America's Uneven Democracy:

Turnout, Race, and Representation in City Politics

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements		**2**
Introduction	The Vote and Democracy	**5**
Chapter 1.	Where Turnout Should Matter	**25**
Chapter 2.	Turnout Could Matter at the Local Level	**43**
Chapter 3.	Winners and Losers in Mayoral Elections	**58**
Chapter 4.	Turnout and Representation on City Councils	**82**
Chapter 5.	Turnout and Local Government Spending Priorities	**116**
Chapter 6.	Raising Voter Turnout	**158**
Chapter 7.	The Benefits of Expanded Participation	**198**
Appendix		**218**
References		**237**

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Introduction: The Vote and Democracy

Voting is the bedrock upon which democracy rests. Through the vote citizens convey information about their needs and preferences, they make important decisions about whom to elect, and they hold leaders accountable for their actions by either voting or not voting to return them to office. Democracy is unworkable and unthinkable without the vote (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 1961, Verba et al 1995, Piven and Cloward 1988, Lijphart 1997).

Despite the centrality of the vote for democracy, we know that large numbers of citizens stay away from the polls.[1] In America, voter participation at every level of government is low and at every level except presidential elections is getting lower.[2] Often the majority of citizens do not vote when given the opportunity. At best, slightly over half of all eligible voters vote in national contests.[3] The numbers are even worse for statewide primaries where turnout can hover around one-third of eligible voters. But nowhere is the problem worse than at the local level. Turnout in municipal elections around the country averages half that of national elections (Morlan, 1984), and local voter turnout often falls below one-quarter of the voting-age population (Bridges 1997, Hampton and Tate 1996). Moreover, trends over time suggest that voter turnout in local elections is declining (Verba et al. 1995, Karnig and Walter 1993).

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[1] Many claim that this non-voting is quite rational (Downs 1957). Citizens, according to this view, understand that their single vote will almost certainly not change the outcome of the contest. The fact that non-voting may be rational on an individual level does not, however, mean that it does not lead to substantial harm to certain groups in society. The rationality of non-voting also does not mean that the rate of non-voting cannot be manipulated by reform to democratic institutions. These two possibilities are the subject of this book.

[2] The downward trend for turnout is less clear in presidential elections than at other levels. Between 1960 and 2000 turnout of the voting age population in presidential elections dropped by 12 percentage points. Part of this drop is due to the increased number of ineligible adults (McDonald and Popkin 2001) but it nevertheless represents a real decline (Patterson 2002). In the most recent elections, however, presidential turnout appears to have rebounded slightly.

[3] In midterm Congressional elections the figure usually falls to under half of all eligible voters.

What is most striking about non-voting is that it does not occur evenly across the population. Those who do turn out to vote look very different from those who do not. Study after study of the American electorate has found that individuals with ample resources vote much more regularly than those with few resources - the poor, racial and ethnic minorities, the less educated (Verba et al 1972, 1995, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Often the skew is severe. In the last presidential contest, for example, white adults were twice as likely to report voting as Asian American and Latino adults (US Census Bureau 2005). [4] Educational differences are even starker. Those with advanced degrees are especially apt to vote (77 percent). By contrast, those with less than a high school diploma report voting only 30 percent of the time (US Census Bureau 2005). A similar story can be told for income, occupation, or almost any measure of status. Those who are disadvantaged are much less likely to be involved in the electoral process than those who are privileged.

The skewed nature of the vote has raised widespread concern about how well the interests of different groups are served in democracy (Verba et al., 1995, Guinier 1994, Casel 1986). The fear is that individuals and groups who do not participate in the voting process will be overlooked and their concerns ignored (Martin 2003, Bennet and Resnick 1990, Piven and Cloward 1988, Griffin and Newman 2005). As V.O. Key noted decades ago, “The blunt truth is that politicians and officials are under no compulsion to pay much heed to classes and groups of

[4] In this book, “white” refers to persons who identify as white and not Hispanic. The terms Hispanic and Latino are used interchangeably, as are the terms African-American and black, reflecting the manner they are listed in the 2000 Census questionnaire. While the following pages liberally refer to blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and whites as racial or ethnic ‘groups’, I readily admit that these categories are problematic. There is little doubt that the population of each of these groups is diverse and that none of these groups is wholly unified in the political arena. There is, in fact, considerable doubt as to whether Latinos and Asian Americans should be grouped by these global pan-ethnic categories. Given divergent experiences related to national origin group, time of immigration, legal status, socioeconomic standing, and a range of other factors, identity as Latino or Asian American can and often is overshadowed by other identities (Lien 2001, de la Garza 1992). Future research would certainly benefit from more refined categorization that takes into accounts divisions within these larger pan-ethnic groups. Nevertheless, as we will see in Chapter Three, the empirical record suggests that each of these racial and ethnic groups acts cohesively enough in the local political arena to warrant being analyzed as a group. The interpretations that are presented here should, however, be read with the complexity of actual group experiences and opinions in mind.

citizens that do not vote" (1949:99). Or as Walter Dean Burnham put it, "The old saw remains profoundly true: if you don't vote, you don't count" (1987:99). If these fears are true, policies will be biased, outcomes will be unfair, and in the end American democracy will represent the interests of the privileged few more than the concerns of the masses (Mills 1956, Schattschneider 1970).

But are these fears founded? Conventional wisdom suggests that increases in turnout would fundamentally change the outcome of democracy. Just about everyone actively involved in politics acts as if turnout is critical. Before most elections, candidates invest precious campaign resources to get out the vote and in speeches regularly implore their supporters to turn out. Former President Bill Clinton, for example, in an effort to aide a fellow Democrat, urged on a crowd by exhorting, "It will all turn now on who comes and who stays home. If half of you stay home, we'll be out of business Wednesday morning." (Libit 2002). Before his election in 2002, Bill McBride, Democratic nominee for governor of Florida echoed that view, "If we have a big turnout, I'll win." (quoted in Canedy 2002). In the 2008 Presidential election, the Democrats invested heavily in a turnout machine that they hoped would ultimately win them the election.

In the days before a contest, the media also regularly cites turnout as critical. Examples from the highest office to the lowest office abound. "Voter turnout will be critical in this election" was the headline in the last presidential election.[5] "Win May Hinge on Turnout" was the sentiment expressed by pollsters in the last Los Angeles mayoral race (Finnegan 2005). After any close contest, commentators are likely to conclude that "turnout emerged as a decisive

[5] Headline from a story in the Midland Reporter-Telegram on November 2nd.

factor in [the] elections" (Bumiller and Nagourney 2002).[6] This was certainly the case in the last two presidential contests but it is common for elections of any size.[7]

Finally, there is an almost iron-clad belief among party leaders and politicians that if a greater range of citizens turned out to vote, electoral results would favor the Democratic Party. This notion has been central to decades of efforts by the Democratic Party to make the vote more accessible and has motivated Republicans to oppose most such changes. Efforts by the two parties to pass and prevent implementation of Motor Voter legislation in the 1990s represent just one of the more recent examples. The presumption is also that if everyone voted or even if different demographic groups turned out at the same rate, racial and ethnic minorities and members of other disadvantaged groups would benefit disproportionately. Latinos and Asian Americans have, in particular, been singled out as being affected by low turnout (Pyle et al 1998). One prominent report outlined the logic for Latinos: "Low registration leads to low turnout [which] leads to modest political clout at the polls. A practical consequence is the low numbers of Hispanics elected" (Yoachum 1987:3).

Because of these beliefs, millions of dollars and thousands of hours of campaign resources are expended mobilizing voters of one kind or another. Get out the vote drives are not the most expensive component of the typical campaign but they are often an important part of candidate and party strategies. In the last presidential election, for example, the two parties lined up 2.2 million volunteers to try to increase participation on election day (Nichols 2004). The existence of groups like the Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project which has registered more than 2.2 million Hispanic voters is premised in large part on the notion that

[6] Likewise, Karl Rove, President Bush's top advisor, claimed that "strong turnout of churchgoers" was the key to the President's re-election (Rother 2004).
[7] "GOP's Ground Game Wins It" is just one of the examples from the last presidential election (Hull 2004).

turnout matters. Ultimately, just about everyone involved in American politics acts as if turnout is important.[8]

Empirical studies of turnout by political scientists have, however, found limited support for this conventional wisdom.[9] The preponderance of evidence, at least in the American case, suggests that skewed electorate does not lead to biased outcomes. This conclusion rests largely on two different tests.[10]

First, when the political preferences of nonvoters are compared to the preferences of voters, the gap is generally small (e.g. Wolfinger and Rosenstone1980, Bennett and Resnick 1990, Gant and Lyons 1993, Norrander 1989, Erickson 1995, Highton 2004). The range of empirical studies on this question are so uniform in their findings that Ellcessor and Leighley are able to state: "one of the least contested conclusions in the study of political behavior is that voters' political attitudes and policy positions are fairly representative of non-voters" (2001:127).[11] In other words, voters and non voters may look very different but they do not think all that differently.[12]

Second, and perhaps more importantly, when political scientists try to determine what would happen if everyone voted or if voting across different social groups was even, they tend to

[8] One famous and oft-cited example of the power of turnout is the purported ability of senior citizens to use high participation rates to secure a range of social welfare provisions for the elderly (Campbell 2003).
[9] There are some important exceptions to this general conclusion that we will detail below. For example see Hill and Leighley (1992), Griffin and Newman (2008), Fellowes and Rowe (2004).
[10] A third, smaller set of studies attempts to see if the policy views of particular groups who vote regularly are more closely correlated with the policy records of incumbents than the policy views of other groups who vote less regularly. The results here are more mixed. Bartels (2008) suggests that voter turnout does not enhance the influence of different groups on incumbent behavior but Griffin and Newman (2005, 2008) find that senators' roll call votes more closely reflect voters' preferences than nonvoters' preferences. Similarly, (Verba and Nie 1972) find a closer link between public attitudes and local elite views in communities with higher turnout (their findings are replicated by Hill and Matsubayashi 2005).
[11] Even those who lament the distortion created by the unrepresentativeness of non-voting forms of political participation, nevertheless tend to conclude that "Voters are relatively representative of the public" (Verba et al, 1995:512).
[12] More recent work that disaggregates preferences down to the state level or lower does, however, find more significant opinion differences between voters and nonvoters (Citrin et al 2003, Griffin and Newman 2008). This work suggests that we should be less concerned about the skew at the national level and more focused on bias at the local level.

find that expanded turnout would make little systematic difference. There is little evidence to suggest that increasing or decreasing turnout would change who wins and loses in American politics. Although some studies have found that increasing turnout might alter the margin of victory slightly in some contests, the findings are often highly variable and the effects are never large (Citrin et al 2003, De Nardo 1980, Nagel and McNulty 1996, Shields and Goidel 1997, Erickson 1995). There is even a prolonged debate over which party would benefit from expanded turnout. Roughly half of the studies find gains for Democrats while the other half suggests that Republicans would be the real beneficiaries (De Nardo 1980, Tucker and Vedlitz 1986, Nagel and McNulty 1996, Petrocik 1987). Most importantly, the elections examined would rarely have ended with a different victor. "Simply put" say Highton and Wolfinger, "outcomes would not change if everyone voted" (2001:179).

