

Community Members Draw the Line: Redistricting by a Ventura County Community Task Force

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Abstract

This study investigates whether a community-based task force's redistricting plan in Ventura County, California, positively affected fair representation, social equity issues, community interests, and the electoral process. Examination and evaluation of the organizational strategies and collaborations involved in the task force's redistricting process find that the Board of Supervisors districts that members of the community drew were successful in improving and maintaining fair representation. This finding is based on comparing supervisorial votes and policies with community members' votes on state propositions and local measures, in addition to conducting interviews with task force members, politicians, and community activists. This study finds that citizen participation in governmental processes improves overall community health and political participation.

Keywords

redistricting, community organizing, civic engagement, representation

Introduction: Does Community Involvement in Redistricting Matter?

Elephant- and donkey-shaped districts designed to be solidly Republican and Democratic would perfectly represent deliberate, politically drawn lines. This imagined district configuration expressively represents the political lines that numerous states drew following the 2010 census.¹ Redrawing district lines, which occurs after the decennial census, as an area of political decision making, allows officeholders to exercise their influence by drawing politically advantageous districts rather than districts that are in constituents' best interests. This is why community involvement in the redistricting process matters. The 2012 elections delivered contested congresses and state assemblies comprising dogmatic representatives from safe districts who immediately began legislation with an ideological tilt that outmaneuvered opposition in introducing legislation, such as voter-restrictive bills, anticollective bargaining rules, and cutbacks in public jobs, resulting in sit-ins in state capitol rotundas, recall petitions, voter rights litigation, and a collective array of occupy movements. These strategies can usefully counter the impact of 2010 redistricting and 2012 and 2014 elections, until another chance at redistricting in 2020, when strategy can be directed at representative redistricting. One strategy lesson from 2010 redistricting is that community members should organize to take an active role in future redistricting. In fact, redistricting on the local level by community members is an excellent template for redistricting involvement at the state level.

A case study of Ventura County, California, where community members formed the Ventura County Redistricting Task Force (VCRTF) to create a redistricting plan to redraw the Ventura County Board of Supervisors districts based on the 2000 census, establishes the point that community involvement in redistricting processes is valuable to realizing fairer representation in local, state, and national legislatures. Activists and scholars have long been aware of how participatory pursuits, such as community organizing (Alinsky, 1971; Piven, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2007) and civic engagement (Putman, 1993; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999), prepare people to become politically and civically engaged in a democratic manner and how the democratizing effect of these activities strengthens the connection between people and the government.

Community members' involvement in policy matters such as redistricting shows that political participation continues to find community members taking direct political action and incorporating collaboration with policy makers in creating and writing policy. This study of citizen participation in the redistricting process is an example of the process, implementation, and consequences of the community member–local government relationship found to be successful in other U.S. cities, districts, and counties. One notable example is a

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grassroots community effort in Santa Ana, California, where González, Sarmiento, Urzua, and Luévano (2012) described how community organizing and coalition building worked inside and outside the public policy process to create a community benefits agreement holding government accountable for its use of tax dollars and for implementing community development. The coalition that González et al. discusses was similar to the VCRTF coalition of community groups, labor unions, and nonprofit community organizations. González et al. found that local government empowerment to increase community participation in the planning process, such as by local government officials developing urban lands in collaboration with developers and design firms, will include the participation of the community in deliberations.

Observers find that policy decisions involving citizens are more likely to be acceptable to the local people and that public involvement often results in better decisions (Heberlein, 1976), which is an advantage for community members and the government. Citizens participating in decision-making processes hold numerous advantages for governments and communities. However, there are disadvantages for community members and the government, as well. Renee Irvin and John Stansbury, for example, find that community member disadvantages include wasted time if the community effort is unsuccessful, and government disadvantages include time consumption, extra costs, and the risk of backfire causing more hostility toward government (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). In addition, the government could lose decision-making control and possibly become associated with a bad decision that is politically impossible to ignore (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). For the VCRTF, these disadvantages did not outweigh the advantages that Irvin and Stansbury (2004) found, such as community members gaining education in government processes and developing skills for activist citizenship, whereas government representatives became more educated about their constituencies, built trust and increased allies, decreased hostility, and gained more legitimacy in their decisions.

Observers and scholars find that citizen participation in volunteer groups is healthy and contributes to how citizens define self-esteem and self-identity in American society (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Passewitz & Donnermeyer, 1989), which is important to a heavily Latino and immigrant community like Ventura County, whereas other researchers, such as Arnstein (1969), have described a typology of citizen participation, finding citizen participation to be the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens presently excluded from the political and economic processes to be deliberately included in the future (Arnstein, 1969).² Arnstein equated citizen participation with citizen power and suggested that if participation did not result in a shift in power between the haves and the have-nots, then it was not real participation.

Arnstein (1969), Irvin and Stansbury (2004), and González et al. (2012) provided excellent models of approach

for this study. This approach has a foundation built on the necessity of community involvement in the political process, with community members benefiting from the advantages of participation, while minimizing the disadvantages, and entering into relationships that include discussion and cooperation with political policy makers and their staffs, all in an effort to improve the community's quality of life. This study found evidence to justify the power of community involvement in political processes after reviewing citizen participation, definitions, and laws governing redistricting, and investigation of the beginnings and operation of the VCRTF, followed by the implementation of their redistricting plan and an evaluation of policies emanating from the Board of Supervisors conducting business in the post-VCRTF redrawn districts.

Overall, this study is intended to demonstrate in concert with other studies how significant community participation in political processes is to a democratic society through examining data and literature that support the basic thesis that community involvement in the political process is advantageous to the community and the government. Examining the outcomes of the 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 supervisor elections helped determine the effectiveness of the VCRTF in achieving its fair representation goal. The new Fifth District, with its increased working-class and Latino concentrations, for example, has become more representative of working-class and Latino communities. This assessment is based on the voter turnout of these groups, evaluating and interviewing the post-redistricting elected officials (who they are and what they have accomplished) and conducting interviews with a representative sample of the population (particularly with nonprofit groups and community activists) regarding their views of officials' responsiveness to their concerns. The subsequent responses to community needs as seen in policies and public statements were measured by examining selected proposition votes, such as environmental and education issues, based on districts from the 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008 primary and general elections. For example, the Fifth District was concerned with public safety, living wage issues, and education, whereas the Second District wanted parks, clean streets, and tax stability, consistent with the majority of the respective districts' constituents. In addition, we conducted interviews with post-2000 redistricting elected officials and community members regarding their views of supervisors' responsiveness to their concerns.

Assessing what community members want and expect based on the way they voted on state propositions and initiatives, and comparing these outcomes with voting records and public support of local issues, yields substantial insight into whether the supervisors are voting within their communities of interest. This investigation finds that the VCRTF successfully redistricted Ventura County's electoral process to make it more representative of all its diverse community and that the time, resources, and education were worth it.

Overview of Redistricting and Ventura County

What Is Redistricting and What Are the Rules?

