time to develop deep civic institutions and figure out how to navigate as a group in a political system that is unfamiliar to many of its members. The other take on it was that Asian Americans have been fighting to match their political voice to their presence in American communities for decades, and that this moment may not be the finish line, but compared to the 1960s and 70s, there is discernible progress. As one respondent put it, “if you think about it, we're pretty early in our political development. Japanese-Americans and Asian immigrants couldn’t become citizens until the 50s. And so we’re on the new end of this, so I’m not discouraged by it. It’s gonna be interesting what form it takes.”

Others were also hopeful because they could identify the challenges clearly, and saw openings in both the internal organization of Asian American communities and the functioning of politics more generally. For example, one respondent argued that machine politics is no longer sustainable, because younger generations, from any racial group, are not interested in identity-based solidarity.

But the old school Antonio talking with Kevin de León, talking to Fabian Núñez, who’ve both talked to Richard Alatorre, who's coordinating with Polanco, who's touched base with Art Torres… that's my generation. It's moving off the board. And what happens now, people are becoming more free agents.

Without the machine, this respondent went on to reason, there would be more space for Asian American candidates who are taking on districts and elections individually, instead of waiting to create a place for themselves in an unwieldy coalition. In a related manner, other respondents said that Asian Americans had achieved enough to start developing their own systems for increasing representation, but that it would look different from the infrastructure that Latina/os have built. One respondent remarked that “we might do it in a very different way. We’re at the point now where we have the ear of a lot of powerful people, but we are going to go about it in a completely different manner. We’re not easy to say ‘Well, I’m gonna deliver of the Asian vote for this.’”

Another aspect of some respondent’s optimism was that they saw most issues as inherently fixable, if Asian Americans themselves would take greater responsibility for internal organizing. A respondent felt that this was particularly the case for expanding the candidate pool and donor networks.

And the worst thing is I don’t think we cross the intersection. You have the Asian Business Association, Filipino Bar Association, Japanese Bar Association, Asian – whatever, Chamber
of Commerce. Have you ever had the Chamber of Commerce talking to the Bar Association? Never. “Oh, I give back to my community; I’m a lawyer on the Bar Association.” Have you talked to non-profit person? “Oh, no, I’m too busy.” That’s no good. Your community will never grow, you’ll never be influential. I know how politics works.

The current national political moment gave another respondent hope that the moment when Asian American leaders will be motivated to organize pan-ethnically may arrive sooner rather than later.

Because no one’s gonna do it for you. It’s our community and you have to organize it. It’s nothing new; we’re just the newest community. There’s still an influx of a lot of immigrants coming in from the different Asian countries but the thing is everyone thinks that we’re a guest here. Well, people think that we’re a guest here. We individually think we’re a guest here and people are scared. Especially with Trump going on. Don’t do anything wrong where you can get deported. Even American citizens are like, “I don’t know.” No. This is your country. This is our country. You got to get involved and you got to organize. As an Asian American, you’re taught not to speak up but you have to.

Whether fear about current anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies mobilizes Asian Americans electorally, as some have argued occurred for Latina/os, remains to be seen. Throughout respondents’ reflections on what the community should do going forward, the necessity of building political institutions, and informal networks is a common thread. On balance, that thread is an argument in favor of the expectation that Asian American descriptive representation, and political capacity, will increase. The challenges facing Asian Americans as a group—the unsteadiness of the voter base, lack of clarity on the best model to win elections, and the identity issues that have yet to be bridged by elites—are not inherent to Asian immigrants exclusively, or immutable. They can be mitigated by the development of civic institutions, and networks of elected officials and potential candidates, and other political infrastructure. As many respondents emphasized, what emerges as the political model for Asian Americans will likely look different from what Latina/o Democrats and labor have built—but there may be opportunity in having room to grow.

Conclusion

The electoral architecture of Los Angeles is itself a third “party” in this analysis of Asian American and Latina/o descriptive representation. As each community’s more recent political history has unfolded, candidates, activists, voters and residents have had to contend with elections that require extensive resources to win, very few seats, and an abundance of experienced candidates in constant circulation. These conditions have created a competitive context for descriptive representation that is very narrow in certain respects. The aggregation of electoral resources is incredibly lopsided. While that aggregation has benefited the representation of Latino men, it often creates an additional hurdle for Latina women who wish to compete for descriptive representation. At the same time, while some Asian Americans have worked in coalition with Latina/os, labor and other Asian Americans, there is no consensus among political actors about whether that is an achievable plan for future representation. Despite great efforts by activists and organization leaders, the civic infrastructure and political networks of Asian Americans in Los Angeles remains a patchwork, where a solid base is required.