If these studies are correct, then politicians, the media, and the Democratic and Republican Parties are unnecessarily worried about turnout and its effects. If it is true that higher turnout does not translate into different electoral outcomes, then American democracy is functioning reasonably well and the status quo is quite acceptable.

Turnout does matter

In this book, I challenge the basic conclusion of the existing literature. I offer an alternative account that not only explains why existing studies have failed to find turnout effects but also reveals where the effects are likely to be the greatest. I then look at a large set of elections where theory tells us to expect turnout to have consequences. Using these cases I demonstrate that turnout can have dramatic consequences in the United States.

The argument is straightforward. I maintain that the reasons existing studies have largely found that turnout does not matter is because they have been narrowly focused on the national electorate and a handful of presidential and congressional elections. I contend that national elections are the last place we are likely to observe skewed results due to uneven turnout. There are two reasons to think that national elections are more representative, and thus, that focusing on national elections reduces the possibility of finding bias.

First, simple logic dictates that the *possible* extent of any skew produced by uneven turnout decreases as overall turnout levels increase. As detailed in Tingsten's (1937) "law of dispersion," the chances of skew are inversely proportional to overall electoral participation. If almost everybody turns out, there can be very little skew. If, however, only a small fraction of the population turns out, the distortion can be severe. Thus, if we are interested in revealing just how much turnout matters, we should not confine our research to national elections where turnout is relatively high. Bias could certainly exist at the national level, where only about half of all eligible voters turn out, but it could be that much worse at the local level where turnout averages half or less than half that of national elections (Karnig and Walter 1983, Hajnal et al 2002).

Second, by looking at the national electorate as a whole researchers ignore substantial variation in group size across geographic boundaries and almost necessarily diminish the role that small minority groups can play. In national contests, only a few very large groups can have a significant effect on the outcome of the vote. Asian Americans, for example, are the third largest racial and ethnic minority group but they make up under 4 percent of the total national population. Whether they vote is almost immaterial to the outcome of national contests.

The same is not true for smaller geographic localities. Because people are distributed unevenly across geographic boundaries, groups that are small minorities and largely insignificant at the national level can be major players within the many states, districts, or cities in which they are concentrated. This kind of geographic segregation is especially pronounced for race and ethnicity. African Americans, for example, make up about a third of the population in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago and almost two-thirds of the population in New Orleans and Atlanta even though the national population is only about 12 percent black. In fact, segregation by race and ethnicity is the rule rather than the exception. The average Latino lives in a city that is 39 percent Hispanic, the average African American in a city that is 35 percent black, and the average Asian American in a city that is 7 percent Asian American, even though the nationwide the population is only 12 percent Latino, 12 percent African American, and 4 percent Asian American.[13] Since minorities make up a substantial proportion of the electorate where they live, their voting (or non-voting) is likely to have a much bigger effect at the local level. If we are concerned about the effects of a bias in the electorate we need to look not just at the national electorate as a whole but at a series of smaller political units where the effect of different groups could be more easily observed. Only by examining each of these smaller units separately will we begin to get a second, perhaps more revealing look at the effects of uneven turnout on voting outcomes.[14]

Although there are strong reasons to suspect that turnout is critical at the local level, there is, to date, little empirical evidence addressing this possibility. A number of studies briefly report on participation rates for different racial, ethnic, and demographic groups in local

[13] These figures are derived from the American Citizen Participation Study, a recent nationwide survey, and the 2000 Census.
[14] Another concern with local elections is that they often get less critical scrutiny than national or state elections. This means that there may be more room for electoral discrimination against minorities at the local level. This phenomenon has been highlighted in a number of Voting Rights Act cases against different localities (Davidson and Grofman 1994).

elections but there appears to be no research that looks at the *consequences* of a skewed electorate systematically across cities (Leighley 2001, Verba et al 1995). We do not know, therefore, whether turnout matters in the numerous elections that occur at the local level.

In the following chapters I seek to answer this question. A series of different tests that focus on who wins the most critical local offices and how local governments spend their money demonstrate that turnout has wide ranging consequences in American politics. The analysis reveals that low and uneven turnout, a factor at play in most American cities, leads to less than optimal outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities. The tests indicate that low turnout results in losses in mayoral elections, less equitable racial and ethnic representation on city councils, and spending policies that are less in line with the preferences of racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups.

Fortunately, there are solutions. In the penultimate chapter of the book, I consider different avenues through which we might expand voter turnout. Although a range of different reforms have been proposed, I focus on changes in local electoral structures. Since these institutions are easier to alter than individual socioeconomic status, individual attitudes, or patterns of mobilization, the three other main factors driving turnout, they represent the most viable and potentially the most effective target for reform. The analysis suggests that small changes to the local electoral structure - moving the timing of local elections to coincide with statewide or national elections, for example - could dramatically expand local voter turnout. These changes would by no means ensure even turnout across groups and they would not be able to expand turnout beyond the already low rates evident in national elections but they nevertheless could boost local turnout rates enough to substantially affect local electoral outcomes.

This represents an important addition to existing national level studies. Although presidential and Congressional elections get much of our attention, local politics represents a key component of American democracy. More votes are cast in the multitude of local elections than in national contests and more elected officials emerge from local contests. Even more importantly, policy decisions at the local level affect citizens in profound and immediate ways (Pellissero and Krebs 2003, Judd and Swanstrom 1994). Local governments control basic services like public safety, education, and water and make critical decisions about land-use and development. Moreover, in an era of policy devolution, more and more policies are both initiated and implemented at the local level (Sellers 2001). Social welfare decisions, for example, are increasingly designed and executed at the local level. All of this results in massive spending locally with the nation's municipalities spending over a trillion dollars annually (Bureau of the Census 2003). In a political arena that touches more and more regularly on the lives of residents, it matters who wins elections and how those winners spending the public's money. [15]

Finally, it is likely that inequities present in today's local political arenas are harbingers of what is yet to come in national political contests. By the mid-century, the Census predicts that white Americans will no longer represent the majority of nation's population. As immigration continues and America becomes more diverse, racial and ethnic minorities will be large enough to influence national contests. If minorities continue to vote less regularly than whites, their impact will be diminished at the national level as well.

A Book about Race

[15] Moreover, it is not just local elections where this could matter. A similar story could be told for other elections where turnout drops and minorities make up a larger share of the population. A range of statewide contests and state legislative elections, for example, could fit these conditions. In short, we cannot and should not judge American democracy on national elections alone.

This is a book about turnout but it is also very much a book about race and the representation of racial and ethnic minorities in American democracy. In assessing the effects of voter turnout, I will focus on the political well being of racial and ethnic minorities and will ask one simple question: are minorities losing out because they vote less often than whites?

Most studies concerned with the implications of uneven turnout have focused on whether differences in turnout affect partisan outcomes (eg Citrin et al 2003, DeNardo 1980, Tucker and Vedlitz 1986 but see Griffin and Newman 2008). There are, however, important normative, theoretical, and practical reasons to shift the focus to race and ethnicity. To begin with, we might want to focus on racial and ethnic minorities because these groups often do not fare well in America society. On most basic indicators of well-being there are substantial gaps between the status of the minority population and the status of the white community. Blacks and Latinos, in particular, are much more likely than whites to end up near the bottom of America's racial hierarchy. Members of the black and Latino communities are three times more likely than whites to be poor (Blank 2001). Blacks and Latinos are also three times more likely than whites to be unemployed (Blank 2001). On basic indicators of educational achievement, wealth and earnings, health, criminal victimization, and a host of other important measures, African Americans and Latinos lag far behind the majority white population (Smelser et al 2001). Even the Asian American population, who for the most part fare well on many of these basic measures, contains several national origin groups that fall well below national averages on key indicators of welfare. If we are concerned about the well being of any group in American democracy, we probably should be concerned about the well being of racial and ethnic minorities.

Moreover, there are reasons to suspect that ongoing racial inequality stems in part from public policy. By most measures, the United States spends less on direct aid to the poor and disadvantaged than most other countries. As a percent of median income, the size of public transfers to the poor is lower in the U.S. than in almost all other western industrialized nations (Smeeding et al 2001). The United States is also the only advanced western nation that does not have either a family allowance or universal health insurance. The United States has tried to address racial inequality by instituting a series of anti-discrimination laws and by enacting a range of affirmative action policies but it is far from clear how much they have done to elevate the status of different minority communities (Blank 2001, Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). In short, government policy in America does not seem to be overly focused on directly aiding the most disadvantaged groups or on eliminating racial disparities.[16]

While none of this comes close to demonstrating that racial and ethnic minorities habitually lose in American democracy because they vote less regularly than others, the relatively low status of America's minority population and the relatively meager efforts of the U.S. government to alleviate those group differences certainly hint at a lack of effective representation for racial and ethnic minorities in American politics. Given that racial and ethnic minorities may be losing out in American democracy, an investigation of their electoral influence and the role of turnout in expanding that influence is warranted.

Another reason to be concerned about racial minorities is America's long history of disenfranchising minorities. Blacks and other minorities were altogether barred from democratic participation for much of the nation's history (Klinker and Smith 1999). Even after blacks were

[16] It is also important to add that this pattern of spending is not in line with minority preferences. Although there is considerable variation within the minority community, public opinion polls detailed in subsequence chapters indicate that racial and ethnic minorities are, on average, more apt than the white community to support greater government spending and greater government activism.

given the right to vote, whites regularly mobilized to prevent blacks from using that vote to gain power (Kousser 1999, Holt 1979). Some of the most egregious examples came during Reconstruction after African Americans were first elected in large numbers to office in the South. In Louisiana, for example, in less than one year, white Democrats killed over one thousand people in their effort to regain white control of the political process (Kousser 1974). Different but equally effective tactics have been repeatedly employed to reduce the influence of the Latino and Asian American populations in the political sphere (Almageur 1994, Kim 1999). Whether institutional barriers to minority enfranchisement continue to exist is less clear but the fact that American history is replete with efforts to minimize the influence of racial and ethnic minorities in the electoral process suggests that we should be especially concerned about the participation and representation of these groups today.

In addition to these normative considerations for being concerned about racial and ethnic minorities, there are also strong empirical reasons to focus on race rather than party. Put simply, turnout is skewed much more by race than by party. Democrats and Republicans turn out at roughly equal levels in both national and local politics. At the national level, the difference in self-reported turnout rates between Democrats and Republicans is just three percent (Ellcessor and Leighley 2001). At the local level, it is an equally small three percent gap. Thus, we should not be surprised to find that expanded turnout would not greatly alter the balance of power between the two parties at either the local or national levels. But race and ethnicity are an entirely different story. As I will demonstrate, at both the local and national levels whites outvote Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans by large margins (Leighley 2001, Verba et al 1995). Often, white adults are more than twice as likely as minorities to vote.

