

Report shows citizen-designed county redistricting worked

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The citizen-designed redistricting plan for the Ventura County supervisorial districts has brought fairer representation, according to a study by a California Lutheran University professor published June 19 by *SAGE Open*, an open-access journal by SAGE.

Gregory Freeland, chairman of the Department of Political Science, compared Ventura County supervisors' decisions to their constituents' votes on state propositions and local measures and interviewed politicians and community activists to draw conclusions that could have implications for other redistricting efforts.

The 2000 census showed that representation for different cities on the Ventura County Board of Supervisors did not reflect changes in population. Rather than relying on political staffs and consultants to redraw supervisorial districts to make the electoral process more representative, the board in an unusual move delegated the job to a citizen [task force](#). Supervisors approved the new districts in 2001.

Freeland's report, "Community Members Draw the Line: Redistricting by a Ventura County Task Force," shows that supervisors were elected or re-elected to office based on their responsiveness to their constituents' concerns after the plan went into effect. Most of the incumbent supervisors were re-elected, but a notable defeat occurred in the predominantly Latino District 5 covering most of Oxnard, where previously unbeatable John Flynn lost to John Zaragoza in 2008. In addition, the district's voter turnout has improved and nonprofit leaders

and activists report increased responsiveness from officials since the redistricting.

The addition of the Ojai Valley strengthened an already solid base of support for environmental protections and liberal social policies in District 1, which also includes Ventura, according to Freeland. Environmentalist Steve Bennett won 76 percent of the vote in 2004 and ran unopposed four years later.

According to Freeland's research, supervisors' stands on issues such as environmental policy, education and campaign finance generally aligned with the opinions of the majority of the residents of their districts. For instance, a proposition dealing with clean water and air and coastal protection passed 61 to 39 percent in Bennett's district in 2002. The proposition failed only in District 4, which includes Simi Valley and Moorpark and is represented by Peter Foy, who voted against a bill by Bennett to allow homeowners to borrow money from the county to invest in environmentally friendly energy systems.

Provided by SAGE Publications

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