The political frameworks that each community has developed over the past two decades also
reflect national patterns in the incorporation of Asian Americans and Latina/os into the two main political parties, and the relatively higher rates of access to electoral competition for Asian American, and especially Latino men, in comparison to co-racial women. Moreover, the electoral field of competition in Los Angeles is constrained by race and gender, in many of the ways suggested by previous chapters; the pool of realistic or viable districts is much smaller for non-White potential candidates than for others, and Latina and Asian American women are less visible, and available as potential candidates. Los Angeles is, in many ways, a possible preview of how immigrant-dominant metropolitan areas may organize their politics in the future. Yet, it is also reflects much of the political exclusion and limitation that marks many areas in the United States today.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The descriptive representation patterns of Asian American and Latina/o women and men illustrate the extent to which elections are decided long before the first vote is cast. Predicting the name of the individual who will win a particular election requires sophisticated models and in-depth knowledge of local politics; reliably predicting the race and gender of that individual typically does not. Yet, most studies of descriptive representation to date have treated the “effects” of candidates’ races and genders on their likelihood of success as separate empirical questions, or dismissed these characteristics as marginal in comparison to partisanship. The research in this dissertation has shown that race and gender are inextricably linked in determining candidates’ potential access to election contests, and thus, in shaping the likelihood of their race-gender group being able to elect a descriptive representative.

By exploring Asian American and Latina/o candidates’ pathways to office, while keeping the racial and gendered context in full view, this study leverages the emergence of immigrant communities to develop a new framework of group competition for political influence in American elections. Like other race-gendered groups, Asian American and Latina/o women and men seek representation and influence in mainstream politics. However candidates from these communities have practical access to a small fraction of electoral contests in any given year. The flipside of this dynamic is that Whites (particularly men) face relatively unfettered access, and as a result, little to no competition for descriptive representation in elections.

Using new data covering every state legislative general election for nearly two decades, a national survey of state legislators, and in depth interviews, I show that severely and persistently lopsided rates of state legislative electoral success are clear evidence of these constraints on competitive access. This intersectional data collection and analysis is the first of its scope focused on candidates and elected officials from immigrant communities in the United States. As such, it facilitates an examination of electoral processes and descriptive representation that moves beyond binary comparisons of racial groups, or genders. Instead, I advance evidence from all 50 states that by looking at race and gender simultaneously, the extent of and barriers promulgating underrepresentation can be more accurately identified. This includes the finding that as minority populations grow, they become more likely to elect men from those communities, but co-racial women do not benefit to the same extent, if at all. I also demonstrate that, contrary to expectations, political ambition is not a gendered trait—Asian American men typically require as much or more encouragement to run as some groups of women, and Latinas persist in their desire to hold office despite active discouragement from those around them.

These results support the Race-Gendered Model of Competition, which underscores that movement towards a more reflective, and balanced representative democracy will necessitate changes that address not only where candidates end up, but also where, and whether, they begin.

Immigrant Communities and the Race-Gendered Model of Competition

When comparing descriptive representation in state legislatures at the beginning (1996) and end (2016) points of this study, there are few differences to detect. The balance of race and gender representation has remained static for reasons that are more readily discernible once we move from looking at race and gender in isolation, to an approach that accounts for how race and gender
simultaneously shape the political and social experiences of groups in distinct ways. Whites have won nearly 90 percent of all state legislative elections over the entire period of the study. However, there is a meaningful difference in the degree of dominance White men have had, winning roughly two-thirds of elections every year, and that of White women, who have won about a quarter of all elections in the same period. These rates of descriptive representation leave little room for other groups to emerge or expand their presence. They are indicative of a set of factors identified in this study which serve to constrain the emergence and success of Asian American and Latina/o candidates, particularly women.