Logically then, one might find turnout to be critical for racial and ethnic minorities even when it appears to have minimal effects for Democrats or Republicans.

Yet another reason one might choose to focus on race and ethnicity is the deep racial division that sometimes occurs in American politics. The more that African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and whites disagree over candidates and policies, the greater the potential for uneven voter turnout to affect outcomes. Although evidence of just what these divisions look like at the local level is sparse, it is, nevertheless apparent that race represents one of the most fundamental divisions in American electoral politics (Kinder and Sanders 1996, Carmines and Stimson 1989). And as we will see in Chapter Two, when I present new data on racial voting patterns in the local political arena, it will be clear not only that these four racial and ethnic groups each represent cohesive voting blocs but also that blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asian Americans tend to have different preferences in the voting booth. There is, thus, a very real potential for minorities who vote less regularly to lose out to whites who have larger numbers and vote more regularly. .

A final, more practical reason to focus on race and ethnicity rather than partisanship is the simple fact that most local elections are not partisan. Nationwide, about 76 percent of all cities hold nonpartisan elections (Hajnal and Lewis 2003). Even if one wanted to see how Democrats and Republicans fared at the local level, the data to assess this relationship would often be absent. For all of these reasons, I seek to understand how turnout can hurt or benefit racial and ethnic minority interests in American democracy.

Understanding Racial Dynamics in America

In the course of examining the welfare of racial and ethnic minorities in American democracy, my primary goal will be to assess the link between turnout and representation.

However, my examination will also shed light on another set of critical questions related to race and ethnicity. Through an examination of the vote by race in a mayoral elections, I hope to understand more about the dynamics of race in the voting booth and the nature of America's racial divisions. Do each of the four groups form cohesive voting blocs? Which groups are likely to be especially divided in their political goals? Are America's different racial and ethnic communities generally pitted against each other in bids to control the local polity or are divisions in the vote more muted? And finally, which of America's four main racial and ethnic groups are likely to form coalitions with each other?

These are increasingly important and increasingly complex questions in a nation that is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Immigration is moving us from a largely white society to one where the color lines are less clear. As minority groups begin to gain more control in politics and as whites, in some places, become the minority group, questions about the nature of inter-group relations take on an increasingly prominent role. Greater diversity raises both hopes and fears. On one hand, diversity raises hope for a powerful inter-racial political coalition. With no dominant group, racial and ethnic communities may be forced to work together to get policies passed. On the other hand, diversity raises the specter of increased tension and conflict. New communities may be seen as a threat that could compete for pieces of a seemingly shrinking pie. By looking at how different racial and ethnic groups vote in the local political arena, we should get a better idea of the reality in America's cities today.

An examination of the vote tells us is that racial divisions in America's cities are pronounced. Race is regularly and strongly reflected in the candidates we choose. Although there are some signs of an emerging coalition between whites, Asian Americans and Latinos, most local electoral contests reveal sharply divergent preferences across racial groups. Generally

speaking what we want or do not want from government seems substantially shaped by which racial or ethnic community we come from.

A Book about Urban Politics

In order to assess how turnout affects electoral winners and policy outcomes at the local level, I need to develop a model of how local government works. This is a difficult task. Scholars of urban politics have had a hard time figuring out exactly what forces influence the actions of local government. From C. Wright Mills' "The Power Elite," to Robert Dahl's "Who Governs?" and more recently to Paul Peterson's "City Limits" there has been a long standing debate about how much the political arena matters and which actors are able to affect policy decisions.

On one side, pluralists contend that local government is open to a wide variety of interests and influences (Dahl 1961, Browning, Marshall and Tabb 1984, Goetz 1994, Donovan and Neiman 1992, Clark and Ferguson 1983, Cingranelli 1981). Either through the vote or through other types of pressure tactics, residents not only control the outcome of elections, they can determine the direction of policy. From this perspective, political imperatives largely determine outcomes at the local level. Others sharply disagree. A range of researchers from Tiebout (1956) to Peterson (1981) maintain that economic constraints largely determine policies at the local level. According to this view, competition across cities for mobile capital means that no one city can afford to levy heavy taxes or to provide generous social welfare benefits to the poor. Any city that tries to shift policy in favor of more disadvantaged segments of the population risks losing businesses and wealthy residents – an outcome that would ultimately lead to financial ruin. For this reason, most cities are ruled by growth machines that enact policies

that try to ensure greater and greater development (Elkin 1987). To these two sides can be added new institutionalists who argue that electoral and governmental structures are likely to play a central role in shaping outcomes (Pelissero and Krebs 1997, Sharp 1991, Sass 2000) and still others who counter that local government is basically a bureaucracy that distributes goods and services in a relatively efficient and fair manner (Mladenka 1980, 1981).

Given considerable disagreement over how local government works, another important goal of this book will be to try to determine who is actually involved in local decision making. The key to answering this longstanding debate is to offer a more systematic examination of local government policy making than has previously been offered. The main problem with existing studies is that each only generally tests for influences from one or two sides of the debate. The result is that each study suffers from omitted variable bias. Peterson (1981), for example, includes no political inputs in his model of local government behavior. Dahl (1961), on the other hand, fails to incorporate many potentially critical economic factors. No existing study incorporates the range of potential factors. By including a much more complete set of variables that directly test for political, economic, institutional, and bureaucratic inputs this book should provide a more illuminating account of how local policy decisions are made.

The results of this fuller model indicate that each of the existing one-sided stories is incomplete. Political forces, both in the form of voter turnout and broader public opinion, are critical in determining who gets what in America's cities, but the overall balance between redistributional and developmental spending is also strongly influenced by economic imperatives and institutional constraints. The one account that gets little support is that of local government as bureaucracy - I find that spending patterns are not closely aligned with actual needs.

Outline

The rest of the book proceeds as follows. Chapter One reviews the existing literature on voter turnout and its implications in American politics. With few exceptions, this empirical research concludes that low voter turnout has limited consequences for American politics. I challenge this finding, by revealing the narrow focus of the literature on national elections, and detail why turnout could matter more in local contests. I identify two factors - relatively low turnout in local elections and high levels of racial and ethnic segregation across municipalities - that could increase the impact of turnout in local contests. The chapter also presents and explains the design of the analysis that follows.

Chapter Two examines in greater detail three conditions of the local political environment that could lead to important turnout effects in local elections. It reveals the severe demographic skew that characterizes the local voting population. Those who vote and those who do not vote do not look alike. Second, it illustrates the substantial racial divides that shape local voting preferences. Groups that vote regularly choose different policies and candidates from those who vote irregularly. Finally, it shows that due to high levels of segregation, the typical racial and ethnic minority resident lives in a city where their own group makes up a sizeable portion of the local population. Groups who vote less regularly are large enough to have a say in the cities where they actually live.

Illustrating why turnout could matter at the local level does not, however, prove that turnout does matter in local politics. In Chapters Three through Five I undertake a series of tests that demonstrate the importance of voter turnout for the representation of racial and ethnic minorities. Chapter Three presents the results of a series of simulations that delineate what might have happened in recent big city mayoral elections if racial and ethnic minority residents

had turned out at the same rate as whites. It not only suggests that many of the winners would be different if turnout were less skewed by race and ethnicity but also that Latino voters would gain the most from more even turnout. Chapter Four examines racial and ethnic representation on city councils and asks whether the racial composition of the council is more equitable in cities with higher – and presumably more diverse – turnout. Once again, the results suggest that turnout is critical. When turnout is low, Asian American and Latino representation is far below parity but as turnout expands much of the underrepresentation of the Latino and Asian American communities is eliminated. African Americans, on the other hand, could be helped the most by institutional reform. Higher turnout itself has little effect on black council representation. Chapter Five focuses on the link between voter turnout and local policy outcomes. The chapter tests whether cities with higher turnout spend more on programs that minorities tend to favor. The tests show that America's low turnout greatly reduces the ability of racial and ethnic minorities to translate their preferences into political outcomes.

Chapter Six seeks to uncover solutions to low turnout. It begins by examining the range of reforms that have been advanced in the hope of expanding participation in the political arena. It then focuses on the one aspect of the political arena that might be amenable to change, local electoral structure. Analysis of the relationship between local electoral institutions and voter turnout indicates that institutional reform offers a viable means to expand participation in local elections.

In the last chapter, I briefly review the main findings regarding turnout and minority representation, discuss some of the normative concerns related to efforts to expand turnout, and highlight the implications of continued growth in the Latino and Asian American populations

and ongoing under-participation of both groups. The conclusion also draws attention to other contexts – including state level politics and class based politics – where turnout might matter.

Chapter One. Where Turnout Should Matter

What do we know about voter turnout and its implications for American democracy? Despite an almost universal belief amongst political actors that turnout matters, analysis of existing empirical research provides little evidence to indicate that turnout is a critical factor in the American political arena. In fact, a rather extensive empirical literature strongly suggests that raising or lowering turnout would do little to change the face of American democracy. Higher or more even turnout would not produce new winners. With lower turnout, there are be no big losers. As one scholar of American elections put it, "most electoral outcomes are not determined in any meaningful sense by turnout and are not likely to change through even highly implausible levels of voter mobilization. It appears that nonvoting does not as a rule make much of a difference to election outcomes" (Teixeira 1992:104).

How have empirical studies of the American electorate reached this conclusion? First, comparisons of the political preferences of voters to those of nonvoters, indicates that the two groups have very similar preferences. Ray Wolfinger and Steve Rosenstone, two of the first political scientists to make this comparison found, for example, that "demographic biases do not translate into discernible overrepresentation of particular policy constituencies" (1980:109-111). This is not to say that the voting population is an exact replica of the nonvoting population, but rather, that on a wide range of issues from taxes to women's rights to military policy and just about everything in between, study after study has found only marginal differences between the policy positions and political attitudes of voters and non-voters (e.g. Bennett and Resnick 1990, Gant and Lyons 1993, Norrander 1989). Moreover, even when small differences do appear, there is no consistent ideological direction to the gaps (Gant and Lyons 1993, Shaffer 1982). Sometimes voters are more liberal than nonvoters. Sometimes they are more conservative.

