

Spring 2013

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Recommended Citation

Diridon, Rod Jr., "A Comparison of Basic At-Large and At-Large By-Seat Elections Systems in the State of California" (2013). *Master's Projects*. 290.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.67kp-twth>
https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_projects/290

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**A Comparison of Basic At-Large and
At-Large By-Seat Elections Systems in the State of California**

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**A Thesis Quality Research Project Submitted on April 5, 2013 in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Masters of Public Administration**

The process through which leaders are chosen in democratic societies has a significant influence on the function of governance. Voters hold the prerogative of electing their representatives and in doing so delegate to them the authority to make important policy decisions on their behalf. “Thus,” Arend Lijphart noted, “the electoral system is the most fundamental element of representative democracy.” (1994, p. 1) The goal of this research paper is to determine if there are differences in voter and candidate engagement between two types of local elections found in Santa Clara County: The commonly used basic at-large (BAL) process and the more rare at-large by-seat (ALBS) system. To the extent the ALBS system is found to be beneficial, it offers municipalities an additional and perhaps compelling option for elections reform.

The bulk of California municipalities elect their city councils through a basic at-large system. In the BAL process, candidates run citywide without a seat or district designation. Residents may cast votes up to the number of openings being considered for election. Candidates equal to the number of openings who receive the highest number of votes are elected (see Diagram 1). (CSC, 2013b)

However, the cities of Santa Clara and Sunnyvale use a unique at-large by-seat system. In the ALBS process, city council candidates stand for election citywide but run for an individual “seat.” This seat does not reflect a geographic area or district, and can

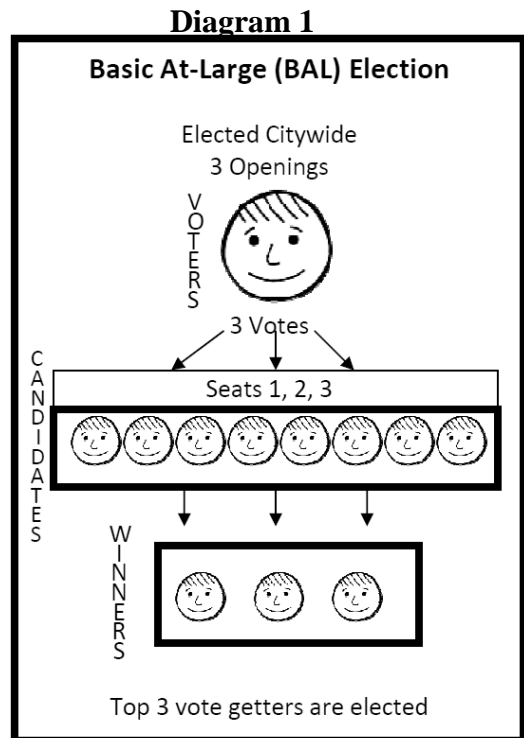
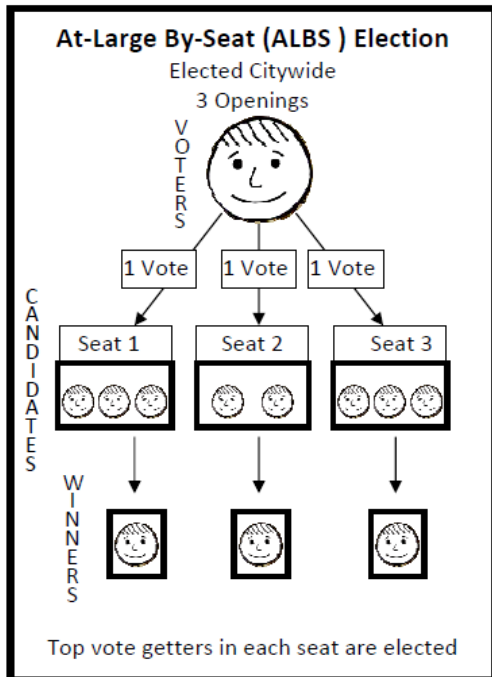


Diagram 2



be thought of as the “slot” for which a candidate runs. The candidate who receives the highest number of votes in the contest for each individual seat is elected (see Diagram 2). (CSC, 2013a) To date, these are the only two municipalities in the state to use the ALBS system in a November general municipal election process.

Proponents of both BAL and ALBS elections contend that their favored process is superior. They cite increased levels of voter and candidate participation in their preferred system

as well as complexity or political barriers that decrease involvement in the system which they oppose. However, to date there has been little study of the anecdotal and quantifiable effects of either. This suggests two questions: Are there measurable differences between the BAL and ALBS systems regarding voter and candidate engagement? And, if so, how are the variations manifested in the public process?

WHY IT MATTERS

Voters, politicians and administrators all have a stake in the elections process. Voters should be provided a system that will engage them and correctly reflect their collective electoral decisions. Candidates should be afforded a format that is approachable and allows them to be judged fairly and openly by the public. While attention is rightly paid to the rapport between voters and candidates, it is important to

recognize that the form and structure of the process play an influential role in the eventual outcomes of elections. (Bowler, Donovan & Karp, 2006, p. 434) It is in this vein that City Clerks and elections officials perform a vital function in administering the process and serving as experts in the policy area. Fostering “neutral and impartial” elections is a professional duty outlined in the International Institute of Municipal Clerks Code of Ethics. (IIMC, 2012) The nature of the process may influence who seeks election, the tenor of debate and how readily residents take part by voting. It is a core belief of City Clerks that elections systems which allow greater involvement and more informed electorates foster a stronger democracy.

The rules of an elections system are a representational conduit through which the needs and social conditions of a community manifest themselves in the process of governance. In *Making Democracy Work*, Robert Putnam states, “Government institutions receive inputs from their social environment and produce outputs to respond to that environment.” (p. 9) At the most basic level, voters provide inputs through those they elect to public office. Lijphart has contended, “This indispensable task in representative democracies is performed by the electoral system – the set of methods for translating the citizens’ votes into representatives’ seats.” (1994, p. 1) It follows that the manner in which both voters and candidates are engaged in an elections system is important as a bridge between the will of people and their government.

There has been an historic downward trend in the United States regarding actual voter turnout (Putnam, 2000, pp, 31 – 33) which has been called, “... an embarrassment in a country whose core self-understanding rests on a commitment to democratic self governance.” (Williams, 2005, p. 637) While there are varying opinions regarding the

extent or causes of lower voter turnout in the US, it has been contended that an explanation should focus on the institutional structure of political systems rather than the motivations or behaviors of voters and candidates. (McDonald & Popkin, 2001, p. 970)

Representative democracy and the performance of its various structures and institutions have been a topic of study for millennia. Theorists ranging from Aristotle to Mill to Tocqueville have postulated the relative benefits and faults of various forms of democratic governance. (Putnam, 1993, pp. 9 – 13) It has been noted that “democracy occupies a privileged place” in the body politic in the United States. (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 237) Overall, Americans are afforded the opportunities and freedom to influence government which are on par or greater than most other democracies. This includes the ability to express personal views through political activism, issues advocacy, and directly campaigning for candidates. (Putnam, 2000, p. 31)

On a broad level, the study of American elections processes has been the subject of significant institutional and academic attention. However, the bulk of these studies have focused on higher profile federal and statewide contests. The prevalence of local elections has been recognized; “... in a federal system of over 80,000 governments, local elections are both the most numerous and frequent type in American politics.” Also, that the “overwhelming bulk” of the local elections in the United States are at-large contests. (Lieske, 1989, pp. 150, 153) Despite this, the lack of academic attention in the area has been lamented for decades. Lieske noted more than twenty years ago that the study of local elections systems was, “... scant, limited, and largely relegated to the professional sidelines” (1989, p. 150) As recently as 2007, Oliver and Ha echoed this sentiment, “Nowhere is this information gap greater than with respect to local elections. ...