The most straightforward implication of White men and women winning between 88 to 92 percent of seats every year is that they are the vast majority of incumbents. As such, they have access to an array of well-documented electoral advantages. Since four-fifths of all state legislative elections on average include an incumbent on the ballot, the benefits of incumbency that are enjoyed by Whites, particularly men, arguably have a definitive impact in shaping the competitive field for elections. This is especially apparent when we consider that the vast majority of districts encompass majority White populations—in a number of states, every single district still encompasses a White majority population as of 2017. Thus, a central tenet of the Race-Gendered Model of Competition is that the dominance of Whites as incumbents and in the arrangement of populations in districts, foregrounds race in electoral competitions. Racial identity effectively limits the raw number of elections that a strategic, non-White candidate can enter with a reasonable expectation of success.

The few majority minority districts in which racial minorities have won, and the even smaller number of majority White districts represented by a person of color, encompass less than ten percent of all of the districts in the United States. Within those districts, potential candidates’ socio-political positioning relative to other groups shapes how visible and available they are to run for office. Men of color are typically more visible than women as viable candidates, both to themselves and particularly to elites involved in the candidate development pipeline. They also tend to be more readily available to choose to run for office, because they are both less encumbered by domestic arrangements and more likely to be engaged in career paths that accommodate office-holding and campaigning. The result is that women of color are positioned farther from the resources and opportunities of mainstream electoral politics than men of color, and their pathways to candidacy and electoral success are qualitatively distinct.

There are women of color who run for and win state legislative office, and the considerations and challenges facing them vary based on their race and ethnicity, and the social and political context. However, based on the extant empirical literature on Black women as candidates and elected officials, and this study’s examination of Asian American and Latina/o candidates, I contend that women of color who achieve office-holding do so in spite of the additional barriers, and distinct approaches that are necessary. Men of color also face constrained opportunities to become successful candidates. But, within districts where a candidate of color is viable, their race-gender identities give men of color distinct advantages and access.

The Race-Gender Model contends that electoral competition for descriptive representation is characterized by these three key factors: 1) the field of electoral competition is highly constrained by race, such that Whites are the only group with relatively unfettered access to all contests; 2) the relative distances each group must traverse to gain mainstream influence through winning elections is much farther for women than men, and farthest for women of color, and; 3) the first two factors tend to produce electoral conditions in which White men are in uniquely close proximity to the resources and power at the center of mainstream political influence, and face little competition from other groups. The original data collected in this dissertation validates these contentions as explanations for both national patterns, and local candidate emergence dynamics.
This study’s analysis of the relationship between racial group populations and descriptive representation contributes to the race and ethnic politics literature by expanding and clarifying expectations for how the growth of a population relates to their likelihood of electing a descriptive representative. Using the Gender Race and Communities in Elections (GRACE) dataset, I leverage nearly two decades of state legislative general election data on candidates’ and districts demographic data to show that increases in the size of a racial group population are robustly tied to increases in the likelihood that a man from that group will be elected. By treating all candidates from a racial group as monolithic, the existing literature would predict that women from those groups would experience a similar benefit to their likelihood of election. However, using regression analyses I find the opposite to be the case. Larger co-racial populations are not consistently significant or positive factors in predicting a woman from that group will be elected. In the models and districts where women’s election is positively related to increases in the racial group as a share of the population, the size and strength of the effect is much smaller for all groups of women, in comparison to co-racial men.

The political and electoral resources that accompany an increase in the size of a co-racial population are a central assumption of pluralist accounts of group competition. Even within literatures that account for differences in the size of the population and the electorate among racial minorities, authors presume that a larger population will be positively related to the likelihood of a community’s ability to elect a descriptive representative. The findings in this study intervene in that literature by asserting that population-related benefits are neither universally accessible or accurate. The regression analyses in Chapter 3 show that in some of the largest majority minority districts, increases in the co-racial population are in fact negatively related to the likelihood that a Latina or African American woman will be elected.

The gulf between the positive effects that increasingly large co-racial populations appear to confer on men relative to women are driven by race-gendered candidate development processes. Men and women, across racial groups, win at similar rates—Asian American and Latina women who run as Democrats actually win at significantly higher rates than co-racial men, and all other women, in the same party. That parity of success is conditional, however, on ballot presence. The extant literatures on both women and racial minorities in elections is clear that the deficit of candidates is a key factor in underrepresentation. However, those literatures are not in agreement on whether the root of that candidate deficit is located in the social and political context, or with candidate’s personal decision-making calculus. I advance a framework for understanding the uneven rates of candidate emergence among race-gendered groups that integrates both the immediate and intimate concerns of potential candidates, as well as the broader considerations tied to membership in marginalized social identity groups.