These results have convinced even some of the biggest critics of America's low turnout to admit that "the most widely cited academic studies all come to the conclusion that there is little difference between voters and nonvoters in terms of political [choices]" (Wattenberg 2002:105).[17]

The second, perhaps more direct, way of demonstrating that turnout is largely inconsequential is to calculate how outcomes would or would not change if turnout were higher or if everyone voted. These kinds of simulations almost all reach the same conclusion - electoral outcomes in American democracy have little to do with turnout. As one study recently noted, "There is no indication that the preferences of nonvoters would have reversed many - or any - elections for which we have reliable evidence" (Petrocik 2003:20). It is true that some studies have linked changes in turnout to slight changes in a candidate's margin of victory and in other studies a handful of the hundreds of elections that were examined might have been reversed had everyone voted (Citrin et al 2003, Brunell and DiNardo 2004). But it is not at all clear who would benefit from these marginal changes. There is, in fact, a sharp debate about whether increased turnout would benefit the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, or neither (De Nardo 1980, Tucker and Vedlitz 1986, Nagel and McNulty 1996, Radcliff 1994, Petrocik 1987, Brunell and DiNardo 2004, Petrocik and Perkins 2003, Martinez and Gill 2002).[18] In the end, the effects of turnout do not appear to be consistent or large. The candidates who win elections would generally still be the winners no matter how many voters came to the polls (Highton and

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[17] There is at least one important caveat to these findings. Time and time again, researchers have been able to show that even if low voter turnout does not lead to skewed policy preferences, other forms of political participation do elicit skewed participation (Verba et al 1993, Verba et al 1995). Those who give money and those who actively participate by writing letters, working on campaigns, or engaging in other more demanding forms of political participation "bring very different policy concerns to their activity" than those who fail to participate through these diverse avenues (Verba et al 1993: 303).

[18] Radcliff (1994) is the only study in this series that finds large turnout effects. However, Radcliff's results are contingent both on omitting potentially relevant controls and on including data from the South immediately following the passage of the Voting Rights Act when the emergence of black voters both increased turnout and the Democratic vote share. These decisions have been sharply criticized (Nagel and McNulty 2000, Erikson 1995).

Wolfinger 2001, Teixeira 1992, Erikson 1995, Martinez and Gill 2002, Lacy and Burden 1999). Were we to dramatically alter turnout rates across the United States, we would simply get much more of the same.

As definitive as this conclusion appears to be, one cannot help but be troubled by how sharply the results of these studies differ from studies of other political contexts. Studies that compare turnout across different countries, for example, almost unanimously find that turnout matters. Cross national comparisons have found that higher turnout can significantly improve the prospects of left-leaning or workers' parties, lead to more liberal policy making, and reduce income inequality (Pacek and Radcliff 1995, Hicks and Swank 1992, Aguilar and Pacek 2000, Bohrer et al 2000, Fauvelle-Aymar et al 2000, Mueller and Statmann 2003). It is also striking how much studies of present day American politics contrast with research on previous periods in American history. We know, for example, that the enfranchisement of African Americans through the civil rights movement led to dramatic gains for the black community.[19] The entry of African Americans into the electoral pool in the South can be tied directly to dramatic growth in the number of black elected officials (Parker 1990, Handley and Grofman 1994), to the repeal of a range of discriminatory polices (Parker 1990, Davidson and Grofman 1994), and to marked improvement in public services for the black community (Keech 1968, Button 1989, Black and Black 1987). In short, a variety of different studies have shown that turnout often matters.[20]

Can it really be that turnout suddenly does not matter in present day American? Or is there something wrong with how researchers have assessed turnout effects in the modern

[19] Likewise, we know that prior to the civil rights movement the disenfranchisement of blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans often had serious consequences for members of each of these communities (Foner 1984, Kousser 1999, Almageur 1994 , Kim 1999).

[20] I also strongly suspect that that turnout has been consequential in the two most recent Presidential races. There is no shortage of commentary pointing to the critical role that the turnout of conservative Evangelicals played in 2000 and 2004. Certainly, in an extremely tight contest, one would think that increased turnout among even small groups would play a role if the groups resided in swing states. Few formal tests of this hypothesis, however, exist.

American context? A range of criticisms of this literature have been advanced. The problem, as the following paragraphs will outline, is that none of these criticisms has led to evidence that refutes the basic conclusion.

One concern has been that existing studies might be understating the effects of turnout by limiting themselves to examining small changes in turnout that occur across any given set of American elections (eg Grofman et al 1999). If one only compares high turnout elections to low turnout elections and ignores the possibility that turnout might be raised further than current levels – as many prominent studies do – then we might minimize the potential for turnout to transform American democracy (DeNardo 1980, Tucker and Vedlitz 1986, Nagel and McNulty 1996, 2000). If we were somehow able to expand turnout more dramatically and get everyone to vote, we might get different results. While alluring, the problem with this hypothesis is that another set of studies has tested it and has found it lacking. Studies that simulate turnout of the entire adult population reach essentially the same conclusions about turnout (Brunell and DiNardo 2004, Highton and Wolfinger 2004, Bennett and Resnick 1990, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Even if everyone voted, outcomes at the national level would be much the same.

Another criticism has been that existing studies are underestimating turnout effects by relying on the expressed preferences of nonvoters. These studies ask nonvoters who they would vote for or what policies they favor and assume that the expressed preferences are their true preferences. But as Lijphart (1997) has noted, it is not clear that nonvoters who are asked their policy opinions and partisan preferences on surveys have really thought about these questions. Their answers may reflect more error than substance. More importantly, when and if these nonvoters are politically mobilized, they may develop class or racial consciousness that pushes

them in a clear political direction. The difference between the choices of voters and the true preferences of nonvoters may thus be much greater than it appears from survey evidence. The problem with this critique is that when habitual 'nonvoters' are mobilized and do on rare occasion go to the polls, their votes are much more likely to reinforce existing electoral outcomes than to overturn them. The reason, as Campbell et al (1960) first noted, is that nonvoters tend to be weak partisans - a characteristic that makes them particularly susceptible to short-term election year effects. As recent tests have shown, these irregular voters tend to jump on the bandwagon and "surge in the direction of the candidate that appears to be winning" (Texeira 1992:87, see also DeNardo 1980). The end result is that increased turnout serves merely to exaggerate existing electoral outcomes.

Knowledgeable readers might also point to a number of more popular publications that do highlight the role of turnout in modern American politics. Scholars from Piven and Cloward (1988) to Wattenberg (2000) and Walters (1988) have made strong claims about the importance of turnout in American politics. The evidence that these studies present is, however, at best anecdotal and at worst distorted. Piven and Cloward (1988), for example, offer persuasive claims about how the disenfranchisement of lower class and minority voters greatly altered political outcomes by lowering class consciousness and inhibiting the creation of a party with lower class interests. These claims are compelling but the authors provide only anecdotal evidence for these connections. Similarly, Wattenberg (2002) offers sweeping conclusions about the importance of turnout but is only able to reach these conclusions by highlighting exceptional elections in American history and by overstating small differences between voters and nonvoters. A number of other studies have argued that minority voter turnout has been critical in American elections (Walters 1988, Lewis and Schneider 1983, Barreto et al 2008, Covarrubias 1998). But

to reach that conclusion, these studies have either had to compare outcomes when all members of a racial group vote to outcomes when no members of that racial group vote or to assess what would have happened if the group in question had altered their preferences. It is possible to point to scenarios where the turnout of one group could affect the outcome of one or two elections but it is harder to show that turnout is generally important in American elections.[21] So far, as best as we can tell, turnout does not seem to be critical in American elections.

Are we looking in the wrong place?

Readers, however, should still be skeptical of these results. All of the research I have cited so far –almost all of the research on this question – focuses on national elections. Does turnout matter in presidential elections? Does turnout shift the balance of power in the Senate or Congress? These are important questions but they cover only a narrow range of American democracy. If there are differences between national politics on one hand and state and local politics, then the fact that we have ignored everything other than national contests may be consequential.

A closer look at the literature does reveal some interesting variation across different levels of American democracy. A series of articles focusing on policy at the sub-national level has been somewhat more encouraging of the turnout hypothesis. Several studies have demonstrated a link between how well different economic classes of voters are represented among a state's voters and at least one policy arena - welfare policy (Hill and Leighley 1992,

[21] There are a range of other studies that have tried to assess bias in national politics in different ways. One line of research has looked at the connection between the behavior of elected officials and the preferences of voters and nonvoters. An early study by Verba and Nie (1972) demonstrated greater congruence between local leaders' views and constituent opinion when voting was higher. More recently, Griffin and Newman (2005, 2008.), have found that in some cases voters' preferences predict Senate roll call behavior better than nonvoters' preferences. It is not, however, clear whether the responsiveness of elected officials is due to the act of voting itself or to all of the other political activities like contacting and campaigning that voters are much more apt to engage in. While engaging in similar analysis, Bartels (2008) finds that higher turnout is not, in fact, responsible for a tighter relationship between public opinion and roll call behavior.

Hill et al 1995, Avery and Peffley 2005, Fellowes and Rowe 2004, Peterson and Rom 1989). Other research has demonstrated a relationship between state level turnout and tax progressiveness (Martinez 1997). And yet another study has found a relationship between voter turnout at the county level and the amount of federal spending going to that county (Martin 2003).

These results have certainly not gone undisputed. Other research has found that class bias in turnout at the state level has no effect on policy (Radcliff and Saiz 1998), that changes in state level turnout have no effect on the results of Senatorial or Gubernatorial elections (Nagel and McNulty 1996), or that increases in minority voter turnout actually lead to a white backlash and less spending on minority preferred outcomes (Radcliff and Saiz 1995). Nevertheless, the positive findings of at least a few studies at the sub-national level hint at two possibilities. First, where we look for the effects of turnout may be important. Second, turnout may be more important outside of national contests. All of this suggests that larger turnout effects may exist at the local level.

Where Turnout Should Matter: The Case of Local Politics

In this book I broaden the research by looking at the implications of voter turnout at the local level. I do not, however, shift the focus to local politics simply because it has not been thoroughly investigated or because a small number of studies outside of national politics have been somewhat more encouraging of the turnout hypothesis. My primary motivation for focusing on the local political arena is theory. I believe that there are two reasons to expect that

turnout will matter more in local contests than in national politics: 1) low turnout in local elections and 2) the uneven geographic distribution of racial and ethnic minorities.[22]

Perhaps the biggest difference between local and national elections is the rate at which citizens participate in each type of contest. Relatively speaking, turnout is exceptionally high in national contests. We may lament low and declining turnout in national elections but it is still the case that in presidential contests roughly seventy percent of eligible voters register to vote and of these registered voters approximately seventy percent actually vote. This is decidedly not the case in other types of elections. Data on municipal elections point to average turnout rates almost half that of national contests (Trounstine 2008, Hampton and Tate 1996, Karnig and Walter 1983). In some cases, local contests regularly fail to draw even ten percent of the voting age population (Hajnal et al 2002).