Although these elections arguably represent the most immediate democratic experience for a majority of Americans, political scientists have little understanding of what determines voter choice in these settings.” (2007, p. 393)

While the study of local elections has been sparse, information regarding the unique ALBS system is even more so, currently limited to anecdotal information and a few staff reports. This is understandable, as the adoption of Santa Clara and Sunnyvale’s ALBS systems were the result of local reform efforts to enhance the elections process and not as academic exercises. The concept of home rule and political innovation have shown the “... capacity of local governments to restructure basic features of their political organizations, and their interest in doing so.” (Briffault, 2006, p. 3) While the Briffault study focused on more recent events, it has generally been contended that direct democracy such as the initiative process allows a more engaged electorate. (Tolbert, McNeal & Smith, 2003, p. 24) Certainly, the electorate was directly involved in making the ALBS policies through the creation of charter review committees, placing the measures on the ballot, and considering the pros and cons when casting their ballots. That said, it would be of value to assess if those changes in electoral policy led long-term to a more engaged citizenry and have demonstrated the capacity to be an reform model for other municipalities.

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The authority for the BAL process is provided in the Government Code and is the prescribed system for general law municipalities that rely on the State Constitution for their operational rules. (State of California, 2012) It has also been adopted by many

communities which have formulated and approved their own city charters. However, charter cities have the additional latitude to enact different elections systems that may be of benefit to the unique needs of their individual communities.

The charter changes necessary to adopt an ALBS system in the City of Santa Clara and City of Sunnyvale were originally enabled by the early 1900s Progressive era “direct democracy” movement. These efforts granted municipalities the “home rule” autonomy to directly influence laws beyond, though not in conflict with, the State Constitution. Through this the public were provided the benefit of the initiative, referendum and recall processes. (Silva & Barbour, 1999, Pp. iii, 4; Gerston & Christensen, 2012, pp. 5, 25 – 27)

In the mid 1960s, the City of Sunnyvale faced “... a conflict of interest scandal, budget woes and a stalled downtown project,” in addition to the resignation of the City Manager and a basic at-large City Council election fielding 22 candidates. Following a tumultuous election cycle, the City Council convened a Citizens’ Charter Committee in 1967 to consider possible reforms to the City Charter. In November of that year, the Committee proposed a change from the BAL system to an ALBS elections process, which was placed on the June 1968 ballot as Proposition C. (CSV, 2006) The argument in support of Proposition C stated, “The numbering of Council Seats will help insure that Councilmen will be more responsive and responsible to the electorate. As a result of the change the electorate will be able to give specific candidates more effective support.” (CSV, 1968) The Charter amendment was approved by a 15,190 (76.33%) “Yes” and 4,708 (24.66%) “No” vote, changing the election of City Council members from a BAL to an ALBS process. (County of Santa Clara, 1968)

The City of Santa Clara followed shortly thereafter and in 1971 constituted a Charter Revision Advisory Committee to consider potential reforms and changes to its City Charter. Among their recommendations, the Committee suggested a move from a BAL to an ALBS elections system (Wise, 1972) which was placed on the November 1972 ballot as Measure G. While there were no pro or con ballot arguments, information from the period indicates the main reasons for proposing the change were the creation of greater accountability among incumbents and enhanced voter engagement. In July of 1972 the *San Jose Mercury News* wrote, “Numbering of the council seats would mean that a candidate could challenge any incumbent directly by filing for his seat.” (Wise, 1972) In August of the same year, the newspaper stated, “Another change numbers council seats, while not changing the at-large election method. It makes possible a candidate zeroing in on one of the incumbents by filing specifically for his seat.” (SJM, 1972) Measure G was approved by a 17,650 (65.66%) “Yes” and 9,229 (34.34%) “No” vote, adopting an ALBS system. (CSC, 2000; CSC, 2006)

In an interview with Gary Gillmor, Mayor of Santa Clara from 1969 through 1977 during the change in election systems, he indicated that there were three main reasons for the charter amendment adopting ALBS elections. The primary focus was accountability. The ALBS system allowed a person to run against an incumbent or candidate based on their track record without having to “run against the entire system” and the combined strength of the field of candidates found in the BAL process. Another reason was to avoid the common practice of “single-shot” or “bullet” voting, where people cast only one vote for their most favored candidate rather than all of their allowed votes. If done in a BAL system where multiple contests are considered collectively, this mathematically allows

greater weight to a single vote and therefore stronger support for one candidate. It was thought the separate contests in the ALBS system would eliminate the need to bullet-vote and offer the public the ability to take part more fully in choosing more of their Council Members. Additionally, it was also hoped that the multiple seat openings would engage geographic areas outside of the City's downtown neighborhood through the perception of greater opportunity to seek office. (Gillmor, 2013)

While there are many benefits of the ALBS system, it has not been without controversy. In 2009, supporters of the BAL process asked the City of Santa Clara's Ethics Committee to recommend that the City Council study a return to that election system. (CSC, 2009a; CSC, 2009b) Their concern regarding the ALBS process had been heightened by confusion in the 2008 election cycle, when a candidate rescinded his nomination papers for one seat and filed in another just a few minutes prior to the closing deadline. This left one candidate unexpectedly unopposed and multiple challengers running in another seat. The City amended the policy to address the issue rather than changing from the ALBS elections system. In previous years, candidates had been allowed to pull nomination papers in multiple seats simultaneously, enabling the jockeying evident in the 2008 filing process. The City changed this practice to allow only one set of nomination papers to be pulled at a time. While candidates can rescind their nomination documents for one seat and request a set for another, they cannot be issued papers for multiple seats concurrently. Since the paperwork and gathering of signatures necessary to file for a new seat is time-consuming, the policy curtailed last-minute gamesmanship and provided greater clarity in the nominations process. (CSC, 2009c)

Additionally, while Santa Clara is an All-American Award-winning city, concerns had been raised regarding the ethnic makeup of its City Council. The San Jose Mercury News noted that the City Council lacks representation from emerging minority communities. While the City has 37% Asian and 19% Latino residents, (Rodriguez, 2011) the Council is predominantly Caucasian. General concerns about potential barriers to public service prompted the City Council in 2011 to create a formal Charter Review Committee comprised of interested community members. While the Committee did not suggest a change to district elections, they did recommend a switch from the ALBS to a BAL system. (CSC, 2012a) The City Council accepted the report of the Committee though did not act on the recommendation at the time, referring the topic to their Council goal-setting process. (CSC, 2012b) However, a recent assessment of the election system's performance in the 2012 general municipal election was completed by Carolyn Schuk of the Santa Clara WEEKLY. She indicated, "...the winners in Santa Clara's city-wide seat system were also the top vote getters overall. And analysis by precinct doesn't change that any. Santa Clara's voting patterns are remarkably uniform across the city." (Schuk, 2012)

REVIEW OF ELECTIONS SYSTEMS

Although there are numerous election types found on an international level, local contests in California use a few main systems. Those which require a majority of votes for a winner to be elected tend to use a primary and runoff elections process. In this, candidates initially compete in a primary election. If a candidate does not reach a 50% +1 vote majority, a runoff election is held. The primary and runoff elections are often

consolidated with the state primary and general elections. More common, especially in smaller municipalities is the plurality system. In this, one election is held in which the highest vote-getter wins, regardless of if a majority reached. Some, mostly larger cities in the state, are divided into geographical districts for the sake of electing representatives from various regions of the municipality. However, the bulk of the city councils are elected at-large, where the entire electorate is allowed to vote for a candidate for each opening. Plurality, at-large processes are found in the cities used as benchmarks for the comparison in this project.

While the BAL and ALBS systems are both elected at-large and citywide, they differ in a number of ways. Practitioners, elections officials and participants have noticed anecdotal distinctions regarding their influence on the political and governmental process. (CSC, 2009b; CSC, 2011; Shanks, 2012) It is believed that the BAL system fosters a more civil discourse while the ALBS process provides greater accountability. With multiple candidates vying for office collectively in the BAL system, competitors may be hesitant to be critical of each other even in cases where it is warranted. The nature of hard-hitting debate between two candidates in a multiple person contest often sheds votes to other viable contenders. In this case “viable” candidates are considered those with some combination of the name identification, fundraising ability, volunteer base, track record and other resources necessary to resonate with voters and win. While this may create a more civil discourse, it may also stifle debate if contenders shy away from warranted criticism of each other out of concern for losing votes to others in the field. In the ALBS system it is more likely that two viable candidates will face each other directly. This enables them to engage in a more vigorous discussion and campaign

without the risk of shedding votes to other candidates. As such, the ALBS system may provide the platform for a more robust debate and greater accountability, in both open seats as well as with targeted incumbents. (CSC, 2011; Shanks, 2012)

Once the election cycle is finished, the BAL and ALBS systems continue to influence the manner in which politics manifests itself in the function of government. In a BAL system, council members serve with former opponents once elected. They may be less collegial due to ill feelings from the campaign process or less collaborative because they view each other as competitors for reelection. This can cause political gamesmanship and the desire to prove value above their peers in the eyes of voters. In the ALBS system, council members have not been direct competitors, nor will they be for reelection to their individual seats. This may foster greater civility and a willingness to share information or support each other's ideas on the basis of sound policy, with less concern of the inter-council political ramifications. The possibility of running for reelection unopposed in the ALBS system may also play a role in the nature of service on the council. Council members may be more inclusive and responsive to community needs if encouraged by the possibility of running for re-election either unopposed or without mainstream opposition. (CSC, 2009b; CSC, 2011; Shanks, 2012)

Statistics regarding candidate and council member behavior are not readily available to assess the validity of these subjective observations regarding the systems' influences on politics and governance. However, voter turnout and candidacy data do exist and can provide a base on which to consider if the systems differ as they relate to voter engagement and candidate engagement.