The qualitative survey and interview data I collect shows that the likelihood of a person getting on the ballot is shaped in large part by their visibility and availability. Visibility encompasses a candidate’s own ability to envision themselves running and winning, as well as the external perceptions of viability held by key actors and gatekeepers in their local political environment. Availability includes factors that determine how well, or easily, campaigning and serving (in what is likely a part-time legislature) fits into a person’s professional, personal and political agenda. These two dimensions determine the social and political positioning of potential candidates, and thus their access to political resources, support and gatekeepers.

The experiences of many of the Latina legislators and candidates I surveyed and interviewed are a clear illustration of the ways in which availability and visibility shape potential candidates’ positioning, and how it varies by race-gender group. Contrary to expectations from the women in politics literature, I show that most of the Latinas who ran for office did not suffer from a deficit of ambition, or have to be convinced of their potential worth as office-holders. Instead, what many
faced was *external* invisibility—party leaders or local gatekeepers, or their own political circles often did not perceive them to be viable candidates. Latinas mentioned being actively discouraged from running more often than any other group. And yet, their rates of success belie the validity of discouragement. Moreover, Latinas also often faced a “double-edged” set of considerations around their availability to run that I found common among other women of color as well. Many were serving their communities in other leadership roles, either through non-profits or local civic activism. They felt that that work represented a commitment to a marginalized group to which they were personally connected and accountable. At the same time, that commitment and accountability often proved decisive in Latinas’ and other women of colors’ eventual choices to run, because the prospect of not elevating that group’s issues or visibility—when they had the opportunity—was untenable.

Latinas were not the only group that cited service to an underrepresented community as a motivation for their decision to run for office; most other women of color and a number of men of color also raised that issue. However, in both the national survey and in depth interviews, that obligation to a specific marginalized community featured centrally in every Latina and nearly every Asian American woman’s account of her candidate development process. Among men from those groups, that sensibility is much farther down the list of considerations, or was mentioned after an extensive discussion of why a particular election came at “just the right time” in their career. White women and men rarely discussed their social identity group as a motivation for serving.

Another illustration of the ways in which availability varies by race-gender group is the extent to which candidates’ personal, domestic lives need to be rearranged in order to facilitate a campaign or frequent travel to the state capitol. Most groups (except Latinas) reported in the survey that the approval of their spouse, or time with their family were among the most frequent considerations they weighed in deciding to run for the state legislature for the first time. Taken in isolation, this could be interpreted as domestic arrangements having equal bearing on the candidacy decisions of women and men. That approach, however, would ignore the disproportionate share of domestic labor that women are responsible for on average, and the inequality of access to paid support across groups.

During interviews with Asian American and Latina/o candidates and legislators, it was clear that the manner in which men had to rearrange their personal lives to run for office was different from that of women. Family and personal considerations were characterized fairly neutrally when they were raised by men, but women typically described aspects of their personal life as serious hurdles they had to resolve before they could commit to running for office. The most frequent aspect of men’s personal lives that they raised in interviews was the decision to move to a particular district, or location, either to be in a better position professionally or for their political career specifically. Many also talked about the need to adjust or work around their professional commitments to make time for campaigning. In contrast, the most frequent aspect of women’s personal lives that they discussed was how “atypical” their domestic arrangements were—either because they did not have children living at home or because they had cobbled together an extensive network of people helping to care for their children. They also frequently raised concerns about the risks of leaving fulfilling, if not always lucrative, work in other sectors.

It is worth noting that women’s discussions of these issues were not limited to their time before running—many of the challenges related to their personal lives persisted well into their campaigns and service as legislators. Again, this is not to suggest that men of color do not also face tradeoffs and tough choices when weighing whether to run for office. However, the men of color I interviewed did not mention concerns about dependent care, or maintaining their share of household labor when describing their decision to run. This may reflect more general, gendered asymmetries in domestic arrangements among married heterosexual couples. If women are at the
center of household arrangements regarding dependent care, daily transit to school and activities, maintenance, meals, etc, their decision to run will require a larger disruption and rearrangement of daily life than that of a man who is married to that woman. Along the same lines, a woman and a man who are in similar socioeconomic positions, wherein they can outsource childcare to paid staff, will likely face disproportionate levels of social pressure and criticism for that arrangement.