This low turnout means that the skew in turnout at the sub-national level can be dramatic. Tingsten's (1937) 'law of dispersion' tells us that the possible extent of a skew grows as turnout declines. If the vast majority of citizens participate, turnout is likely to be fairly representative. If, however, only a small fraction of the population participates, the skew can be severe.[23] For this reason, we might be especially concerned about the representativeness of democracy at the

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[22] Aside from the two reasons that are outlined in the text, there are at least two other possible differences between national and local elections that might influence how much turnout affects outcomes: the closeness of electoral contests and the degree to which different groups have different voting preferences. In particular, less competitive elections (larger margins of victory) and less racially divided voting at the national level might reduce the impact of uneven turnout in national elections. However, available evidence suggests that local elections are often uncompetitive with large margins of victory and high rates of incumbent reelection (Wolman et al 1990, Hajnal et al 2002, Trounstine 2006, 2008). In California, for example, 18 percent of all mayoral elections are uncontested. Even in contested races, the average margin of victory is 24 percent (Hajnal et al 2002). Moreover, despite some evidence of polarized voting in local elections (Stein and Kohfeld 1991, Deleon 1991, McCrary 1990), it seems unlikely that racial bloc voting at the local level would regularly exceed the racially polarized vote at the national level (Hajnal 2007, Carmines and Stimson 1989).

[23] Hamilton (1971) was perhaps the first to point out this pattern in American elections. Although his analysis was based only on one election in Toledo, Ohio, he did find that, "the association of turnout and social status was far greater [in the Toledo primary] than in presidential elections" (1140).

local level. Bias could exist in any American election but it could be the most severe at the local level.

The second reason turnout could matter more in local elections is the uneven geographic distribution of the population. Segregation by race and other demographic characteristics means that groups that make up a tiny fraction of the national population and thus have a tiny impact on national contests can make up a substantial share of the population within smaller geographic boundaries and thus can be major players within cities, districts, or states.

Only a few very large groups can have a substantial impact on the national vote. Welfare recipients, for example, number about 5.5 million – a large number but still a tiny percentage of the national population - two percent. Whether their votes are added to the presidential vote tally is almost trivial. A similar story can be told for almost any disadvantaged minority group at the national level. Looking exclusively at national elections diminishes the role that small minority groups can play.

A very different story can be told at the local level. Since segregation is often quite pronounced, small groups that are essentially inconsequential at the national level can be significant players in the localities where they live. Latino impact, for example, is much more likely to be felt in cities like Los Angeles, Miami, and San Antonio, where Latinos make up half or more of the population, than it is nationally where Latinos make up only 12 percent of the population. This pattern exists for all kinds of groups but it is the most pronounced for the demographic groups that are the most segregated. In America, that means racial and ethnic groups. Segregation by income, education, and other measures of well-being occurs but segregation by race and ethnicity is much more severe (Oliver 2001). According to Massey and Hajnal (1995), half of all blacks would have to move to a different city to achieve an even racial

distribution across city lines. Even Latinos and Asian Americans, who are much more likely to live in diverse neighborhoods tend be located in cities and municipalities that have dense minority populations (Massey 2001). If we have reservations about the effects of a skew in the electorate we need to look at these sub-national political units.

Evidence at the local level

There may be strong reasons to suspect that voter turnout plays a more critical role in local politics but empirical evidence addressing this topic is sparse. At the same time that low voter turnout in national politics has garnered considerable attention and concern, much lower turnout in municipal elections has often been ignored. Recently, there have been some exceptions. Leighley (2001) and Verba et al (1995) detail participation rates for different racial, ethnic, and demographic groups in local elections and Trounstine (2008), Oliver (2001), Bridges (1997), Hajnal and Lewis (2003), Wood (2002), and Caren (2007) all examine the causes of low voter turnout in local elections.[24] But none of this research examines the question at hand. There is almost no research that looks systematically across cities at the *consequences* of a skewed electorate at the local level. We simply do not know if turnout matters at this level.

This is not to say that urban scholars have been mute on the question. There is a robust debate about how open the urban political arena is and how much different voices in the local community are heard. A long line of pluralists starting with Dahl (1961) have claimed that the mobilization of residents to vote can, potentially, shift local political outcomes. Since Dahl published his seminal work on New Haven, research by Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984), Erie's (1988), and Bridges (1997) has, in different ways, also highlighted the potential of voter

[24] Prior to these studies there was little research on the nature and consequences of low voter turnout in local elections. The only other published article on bias in local voter turnout was written over thirty years ago and it only looked at one city (Alford and Lee 1968).

turnout. Although Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984) did not focus on voter turnout, they did link other forms of political participation - especially protest activity - to increased levels of black political representation. Erie's (1988) work on the Irish machines of the 19th and 20th centuries suggested that the active exclusion of blacks and new immigrant groups from the political arena allowed the Irish to channel resources to their own community. And in perhaps the most relevant research Bridges (1997) found that low turnout cities in the west tended to be dominated by middle-class interests.

On the other side of the debate stands a similarly long line of elite theorists who maintain that local government decisions would not change much even if more people voted. The view here is that local governments are driven by economic considerations while political inputs – including voting – make little difference (Peterson 1981, Tiebout 1956, Logan and Molotch 1987, Buchanan 1971). Peterson (1981), in particular, argued that a city's policy choices are constrained by competition with other cities over mobile capital and labor. As such, cities do what is economically wise and not necessarily what a new crop of voters wants.[25]

Unfortunately, neither side has been able to offer anything that directly tests the turnout hypothesis. At most, pluralists have illustrated a correlation between turnout and outcomes in a small set of cases. Elite theorists have been able to document the effects of economic constraints on local policy but they have not been able to rule out the effects of turnout. None of the studies that supports an elitist view of local politics has included political variables like voter turnout in their empirical models. Even Peterson (1981) readily admits that economic competition represents only one part of the story of urban politics. In short, while there is a heated debate about how local government works, there is little in the way of clear tests.

[25] In line with this reasoning, other researchers have identified a large number of cities where politics is dominated by a pro-growth focus and spending policies that encourage economic development (Logan and Molotch 1987, Elkin 1987).

Research Design

To see if and how turnout matters in the local level, the rest of the book focuses on three aspects of the local political arena: 1) mayoral elections, 2) city council elections, and 3) local government spending patterns. The first part of the analysis simulates even turnout across racial and ethnic groups to see how it would affect outcomes in mayoral elections in major cities. Does even turnout lead to different winners? In the second part of the analysis I examine the link between turnout and racial and ethnic representation on city councils nationwide. Does higher turnout lead to more equitable racial representation? And finally, in the third stage of the analysis, I look at the relationship between local voter turnout and local government spending patterns. Does higher turnout lead to spending on policies that minorities favor?

This particular set of tests was chosen with two purposes in mind. First, I wanted to see if turnout mattered in critical areas of local politics. Thus, each of the three tests examines one of the most important aspects of local politics. For most municipalities, the mayoralty and the city council are the two most prominent offices in local government. The mayor is often the symbolic leader of the city. Even when the mayor's official powers are not extensive, the public often views the mayor as the most important actor in city politics. The city council is almost always the central law-making body (Pelissero and Krebs 2003).[26] Similarly, how much money local governments spend on different sets of policies is one of the most revealing measures of a government's priorities. It is also a window into who is winning and losing in the local democratic process. Unless a local government allocates sizeable economic resources to a policy, that policy is likely to have little impact and any group that favored that policy is likely to

[26] Most U.S. cities have a council/city manager form of government and even in cities with mayors, the mayor seldom has unilateral control over the budget (Hajnal and Lewis 2003).

lose out. If turnout can lead to real change in these three aspects of local government, it truly matters.

Second, these three aspects of local government assess several key dimensions of representation. This is critical if we want to come up with an overall measure of racial and ethnic minority influence in the local political arena. In particular, these three areas of local government allow us to gauge both descriptive and substantive representation – two very different but critical aspects of minority representation (Pitkin 1967, Guinier 1992, Mansbridge 1999, Thernstrom 1987, Swain 1995, Tate 2003, Lublin 1997).

The election of racial and ethnic minorities to the mayor's office and to the city council represents the most obvious and perhaps the most important measure of minority success. Obtaining descriptive representation in key offices such as the mayoralty and the city council is important for the minority community for reasons that range from wholly symbolic to concrete. By demonstrating the openness of a democracy to the minority community, descriptive representation can be critical in creating legitimacy and trust in the political system and in fostering the participation of minorities in that system (Tate 2003, Mansbridge 1999, Bobo and Gilliam 1989). Descriptive representation can also be a powerful tool to demonstrate the competence of minority leaders and the compatibility of minority interests with the interests of the majority white community (Hajnal 2006). More concretely and perhaps most notably, descriptive representation is seen by many as a necessary first step for growth in substantive representation (Whitby 1998, Kerr and Mladenka 1994 but see Hero and Tolbert 1995, Swain 1995). For all of these reasons, the election of minorities to office is likely to represent an important gain for the minority community.

In examining the vote by race in mayoral elections, I am also able to get at a second core measure of minority representation, the success of minority voters. For each election, I assess the extent to which minority voters end up on the winning or losing side of the vote. Minority voters who supported a victorious candidate can be seen as winners. Minority voters who supported a losing candidate can be viewed as losers in that particular contest. This is an important alternative to descriptive representation because it counts and considers the success or failure of each individual voter and therefore makes no assumptions about which candidate is the minority favored candidate. Although empirical studies show that most minority voters tend to prefer minority candidates in most bi-racial elections, it is not always the case (McCrary 1990, Hero 1989, Williams 1990).[27] Moreover, in races without minority candidates, the minority vote can be quite divided. By counting how regularly minority voters end up on the winning side of the vote, we may get a cleaner, more objective measure of how well a democratic system represents minority preferences.

Looking at voters and their outcomes rather than at elected officials also has the added benefit of bringing us closer to legal definitions of minority rights. The Voting Rights Act and the courts at various points in recent decades have made it clear that one of the most important rights racial and ethnic minorities have in American democracy is the right "to elect a representative of their choice" (Section II of the Voting Rights Act). This definition has led to a focus on 'minority vote dilution' and efforts to identify locales where minority voters repeatedly lose out. Thus, by counting votes and adding up winners and losers by race and ethnicity, we come close to an assessment of the core legal metric.

[27] Even in the cases where most minorities favor the minority candidate support is usually far from unanimous. Many minority voters will end up as losers even when a minority candidate wins.