Voter Engagement: It is believed that the BAL system allows more flexibility while the ALBS system allows more full engagement. In this case, engagement refers to the manner in which members of the public participate in the election, interface with and understand the ballot, and cast their votes. In the BAL system, residents can consider the contenders as a group and vote for their preferred candidates without the constraints of the seat-related ballot structure. The ALBS system would limit this choice to the candidates who file for a particular seat. Additionally, the BAL system's consideration of all candidates collectively allows residents to bullet-vote and lend stronger support for their favorite contender. While academic research regarding bullet voting is limited, it has been identified as a common political strategy in Santa Clara contests prior to the adoption of the ALBS system. (Gillmor, 2013) The ALBS system offers more robust engagement by allowing residents to cast a vote for each opening without the fear of dilution among multiple candidates. Since the contest for each opening is considered independently, residents can cast votes in each contest without the concern of being overpowered by those who bullet-vote. As such, the ALBS system may allow fuller participation and foster less fall-off between the total votes cast by the electorate and those tendered in municipal races. (CSC, 2009b; CSC, 2011; Gillmor, 2013; Shanks, 2012)

The actual ballot layouts also provide a different interface for the voter, which can in turn influence overall municipal turnout. In the BAL system, candidates are lumped into one contest, with the participant allowed to cast votes equal to the number of openings. Some contend this is an easier voting process, allowing participants to choose their favorites at once, without being subjected to a number of different ballot questions.

However, critics of the BAL process argue that confusion regarding the number of votes able to be cast or fatigue when comparing candidates from a long list of contenders may cause greater fall-off. The ballot for the ALBS system has an individual contest listing the candidates for each seat up for election. Participants are allowed one vote for each race rather than consolidating all of the contests together. Some contend that this step-by-step process and ability to compare candidates by seat avoids confusion and voter fall-off. However, critics of the ALBS system may argue that the task of considering multiple seats instead of one combined contest will lead to even greater fatigue. (CSC, 2011; Shanks, 2012) In practice, it is likely that the system with a more clear match-up between contenders will enable greater voter decisiveness and therefore higher turnout.

The goal of greater participation is one with practical value. In *Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma*, Lijphart indicates that one of the necessary elements of representative democracy is citizen participation to create responsiveness among elected officials. (p. 1) It follows that the greater the participation among voters, the higher the levels of representation, responsiveness and accountability from government officials. This concept is a core element of the ALBS/BAL comparison. If voters feel the need to bullet-vote in the BAL system, they effectively decrease their level of participation. Similarly, if they suffer increased confusion or fatigue from either the ALBS or BAL system, this is a barrier to their ability to be fully engaged. On an international basis a number of factors have been seen to influence participation through voter turnout. These include compulsory voting, modified registration laws, less frequent elections and weekend election days. (Lijphart, 1997, p. 2) Additionally the lack of easily accessible information such as party affiliation have

caused local “down ballot” non-partisan races have struggled regarding voter turnout parity with partisan races at the top of the ballot. (Wright, 2008, pp. 13, 14) Although the bulk of the relevant rules in California are outlined in the Elections Code and are static, the election type does determine the basic ballot layout which can in turn influence voter participation. While the relative clarity of the BAL and ALBS ballot types can be debated, it is probable that the more accessible and straightforward ballot will lead to more robust participation.

Candidate Engagement: It is believed that the BAL and ALBS systems differ regarding candidate engagement. In this case, candidate engagement refers to the manner and structure through which potential candidates choose to seek office, or not, in municipal contests. It is likely that the process which is more appealing will engage a higher number of candidates to file nomination papers to seek election. In general, it is thought that the BAL system is the easier in which to file to seek office, while the ALBS system allows greater strategic flexibility regarding the field of contenders. With only one candidate filing option and all contests considered collectively, the BAL system is the more simple of the two. This may be beneficial to candidates who are confused or intimidated by the process of seeking office. Additionally, some candidates may be more comfortable standing for election among a group and shy away from the inherent contentious nature of running for a seat directly against an opponent. However, the ALBS system allows candidates to file for an individual seat to either run against or avoid facing an incumbent or other challenger. Contenders may in general be more strategic and are provided the flexibility to seek office without facing a political ally or someone who shares the same social or ethnic constituency. In this, the ALBS process

may permit multiple candidates from emerging minority communities to seek election simultaneously without marginalizing or “splitting” a shared support base as might be seen in the BAL system. (CSC, 2009b; CSC, 2011; Shanks, 2012)

It should be noted that the structure of an elections process can have an influence on the success of the contenders. This, in turn, can affect the willingness of candidates to file to seek office based on their perceived likelihood of winning. For example, the sheer number of candidates in a contest has been shown to have an effect on individual success rates. Congleton and Steunenberg’s study of voter discernment and candidate entry indicated, “Generally, the probability of success falls as the number of candidates increases ... and expected vote shares diminish.” (1998, p. 298) Some candidates may wish to seek election with the clarity of an ALBS contest rather than fighting for attention in a larger group of candidates as seen in the BAL system. This is the case both in open seats as well as those who choose to challenge an incumbent.

Candidate incumbency plays a large role in the choice of a competitor to seek elected office, or not. This is seen in the strategic entry of candidates either avoiding a race against an incumbent or seeking to face an incumbent in the most tactical manner. It has been widely shown that incumbents have a higher probability of being elected than challengers. This has been attributed to greater resources of incumbents to provide constituent services, access to media coverage and fundraising ability. Additionally, having already been elected, incumbents have a previous history of appealing and successful characteristics which represent less perceived risk for voters. (Anderson & Glomm, 1992, p. 207; Ashworth & Bueno de Mesquita, 2008, p. 1006) This has a deterrent effect on challengers choosing to face an incumbent, “... potential challengers,

knowing that incumbents can derive large direct benefits from resources at their disposal, will be less inclined to enter the fray – and this will be particularly true of potential challengers with higher opportunity costs, hence higher quality.” (Cox & Katz, 1996, p. 479) While the bulk of these studies were of US Congressional races, similarities can be expected in municipal contests. When considering the strategic entry into a local election, challengers may want either the ability to seek office in an open seat without an incumbent, or, if the defeat of the incumbent is the goal, the ability to face them in the most competitive manner. The direct competition by individual seat in the ALBS system may allow candidates to be more strategic regarding the nature of incumbency in the elections process.

The basic structure of the ALBS system in Santa Clara and Sunnyvale provides a greater opportunity for challengers to seek election without facing an incumbent. Both cities have seven seats on their City Councils, with one seat in Santa Clara held by a directly elected Mayor, as well as a two-term limit. The combination of term limits and by-seat elections ensures a rotation of openings without an incumbent for consideration by quality candidates. In a BAL system the incumbent and open seats are combined into one contest. It is unlikely that in a municipality without term limits all of the incumbents would choose not to seek reelection. Even in a term-limited environment, with the rotation of incumbent and open seats it is expected that one or more sitting council members would seek reelection in each cycle. As such, it is unlikely in the BAL system that a challenger would have the option to stand for election without an incumbent sharing the same ballot.