The practice of redistricting is grounded in the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment equal protection clause, which requires states to govern impartially and stipulates that election rules that favor one segment of the population or disadvantage a politically weak segment of the community violate the amendment's guarantee of equal protection. The Constitution protects citizens from voting districts drawn in partisan ways or that restrict their right to vote. Further legal protections include the U.S. Supreme Court declaration in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) that districts must be substantially equal in population, as is reasonable, to achieve balance and that districts with unequal populations must meet a one-person, one-vote requirement.³ This decision also asserts the principle that U.S. congressional representation based on population size be applied to legislative districts from state to local levels. Because *Reynolds v. Sims* held that disparities in legislative districts violated the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause, the Supreme Court found that the same rule applied to local government districts. For example, in *Avery v. Midland County* (1968), the Supreme Court found that there was insignificant difference in terms of the application of the equal protection clause and the principles of *Reynolds v. Sims*, between the exercise of state power through legislatures and between the exercise of elected officials in cities, towns, and counties.⁴

In a redistricting case, *Bartlett v. Strickland* (2009), the Supreme Court considered whether a racial minority group that constitutes less than 50% of a proposed legislative district's population can state a vote dilution claim under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.⁵ The standard interpretation of whether a minority group can state a claim under Section 2 is whether its members have less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the political process and to elect representatives of their choosing. The Supreme Court ruled on March 9, 2009, that federal voting rights law does not require the creation of a new legislative district as a remedy when minority voters' rights have been diluted when the new district would include a racial minority group that comprises less than 50% of the population. Only when a group of minority voters would form a majority in a single-member district must this remedy be applied under Section 2. Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the majority, wrote that the Voting Rights Act allows redistricting only when a geographically compact group of minority voters is able to form a majority within the redrawn election district.

In *Abate v. Mundt* (1971), the Supreme Court allowed greater latitude to political subdivisions regarding equal population standards than to larger political units.⁶ The court also decided in that case that local legislative bodies frequently have fewer representatives than their state and national counterparts and that some local legislative districts

may have much smaller populations than do congressional and state legislative districts. Both decisions lend support to the argument that a slightly greater percentage of deviations may be tolerable in a local government apportionment plan. An optimal percentage of each supervisorial district is between 17% and 23% of the total population. This works well for supervisorial districts because the board has to take into account communities of interest, which makes complete population parity elusive. For example, the VCRTF had to consider whether one district would keep control of a city when geography suggested that it would be more logical to place it in another district.⁷

Considering the number of legal rules involved in redistricting, of primary concern was that involving community members in the redistricting process would be disadvantageous, because they do not possess the legal expertise, experience, capacity, or knowledge to do a credible job. Redistricting is a complex process that necessitates knowledge of policies, legalities, mathematics, and demography. However, with the aid of a strong program of workshops, consultants, academics, and computer instrumentation, for example, community members can assist in redrawing district lines by providing input to redistricting commissions and task forces, or they may redraw lines themselves by forming a community redistricting commission or task force, significantly dealing with the problems related to lack of practical redistricting knowledge. The VCRTF community members overcame knowledge concerns by drawing redistricting lines that were superior enough to be accepted by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors.

Ventura: The Scene of Community Redistricting Action

Ventura County, California, which is located in the central coastal region of Southern California, is diverse in terms of both political ideologies and ethnic-racial differences. Ventura County has numerous nonprofit organizations, political groups, community organizers, and funding agencies dedicated to social justice, community organizing, and cultural celebrations, all of which support the ascendance of an activist community. Ventura County is associated with the beginning of the farm workers' movement and the emergence of Cesar Chavez as its leader.

Redistricting strongly correlates with the increasing Latino population, because research has found that as the size of a minority population such as Latinos and African Americans increases, the probability that a minority candidate will be elected to office increases, which suggests that the racial and ethnic composition of a district may be associated with the racial and ethnic makeup of the candidate pool (Branton, 2009; Lubin, 1997). If this finding is coupled with the fact that minorities tend to register with the Democratic Party, more minorities, particularly Latino, likely will run for and win elections in Ventura County, because the percentage

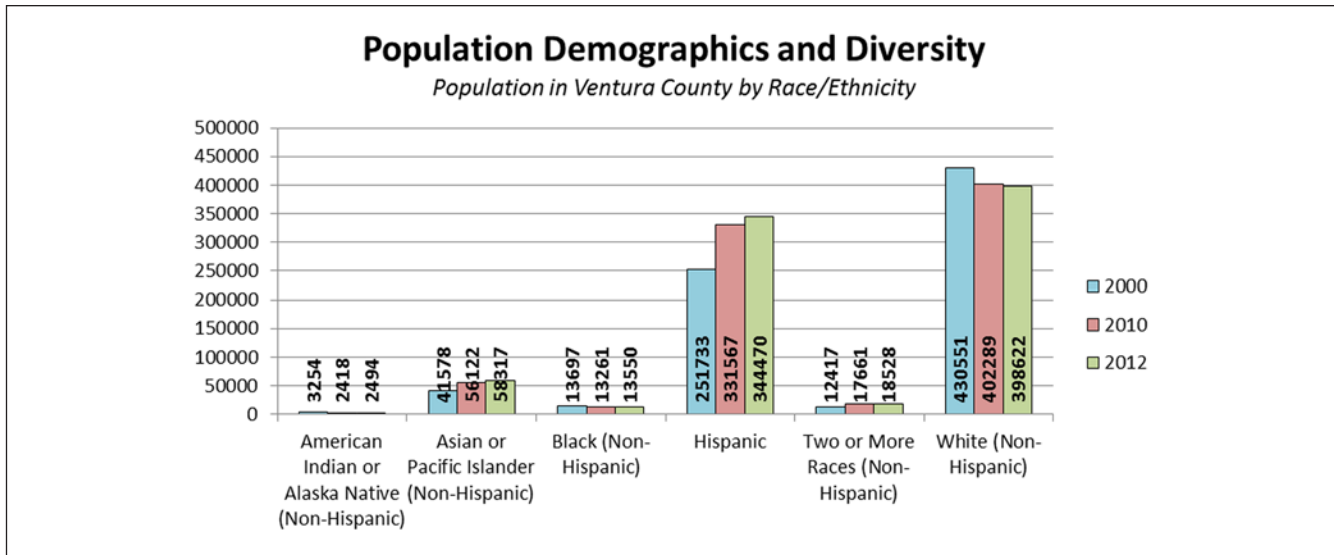


Figure 1. Ventura County racial/ethnic populations 2000-2012.

Source. Harvard University School of Public Health—Diversitydata.org. U.S. Census Bureau Intercensal Population Estimates (2012).

of Latinos within a district has a strong, positive impact on the probability of a Latino candidate winning an election. In looking at Figure 1, Latinos (Hispanics) are the second most dominant group after Whites, making Latinos statistically significant in electoral politics, which can affect election outcomes depending on whether they are registered voters and likely to turn out in sufficient numbers on election day. In 2002, the first post-redistricting election, 43,164 Latinos were registered as Democrats and 14,498 as Republicans.