Finally, through an analysis of how well local government spending patterns mirror the policy priorities of minority constituents, I provide a third measure of the representation of racial and ethnic minorities. Although election outcomes are often critical, they do not always lead to real change in minority well being. Even if an elected leader tries to represent minority interests, she may not always be able to do so.[28] Likewise, ending up on the losing side of an election does not always mean failure for minority voters. Leaders can be responsive to voters who voted against them.[29] Thus, if we want to know whether minorities are gaining and turnout is affecting the welfare of different groups, we need to look not just at electoral outcomes but also at policy outcomes. It is what a government does, not who is in office, that is perhaps the most unambiguous indication of whether minority preferences are being represented. Thus, in a last test of how turnout affects minority representation, I look to see whether the spending priorities of cities match the expressed policy preferences of most members of the minority community more regularly in cities with higher turnout than in cities with lower turnout. I focus on spending patterns because changes in how cities raise and spend their money is arguably the most important way local governments can affect policy. Unless a local government actually commits substantial economic resources to a policy, that policy is likely to have a marginal effect on the well-being of different respondents. Thus, the more that spending patterns follow the public opinion of minority constituents, the more minorities can be seen as being well represented.[30]

[28] Particularly, in the case of minority leaders who are elected to legislatures or other offices where they are in the minority, getting a pro-minority agenda passed may prove to be difficult (Guinier 1994).
[29] By turning out to vote in great numbers minorities and other disadvantaged groups could become a large enough threat that they motivate leaders to be more responsive to minority interests – regardless of the direction of the minority vote.
[30] The main problem with this last measure is in measuring minority policy preferences. When the minority community is divided in its preferences and when polls are not available to measure minority preferences, it is difficult to intuit minority interests and thus difficult to gauge minority representation. Data on minority spending preferences is presented later in the book.

Each of these tests assesses a slightly different aspect of representation and each alone is insufficient to fully understand how well minority interests are being represented in local democracy. Combined, however, they present a fairly complete picture of how well minorities are doing in democracy and of how much that success is affected by turnout.

Data

Testing the role of turnout across these different aspects of the local political arena requires a range of data sets. For the mayoral simulations, I collected data on the vote by race in the nation's twenty largest cities for elections between 1990 and 2000. In order to simulate what would happen in these elections under conditions of even turnout across racial and ethnic groups, I needed the vote by race. I acquire data on the vote by race from exit polls, ecological inference, or homogeneous precinct analysis, and data on the racial and ethnic makeup of each city from the Census. To gauge the effects of uneven turnout, I simply compare the actual election outcome with estimates of what would have happened if members of all racial and ethnic groups voted at the same rate.

To see how turnout affects racial and ethnic representation on city councils, I acquired data on the racial makeup of the city council, voter turnout, and local institutional structure for a nationally representative sample of cities from the 1986 International City/County Manager's Association survey (ICMA). The survey is mailed to city clerks in every city in the United States with over 2,500 residents and has a response rate of 66 percent. Although there are more recent ICMA surveys, the 1986 survey is the only ICMA survey that asks specifically about local voter turnout. The 1986 ICMA survey reports figures for registration and turnout in the most recent city council election, the number of city council members who are white, African American, Latino, and Asian American, and the institutional and electoral structure of the city.

With this data, one can determine whether cities with higher turnout have more equitable racial representation.

For the analysis of local government spending patterns, I merged the same ICMA data with data on local government spending from the 1987 Census of Governments. In the analysis, I break down government spending and fiscal policy into different areas that are more or less popular among different segments of the city population. Specifically, public opinion survey data consistently show that poor, minority voters are especially concerned about redistribution and social services, while whites and the middle class are especially concerned with attracting businesses and others aspects of development, and improving their quality of life through better parks and recreation and easier transportation. To mirror these preferences, I break down city spending into three standard areas: 1) redistributive spending, 2) developmental spending, and 3) allocational spending. If local governments respond to who actually turns out to vote, increases in voter turnout that add more disadvantaged, minority voters into the electorate should lead to greater redistributive spending and less developmental and allocational spending.

This nationwide data is supplemented with data from a 2001 Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) survey of all city clerks in California.[31] By performing essentially the same set of tests on this PPIC survey data, one can determine whether voter turnout affects city council representation and local government spending patterns for a more recent period of time.

The main advantage of using this diverse range of data is that the results, if confirmed by all of the different tests, can be seen as particularly robust. Each of the different tests of the turnout hypothesis differs not only in terms of focus - different aspects of local politics and different aspects of minority representation - but also in terms of analytic method, time period, and geography.

[31] For more details on the PPIC survey see the appendix and Chapter Four.

The analytic differences are important and worth highlighting. The mayoral analysis simulates even turnout across race and ethnicity while the city council analysis simply compares high and low turnout cities. The former can be seen as a measure of the upper limits of how much turnout could affect outcomes in the future. By contrast, the city council analysis is a measure of actual rather than potential turnout affects. How much do existing differences in turnout affect current outcomes? The different time periods that are focused on in the analysis are also significant. The mayoral data and the California data cover recent elections while the ICMA council data dates back to 1986. Finally, the differences in geography are equally compelling. The mayoral data covers only the largest cities, while the ICMA council data covers all kinds of municipalities across the nation, and the PPIC data includes almost every city in California. If turnout matters across this range of data sets, times, places, and methods, then there is little doubt that it matters in local politics.

Chapter Two. Turnout Could Matter at the Local Level

In the last chapter I suggested that existing studies have generally been looking in the wrong place for evidence that turnout matters. If uneven turnout leads to skewed outcomes at any level in American democracy, it is likely to be at the local level. In this chapter I begin to investigate this possibility. The goal here is not show that turnout matters at the local level. Rather the purpose of this chapter is simply to show that turnout *could* matter there.

For turnout to matter at *any* level, three conditions are necessary. First, turnout must be skewed. Some groups must participate less than other groups. This, I suggested, was more likely at the local level where turnout is exceptionally low. Second, groups that vote less must have different preferences from those that vote more. Only if nonvoters favor different choices can their entry into an electoral contest affect the outcome. Whether these kinds of divisions are greater at the local level than other levels is unclear. Third, and finally, the groups who vote less regularly must be large enough to have a say if they did vote. I suggested that this is also a condition that is more likely at the local level given the uneven geographic distribution of the population. In the cities where minorities actually live, they should make up a substantial portion of the electorate and should be large enough to at least theoretically help determine the outcome of the election.

In the rest of the chapter, I demonstrate empirically that each of these conditions is present in the local political environment. Since all three are present in local elections and since two of the three are particularly acute at the local level, we might find absolutely no turnout effects at the national level while at the same time uncovering substantial turnout effects at the local level.

Low Turnout at the Local Level

We know that local elections experience exceptionally low turnout. All available evidence indicates that few people go to the polls in local electoral contests. Data from the most recent nationwide survey of city clerks – those who record and report local participation rates – indicate that nationally only about 27 percent of voting age adults participate in city council elections.[32] Data from more recent California elections suggest that turnout for mayoral elections is no better.[33] Across the state, mayoral elections drew an average of only 28 percent of the voting age population to the polls.[34] Even when we look only at registered voters, it is clear that local elections fail to draw most potential voters. Nationwide, the ICMA data indicate that only 39 percent of registered voters participated in the typical council election.[35] Moreover, these figures likely represent the high end of the spectrum. Anecdotal evidence from other kinds of local elections - from the school board to county supervisors – suggests that voter apathy is much greater in other kinds of local contests.[36] At the local level where policies are most likely to be implemented and where a majority of the nation's civic leaders are being elected, important public policy decisions are being made without the input of most of the affected residents.

Local voter turnout also appears to be declining. The best data we have indicate that participation in local contests has declined precipitously since the 1930s. In 1936, turnout of registered voters in local contests averaged 62 percent. That figure dropped to 52 percent in 1962, 45 percent in 1975, and as already noted, 39 percent in 1986 – the last year for which we

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[32] To get this overall measure of local voter turnout, we utilize responses from the 1986 ICMA survey of city clerks – the most recent nationally representative survey with data on aggregate turnout and registration figures.
[33] Turnout figures are derived from the 2001 PPIC survey which went out to every city clerk in the state and had a response rate of 84 percent.
[34] The same California data indicate that city council turnout averaged a meager 28 percent in 2001.
[35] The California data are only a little more encouraging. Across that state, 48 percent of registered voters turned out in council elections. The figure for mayoral elections was 44 percent.
[36] A study of Michigan school districts in 2000 found that registered voter turnout averaged only 7.8 percent across the 477 districts (Weimer 2001).

have nationally representative data (Karnig and Walter 1983, 1993). A survey of a smaller sample of cities suggests that turnout dropped even further in the 1990s – and averaged only 34 percent in the latter half of the decade (Wood 2002). The vote may be the primary means through which citizens communicate information about their interests and needs but at the local level, that voice is exceptionally weak and getting weaker.

Participation in local contests also falls well below participation in national and statewide contests. All of these local turnout figures are significantly lower than turnout figures for national contests. In the last two decades, over 60 percent of the voting age population (71 percent of registered voters) has turned out in the typical presidential contest. Figures for mid-year Congressional elections are only marginally lower – with about 40 percent of adults turning out (54 percent of registered voters) in the average case (McDonald and Popkin 2001). Although some cities generate turnout numbers that are equal to or even occasionally exceed turnout in national contests, in the typical case local turnout is half that of national elections.[37] This suggests that there is reason to be especially concerned about turnout effects at the local level. With such a small proportion of the local electorate making it into the voting booth, the probability that the local electorate is strongly skewed is high.

Voters Look Different

To determine if, in fact, local voters are different from local non-voters, I utilize data from the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study (ACPS). The ACPS survey contains measures of local and national voter participation as well as a range of questions that assess individual demographic characteristics. Importantly, it has 2517 respondents across almost 1000

[37] For a third of the cities responding to the ICMA survey, turnout fell below 17 percent of the eligible adult population – less than one quarter of the national turnout rate.

different communities in the country.[38] This distribution across different localities makes it an ideal data set to assess the skew in local voter turnout across the nation.

In Figure 2.1, I examine bias in the local electorate across a wide range of demographic characteristics that have been shown to be related to voter turnout in other circumstances (Verba et al 1995, Rosenstone and Hanson 1993). The figure presents self-reported local voting rates for voting age adults.[39] Since individuals over-report voting, the participation rates for all groups are inflated (Sigelman 1982, Ragsdale and Rusk 1993). However, since racial and ethnic minorities are particularly likely to over-report voting, the figure may, if anything, understate the actual racial skew in local voter turnout (Shaw et al 2000, Abramson and Clagett 1984, 1992 but see Silver et al 1986).[40]