In cases where challenging an incumbent is the goal, the ALBS structure also plays a role. In non-partisan elections, much of the benefit or power of incumbency relates to name recognition among voters. Similarly, because incumbents, former incumbents or previously unsuccessful candidates already possess some name identification, they start with an electoral base on which to build. (Lieski, 1989, p. 168) Ensley, de Marchi and Munger go on to clarify, "... in complex electoral settings, incumbents should have an advantage. The more complex the setting, the greater is the extent of this advantage." (2007, p. 234) The inherent structural differences in the ALBS system provide a more direct and less complex relationship between challenger and incumbent. Additionally, the prospect of a direct, head-to-head contest against a strong competitor may have an influence on the incumbent's decision to seek re-election, or not. In their study of the incumbency advantage, Engstrom and Monroe indicated, "... the reason for withdrawal was likely the anticipation of a rough campaign" (2006, p. 4) of seated US House Members' choices to voluntarily not seek reelection. While the dynamics are different in a term-limited local environment, the more direct challenging of an incumbent in the ALBS system may also play a role in their consideration to seek a second term.

CASE STUDIES: Santa Clara, Sunnyvale and BAL Benchmarks

Due to these factors, the BAL and ALBS systems have different influences on the conflict inherent to the democratic political process. In theory, the BAL system provides the platform for a more civil election cycle and less collegial policy process. At the same

time, the ALBS system may foster a more contentious election cycle and more collaborative policy process. (CSC, 2011; Shanks, 2012)

While the differences between the BAL and ALBS systems may seem nuanced, the reliance of democracy on fair and impartial elections provides them weight in the study of local government. The questions raised by these differences are at the nexus between the political and public administration realms, with the public, politicians and administrators all as stakeholders. This leaves the consideration of the ALBS system at an interesting point. While the academic body of knowledge regarding government is significant, the study of local elections is limited and research regarding the rare ALBS process almost nonexistent.

To determine if there are quantifiable differences in voter and candidate engagement between the ALBS and BAL systems, appropriate benchmark cities and sources of data are necessary. While BAL cities are plentiful, ALBS cities are not nearly as common. There was scant information on the Secretary of State or Fair Political Practices Commission websites regarding the elections systems found in municipalities. However, a 2006 report for the City of Sunnyvale surveyed the 20 largest counties in the state to identify ALBS cities. The research indicated that only Santa Clara and Sunnyvale use the unique election system. (CSV, 2006) To confirm this information, an email was sent to the City Clerks distribution list operated by the League of California Cities requesting the identification of other ALBS municipalities. Of the 697 City Clerk professionals on the distribution list, only the Cities of Santa Clara, Sunnyvale and Chula Vista were identified as using the ALBS system. (Okabe, 2012; Norris, 2012) However, the City of Chula Vista requires a majority for victory, with an initial primary election in

the spring and a runoff if necessary. This was not comparable to the ALBS system found in Santa Clara and Sunnyvale, which use a plurality process and a November election cycle.

Due to this limited use of the ALBS system, the sample size of any statistical analysis will be relatively small. However, the City of Santa Clara and City of Sunnyvale are often regarded as exceptional models of government and are a compelling basis for research. The City of Santa Clara has received the Helen Putnam Grand Prize award for its Vote Ethics good government and community engagement programs. (CSC, 2012c) The City of Sunnyvale was recognized for its performance-based budget practices in Osborne and Gaebler's *Reinventing Government* in 1993. (pp. 138 – 165) Both municipalities are financially stable with a high standard of living and are generally recognized as well-run cities. They have also effectively used the ALBS system for approximately 80 years, combined. The entrepreneurial nature of their city governments, as well as the presence of comparable elections and census statistics allow them to be an appealing foundation on which to base research comparing the ALBS and BAL systems.

As benchmarks for the even year presidential and gubernatorial election cycles, the City of Santa Clara as an ALBS example was compared to the Cities of Milpitas and Mountain View, which use BAL systems. As benchmarks for the odd-year uniform district election "UDEL" cycles, the City of Sunnyvale was compared to the Cities of Cupertino and Palo Alto. To be clear, the inclusion of the word "district" in the UDEL title refers to the overall agency, such as a city or school district, rather than a subset or district within that jurisdiction. Data from a ten-year period, including the election cycles of 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010 for the even-year cycle, and 2001, 2003, 2005, 2007

and 2009 for the odd-year cycle was compiled into a database. It should be noted that the City of Palo Alto recently changed to a presidential cycle, with 2009 being their final odd-year election for comparison.

Numerous variables contribute to voter turnout. For example, individuals with greater resources, such as wealth and knowledge, tend to vote at a higher rate than those without. (Tenn, 2005, p. 280, 281; Matsusaka, 1995, p. 112) It should follow that the more affluent, educated and engaged communities will have higher rates of participation. An assessment of these factors in the benchmark cities will provide a basis for understanding if the ALBS or BAL systems influence elections, or if the outcomes are driven by demographics. While a more complex regression analysis would be necessary to determine the true statistical influence of these characteristics, they can be used anecdotally at face value. Trends should in general be consistent with those seen in census and voter registration data, with higher income, education and voter registration levels yielding greater voter and candidate engagement.

To the extent possible, care was taken to ensure that the benchmark cities and available data were comparable. Geographically, they share contiguous borders in the South Bay and Peninsula regions of Santa Clara County. They also contract with the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters (SCCROV) as a regional elections office, assuring that data and reports would be derived and presented in a consistent format. Demographic information was available from the 2010 census completed by the US Census Bureau and voter registration data was provided by the SCCROV for the 2010 time frame as well. (US Census Bureau, 2012a – f; SCCROV, 2010) It should be noted that the statistics regarding the portion of the population which was registered to vote

used those 18 and over as a base, but did not eliminate those precluded from voting due to citizenship or other requirements. Additionally, the data regarding those with a college degree was a universe of those 25 or older (Percival, 2013) and wealth was measured per-household.

The even-year cycle cities are fairly similar regarding household income, showing a variance of \$7,400, or an 8.7% increase between the lowest and highest earners. However, college graduation rates differ by a larger rate of 19.3%. Odd-year cycle cities again have a larger disparity in both

City	Election Cycle	Election Type	Median Household Income	College Graduate
Santa Clara	Even	ALBS	\$85,294	48.8%
Milpitas	Even	BAL	\$92,694	39.4%
Mountain View	Even	BAL	\$88,244	58.7%
Sunnyvale	Odd	ALBS	\$90,174	56.1%
Cupertino	Odd	BAL	\$120,201	74.4%
Palo Alto	Odd	BAL	\$120,670	79.3%

areas, with a more than \$30,000 income variance, or a 33.8% increase between the lowest

and highest earners and a

City	Election Cycle	Election Type	18+ Population	Voter Registration	% Registered to Vote
Santa Clara	Even	ALBS	93,073	46,908	50.4%
Milpitas	Even	BAL	51,495	25,773	50.0%
Mountain View	Even	BAL	59,475	32,549	54.7%
Sunnyvale	Odd	ALBS	108,703	54,705	50.3%
Cupertino	Odd	BAL	42,211	26,826	63.7%
Palo Alto	Odd	BAL	49,333	36,917	74.8%

college graduate rate delta of 23.2%.

With only a 4.7% variance, the even-year election cycle cities are fairly clustered regarding the portion of the population which were registered to vote. However,

the disparity is much larger with the odd-year cycle cities, ranging from 50.3% to 74.8%, for a 24.5% variance.

Voter Engagement: It is believed that the BAL system allows voters greater flexibility to choose their preferred candidates regardless of seat designation, as well as the ability to bullet-vote. However, the ALBS system has a more direct ballot layout and an ability to cast votes for each opening without diluting support among competing candidates. It has been acknowledged that the highest voter turnout in the United States is seen in national elections during a presidential election cycle. State, local and other races farther down the ballot have “considerably lower turnout.” (Lijphart, 1997, p. 5) An assessment of even-year presidential and gubernatorial election cycles comparing voter fall-off between overall turnout and that specific to city council races in benchmark cities will help determine which system fosters more voter engagement at a municipal level.

As a basis for considering municipal voter engagement in the ALBS and BAL systems, voter fall-off was determined for local contests. A ten year, five election cycle period from 2002 – 2010 was used as the data set. The total votes cast in city council races were divided by the number of seats being considered to determine the average *municipal voter turnout*. The total votes cast in the city was then divided by the number of registered voters to determine the *overall turnout*, including contests at the top of the ticket. The municipal turnout was then subtracted from overall turnout to determine *voter fall-off* for local contests.