The framework of visibility and availability expands previous theories of candidate emergence in the women in politics literature. It allows for the relative weight of personal, intimate considerations, and those connected to membership in a marginalized social group, to vary among race-gender groups. For some groups, such as White women and men and Asian American and Latino men, I find that personal considerations, tied to their conception of themselves and their close relationships, are generally paramount in their decision to run. For others, particularly Latinas, Asian American women and African American women and men, I show that while their immediate and intimate relationships are also important and challenging, concerns about serving the representation needs of the larger marginalized group are central considerations that often help to propel them past concerns that might otherwise keep them from running.

The role that visibility and availability play in determining potential candidates’ proximity to political power and resources, and the practical constraints that race places on candidates of color, are also apparent in this dissertation’s case study of Asian American and Latina/o pathways to elected office in Los Angeles. The county’s distinctive status as a majority immigrant, sprawling landscape of racial and ethnic diversity may preview some aspects of American cities in the near future. I argue that Los Angeles is also solidly in step with the rest of the country today, both in the way that ongoing legacies of discriminatory policies and practices continue to shape politics, and in the fairly wide access that White men alone have to electoral contests.

The electoral structure of Los Angeles is characterized by high barriers to entry for most offices at the City, state legislative, and Congressional levels. Running for office successfully in this environment often requires a large cache of material and human resources, and candidates who have considerable experience, since term limits keep veteran lawmakers rotating through the seats at all levels. Latina/os and Asian Americans have developed two very different political infrastructures in response to these conditions. Latina/o Democratic elites have developed, in tandem with organized labor, a high functioning, disciplined coalition with many African American and liberal White political elites. That coalition is particularly powerful in shaping ballots near central, southern and eastern Los Angeles, but its reach extends into the outer reaches of the county as well. A small group of elected officials, current and former, facilitate the movement of candidates across seats and districts. Their power stems from “the leadership’s” ability to mobilize high levels of campaign money and volunteers, and to enforce discipline among coalition members when a decision to support a particular candidate, or stay out of a race, is made. Potential candidates seek out the support of the Latina/o Democratic leadership, and labor unions, and many interview respondents agreed that their “blessing” could make the path to winning very clear in most races.

Even as this machine has increased the presence of Latino men in City Hall, the state legislature and in Congress, Latina rates of candidacy and electoral success have declined in the past decade. I show that this is a product of structural exclusion from Latina/o Democratic leaders decision-making and negotiations processes. The networks from which Latina/o Democratic leadership typically choose the beneficiaries of their support are insular and male-dominated. The extent to which the leadership plans and coordinates which candidates will run where is widely known, but my interviews revealed that Latinas are rarely part of those plans. Instead, when Latinas have “come out of nowhere” without having leadership’s prior approval, their candidacies have been met with responses ranging from ambivalence to outright opposition. In many respects, the Latina/o Democrats have replicated, and strengthened political machines from prior eras in Los
Angeles politics. The additional strength stems from their work to forge a strong political alliance between labor and the Latina/o community. One aspect of that replication that may hinder representative growth in the long term is the marginalization of women, in the pursuit of growing a male dominated cadre of Latino politicians with mainstream power.

Asian Americans in Los Angeles, in contrast, have an electoral infrastructure that is characterized by a patchwork of ethnic organizations, donors, and a small handful of prominent elected officials. The Asian American population in Los Angeles is very diverse in terms of its ethnic makeup, immigrant generation and tenure in the United States. Political leaders from this community have not developed a clear model for expanding descriptive representation. In part, this is due to a persistent struggle among elites to build a consensus regarding the utility of pan-ethnic political mobilization. Additionally, the civic organizations based in Asian American communities are largely rooted in ethnic identity, and are rarely oriented towards electoral politics. These factors exacerbate the challenges Asian Americans face in carving out a space in the existing Democratic coalition, which is currently based around race for communities of color, and liberal issues for Whites.