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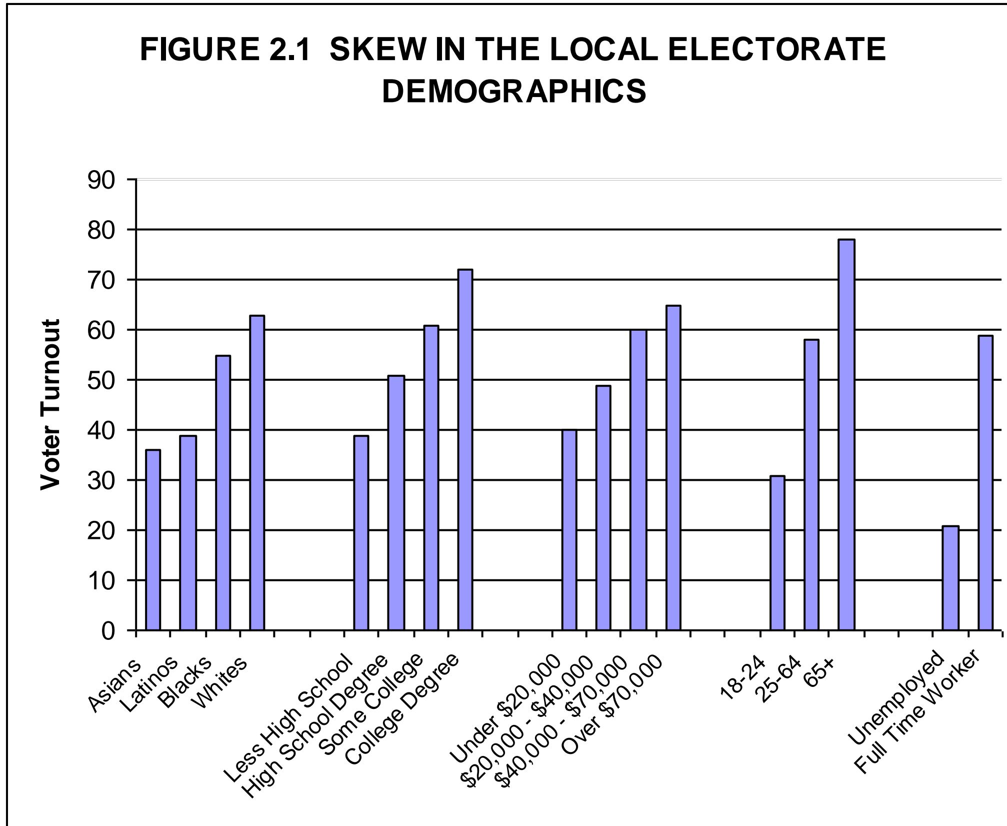
[38] The localities included in the sample are reasonably representative both institutionally and demographically of all of the nation's localities.

[39] We gauge local turnout with responses to the question, "Now thinking about local elections that have been held since you were old enough to vote. Have you voted in all of them, in most of them, in some of them, rarely voted in them, or have you never voted in a local election?" Those who report voting "always" or "often" are coded as local voters. As a check on the robustness of our results, we also re-ran all of our analysis with a question asking about voter participation in the most recent local election and found that the results were basically the same. Since the ACPS survey design over sampled minorities and political activists, we reran the analysis with the data weighted to attempt to get a nationally representative sample but found that the results were essentially the same (see Verba et al 1995 for details on the sampling and weighting procedures). Finally, we repeated the analysis using a question on local voting in the General Social Survey. The same pattern emerged from this alternate data set.

[40] Silver and his colleagues find that the well educated are also particularly apt to over-report voting so the skew by education could be less severe than what we see here (Silver et al 1986).



The figure reveals that there is a severe demographic skew to the local electorate. Those from relatively upper status groups (whites, the well educated, those with higher incomes, and the employed) report voting in local elections at rates that are up to three times as high as members of lower status groups. Across all of demographic characteristics the smallest gap between the most advantaged group and the most disadvantaged group is 19 percentage points. The largest gap in turnout is a whopping 39 points (between full-time workers and the unemployed). This tells us that local voters do not look at all like local non-voters.

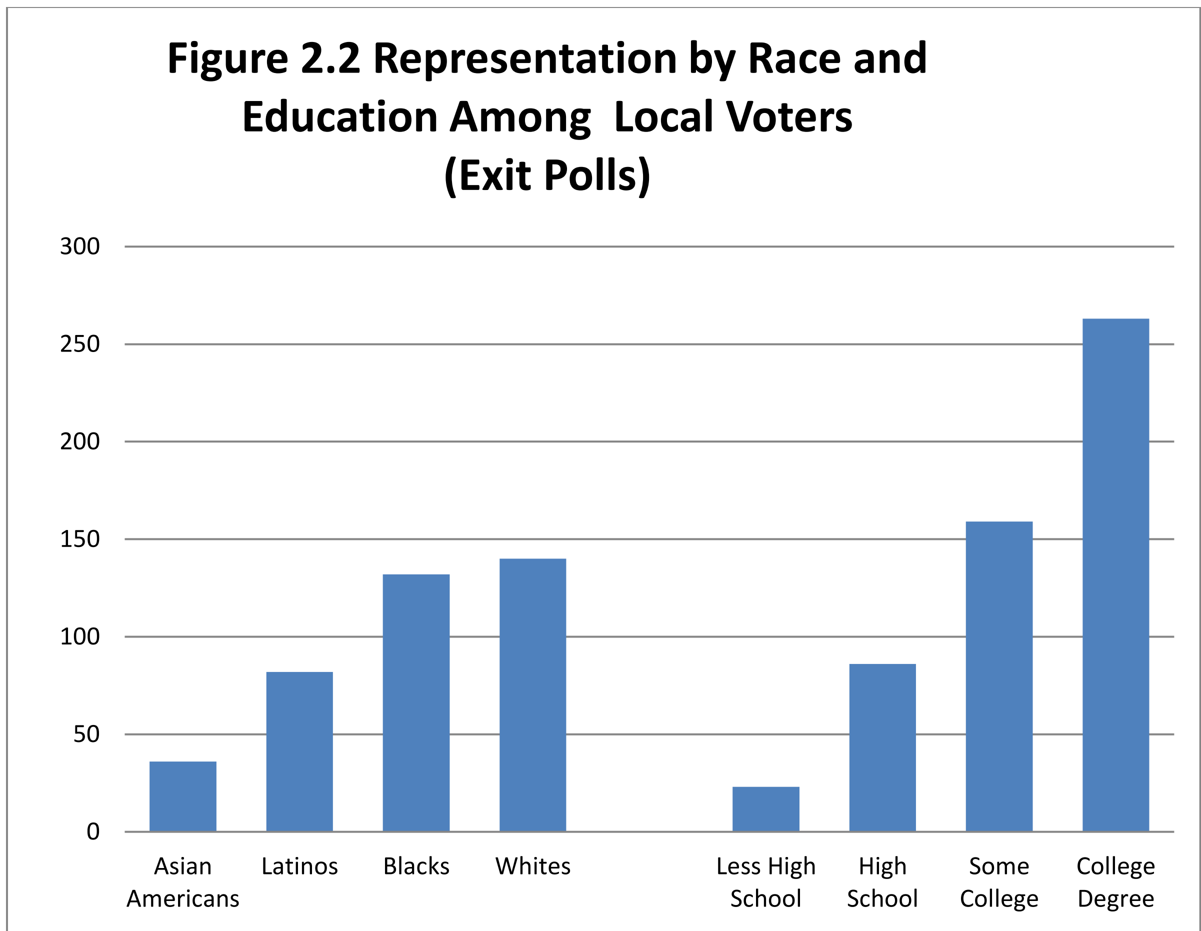
The gap by race and ethnicity is particularly important. Whites report voting almost twice as regularly as Latinos and Asian Americans. Fully 63 percent of whites report voting in local elections compared to only 39 percent for Latinos and 36 percent for Asian Americans. African Americans fall somewhere in the middle with a reported voting rate of 8 percentage

points below whites. If the vote does matter, whites will be on the winning side of democracy and racial and ethnic minorities on the losing side.

To test the robustness of the results, I repeated the analysis with the General Social Survey (GSS), the only other nationally representative survey that has asked about local voter participation. The GSS does not have the same distribution of respondents across as many municipalities as the ACPS but it did ask about local voter turnout and it has questions on the same range of demographic characteristics. The basic patterns evident in the GSS data closely match the patterns illustrated here.

Since these figures are based on self-reported turnout and since we know that people over-report voting, I also collected data from as many mayoral election exit polls as possible to see if actual turnout patterns matched reported turnout patterns. For each of the twenty mayoral elections for which I was able to acquire exit poll data, I compared the makeup of the voting population based on exit poll data with the makeup of the city population based on Census data.[41] The average level of over or underrepresentation of each group among voters is displayed in Figure 2.2.

[41] These twenty elections are from five cities and span from 1981 to 2005. They cannot be viewed as representative of all mayoral elections but there is no obvious reason to expect the skew in voter turnout to be abnormally high or low in these cities and elections.



The exit poll data confirm the basic skew that was evident in self-reported voter turnout. As the figure illustrates, across these mayoral elections whites and those from upper status groups are greatly overrepresented among voters while Asian Americans, Latinos and those with less advantaged backgrounds are grossly underrepresented. The skew in these local contests is, once again, severe. Among racial groups, Asian Americans are the worst off. On average, Asian Americans represented only about a third as high a proportion of the voters in these cities as they did among the adult populations of these cities. The figure for Latinos was higher - 82 percent - but still demonstrates substantial underrepresentation. On the other pole, whites were about 1.5

times better represented among voters than they were among the adult population.[42] The figures for education are just as dramatic. Those with less than a high school education represented less than a third as high a proportion of voters as they did in the general adult population. By contrast, residents with more than a college degree were well over twice as well represented among voters than among adults. By every test, there is a severe skew to the local electorate.[43]

Different Preferences

The second requirement for turnout to matter in local politics is that the preferences of groups that vote less regularly must differ from the preferences of groups that vote more regularly. Unfortunately, systematic data on local voting patterns by race is limited.[44] There are several studies with data on the black-white divide. In most cases that research has revealed major divisions and regular conflict between these two groups (Lieske and Hillard 1984, Stein

[42] Put another way, Latinos made up almost 30 percent of the adult population of these cities but only 14 percent of the voters in the exit polls. Asian Americans made up 7.5 percent of the adult population and only 2.6 percent of the voting population. By contrast, whites, who were greatly overrepresented among voters, made up 57 percent of voters compared to 39 percent of adult population.

[43] Whether the skew in local elections is more severe than in national contests is more difficult to determine. We know that a lot of people lie about voting. It is also readily apparent that many more people lie about voting in local contests than in national elections. In the ACPS, for example, 69.6 percent of the respondents say they voted in the most recent municipal election, while 71.6 percent say they voted in the last presidential contest. Given that turnout in Presidential elections roughly doubles turnout at the local level, we know that local turnout is being much more regularly overstated. Given that problem, one cannot simply compare the skew in self-reported turnout at the local level to the skew in self-reported turnout at the national level. Instead, one needs to compare confirmed turnout at the two levels. One way to do that is to compare the skew in exit polls for local and national contests. That comparison strongly suggests that turnout is more skewed at the local level. In particular, when I compared the average skew in the 20 mayoral elections for which I have exit poll data to the average skew in the entire Voter News Survey series (a series of 6 exit polls covering 12 years and including over 100,000 voters), I found that whites were 40 percent better represented among local voters than among the local population but only 7 percent better represented among national voters than among the national population. Similarly, Americans with more than a college degree were 2.6 times better represented among local voters (than local adults) but only 1.9 times better represented among national voters (than national adults).