The City of Santa Clara was the ALBS example and the Cities of Milpitas and Mountain View were the BAL examples. It should be noted that since odd-year election cycles focus primarily on municipal and school district contests, they normally do not

include an up-ballot race on which to judge fall-off. As such, the benchmark cities for the assessment of voter engagement will be limited to those in the even-year presidential and gubernatorial cycle cities.

Election Cycle	City of Santa Clara (ALBS)	City of Milpitas (BAL)	City of Mountain View (BAL)
2002 Voter Fall-Off	9.86%	11.19%	15.09%
2004 Voter Fall-Off	15.55%	15.82%	25.04%
2006 Voter Fall-Off	9.66%	9.28%	16.40%
2008 Voter Fall-Off	21.62%	27.44%	37.23%
<u>2010 Voter Fall-Off</u>	<u>14.54%</u>	<u>15.63%</u>	<u>26.64%</u>
Avg, Voter Fall-Off	14.25%	15.87%	24.08%

BAL Avg. Fall-Off:	19.98%	
ALBS Avg. Fall-Off:	14.25%	
Total	5.73%	Less Voter Fall-Off in ALBS System

The data show a voter fall-off rate of 14.25% for Santa Clara, the ALBS city. The fall-off rates for the BAL cities were 15.87% and 24.08%, for Milpitas and Mountain View, respectively. In total, there was greater voter engagement in the ALBS system, with an average of 5.73% less fall-off.

Hypothesis testing of the question, “Is there a significant difference in voter drop-off rates between ALBS and BAL elections?” was also completed using a two-proportion Z test and a significance level of 1%. The analysis yielded results where Z was equal to 20.741 and the p-value was 8.09×10^{-96} . This allowed the rejection of the null hypothesis and the conclusion that the difference in voter turnout is in fact statistically significant and cannot be explained by random chance. (Rahim, 2013b)

Comparing this to US Census and voter registration data can provide an anecdotal sense of whether these results mirror income, education and voter registration trends. The City of Santa Clara had the least voter fall-off at 14.25% while the City of Mountain View had the highest at 24.08% (see Diagram 3). Income, education and voter registration levels were not consistent with these trends. While Santa Clara had a 9.9% higher level of voter engagement, Mountain View was 3.5% more wealthy than Santa Clara with an average household income of \$88,244 compared to \$85,294, respectively (see Diagram 4). Santa Clara also had a lower level of college graduates at 48.8% compared to Mountain View at 58.7% (see Diagram 5). And, the City of Mountain View had a higher level of voter registration at 54.7% compared to 50.4% in Santa Clara (see Diagram 6). While it would be expected that the more affluent, educated and registered population would have greater participation and less voter fall-off, this was not the case when comparing the benchmark cities.

Diagram 3

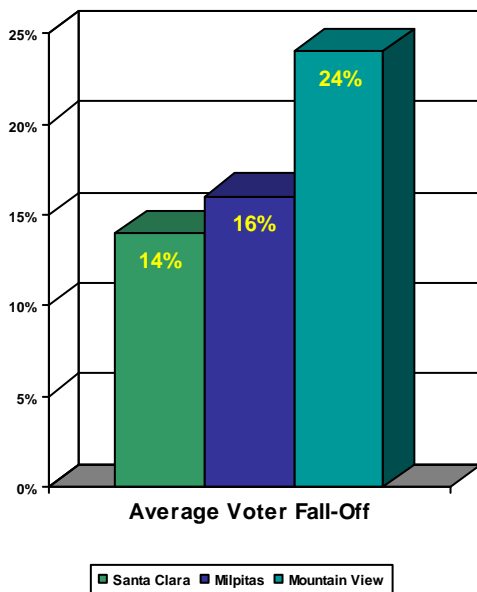


Diagram 4

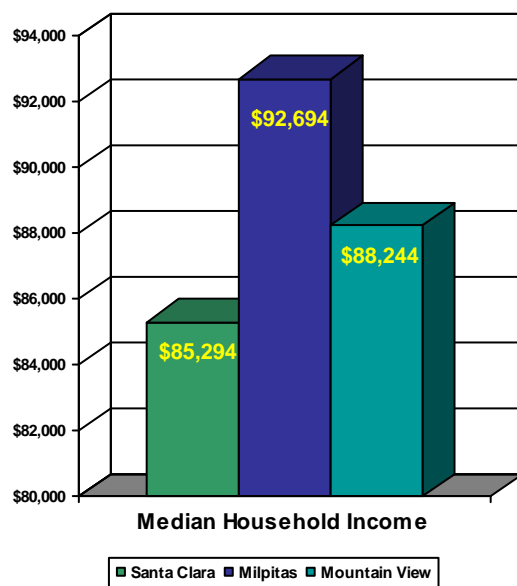


Diagram 5

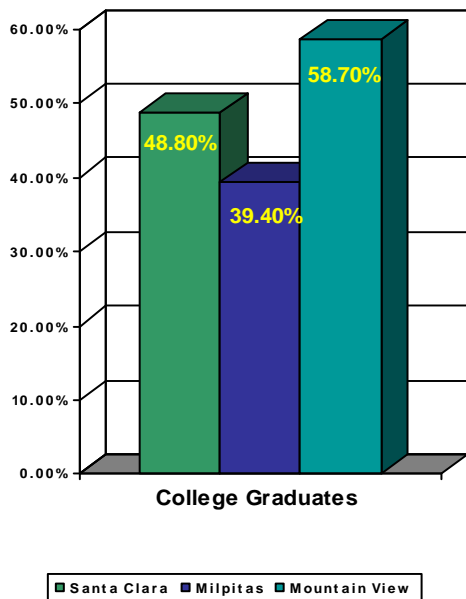
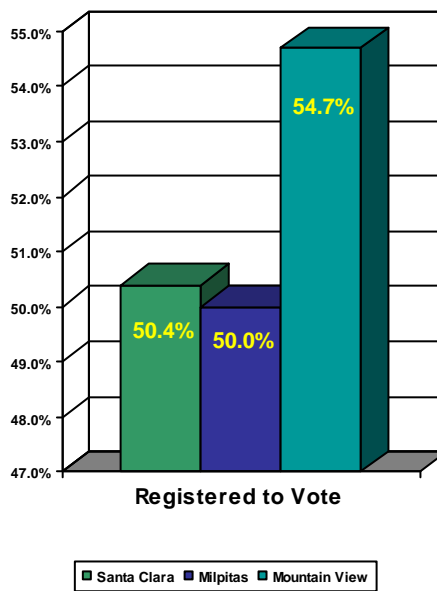


Diagram 6



If in fact participation is influenced by the type of elections process, projected outcomes from changing from one system to the other can be estimated using past elections data. In this, the total municipal turnout for each election cycle is multiplied by the 5.73% difference in voter participation from Table 4. This yields the projected increase, or reduction, in voter participation for each election, which is then totaled to derive how many more or fewer votes would be received during a ten year period if the city changed from one system to the other. The overall total is then divided by the number of election cycles to estimate the average increase, or decrease in voter participation per election. The exercise indicated that the City of Santa Clara could expect an average 2631 vote drop per election in municipal turnout if it changed from an ALBS to a BAL system. Similarly, if Milpitas and Mountain View changed from a BAL

to an ALBS system, they could expect an average increase of 1432 votes and 1978 votes per cycle, respectively.

Table 5: Potential Change in Fall-Off <i>if</i> Santa Clara Used BAL System	
City of Santa Clara	# of potential votes
2002 Less Voter Turnout	2406
2004 Less Voter Turnout	2898
2006 Less Voter Turnout	2499
2008 Less Voter Turnout	2668
2010 Less Voter Turnout	2687
Fewer Voters Over 10 Years	13157
Average Per Election Cycle	2631

Table 6: Potential Change in Fall-Off <i>if</i> Milpitas Used ALBS System	
City of Milpitas	# of potential votes
2002 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1262
2004 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1565
2006 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1377
2008 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1479
2010 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1476
Additional Voters Over 10 Years	7159
Average Per Election Cycle	1432

Table 7: Potential Change in Fall-Off <i>if</i> Mountain View Used ALBS System	
City of Mountain View	# of potential votes
2002 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1943
2004 Adtl. Voter Turnout	2308
2006 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1829
2008 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1944
2010 Adtl. Voter Turnout	1864
Additional Voters Over 10 Years	9888
Average Per Election Cycle	1978

Candidate Engagement: Candidate engagement in an elections system can influence the number of contenders from which voters have the opportunity to choose their representatives. It is believed that the simplicity of the BAL system during the filing and nomination process may be more approachable for candidates. With all openings considered collectively, there is only one potential filing option from which to choose. However, the flexibility of numerous contests to seek election found in the ALBS process and the ability to run while choosing not to face an ally or incumbent may also be appealing.