Whereas the structure of the Latina/o Democratic coalition tends to keep Latinas out, the lack of a structure among Asian Americans results in little political scaffolding or support for potential candidates of both genders. However, because women and men begin from different social and political positions, the absence of an infrastructure has likely had a more pronounced effect on the frequency of women’s candidacies than those of men. Asian American men and women run, and consequently win, less frequently than other race-gender groups in Los Angeles, but there is a wide gap between the number of men who have been candidates, and are still circulating through electoral politics, and the very small number of women who have run.

When I raised the paucity of female candidates among the Asian Americans running for office in Los Angeles during interviews, most respondents returned to the broader issue of the general lack of political infrastructure. Asian American candidates who have been successful have typically built their own networks to mobilize and fundraise around their own campaign, and have rarely shared that apparatus with others, as is common in other parts of the Democratic coalition. This has been particularly true of candidates who have entered politics in the last decade, as opposed to those who were connected to the activism and organizing of the civil rights era and the 1990s. Because Asian American women are on average less visible and available as candidates than men, the lack of shared resources and candidate development outreach makes it even less likely that they will become successful candidates.

The dearth of Asian American and Latina women running for elected office in Los Angeles is, among other things, a missed opportunity for those communities and their political leaders to close the racial and gender representation gaps. Asian American and Latina women are the two fastest growing racial groups of women. When they are on the ballot, they win at higher rates than other groups. As candidates, they often bring extensive experience in policy issues, deep connections to their ethnic community organizations, and a relatively independent public profile. However, these high quality candidates, and potential candidates, are frequently disconnected from key fundraising networks and invisible to important political gatekeepers, either by structural impediments or the absence of any infrastructure. Their lack of incorporation reinforces the likelihood that immigrant communities, and women, will continue to face a ceiling on their levels of descriptive representation, that is far below parity.

Findings from my study of Los Angeles contribute a comparative case to literature on trajectories of immigrant incorporation, and show how the effects of political institutions and electoral structures can vary in the development of political capacity and power within communities. Generally, the high barriers to entry in Los Angeles tend to skew access to power towards groups
and individuals who have extensive resources behind them—this has in the past, and continues to favor White men winning office more frequently than any other group. Beyond that, Latina/o and African American political leaders have, to some extent, been able to forge a coalition with organized labor that magnifies their own community’s limited political resources. Asian Americans have yet to forge a sustained connection to those networks, or to build their own on the scale necessary to compete for descriptive representation with any frequency in the top tier of political positions in Los Angeles. However, it is worth noting that the recent balance of political power and access in the county is of fairly recent vintage—the political history of Los Angeles up to the end of Rick Riordan’s tenure as Mayor in 1996 was frequently defined by struggles against a powerful White male conservative majority in most positions of political influence. The Democratic coalition that has emerged is often said to have demographics on its side, but precedent is not necessarily there as well.

The analysis in this dissertation approaches elections as the endpoint of a “bundle” (T. Lee, 2008b) social and political processes, formal and informal. Many of those processes do not require citizenship for participation, and much of the literature on immigrant political incorporation reflects the view that political activity encompasses far more than casting a ballot. Additionally, as noted in Chapter 1, elected representatives are selected to serve all of the constituents in their respective jurisdiction, voters and non-voters alike. That said, one way that this analysis has departed from other studies of immigrants and elections is in its reliance on residential population data, instead of citizen voting age population data (CVAP). This choice was made for both theoretical and methodological reasons. At its core, the theoretical reason is about the nature of elections as a means of gaining representation. Elected representatives come to win their seats not simply or only because they are smarter or more capable than every other person in the district, or because they worked harder or knocked on more doors. Representatives win elections in part because of the things they do, but also because of who they are, and how those identities have positioned them in society and political life. The society from which they emerge can be evaluated in a number of ways—rates of education, income inequality, partisanship, and many others. Based on the evidence of the existing literature on race and ethnic politics, and the central role that race has played in the history of American politics, this study relies on the racial composition of communities and districts as an indicator of the type of social milieu in which potential candidates attempt to compete.