Figure 1 also indicates the growth of the Latino population in relation to the non-Latino population between 2000 and 2012. The presence of a Latino candidate on a ballot can also increase voter turnout among Latinos at the polls (Barreto, Segura, & Woods, 2004). As Figure 1 indicates, Whites still constitute the majority population in Ventura County, but district-based breakdowns indicate that Latinos dominate in some areas, towns, and districts. There are minority populations in contrast to the dominant White and Latino populations, but their numerical status has not prevented, for example, African Americans and Asians from being active in community organizing and political activities. A primary reason for this is that these populations are concentrated in particular cities and communities. For example, nearly one half of all African Americans live in Oxnard, where they run for local office, operate volunteer groups, and support three African American churches.

VCRTF Construction, Takeoff, and Outcomes

The VCRTF

The VCRTF was essentially a community-initiated effort led by community activists led in the initial stage by activists,

like, Marcos Vargas, executive director of the active community organization Coastal Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE). According to Vargas, CAUSE was the organizational force behind VCRTF's formation, which was inspired by CAUSE's involvement in a redistricting effort in Santa Paula (M. Vargas, personal communication, July 16, 2009).

VCRTF's composition was a broad coalition from throughout the county. Politically, the individuals and groups that became involved with the VCRTF were liberal activists and supporters of social, environmental, cultural, labor, and economic equality issues. The VCRTF, according to its cochair, Karl Lawson (personal communication, June 22, 2009), "was a citizens committee; a group of people came together who had been involved in grassroots political involvement, primarily in western Ventura County, for a number of years." Vargas stated that VCRTF was a "broad-based, multiracial coalition representing more than 18 community, labor, and faith-based organizations" (Vargas, personal communication, July 17, 2009). The coalition included representatives from CAUSE, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Ventura County chapter, El Concilio del Condado de Ventura, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the Ventura County League of Women Voters. Individually, this community of activists had a cultural, political, and/or social agenda, but these interests melded into an effective coalition for a common cause that prevented any single member's agenda preferences from negatively affecting the objective of the task force. VCRTF were predominately volunteers. The only paid task force members were Vargas and Das Williams (VCRTF cochair and CAUSE legislative analyst), whose pay was supported by foundation grants generated by CAUSE. The VCRTF coalition

possessed characteristics of coalition organizing that address coalition effectiveness (Kania & Kramer, 2011), in that VCRTF had a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations.⁸

VCRTF objectives. The task force's original objective was to learn about and influence the redistricting process at all levels, including the state level, but after a discussion on practicality and workload, VCRTF decided to focus on the local. An important component of VCRTF's workload was to become familiar with redistricting rules, strategies, and execution. Identifying communities of interest, comprising, for example, voting and workplace patterns, was an important component of VCRTF's learning process. The courts authorized the designation *communities of interest* to use in redistricting. Because the courts blurred descriptions of communities of interest, numerous demographic designations of redistricting can be used. Communities of interest are, however, not to be confused with the redistricting concept of *packing*, which concentrates members of a particular minority in one or more districts so that they compose a majority, a practice that has been challenged under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act. A community of interest is a population with common social, economic, and cultural interests that would gain from unified political representation. A community of interest includes, for example, shared history, race, culture, socioeconomic status, and geography.⁹

Thomas Brunell (2008), in *Redistricting and Representation*, calls for a radical departure from traditional approaches to redistricting and argues for a need to pack districts with as many like-minded partisans as possible, maximizing the number of winning voters, not losers (Brunell, 2008). Brunell's position is more in the spirit of the way *community of interest* is defined, because not all African Americans or all Latinos are like-minded. Working class can be a community of interest based on a common desire for better wages, health care, schools, and environmental safety on the job; a professional, upper-class, white-collar community of interest would be concerned with lower taxes, speed bumps, and brush-free hiking trails.

Rationale for and configuration of VCRTF's redistricting plan. Following release of the 2000 census, Ventura's supervisorial districts experienced a population growth to varying degrees, which required a redistricting effort to even out the districts into 20% portions in the best way possible.¹⁰ The VCRTF's three redistricting goals were, in order of importance, to provide for communities of interest, retain the integrity of cities, and ensure geographic compactness. From a fair representation point of view, VCRTF's allegiance to a nonracial communities-of-interest emphasis on redistricting allowed for occasional alliances with other districts, because race was not the overriding focus. The VCRTF determined that because Latinos make up more than one third of Ventura

County's population, at least two supervisorial districts would be Latino and/or working-class seats, whether or not a Latino held the seat.

Most of the actual VCRTF work took place between February 2001 and July 2001. Among the VCRTF meetings that occurred during this period was an important February 8, 2001, meeting whose agenda included background on the current redistricting effort and preparation for an upcoming William Velasquez Institute Redistricting Workshop. This meeting provided an update on the current redistricting process and a presentation on developing a redistricting agenda, which was given by Leo Estrada, a consultant to VCRTF and a University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) scholar on redistricting. Technical support was drawn from UCLA's Urban Planning Program.

The task force met on average every 2 weeks, and even though the attendance pattern fluctuated throughout, several committed members attended all of the meetings. Issues among task force members arose early and mobilization of VCRTF efforts only advanced after VCRTF participants' political associations and cultural identifications were minimized to obtain common goals and group interests.

The VCRTF sustained task force involvement by assigning one or more participants to carry out certain duties over the duration of the redistricting project. For example, Karl Lawson, Das Williams (cochair), and Marcos Vargas were active organizers, as were Hank Lacayo (VCRTF legislative liaison) and Marilyn Valenzuela (VCRTF treasurer). Williams, a legislative analyst with CAUSE, was primarily tasked with implementing VCRTF strategy. Sustained attention to the project from such assignments ensured that the flow of information was maintained.

VCRTF Redistricting Process Tools and Strategy

VCRTF followed a process suggested by Estrada on how to develop a redistricting plan (K. Rudiger & L. Estrada, e-mail communication to VCRTF, March 5, 2001). VCRTF first laid out base maps of Ventura County with basic information and then laid transparent sheets of Mylar over the maps. Task force members generated ideas about where geographic boundaries, highway-freeway divisions, and cultural themes existed in the county. VCRTF ideas noted the representation of geographic issues (major topographic divisions and streets that serve as dividing points), cultural issues (language, ethnicity, etc.), attitudes (issues associated with how people define their community), behavioral indicators (voting and registration data), and economics (socioeconomic status, housing, and poverty).

The VCRTF announced in its March 8 agenda that Maptitude Redistricting software would facilitate mapping exercises and guide the VCRTF redistricting process. Maptitude is geographic information system (GIS) software that provides desktop mapping and spatial analysis functions as well as nationwide geographic data sets of streets with

addresses, census tracts, and census boundaries, with more than 600 demographic variables. It also has race categories and geographic layers, such as census blocks, voting districts, and school districts. The Census Bureau provides each state with census data, such as race and voting-age data, broken down by census tracts and census blocks. Maptitude translates the geographic file into a format, whereby districts can be created by aggregating smaller geographic layers. Blocks and precincts can result in newly created districts, and more than one geographic layer can be displayed on the same map, so that blocks can be shown overlain by voting districts. Maptitude's ability to query and display data on maps is one of its most prominent features. For example, thematic maps can display Latino population percentages by incorporating varying colors of blocks.