An assessment of the number of candidates who file to run, per open seat, should help to identify if either the ALBS or BAL process has an effect on candidate engagement. In this case, all six benchmark cities were used, with the even-year cycle cities from 2002 – 2010 and the odd-year cycle cities from 2001 – 2009. To do so, the number of contenders who sought election during that timeframe were summed to derive the *total candidates* for each municipality. At the same time, the number of seats that were considered during that timeframe were also summed to derive the *total seats* for each city. The total number of candidates for each election was divided by the number of seats being considered to determine the *average candidates per seat*. The average number of candidates per seat for the ALBS system was then compared to that for the BAL system benchmarks to determine which fosters more candidates.

Table 8: Even-Year Cycle, 2002 - 2010							
City of Santa Clara (ALBS)			City of Milpitas (BAL)			City of Mountain View (BAL)	
Total Seats	14		Total Seats	10		Total Seats	18
Total Candidates	37		Total Candidates	29		Total Candidates	41
Average Candidates Per Seat	2.64			2.90			2.28

Table 9: Odd-Year Cycle, 2001 - 2009							
City of Sunnyvale (ALBS)			City of Cupertino (BAL)			City of Palo Alto (BAL)	
Total Seats	17		Total Seats	13		Total Seats	23
Total Candidates	36		Total Candidates	29		Total Candidates	63
Average Candidates Per Seat	2.12			2.23			2.74

Table 10: Candidate Engagement			
Overall Average			
BAL Candidates Per Seat	2.54		
ALBS Candidates Per Seat	2.38		
Total	0.16	6.58%	More candidates per opening in a BAL system

The data indicate that an average of 6.58% more candidates per opening file to run for city council in BAL elections than in ALBS contests. This is the equivalent of an additional .16 of a candidate filing to run for each seat the BAL system. Of course, a partial candidate cannot file to run for city council and the actual number of additional candidates in a given city or election would vary depending on the number of seats on the ballot.

Hypothesis testing of the question, “Is there a significant difference in candidates per seat between BAL and ALBS elections?” was also completed using a two-proportion Z test and a significance level of 1%. The analysis yielded results where Z was equal to 0.393 and the p-value was 0.346. This precluded the rejection of the null hypothesis and concluded that the difference in the number of candidates was not statistically significant and could be explained by random chance. (Rahim, 2013a) While a statistical relation was not precluded it was also not proven, and the results of the research should be considered anecdotal.

Regardless of the status of the data as statistically significant or not, additional information can be gleaned by comparing the outcomes in the benchmark cities with demographic trends. It would be expected that the municipalities with higher income, education and voter registration levels would also have a greater candidate engagement. For the benchmarks elections during the even-year cycle, the correlation between income, education and voter registration was inconsistent. The City of Milpitas had the highest number of candidates at 2.9 per seat while the City of Mountain View had the fewest candidates at 2.28 per seat (see Diagram 7). Milpitas was 5% more wealthy than Mountain View, with an average household income of \$92,694 compared to \$88,244,

respectively, which is consistent with demographic trends (see Diagram 8). However, education levels did not follow this pattern, with the lowest level of college graduation found in Milpitas at 39.4% compared to the highest level in Mountain View at 58.7% (see Diagram 9). Additionally, Milpitas had the lowest level of voter registration at 50.0% while the City of Mountain View had the highest level of voter registration at 54.7% (see Diagram 10).

For the benchmark elections during the odd-year cycle, the correlation between income, education and voter registration was more consistent. The City of Palo Alto had the highest number of candidates at 2.74 per seat while the City of Sunnyvale had the fewest candidates at 2.12 per seat (see Diagram 7). Income, education and voter registration levels followed this trend. Perhaps most significant, Palo Alto was 34% more affluent than Sunnyvale, with average household incomes of \$120,670 and \$90,174, respectively (see Diagram 8). The highest level of college graduation was also found in Palo Alto at 79.3% compared to the lowest level in Sunnyvale at 56.1% (see Diagram 9). This trend continued regarding voter registration, which was 74.8% in Palo Alto with 50.3% found in Sunnyvale (see Diagram 10).

Diagram 7

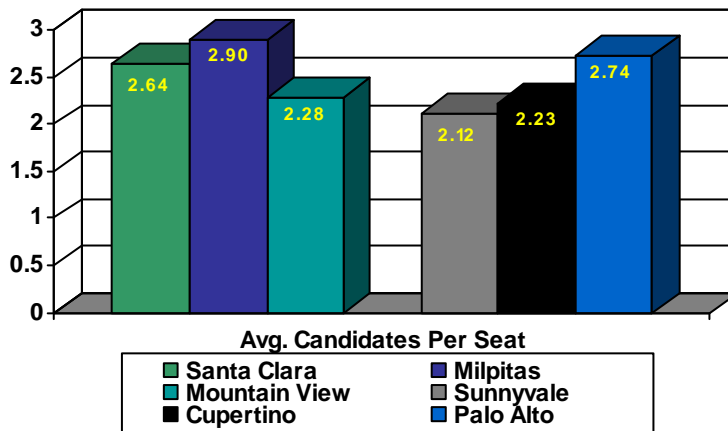


Diagram 8

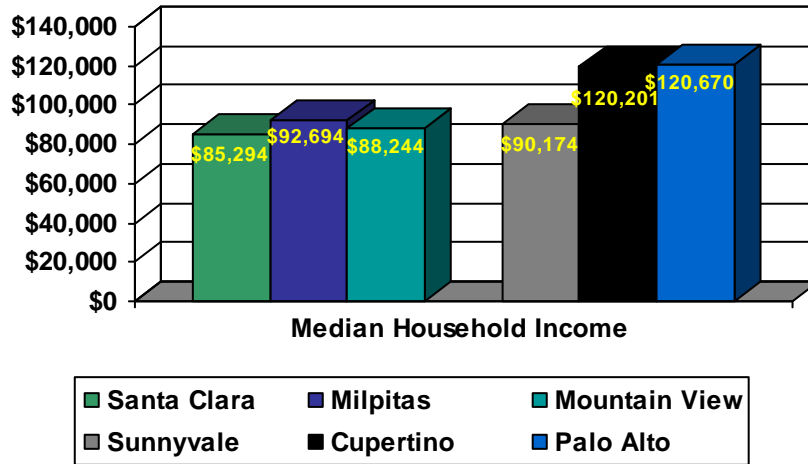


Diagram 9

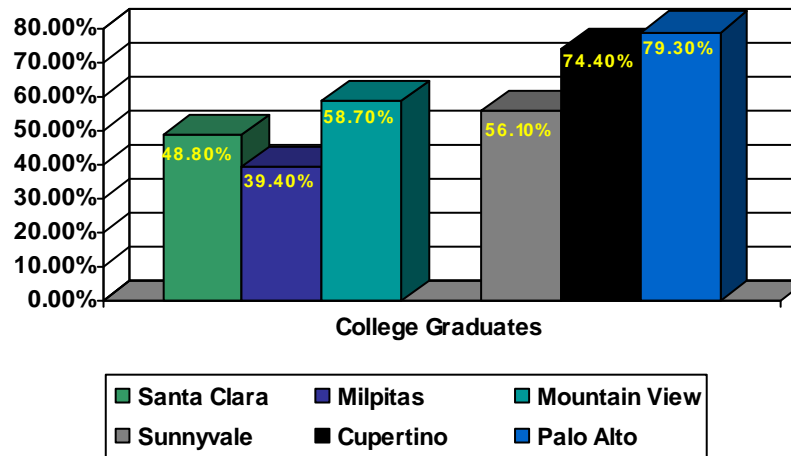
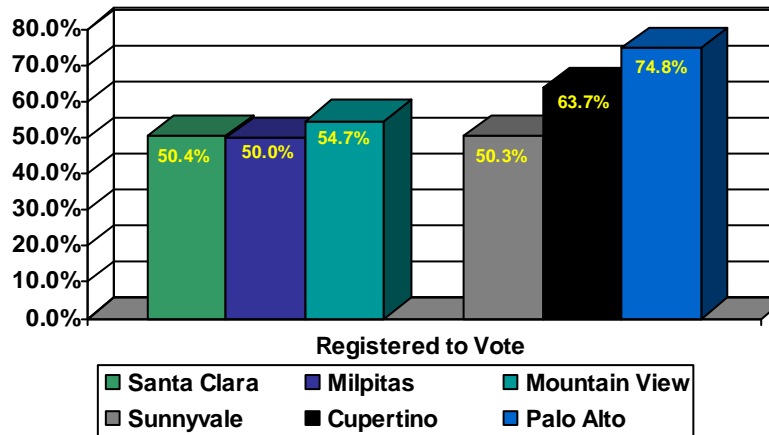