The methodological reason for using resident population data, instead of CVAP is straightforward, and tied to the intersectional approach of this project. Intersectional research, as I argue in Chapter 2, requires the ability to situate the observed phenomenon within its context, because the way identities shape political and social experiences is often dependent on the context. In order to conduct a large scale, statistically robust, intersectional study, I needed to gather enough data on Asian American and Latina/o candidates and election winners to facilitate running separate analyses for race-gender groups. To do that, I collected election data from nearly twenty years of elections, and augmented it with data on candidates and winners, and demographic data from districts. Across that span of time, given the variation in districting practices in states, and legal challenges over three rounds of redistricting, the most widely obtainable state-district level demographic information was for resident populations, not CVAP. This limitation, however, gives my findings a conservative bias, if any. If I ran the same analyses of the distribution of white populations and the relationship between population growth and likelihood of electing a descriptive representative, I would expect that the skew towards White majority population domination would be even sharper, and that the gap between the positive effects of co-racial population growth for women and men would be stable.
Another aspect of this study that is distinct from others is that it dwells on partisanship very rarely. In one respect, that is due to the now-repeated finding that most Asian Americans and Latina/os, the communities on which I am primarily focused, are non-partisan, independent, or decline to state their partisan affiliation. In another vein, it is also due to the practical reality that most of the time, the observations of Asian Americans and Latina/os on the ballot encompassed in my data collection are observations of Democrats. The study is national in scope, and outside of Latino men in New Mexico, most of the winning state legislative candidates who are Asian American and Latina/o over the two decades of data were Democrats. This may be the result, in part, of some strategic choices on the part of potential candidates—Republican women and men from both communities have lower win rates than Democrats. This study has little to say about why that may be the case, other than the possibility that in places where Latina/os and Asian Americans are running for the state legislature, resources for developing candidates from those communities are most deeply in place among Democratic lawmakers and party activists.

Perhaps a more expansive interpretation of the partisan trends in this study is that are another in a long line of race and ethnic politics studies that illustrate the limitations of treating partisanship as a stand alone explanatory variable for political outcomes. Partisan leanings, either of candidates, voters, or entire political communities, are not sui generis. The rich literature on the connections between race and partisanship in American political history attest to that for Whites and African Americans, and the emerging literature on immigrant political incorporation has begun to outline the ways in which both of the major parties have eschewed their role as mediating institutions of incorporation, and in some cases, acted to alienate immigrant communities as a deliberate strategy. In the case of explaining the descriptive representation patterns of Asian Americans and Latina/os, focusing on partisanship would reveal next to nothing about the underlying processes I have identified in this study. We would simply learn that Asian Americans and Latina/os who are Democrats are more likely to run and win than Asian Americans and Latina/os with other partisan affiliations.

Finally, it is worth reiterating that this analysis incorporates two primary projects. The first is to describe a new way of thinking about the relationship between populations and their ability to compete in elections for descriptive representation, and political influence more generally. The second, and related project, is to underscore the importance of all of the processes that are occurring before election day, in determining the race and gender balance of elective institutions. Neither of these endeavors negates the importance of what voters do, or the role they ultimately play, or the necessity of understanding why they make the choices they do. Those queries are beyond the boundaries of this study, which argues that the array of choices that voters have is more constrained than it appears to be when we limit our analyses of electoral competition to campaigns and election days.

Implications of the Race-Gender Model of Competition

The results and analysis in this dissertation speak to broader debates about strategies for political incorporation, strengthening access to democratic processes and the role of parties, civic organizations and other mediating institutions. The race-gendered nature of the relationships between co-racial populations and the likelihood of electing a man or a woman from those communities, as well as the declining presence of women in Los Angeles’ elected ranks, raise flags about the unintended consequences of “universal” policies aimed at diversifying elected bodies. Majority minority districts have been shown repeatedly to confer positive political benefits on the largest of the racial minority populations they encompass, but this study shows that they are likely an insufficient means of bridging the representation gap. Without reform to the internal political
processes and systems of support for candidate development within those districts, the female half of the minority population targeted for increased representation is likely to face limits on their access to electoral competition. Similarly, term limits appear to have done little in the long term to alter the race and gender composition of ballots in Los Angeles. Both of these strategies may be necessary, but insufficient remedies because they intervene in election processes far too late, after the candidate development pipeline has taken shape.