GIS has become a popular tool for redistricting efforts because it can quantify and incorporate various measures of communities of interest in its redistricting databases. GIS is useful in creating districts that are relatively representative and politically competitive. The VCRTF found GIS redistricting software to be efficient and effective in its ability to move boundary lines according to demographics, such as race and voting age, by district to include or exclude census tracts or blocks. VCRTF was able to evaluate the effect of boundary changes on the population and simultaneously check changes to necessary criteria, including communities of interest, integrity of cities, and geographic compactness, consistently throughout the process.

VCRTF processing the rules. The VCRTF expressed concern about fair representation among the concentrations of blue-collar urban workers in Oxnard and Ventura, the African American population in Oxnard, the population of beach communities, and the working-class population in inland farming communities in Fillmore, Moorpark, and Santa Paula. The VCRTF followed the legal requirements, including compliance with the one-person, one-vote principle and the Voting Rights Act; consideration of the compactness and contiguousness of districts; respect for political subdivisions; preservation of the cores of existing districts; no placement of race above other criteria in creating boundaries; and encompassing communities of interest established by evidence submitted at task force citizen meetings and by census data.¹¹

VCRTF redistricting juggling. One of the VCRTF's practical and strategic moves was to engage and work with the Board of Supervisors and Ventura County government staff. According to Third District supervisor Kathy Long, the VCRTF was the only organized group to approach the board requesting collaboration in the process (K. Long, personal communication, July 22, 2009). Long felt there was broad representation by this group and certainly would have welcomed others, because the entire process was intended to be open to the public and allowed for engagement in a variety of ways. For

example, the VCRTF met with county staff (in particular, Steve Wood, county demographer; John Johnston, chief administrative officer; and Thomas Berg, director of the Resource Management Agency) and requested information and advanced inquiries regarding the redistricting process and board criteria. According to Johnston, because the board had the legal responsibility to reapportion after the census, his role was to provide board staff with statistics and information, and with the support of the Board, he made this process as transparent as it had ever been in Ventura County (J. Johnston, personal communication, August 27, 2009). VCRTF, in taking advantage of this political opportunity, went to the boardroom, where its members urged the board to conduct the redistricting process fairly and openly and in a way in which community members could participate. Johnston stated that the board directed him to work through the county executive office in an effort to ensure community input, that meetings were called at which the VCRTF were able to voice their requests, and that these requests were not in conflict with what the board wanted to accomplish.

In addition to regular Board of Supervisors meetings, extra study sessions allowed talk about the redistricting process. VCRTF worked as an equal participant in public meetings with the board and made suggestions along with the board and its staff. For example, VCRTF members would view the statistics and district lines projected on screens and visualized how to rearrange the boundaries. In terms of resource access, the VCRTF did everything on its own with access to the same information that the board had, which was provided to VCRTF by the county planning department. The board held eight public hearings; two were devoted to establishing the process and schedule, four were devoted to evaluating and ultimately selecting an alternative, and two were for the first and second reading of the ordinance.

After reviewing the proposal arguments, suggestions, and final copy, the supervisors chose one of VCRTF's two submissions. This decision followed the board's discussion of supervisorial redistricting alternatives, which began on May 22, followed by public hearings and board discussions on June 5, June 19, and July 10. The final supervisorial redistricting boundary plan was approved in the July-10 meeting. The plan was prepared for formal adoption, with a first reading of the "Year 2000 Census County of Ventura Redistricting Ordinance" at the July-17 board meeting and the second reading at the July-24 meeting, where First District supervisor Bennett called a motion that was seconded by Third District supervisor Long. The plan passed 4-1, absent the Fourth District supervisor.

The VCRTF's efforts were endorsed by the editorial board of the *Ventura County Star*, which is the county's primary newspaper. The timing of these events and the opinions of the VCRTF were documented in newspaper coverage and other local media. In addition, the *Ventura County Star* invited members of the task force to write op-ed articles, one of which appeared in the Sunday edition, before the board

voted on the redistricting plan. VCRTF's process illustrates that political outcomes can be affected by working with decision makers and opinion leaders to influence policy and media resources.

VCRTF putting the pieces together. One goal was to create a community of interest based on a working-class (largely Latino) population as well as an environmental community of interest and to avoid (or at least minimize) division of Oxnard, which is a majority working-class Latino community. The VCRTF determined that the new Third District, with its increased working-class and Latino concentrations, was more representative of working-class and Latino communities over the 2002-2008 voting period. The communities-of-interest ideal was configured, such that one seat would be Republican but pro-environment (Second District); one seat would be Republican and conservative (Fourth District); one seat would be solidly working-class, urban Latino (Fifth District); one seat would unite the smaller cities in a diverse mix in which no one population could dominate the other (Third District); and one seat would be coastal, pro-environment, White, middle class, and Democratic (First District). This division closely resembles the community-of-interest definition Guinier (1994) suggested, where under cumulative voting, a nonracial means to a racial end may occur. For example, Latino voters who have similar interests could be placed together with other voters, and this community could elect a candidate who would advance their interests as a specific community of interest, while simultaneously being a racially dominant community.

Other VCRTF considerations were issue-based. The issues surrounding the Fourth District, for example, were land use in the Los Posas Valley and Somis; governance of the Santa Rosa Valley, State Route 118, and Santa Rosa Road; and the Santa Susana Field Lab/Rocketdyne on the far eastern edge of Ventura County. There was a variety of input during the process from citizen groups in the Somis and Santa Rosa areas. Santa Rosa gained population by the transference of residents from the Fourth District to the Second District. The Somis group also wanted to be taken out of the Fourth District and absorbed into the Third District but ultimately lost this bid because the Fourth District was redrawn to extend past Somis and further into the Los Posas Valley. The Fourth District was given to Box Canyon and defense contractor Rocketdyne, to make up for the lost numbers in the Santa Rosa Valley.

The VCRTF redistricting plan took Port Hueneme out of the Second District and put it in the Third District. The Second District was previously populated by about four fifths of the wealthy and politically conservative Thousand Oaks population (100,000 residents), about 20,000 working-class residents of Port Hueneme, and 12,000 working-class residents in South Oxnard. This latter community of interest was a better fit with the Third District in terms of both common interests and geography. Conversely, part of Thousand

Oaks and the middle- to upper-class Newbury Park were in the Third District, along with the large Latino populations (40,000 residents) in Fillmore and Santa Paula, which were separated from their community of interest in the Second District. This situation left a substantial amount of Second District and Third District political power in the hands of the wealthier, more White communities in Ventura County. The VCRTF placed all of Thousand Oaks and Newbury Park into the Second District and placed Port Hueneme and South Oxnard (33,000 residents) into the Third District with Fillmore and Santa Paula. This was done in an effort to make the Third District supervisor more responsive to the needs of the working-class Latino population, while allowing the needs of the upper-class, predominantly White population to be served by the Second District.

The VCRTF eventually prepared a plan that respected a half percent population variance and communities of interest, particularly in terms of the urban-rural split. VCRTF submitted its plan to the board on May 17, 2001. Lawson presented the plans drawn up by VCRTF, which included Ventura County boundaries, total county population divided into fifths, districts that had to grow (1 and 3), districts that had to shrink (2 and 5), district boundaries, court cases, district populations, and VCRTF maps. In addition, the VCRTF prepared a three-page report, detailing how it had prepared its plans based on the criteria listed by the board at its April-17 meeting.