Diagram 10



If the number of candidates who seek election is in fact influenced by the type of elections process, estimated results from changing the system can be projected in relation to the number of seats that were up for consideration during the timeframe. In this, the total seats for each election cycle is multiplied by the .16 additional candidates per seat ratio from Table 10. This yields the projected increase or decrease in the number of candidates in both a raw and percentage form for each election. Those numbers are then totaled to derive how many fewer or more candidates would have run during a ten year period if the city changed from one system to the other. The overall total is then divided by the number of election cycles to estimate the average increase, or decrease in candidate engagement per cycle. It is important to note that applying the .16 additional candidate ratio per seat rather than the 6.58% average from Table 10 enables the creation of data both in the change in candidate and as a percentage for each individual municipality.

Even-Year Election Cycle

Potential Change <i>if</i> Santa Clara Used BAL System					
City of Santa Clara (ALBS)	Candidates	# of Seats	Ratio	Adtl. Cand.	% Change
2002 Election Cycle	6.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	5.33%
2004 Election Cycle	12.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	5.33%
2006 Election Cycle	5.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	6.40%
2008 Election Cycle	10.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	6.40%
2010 Election Cycle	4.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	8.00%
Additional Cand. Over 10 yrs.				2.24	6.05%
Additional Cand. Per Cycle				0.45	

Potential Change <i>if</i> Milpitas Used ALBS System					
City of Milpitas (BAL)	Candidates	# of Seats	Ratio	Adtl. Cand.	% Change
2002 Election Cycle	6.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	5.33%
2004 Election Cycle	5.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	6.40%
2006 Election Cycle	6.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	5.33%
2008 Election Cycle	4.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	8.00%
<u>2010 Election Cycle</u>	<u>8.00</u>	<u>2.00</u>	0.16	<u>0.32</u>	<u>4.00%</u>
Fewer Cand. Over 10 yrs.				1.60	5.52%
Fewer Cand. Per Cycle				0.32	

Potential Change <i>if</i> Mountain View Used ALBS System					
City of Mountain View (BAL)	Candidates	# of Seats	Ratio	Adtl. Cand.	% Change
2002 Election Cycle	13.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	4.92%
2004 Election Cycle	6.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	10.67%
2006 Election Cycle	8.00	3.00	0.16	0.48	6.00%
2008 Election Cycle	8.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	8.00%
<u>2010 Election Cycle</u>	<u>6.00</u>	<u>3.00</u>	0.16	<u>0.48</u>	<u>8.00%</u>
Fewer Cand. Over 10 yrs.				2.88	7.02%
Fewer Cand. Per Cycle				0.58	

Odd-Year Election Cycle

Potential Change <i>if</i> Sunnyvale Used BAL System					
City of Sunnyvale (ALBS)	Candidates	# of Seats	Ratio	Adtl. Cand.	% Change
2001 Election Cycle	7.00	3.00	0.16	0.48	6.86%
2003 Election Cycle	9.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	7.11%
2005 Election Cycle	7.00	3.00	0.16	0.48	6.86%
2007 Election Cycle	7.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	9.14%
<u>2009 Election Cycle</u>	<u>6.00</u>	<u>3.00</u>	0.16	<u>0.48</u>	<u>8.00%</u>
Additional Cand. Over 10 yrs.				2.72	7.56%
Additional Cand. Per Cycle				0.54	

Potential Change <i>if</i> Cupertino Used ALBS System					
City of Cupertino (BAL)	Candidates	# of Seats	Ratio	Adtl. Cand.	% Change
2001 Election Cycle	6.00	3.00	0.16	0.48	8.00%
2003 Election Cycle	4.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	8.00%
2005 Election Cycle	6.00	3.00	0.16	0.48	8.00%
2007 Election Cycle	6.00	2.00	0.16	0.32	5.33%
<u>2009 Election Cycle</u>	<u>7.00</u>	<u>3.00</u>	0.16	<u>0.48</u>	<u>6.86%</u>
Fewer Cand. Over 10 yrs.				2.08	7.17%
Fewer Cand. Per Cycle				0.42	

Potential Change <i>if</i> Palo Alto Used ALBS System					
City of Palo Alto (BAL)	Candidates	# of Seats	Ratio	Adtl. Cand.	% Change
2001 Election Cycle	14.00	5.00	0.16	0.80	5.71%
2003 Election Cycle	11.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	5.82%
2005 Election Cycle	12.00	5.00	0.16	0.80	6.67%
2007 Election Cycle	12.00	4.00	0.16	0.64	5.33%
2009 Election Cycle	14.00	5.00	0.16	0.80	5.71%
Fewer Cand. Over 10 yrs.				3.68	5.84%
Fewer Cand. Per Cycle				0.74	

The data indicate that as a tangible effect, the BAL system would yield one additional candidate for voters to consider every two to four election cycles, or a 5.52% – 7.56% larger pool of candidates. This offered an additional 1.6 – 3.68 candidates per benchmark city over a ten year period, or .32 – .74 candidates per election cycle.

Analysis

Research has indicated a statistically significant difference in voter turnout with 5.73% higher participation of the overall electorate in the ALBS system. Additionally, a nominal difference of 6.58% in the number of candidates in the BAL system was seen, though this was not statistically significant and could be explained on the basis of random chance. As such, more weight should be given to the findings of increased voter participation in the ALBS system than the increased candidate participation in the BAL process.

Overall, there was an inconsistent correlation between the level of income, education or voter registration regarding either voter participation or candidate engagement. With these key demographic trends showing a disconnect or irregular relation to the voter and candidate data in the benchmark cities, it is likely that outside factors such as the elections process influenced the results.

The implementation of the ALBS and BAL benchmark elections was the responsibility of the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters. Former Assistant Registrar of Voters Elaine Larson retired in 2012 with 22 years of experience as an elections professional. In an interview, Ms. Larson indicated that, based on the disconnect between voter and candidate participation rates, and the income, education and voter registration levels of the benchmarks, it is likely that the election system had an influence. A long ballot as sometimes found in the BAL system can intimidate or fatigue people to the point that some do not use all of their entitled votes or skip contests completely. Additionally, sometimes people don't read how many votes they can cast in the BAL system, and don't realize they can vote for more than one candidate. Further, Ms. Larson indicated that the ALBS ballot layout is more clear and less complex than the BAL system. If people are prompted to vote in each contest as seen in the ALBS process, they are more likely to do so. The lack of bullet-voting in the ALBS system likely caused larger turnout as well. While there was a less significant effect on candidate engagement, it was felt that in general the ALBS system was more strategic and the BAL process more simple. For candidates with political savvy, the by-seat process allowed more flexibility to run without going against an ally or an incumbent, unless so desired. However, the lack of seat designations in the BAL system eliminates one of the choices necessary to run for council so may be more approachable for those who are not as experienced. Overall, Ms. Larson shared that the significant increase in voter turnout seemed more valuable to the elections process than the small increase in the number of potential candidates. A larger portion of the electorate was involved in the

democratic process of choosing their representatives, and through this had a say in the future of their city. (Larson, 2013)

However, the assessment of benchmark trends should not be limited to their relation to US Census and voter registration data. There are a number of academic and anecdotal dynamics that should also be considered regarding the implications and consequences of the ALBS and BAL elections processes.

While traditional political literature has determined causality between negative campaigning and lower voter turnout, more recent studies have indicated that American voters are more resilient. One possibility is that the nature of civility or incivility in the debate may have more impact than the overall presence of negative campaigning. (Brooks, 2006, pp. 693, 694) To the extent that the more direct debate in the ALBS system is focused on issues rather than personal attacks, the information and attention garnered from the discussion may yield higher turnout.