Labor unions’ integral role in the ascent of Latina/o Democratic elected officials in Los Angeles demonstrates the potential power of organizations other than parties to shape the electoral context in a way that creates access for political newcomers to compete. The Los Angeles County Federation of Labor was not always inclined towards electoral participation. A change in leadership enabled organized labor’s pivot towards member-based engagement in political mobilization, as opposed to check writing and pro forma endorsements alone. Well beyond Los Angeles, the majority of Asian American and Latina/o respondents to the national survey of state legislators named one or more labor unions as among the top supporters of their campaigns. Organized labor has frequently been an essential source of resources, training and support for Asian Americans and Latina/os who have been elected to state legislatures in the past two decades.

Unions, however, are declining nationally, and have a significant political presence in a small handful of areas around the country. The formal political parties in Los Angeles, as in many other urban areas, do not play a significant role in incorporating immigrants and other marginalized groups into electoral politics. Civic organizations and cultural associations tied to immigrant communities are numerous and growing across the United States, in areas that have historically been home to Asian Americans and Latina/os, as well as relatively new destinations. While most do not have an explicitly political mandate or inclination towards political engagement, many civic organizations are a vital part of immigrant communities’ incorporation into American political life (Bloemraad et al., 2008; Michelson & García Bedolla, 2012; J. Wong, 2008). Several of the civic organization leaders I interviewed enumerated significant challenges in turning their constituents toward candidate development and electoral mobilization, including a general distaste for and distrust of politicians, a steep learning curve for new immigrants on the dynamics of democratic engagement, and less willingness among donors to fund projects aimed at training potential political leaders instead of mobilizing new voters.

In addition to bearing on these public issues of democratic incorporation and engagement, the model and results presented in this dissertation also casts doubt on the general optimism of pluralist theories of competition. I show that significant portions of the population experience persistent underrepresentation, and that the political resource which is most abundant, growing populations, is limited in its utility for building political power, and often inaccessible for women from those communities. I also show that White men’s dominance in state legislative elections is structurally reinforced by their position as incumbents, the skewed distribution of racial populations in districts across the country, and the close proximity to political resources and influence that stems from their race-gender identities. The frequent absence of competition for descriptive undercuts the pluralist emphasis on group competition as a salvo against concentrated power in a democracy. The limits of population growth as a remedy for underrepresentation, particularly for women, undermine the race and ethnic politics literature’s emphasis on populations as a tool for building power from a position of disadvantage. These insights are facilitated by this study’s reliance on an intersectional framework, and serve as a caution for future research on group competition and representation: the experiences of subgroups may reveal more complete information about the whole.
Future Research

The state legislatures featured in much of the data collection in this dissertation impart important variations in political climate, partisanship, demographic context and political institutions across the election observations. In future research on candidate emergence, further exploration of that variation may yield more nuanced pictures of how race and gender identities function in specific types of political and social contexts. More non-demographic data specific to regions, states and state legislative districts would help to refine the interactions between potential candidates’ identities and their environments further. Additionally, because most of the processes of candidate development are somewhat opaque and largely informal, more qualitative research in different types of political environments would also help to confirm the patterns and processes outlined here. While Asian Americans are a relatively “new” group in politics in Los Angeles, they are entering a context in which a number of groups are amassing resources and actively competing for mainstream power. In another city or metropolitan area, where political power is more closely concentrated among Whites, the experiences of immigrants attempting to develop political infrastructure and candidate development mechanisms may yield greater insights into how context shapes patterns of immigrant political incorporation.

The stark contrast between the findings in this study, and the rapid growth of Asian American and Latina/o communities is disparate parts of the United States casts an unflattering light on the current capacity of American electoral institutions to incorporate and facilitate the representation of immigrant communities. However, a consistent thread throughout the data collection and analysis of this dissertation is the ability of Asian American and Latina/o candidates and their supporters to persist, and win, often in spite of conditions militating against their success. This was especially the case among the Asian American and Latina women who shared their experiences for this study. As immigrant populations continue to reshape the American political context, it may be that those leaders who “came out of nowhere” will be in the best position to reshape electoral institutions in a way that allows the emerging majority to finally, be fully visible.
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**APPENDIX 1**

Table A: Success Rates (Run/Win) for Asian American and Latina/o Candidates in Open Seat State Legislative Races (GRACE Dataset)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N (All)</th>
<th>Success Rate All</th>
<th>N (Democrats)</th>
<th>Success Rate Democrats</th>
<th>N (Republicans)</th>
<th>Success Rate Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Women</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Men</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina Women</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Men</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
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