Aftermath: VCRTF Redistricting Electoral Impact

A look at the Board of Supervisors elections since the VCRTF-led redistricting reveals that most of the pre-VCRTF-led redistricting incumbents were reelected. The most notable defeat occurred in the predominantly Latino District 5, where longtime and previously unbeatable John Flynn lost to John Zaragoza in the November 2008 elections. Flynn was defeated 53.88% to 45.55%. In Flynn's first post-VCRTF redistricting election in November 2004, he defeated Manuel Lopez 56.2% to 43.3%. Flynn was a major opponent of the VCRTF's efforts, especially in regard to District 5. When Flynn was first elected in 1978, District 5 was a majority White district, but over the years, he had developed good relationships with the working-class Latino community that came to dominate. These connections eventually broke down because Flynn was no longer perceived as being an effective advocate for District 5. In the November 2004 supervisorial elections, incumbent Steve Bennett won 76% to 22.8% over challenger Jeffrey Ketelsen, and in June 2008, Bennett ran unopposed. The addition of Ojai and Ojai Valley to District 1 strengthened an already solid community of interest. District 1 was and continues to be a safe seat that is environmentally progressive and liberal on social policy and devoid of a significant low-income working class.

In the first elections after the VCRTF redistricting in March 2002, Linda Parks, an environmentalist, won for the

first time in the Second District on a 53% to 46.7% vote over opponent Randy Hoffman, who was a conservative businessman campaigning as a slow-growth candidate. Parks's victory came after conservative incumbent District 2 supervisor Frank Schillo decided to retire after two terms. Although opposed to the VCRTF participation and proposals, Schillo eventually agreed that Port Hueneme and South Oxnard do not share much in common with the rest of socioeconomically advanced, largely White District 2 and voted in favor of giving up a substantial portion of his district in exchange for another portion that was more similar to District 2. Parks was successful in her reelection bid in June 2006, winning 63.88% to 35.72% over challenger Joe Gibson.

In the other March 2002 election, incumbent Fourth District supervisor Judy Mikels held off a challenge from John Lane to win 51.4% to 48.2%. This close election signaled another tough election in June 2006, when Mikels was defeated by current Fourth District supervisor Peter Foy 38.39% to 28.59%, with third candidate Jin Dantona receiving 32.67%. Mikels could not overcome the community-organized efforts to defeat her after the activist residents of the Fourth District were unsuccessful in convincing the VCRTF and the Board of Supervisors to move Somis out of District 4 and into District 3.

Most of those involved in the redistricting process agreed that District 3 was the most affected by change and felt the biggest consequences. Long first won this district in November 1996 and was involved in relatively tight elections in 1996 and 2000, but with the redrawn district, her victory margins increased. For example, in March 2004, she defeated opponent Mike Morgan 59.5% to 40%, and in June 2008, she won over Socorro Lopez Hanson 80.94% to 18.35%. These results are in contrast to the several hundred vote differences she had in earlier elections with Mike Morgan, who consistently worked within the Thousand Oaks and Camarillo areas.

District 3 is an especially active district; citizen participation is high, and the issues are numerous. Because the district still contains upper-middle-class White constituents, their interests often are at odds with the substantial Latino and working-class populations, but not with the Latino and working-class populations who are politically weak. Long, who already had appealed to the Latino-dominated Fillmore and Santa Paula constituencies, became more solid with the Latino-based inclusions of South Oxnard and Port Hueneme. Conservative and Republican interests were diminished with the post-2000 redistricting, because the union with Thousand Oaks on which these groups could rely for favorable supervisor policy support gave way with the entrance of Port Hueneme and South Oxnard.

The VCRTF managed to balance its communities-of-interest emphasis with geographic sensibilities. Geographically, it made more sense to move Ojai out of District 3 and put it with the rest of the Ojai Valley in District 1. Although Schillo favored retaining Port Hueneme, a position that critics claim was based on a desire to have a port

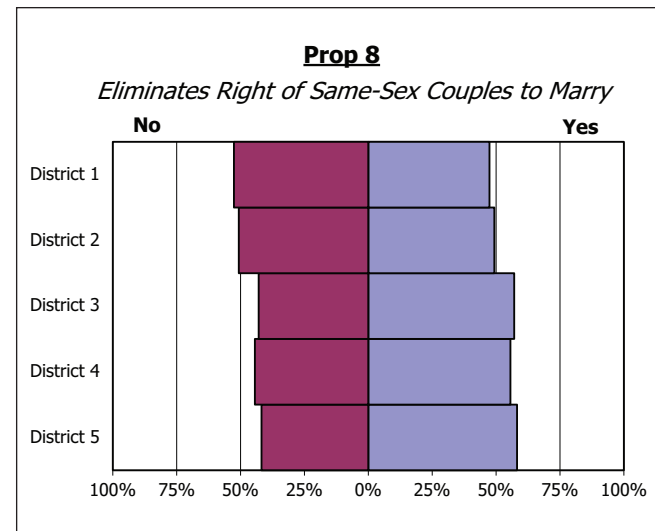


Figure 2. Same-sex marriage rights.

Source. Los Angeles Law Library: 2008 General Election.

Note. Prop = proposition.

city in his district, geographically it appeared to be a better fit for District 5 (F. Schillo, personal communication, August 11, 2009).

Fair Representation and Supervisorial Response to Communities of Interest

A local, state, or national government responding to best interests of the community members indicates the degree of accountability to community members expected in a democratic system. VCRTF efforts and results demonstrate how this expectation was applied through district members' votes on propositions in the post-2000 census Board of Supervisors redistricting of Ventura County. Supervisor votes on supported and passed policies were reviewed, and supervisors responded to how they felt about their responses to their communities of interest and to the uncommon (and often-times common) interests and positions of their colleagues from other districts.

California proposition voting patterns provide justification for identifying communities of interest in the Board of Supervisors districts. District 1, for example, can be characterized as White, fairly affluent, and politically liberal, and District 1 supervisor Steve Bennett is a Democrat who is often called "the voice of the board's liberal majority" (Catherine Salliant, *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 2007). On Proposition 8, the proposition to eliminate the right of same-sex couples to marry, District 1 voted 47% to 53% against the proposition, whereas Republican supervisor Peter Foy's politically conservative District 4 voted 56% to 44% for Proposition 8 (see Figure 2).

Environmental policy. In the primary in 2002, the first year of district elections under the VCRTF-drawn lines, the

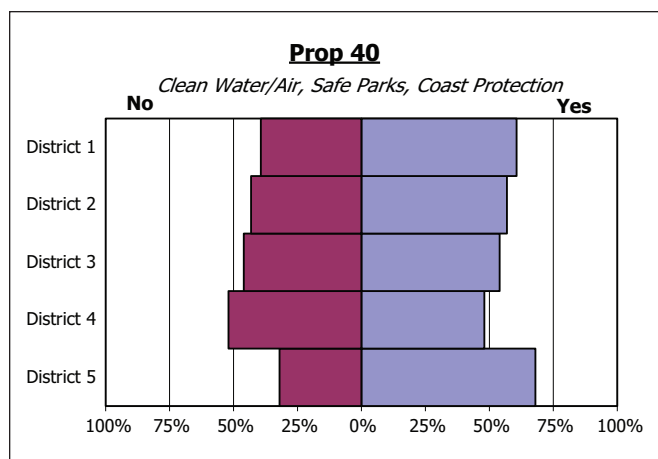


Figure 3. Environmental improvement/sustainability.