Major factors in determining community participation are access to information and the expected “legislative profits” from an election. In this, higher engagement is expected in relation to the perceived importance of the election, or the legislative profits of the contest. (Settle & Abrams, 1976, pp. 81, 82, 87, 88) For example, increased turnout has been found in states which tax or spend at a higher rate, providing voters with a greater economic stake in the outcome of the election. (Percival, Currin-Percival, Bowler & van der Kolk, 2007, pp. 137, 138) Participation is also influenced by the personal exposure to and the desire to assimilate political information. (Tolbert, McNeal & Smith, 2003, p. 27) However, demonstrating the vital role that municipalities play in government and the accompanying legislative profits can be difficult. The lack of attention paid to

local affairs by media outlets may hinder the public's ability to garner much of this information. (Lieski, 1989, p. 153, 154) Gerston indicates, "It is in that no man's land of politics that local elected officials in California operate ... their accomplishments ... are often buried deep in local newspapers or mentioned almost as afterthoughts on television news, if at all." (2012, p. 139) To the extent the ALBS or BAL system offers a more open or transparent process of governance, they may allow the public and media to more readily determine the legislative profits therein. Should the profits be compelling, this may in turn drive greater participation in local government.

The more direct competition seen in the ALBS system may also provide greater clarity for voter decisions and therefore cause higher turnout. Matsusaka noted that people are more likely to vote if they have a clear understanding of who is the best candidate. (1995, p. 112) Levine and Palfrey have also indicated a sharp decline in turnout as the "cost," or effort required to assess candidates and vote increases. (2007, p. 155) The ease by which people determine the best candidate decreases the cost of participating in the process and increases turnout. It may be that both the more critical nature of the ALBS system as well as the individual by-seat contests allow voters to more readily discern which candidates best reflect their own ideologies. With candidates separated into smaller groups for individual seat contests, the ALBS system offers a more manageable number of contenders to compare rather than the collective field in the BAL process. And, the debate in the ALBS system for each seat being directed between fewer candidates may provide more focused information for the voter to use in determining which is their desired representative.

In *Nonvoting and the Decisiveness of Electoral Outcomes*, Abramson, Diskin and Felsenthal discussed variations on the Downsian “voting paradox” in which residents who feel their individual vote will not affect the outcome of an election are less likely to participate. This in turn empowers those who choose to vote and favors their desired outcomes. (pp. 500, 501, 510) It appears that the higher rate of voter turnout and engagement in the ALBS system either fosters or has been fostered by the empowerment of a broader portion of the community. An alternative point of view could be that residents who choose to bullet-vote in the BAL system are allowed greater influence for their specific favored candidate, which is also a form of empowerment. However, it should be noted that there is a risk in the BAL system of multiple candidates from minority or underrepresented segments of the community splitting votes from a discrete support base. In this case, bullet-voting in the BAL system may be detrimental to the success of multiple minority candidates while the separate seats in the ALBS system may provide a structure allowing fuller engagement of these communities.

While the structure of contests in the ALBS system was created to foster greater incumbent accountability, the nature of higher turnout may in itself have an effect. Wright has indicated that “... the non-partisan ballot drives down participation and yields an even greater electoral advantage for incumbents.” (Wright, 2008, p. 14) While local races in California are obligated by law to be non-partisan, the higher voter turnout and engagement in the ALBS system may foster its own form of incumbent accountability.

Additionally, the two systems differ regarding the ability for a sitting council member to run unopposed. It is unlikely that incumbents will garner no challengers in the BAL system. With multiple seats on the ballot collectively, it is probable that at least

one challenger will file, which means all of the candidates will be opposed. One point of view is that this is desirable, and that all incumbents should be required to run against competitors for re-election to share their political ideologies and be judged by the public. Another point of view is that the potential for a high-performing council member to run unopposed may lead them to be more responsive to community needs in pursuit of that goal. In the ALBS system it is more likely that a well-prepared incumbent in an individual seat will run unopposed. Challengers may choose instead to file in either an open seat or one with a weak incumbent. The decrease in fundraising necessary for unopposed incumbents may lessen the influence of money in that particular seat as well as provide more time for the council member to focus on the process of governance.

Conclusion

The question remains, what does this information mean for residents, elections officials and local governments? Proponents of the ALBS system will contend the 5.73% overall increase in the voter turnout yielding 7,159 – 13,157 participants for benchmark cities during a ten year timeframe is significant. However, those who favor the BAL system may contend that the 5.52% – 7.56% increase in the candidate pool yielding 1.6 – 3.68 more candidates over a ten year period is also of benefit. As much of this assessment is relative to the needs of the individual community and the environment in which the elections systems operate, either may be a viable alternative depending on the circumstances.

However, the gains seen in voter and community engagement in the ALBS system are difficult to overlook. Putnam has indicated that, “It is sometimes hard to tell

whether voting causes community engagement or vice-versa, although some recent evidence suggest that the act of voting itself encourages volunteering and other forms of good citizenship. So it is hardly a small matter for American democracy when voting rates decline" (2000, p. 35) Given this, it is likely that the considerable increase in voter engagement in the ALBS system will produce greater public benefit than the nominally larger number of candidates in the BAL system. This is augmented by the statistical significance of the voter engagement data, while the results of the candidate engagement data could be explained by random chance.

As a foundation for democracy, the structure of a local election system should not be taken lightly or influenced by the potential for political gain. In considering which system would be of most benefit to a municipality, it is important to focus on the actual needs of the community. Those unsuccessful in an established system may seek change in an effort to increase their political chances. At the same time, incumbents may be hesitant to change due to their familiarity and success in the current process as well as uncertainty regarding alternate systems. (Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006, p. 435) Neither is the correct impetus for adhering to or changing an election system. The process which best fits the culture and needs of each unique community should be that which is favored, regardless of challenger or incumbent status.

Policy makers and voters should also be cautious that change for the sake of change, or to suit political motivations, may yield unforeseen or unintended outcomes. The results may be different but not necessarily better. An example is seen in *Losing Fewer Votes*, where it was shown that changing to new elections technology is usually accompanied by a decline in voter turnout, due primarily to unfamiliarity with the process

and a failure to cast votes properly. (Hanmer, Park, Traugott, Niemi, Hernson, Bederson & Conrad, 2010, pp. 129, 139) It is likely that a change from the BAL to the ALBS system, or vice versa, would cause similar voter confusion and an initial drop in turnout. The extent to which this decrease is sustained would depend on how engrained past practice is in the community, how intuitive the new ballot type is found to be and how aggressively voter education is pursued to explain the new system.

Certainly, this research is not exhaustive and is meant as a starting point for the academic discussion of the ALBS system. Future study of incumbency success rates, ballot statement costs, funding levels of political campaigns, or measurements of political and governmental performance would be pertinent as well. Efforts as simple as extending the existing 10-year data set to a longer time frame would further test the current findings. A further step of using a more robust regression analysis to statistically determine the influence of demographic and census data on the outcomes would also lend additional credibility. And, looking outside of California to states such as Washington, which uses variations of the ALBS process as its main elections system may yield additional benchmarks for study. (Katsuyama, 2013; Meinig, 2013) With the limited body of academic knowledge regarding the ALBS system, there are numerous additional foci of study that could yield valuable information.

However, it is hoped this will lend itself toward a tangible body of knowledge. It has recently been lamented that on a state level in California, “Reform is an idle concept left to the whimsical who fail to understand the intractable political cement otherwise known as the status quo.” (Gerston, 2012, p. 199) On a local level, policy makers have fewer institutional constraints and a greater opportunity to enact change. Should the need

present itself in a local municipality, the ALBS system has shown itself to be at least one more viable option for elections reform.

Appendix A

List of Diagrams:

- Diagram 1: BAL System
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- Diagram 3: Average Voter Fall-Off (Voter Engagement)
- Diagram 4: Median Household Income (Voter Engagement)
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List of Tables:

- Table 1: 2010 Median Income and Education
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- Table 3: Voter Fall-Off
- Table 4: Overall Average Fall-Off
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- Table 8: Even-Year Cycle, 2002 – 2010
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- Table 11: Potential Change in # of Candidates if Santa Clara Used BAL System
- Table 12: Potential Change in # of Candidates if Milpitas Used ALBS System
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- Table 15: Potential Change in # of Candidates if Cupertino Used ALBS System
- Table 16: Potential Change in # of Candidates if Palo Alto Used ALBS System

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