Source. Los Angeles Law Library: 2002 Statewide Primary Election.

Note. Prop = proposition.

environmentally based Proposition 40, which dealt with clean water and air and coastal protection, passed 61% to 39% in District 1, the environmentally conscious community of interest, whereas in District 4, the vote was 48% to 52% against (see Figure 3). District 1 supervisor Bennett appears to be in sync with his constituents by introducing and supporting legislation favorable to a clean and sustainable environment. For example, he has advocated the restoration of beach water quality testing as a year-round county activity, led passage of a Ventura County policy to require higher energy efficiency from extra large homes, and requested that the County and Air Pollution Control District develop Climate Change Action Plans.

In contrast, Fourth District supervisor Foy voted no on a bill introduced by Supervisor Bennett to allow homeowners in unincorporated areas to borrow money from the county to invest in alternative, environmentally friendly energy systems such as solar panels. District 4 was the only district to vote no on Proposition 40, and Supervisor Foy was the only one to vote no on Supervisor Bennett's bill. District 5, the working-class district, had the highest percentage of yes votes on Proposition 40, whereas District 3, which is the most complex district in terms of community of interest, had the lowest percentage of yes votes. The District 5 supervisor at the time of the vote, John Flynn, was not present for the vote. On environmental issues, Fifth District supervisor John Zaragoza, elected in 2008, did vote with the board to hand over Camarillo Regional Park to California State University Channel Islands for preservation and use as an environmental study site for students and faculty, which is an early indication of how he will represent the environmentally challenged District 5.

District 2 supervisor Linda Parks, a Republican representing a generally conservative, especially fiscally, professional, white-collar district, is a strong environmentalist who can be

considered out of proportion to the narrow yes vote on Proposition 40. For example, Parks works on policies specific to particular spaces, such as support to limit the use of rodent poisons in rural areas, because a progression up the food chain has found it to be a fatal mix for mountain lions, to working to create a county transportation plan that will reduce automobile congestion, while simultaneously reducing greenhouse gas emissions. These are environmental concerns that fiscally conservative but more environmentally attuned professional, white-collar populations, many living on the edges of open wooded areas, favor.¹²

When we consider issues that can transcend particular district interests or break down according to particular interests, the environment emerges as an issue best demonstrating this effect on the Board of Supervisors. When environmental issues are broken down, they usually fall into fiscal and non-fiscal (including taxes, development, and overall land use) areas. For example, in April 2007, a vote to send a letter urging the Environmental Protection Agency to remove the waste at the contentious Halaco Engineering site located in District 5, by designating it as a Superfund site, was unanimous. Whenever consensus was not reached over environmental issues with fiscal attachments, District 4 supervisor Foy was often the dissenting vote, whereas District 2 and District 1 supervisors typically sided with one another in advocating environmental concerns. District 3, 4, and 5 supervisors voted no in June 2007 to a proposed county law that tilted toward development over farmland, which would have imposed a 300-foot buffer zone between farmland and any new construction in unincorporated areas of the county. District 1 and 2 supervisors Bennett and Parks voted to impose this buffer zone based on their concerns about negative environmental impact on the area. In a similar vote in December 2007, District 3, 4, and 5 supervisors passed a plan to demolish Cabrillo Racquet Club near Saticoy, in District 1, and replace it with eight homes, with District 1 and 2 supervisors voting against because of the potential impacts on farmland. Supervisors also voted down a proposal by District 1 and 2 supervisors to replace some of the lawns surrounding the County Government Center (June 2008) with more drought-resistant landscaping.

One controversial environmental issue that united a diverse group (environmentalists, working class, ethnic, and socioeconomic) of activists was a proposal to build a liquid natural gas (LNG) facility off the Ventura County coast. This project was ultimately rejected, and during the controversy, the Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to oppose Woodside Energy's plan to target the Point Mugu area for ship-to-ship transfers of LNG. The pattern that emerges from supervisorial votes on environmental issues is that when a choice between development, financial outlays, and the environment occurs in District 4, the most conservative district sides with development, whereas District 1, the most environmentally conscious, votes against development. District 3 is a growth area in terms of housing development, as is

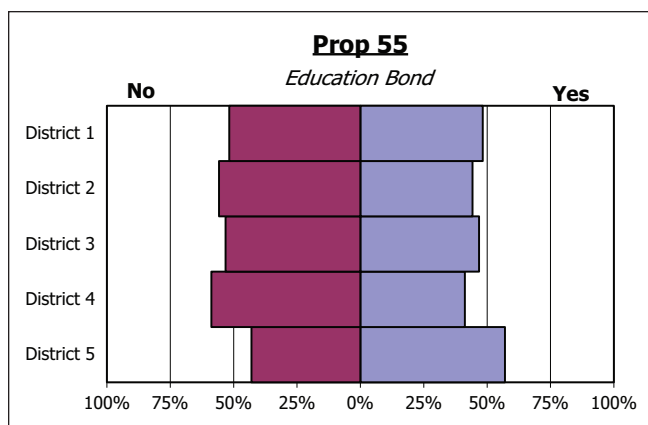


Figure 4. Education funds.

Source. Los Angeles Law Library: 2004 Statewide Primary Election.

Note. Prop = proposition.

District 5, but the current District 5 supervisor has not been in office long enough to establish a strong environmental voting pattern.

Education. Education is universally important to parents at some level but is more of a necessity for working-class and minority communities who view education as a way out of economically stressed situations. On the 2004 presidential primary ballot, District 5 voted 57% to 43% for Proposition 55, an education bond proposition, whereas all other districts voted against it, with the widest spread occurring in District 4 at 41% to 59% (see Figure 4). This could be a case of fiscal conservatism, even among the liberal districts, overcoming the desire for better education, except that the district with less economic income preferred some expense in exchange for better education. Because there are active school districts with spheres of authority, the supervisors rarely have to deal with education issues.

Third District supervisor Kathy Long did encounter an education politics situation when she supported Ventura County Measure U (2008 election), a measure to form a Camarillo unified school district that would separate Camarillo from the Oxnard Union and merge the 3,200 Camarillo and Somis students into a district with the majority White K-8 Pleasant Valley School District. Opponents of Measure U favored the racial point as the primary motivation for Measure U. Although District 3 has the predominately White Camarillo, Latinos make up 40% of the district. Did Supervisor Long represent the interest of her community of interest? The answer is about as complex as her district. Supervisor Long represents a district with strong organized advocates through these communities, and her strength flows from an ability to transverse both skillfully. Despite the questionable decision to become involved in the controversial Measure U on an endorsement basis, Supervisor Long has significant community and voter support in District 3 and

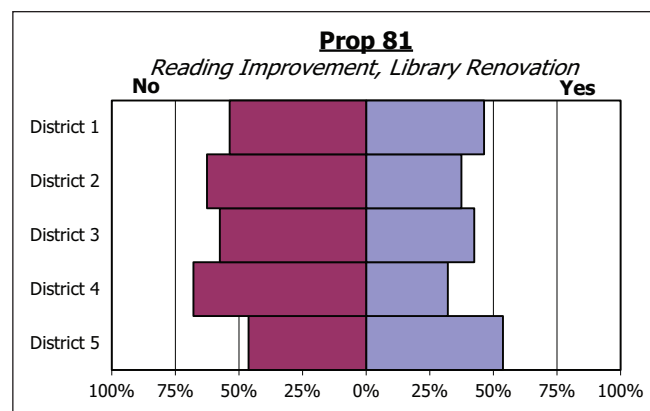


Figure 5. Reading and library renovation.

Source. Los Angeles Law Library: 2008 Statewide Primary Election.

Note. Prop = proposition.

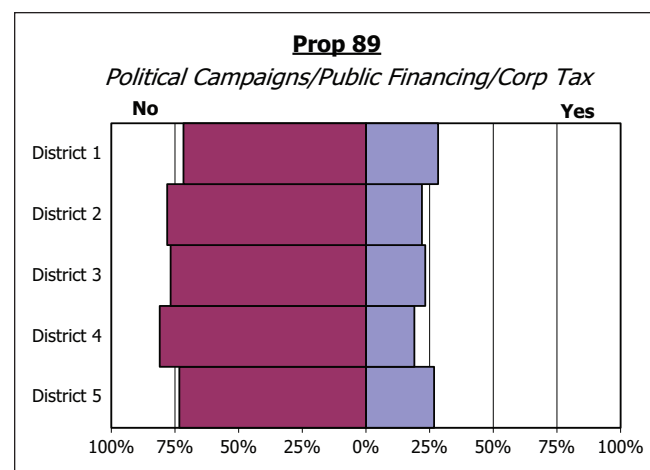


Figure 6. Campaign financing.

Source. Los Angeles Law Library: 2006 General Election.

Note. Prop = proposition.

enjoys what Fenno (1978) called good “home style” in maintaining constituent support, which gives her more leeway in policy making and voting.

Educationally, on the 2008 primary election ballot, District 5 voted 54% to 46% for Proposition 81, a reading improvement proposition (see Figure 5). This proposition was trounced in the other districts, led again by District 4, where this proposition was defeated 32% to 68%. Even in socially conscious District 1, the vote was 46% to 54%.

Political campaigns. Fourth District supervisor Peter Foy represents his district’s interests well based on other examples of his supervisorial board policy supports, such as campaign financing. Proposition 89 on political campaigns (Figure 6), which would limit corporations to spending no more than US\$10,000 on initiatives, ban contributions from lobbyists to politicians, and provide limited public funds for

candidates who agree not to take private funds, was defeated overwhelmingly throughout the districts (83% to 17% in District 4). District 4 supervisor Foy proposed county campaign finance reform (November 2008) that would have increased the voluntary spending limit for candidates for supervisor from US\$73,000 to US\$300,000 and the limit on each donation from US\$700 to US\$2,500. Foy was the lone vote in support of this, and based on Proposition 89's defeat, his proposal would appear to be out of step with the interests of District 4.

Elected officials, in this case county supervisors, will most likely represent their districts fairly, which makes redistricting the most critical component in the fair representation scenario. Sometimes a particular demographic, such as the working-class or fiscal conservatives, is a substantial portion of an area but is weakened by a drawing based more on political expediency than pragmatic community interests. Ventura represents a solving and/or improvement of the fair representation equation. For example, fourth District supervisor Peter Foy's representation of a conservative district often put him at odds with at least three other supervisors. Foy opposed services for undocumented immigrants but supported Ventura County's public clinics and hospitals, which provide services regardless of citizenship status because federal law mandates it (Biasotti, 2008). Furthermore, Foy managed to combine his conservative position on less government spending with treating undocumented individuals by stressing that it is cheaper to give them preventive care than have them end up in the emergency room (Biasotti, 2008).

Generally, Ventura County supervisors were responsive and sensitive to the communities of interest, whether the interests were based on environmental issues or educational goals and were elected and/or reelected based on their concerns for district constituents. Supervisor responsiveness is compatible with majority community opinion. Examination of propositions is a constructive way to determine policy-specific attitudes among constituents and compare them with supervisorial policy output and support or nonsupport of the propositions. Although this study only covered a selective number of propositions to fit topics that have clear ideological and/or partisan positions grounded in economics, taxes, and moral stances, it is important in its identification of how well supervisors' policies and supports corresponded with what a majority of members feel is best for their community.

Conclusion

The key theoretical and practical purposes of this study have been to examine and analyze the process by which community members become significant actors in the policy-making apparatus in their local communities, in addition to how community involvement in the redistricting process can assist in countering a political trend that finds lines drawn for political gains of a radical minority at the expense of a

pragmatic majority interest. This investigation of community member engagement in Ventura County resulted in findings that indicate community involvement in political participation, such as the VCRTF and redistricting, is empowering and can result in more fair representation and inspiration for increased community involvement in a range of issues and policies, from environmental sustainability to economic health and land use policies. The VCRTF coalition membership illustrates that a diverse group is able to accomplish goals that an individual and/or individual organization would struggle to accomplish in a timely way, if at all.

The evidence presented here, based on a selective number of propositions and supervisorial policy positions, shows fundamentally that elected officials can and will represent their communities of interest if they are elected under a redistricting plan submitted by a group of nonelected or consultancy-based interests. This is not to suggest that a broad conclusion can be made and that this effect can work on a statewide level; rather, it is useful to try to implement it in the absence of other civic engagement and political participatory activities designed to improve and shape policies that flow from legislatures. Also, the basic strategy can easily transfer from a local supervisorial redistricting effort to a statewide assembly and senate redistricting.

Also, two other explanatory points are necessary. First, there is no question that citizen redistricting commissions can be populated by individuals and/or group representatives with a political, economic, and/or cultural agenda. For example, many active members of the VCRTF were community activists tilted toward liberal democratic politics and culturally sensitive positions. The presence of a diverse VCRTF community elevated the desire among participants to transcend differences and particular stances to work for the community as a whole. Second, the 2010 Ventura County Board of Supervisors redistricting did result in a change among the Board of Supervisors elected under the 1990 redistricted lines. District 5, whose community-of-interest status is working class-minority, voted out a longtime supervisor with a good reputation among the District 5 community population who made decisions and statements that did not represent his district's best interests. The redrawn lines clearly intend to represent particular community interests and increase the awareness among the pre- and post-redistricting elected officials that a high degree of sensitivity to community interests is essential, and they risk removal from office unless they continue to represent fairly, as they have always done or as they have to do, in response to the community-based redrawn lines. The VCRTF did not regroup for the 2010 census redistricting; however, the lines remained very similar to the 2000 census redistricting. Redistricting the 2010 lines was done in-house by the Ventura County Resource Management Agency (CMA), although public hearings were held and speaking before the Board were several participants in the VCRTF.

The citizen-driven VCRTF took advantage of the political structural opportunities provided in Ventura. Other cities, counties, and states have considered allowing citizen-based groups and commissions to play redistricting roles, but few have allowed them to do so to the point where citizen-based maps and recommendations have been accepted and implemented. In addition to taking advantage of the political opportunity given to them, VCRTF members had the advantage of organizing and operating without a similarly organized opposition group.

There is a need for comparison studies in which citizen redistricting efforts are compared and contrasted as well as for districts drawn the traditional way to indicate relative and differential outcomes. VCRTF is an instructive model for states and municipalities to consider when the redistricting process is planned following the 2020 census and subsequent decennial censuses. The VCRTF experience suggests that academic, ethnic, cultural, and underrepresented groups and businesses should be involved in this effort to make commissioners, political consultants, and politicians more knowledgeable and aware of their needs and interests in the deliberations for redrawing districts. The lessons of this case study point out the usefulness of a comparison study such as that between Santa Cruz and Los Angeles counties as well as counties throughout the United States.

The research was intended to examine how through active engagement, community members can be skilled, educated, and pro-active contributors to their communities and quality of life. This research provides insights into the factors directly shaping involvement in their communities, such as creating task forces, forming coalitions, and engaging with policy makers. This research answered the questions, how do community members work with their elected officials to shape legislative policy? What knowledge and skills do they need to participate effectively in policy making? And how did bringing people together from diverse relevant resources and interests become effective in a way that generated positive responses from local policy makers? Utilizing votes on propositions to note what the community members preferred and comparing the vote counts with the ways supervisors voted on community policies was effective in charting whether the redrawn district lines worked well and avoided the disadvantages that can accompany citizen involvement in policy making. This research also succeeded in adding to other research, such as that by González, Arnstein, and Irvin and Stansbury, into the substantial value of community involvement in the political process. Community activists at every level need to be in charge of some aspect of the decision-making apparatus to direct the spoils of the political structure in a manner that is more responsive and responsible to the average community member. The average community member might be motivated to become more engaged with political participation, provided there are community forms of decision making and/or policy formulation that tend to act in a socially cohesive and community-strengthening way.

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Notes

1. A report by the Brennan Center found that Republican legislators and governors drew district lines for 173 of the 435 seats in Congress, and where Republican legislators controlled redistricting, Republicans won 11 more seats than they would have under the old district lines. Five of these 11 were seats that flipped party control because of redistricting; 6 were Republican seats saved by redistricting. Democratic legislators and governors redistricted 44 seats, just one quarter the number of seats as Republicans. Where they controlled redistricting, Democrats won three more seats than they would have under the old district lines, and Republicans lost five more seats. (Iyer, 2012). Wisconsin is typical of states where redistricting shaped state legislatures, wherein 17 of 33 state senate districts and 56 of 99 state assembly districts voted Republican for president despite the Democratic presidential candidate winning the state by seven points.
2. Arnstein's (1969) article describes a *ladder of participation* with eight rungs, each higher rung representing a greater degree of citizens' power. The two lowest rungs on the ladder (manipulation and therapy) are labeled nonparticipation; the next three rungs (informing, consultation, and placation) are the token participation levels; the highest three rungs of the ladder (partnership, delegated power, and citizen control) are labeled "citizen power."
3. In *Reynolds v. Sims*, the U.S. Supreme Court established the principle of one person, one vote based on the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. This decision required almost every state to redraw its legislative districts, and subsequent constitutional law on apportionment has relied on the principles established in *Reynolds v. Sims*. This decision resulted in a shift of power from rural to urban areas.
4. The Supreme Court issued a decision on April 1 stating that the case of *Avery v. Midland County (Texas) et al.* should be vacated and remanded and declaring a municipal/other local ordinance as unconstitutional. The judgment rested on the Court's authority over judicial review at the state level.
5. The Supreme Court declared in *Bartlett v. Strickland* that a minority group must constitute a numerical majority of the voting-age population in an area before Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act would require the creation of a legislative district to prevent dilution of that group's votes. The decision struck down a North Carolina redistricting plan that attempted to preserve minority voting power in a state legislative district that was 39% Black.
6. In the New York case *Abate v. Mundt*, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that after more than a century, the Rockland County Board of Supervisors consisted of the supervisors of the

county's five towns, resulting in extensive functional interrelationships and intergovernmental coordination between county and towns. The Court of Appeals of New York upheld the plan in light of the long tradition of overlapping functions and dual personnel in the Rockland County government and the fact that the plan does not contain any built-in bias favoring particular political interests or geographic areas; thus, the court found the plan not in violation of the equal protection clause.

7. The conservative Republican assault on the Voting Rights Act after 2008 resulted in a setback for fair representative redistricting when, in June 2013, in *Shelby County (Alabama) v. Holder*, the Supreme Court invalidated Section 3(b) of the Voting Rights Act, which had a formula that required states and jurisdictions with a history of discrimination to obtain prior approval or "preclearance" before changing any voting law, including congressional redistricting plans. Section 5 required those questionable states to preclear their redistricting plans with the Department of Justice or the U.S. District Court of Columbia before implementation. The nine states and six jurisdictions previously subjected to this no longer are opening up one other method of voter suppression. In the meantime, legislation has been introduced in the 113th Congress to negate this, such as the Redistricting Transparency Act of 2013, which would require states to conduct congressional redistricting in a manner that the public is informed about congressional redistricting plans through a public Internet site that allows the public to participate in the shaping and/or plans for redistricting. For discussion of the constitutionality of redistricting legislation, for a discussion of the constitutionality of mid-decade redistricting, see L. Paige Whitaker (2014, February 24). Congressional redistricting and the Voting Rights Act: A legal overview. (Report No. 42482). Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
8. Three collaborative efforts shared the five key conditions that distinguished their collective impact from other types of collaborations: the Strive Partnership educational initiative in Cincinnati, the environmental cleanup on the Elizabeth River in Virginia, and the Shape Up Somerville campaign against childhood obesity in Somerville, Massachusetts (Kania & Kramer, 2011).
9. The term *community of interest* is a vague phrase that is in statutory and constitutional redistricting regulations, but in this case, it applies to not splitting political subdivisions, counties, and cities. Communities of interest are similar or like-minded areas, based on characteristics, such as economic interests or ideology, that comprise shared interests. The courts have not come up with a definitive definition of *community of interest*.
10. Because California has large geographic districts, the state is one of the strictest in the country, holding to a 1% to 2% variance in population.
11. The Board of Supervisors criteria were provided as required by state and federal law. Per state law, Section 21500, the board can consider four criteria: topography, geography, cohesiveness/contiguity/integrity/compactness of territory, and community of interest. Federal law is contained in a U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Shaw v. Hunt*, 1996) that opposed elevating race above traditional redistricting factors.
12. It should be noted that in the General Election of 2008, two environmental propositions, Propositions 7 and 10, were on

the ballot but failed to pass, and all Ventura County districts voted against them. The closest vote was in District 5, which had a 50–50 split on Proposition 10.

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