[44] We might also be interested in preferences on local policy questions. Surveys on local policy preference are more readily available and they do reveal fairly clear racial divisions in terms of public opinion. As we will detail in Chapter Five, these surveys generally suggest that there are reasonably strong differences of opinion between racial and ethnic minorities on one hand and whites on the other (Welch et al 2001, Lovrich 1974, Deleon 1991, and Clark and Ferguson 1983). In particular, these surveys show that minorities tend to favor redistributive spending while whites emphasize development and city services.

and Kohfeld 1991, McCrary 1990, Loewen 1990, Hajnal 2007).[45] But it is not at all clear how well data from a black-white contests apply to the much more complex, multi-racial environment that often exists in most cities today. On this latter environment, data is sparse. Studies that examine inter-group voting patterns are generally anecdotal in nature and thus highly speculative. The data often come from a particular election, from one or two cities, or at best from a series of elections in one city (Deleon 1991, Jackson et al 1994, Kim 2000, Horton 1995, Jones-Correa 2001).

Clearly we need better data to answer this question. With that need in mind, I collected data on racial voting patterns across a range of mayoral elections. Specifically, I attempted to collect the vote by race for all primary and general elections in the nation's 20 largest cities for 1990s and early 2000s. This process has led to a data set of 46 elections that represent a range of cities and electoral contexts.

The data are far from perfect. For one, 46 elections across 20 cities is a small number of cases. Nevertheless, it is a major improvement from the case study nature of previous research.[46] The data set is also incomplete. Data on racial voting patterns were not available for about half of the elections in these cities over this time period. This means that the divisions we see in these elections may not be fully representative of even these major cities.[47] Another concern is that the estimates of the vote by race that I use are imprecise. To assemble the data, I had to use

[45] There is also considerable evidence that different groups feel threatened by each other and firmly believe that they are in competition in the local arena (Bobo and Johnson 2000, Bobo and Hutchings 1996, Cummings and Lambert 1997, Hochschild and Rogers 1999, Oliver and Wong 2003, Jackson et al 1994, Kaufmann 2000, Tedin and Murray 1994).

[46] The cities in the data set are fairly representative of major cities in terms of institutional structure and economic standing. They are not, however, fully representative of all cities in the U.S. In particular, these 20 cities have larger minority populations than the typical city in the nation.

[47] To try to address this issue, we re-ran the analysis with a smaller, but complete set of elections – namely the most recent contest in the ten largest cities. The patterns evident in this smaller data set are nearly identical to the patterns we see across the larger set of elections.

different methods for estimating the vote by race in different elections.[48] The data also only provide insight into mayoral politics. Divisions could certainly be more pronounced or more limited in other types of local contests – especially when those cases involve elections where different racial groups are isolated in distinct districts. Despite these caveats, the vote in these big city mayoral elections represents a potentially valuable tool that is likely to be more telling than other measures that are currently available.

The vote reveals that local elections are fairly sharply divided by race and ethnicity. Those who do vote regularly – whites – often have different preferences from those that vote less regularly – racial and ethnic minorities. As Table 2.1 illustrates, across the entire set of elections, there is a considerable gap between the vote of the white electorate on one hand and the vote of the black, Latino, and Asian American electorate on the other. The black-white gap, as one might expect is the largest. In the typical case, the percentage of blacks who supported the winning candidate differed by 42 points from the percentage of white voters supporting that same candidate. This grows to an alarming 52 point gap in elections with only two candidates – about half the contests. Measured another way, across the entire set of elections, the black vote was significantly and negatively correlated with the white vote ($r=-.24$, $p<.05$). In short, it was unusual when black and white voters wanted the same things at the local level.

Table 2.1. The White-Nonwhite Divide in Local Politics

	Average Divide in Mayoral Vote	
	All Elections	Two Candidate Elections
White-Black	42	52
White-Latino	16	26
White-Asian American	12	14

[48] For most cities, we rely on exit polls but in other cases we employ ecological inference using precinct data. In other cases, we rely on homogenous precinct analysis. And in still others, we use polls immediately prior to the election to get the vote by race. None of these estimates is error free and the margin of error is sometimes large.

The Latino-white and Asian American-white divides were substantially smaller. In fact correlations show that white voters often agreed with Latino and Asian American voters. Across the entire set of elections, the white vote was fairly closely correlated with the Asian American vote ($r=.73$, $p<.01$) and the Latino vote ($r=.64$, $p<.01$). At the same time, differences between these groups were apparent. In the typical contest, the racial divide between Latinos and whites was 16 percentage points (24 points in contests involving two candidates) and for Asian Americans and whites it was 12 points (14 points in contests involving two candidates). And there were certainly cases where the gap was much greater. The white-Latino divide grew as high as 68 percentage points in one case and the white-Asian American divide ranged up to a 48 point gap.

Judged by these electoral contests – albeit a limited set of elections in a small number of cities – the local political arena generates considerable racial and ethnic division. Those who vote regularly often want different candidates to govern than those who vote less regularly. The white-black divide is certainly much greater than the white-Latino and white-Asian American divides but the fact that mayoral elections often pit whites against different minority communities means that turnout could matter in a large number of contests.[49]

The relatively large racial divides that are apparent in mayoral contests begin to provide an answer to another critical question about racial and ethnic groups. Namely, can the four racial and ethnic groups that I focus on in this book really be viewed as cohesive voting blocs? Are

[49] Although the results in Table 2.1 suggest that each racial and ethnic group in America has distinct preferences, further analysis of these and other racial divisions reveal important variation in the size of the racial divide. The first point that emerges from this research is that intra-minority divisions are also stark. In the typical election, the percentage of blacks who support the winning candidate differs by 33 points from the percentage of Latino voters supporting that same candidate. Black voters also differ sharply from Asian American voters (a 24 point gap across all elections). These pronounced intra-minority divisions make talk of a rainbow coalition among non-white voters seem overly optimistic. The other story that emerges is the possibility of a coalition between whites, Latinos, and Asian Americans. The divides between these three groups are, at least relatively speaking, small. Finally, patterns in the vote reveal the distinctiveness of the black community. To a certain extent, local elections are pitting African American voters against voters from the other three racial and ethnic groups.

Latinos, Asian Americans, African Americans, and whites each too divided by national origin, class, immigrant status, and any number of other splits to be viewed as a legitimate voting bloc? In Table 2.1, I directly assess intra-group dynamics by looking at voting cohesion in the same set of mayoral elections. The table measures group cohesion in two ways. In contests with two candidates, the table displays the percentage of voters from each racial/ethnic group that supported the group's preferred candidate. If a group was wholly united, the measure would equal 100. A totally divided community would score 50. Cohesion is slightly more difficult to measure in multi-candidate contests. Here the measure is the degree to which each racial/ethnic group diverged from evenly splitting their vote across the candidates in the election. In a contest with three candidates, for example, this measures how much more or less than one-third of the vote each racial and ethnic group's most popular candidate received from members of the group. Since this measure is more difficult to interpret and can, in contests with several non-viable candidates, overstate cohesion, the primary focus should be on two candidate contests. Nevertheless, it is important to note that, as Table 2.2 illustrates, the pattern across the two measures is almost identical.

Table 2.2. Intra-group Cohesion in City Politics

	Mean Percent on Same Side (Two Candidate Elections)	Mean Distance from an Evenly Divided Vote (Multi-Candidate Elections)
African Americans	83%	24%
Latinos	70	20
Whites	69	18
Asian Americans	64	12

The main conclusion to emerge from this analysis is that it is possible to talk about racial group voting blocs.[50] Even the least most cohesive group, Asian Americans, votes together

[50] The other conclusion that is evident from Table 3.3 is that cohesion varies substantially across groups. On one end of the spectrum, African American voters are almost totally unified. There is some difference of opinion within the black community but at the local level, it is generally clear who the 'black' candidate is and who the 'black'

much more than chance would suggest. In the typical two candidate contests, 64 percent of Asian American voters favor the group's preferred candidate. This is far from a wholly united vote but it is also far from evenly divided. Moreover, Latinos, whites, and African American are all more apt to vote as a bloc. For Latinos the figure is 70 percent, for African Americans it is an impressive 83 percent, and for whites it is 69 percent. These results suggest that America's four main racial and ethnic groups do represent somewhat cohesive communities. Mayoral voting is at least in part the story of four different racial and ethnic groups sorting out their preferences.

This cohesion is perhaps most surprising for Asian Americans. The fact that only about a third of the Asian American electorate opposes the 'Asian American' candidate in these contests means that in the arena of urban politics, the Asian American community is often able to at least partially overcome differences of national origin group, immigration status, and socioeconomic status. We still cannot think of Asian Americans as a monolithic voting bloc but we should probably consider them as more of a voting bloc than many accounts suggest (Lien et al 2004, Espiritu 1992).[51]

Combining the results on group cohesion and the table on inter-group divisions, it is evident that the four racial and ethnic communities represent fairly cohesive groups with markedly different preferences from each other. All of this gives us even more reason to believe that turnout could matter in the local arena.

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candidate is not and the vast majority of the community supports their group's candidate. Despite growing class divisions and by some accounts, the diminishing importance of race, electoral politics still appears to bring blacks together. Latinos, the next most cohesive bloc of voters vote together about 70 percent of the time in elections with two candidates. For an ethnic group that is often viewed as being sharply divided by national origin group and immigrant status, cohesion in the voting booth is surprisingly high. The issues, candidates, and choices that are put forward in local contests enable Latino voters to overcome at least some of their internal divisions. Finally, whites are essentially in the middle with Asian Americans on the far end of the spectrum.

[51] This is not to say that all contests bring Asian American voters together. There is considerable variation in the results and several of the elections do lead to a fairly divided Asian American vote. But these atypical contests do not refute the underlying cohesiveness of Asian Americans in the typical contest.

Minorities are large enough to have a say

For turnout to matter at the local level one last condition must hold. Groups that vote less regularly must be sufficiently large to influence the outcome. Nationwide we know that this is seldom the case. Since racial and ethnic minorities make up a small fraction of the national electorate, their vote in national contests is almost immaterial. But what about at the local level? Does the uneven geographic distribution of the population make a difference? Are racial and ethnic minorities numerous enough to determine electoral outcomes were they to participate more regularly?

Most Americans know that neighborhood level segregation is often very pronounced in the nation's cities (Massey and Denton 1993). Fewer realize that segregation by city or municipality is also extensive.[52] By coupling ACPS respondents with Census data on the racial demographics of their municipalities, I can calculate the city demographics for the typical minority resident.[53] The results, which are displayed in Figure 2.3, indicate that the uneven geographic distribution of the population has the potential to give racial and ethnic minorities a larger voice in the local political arena. As Figure 2.3 shows, nationwide, the typical Latino lives in a city that is 39 percent Hispanic. Similarly, the average African American lives in a city that is 35 percent black. For Asian Americans the figure is 7 percent.[54] Unlike the national level, where whites make up the vast majority of the population, at the local level, at least in cities where minorities live, they make up a sizeable share of the electorate. Whether or not they vote could have real consequences at the local level.

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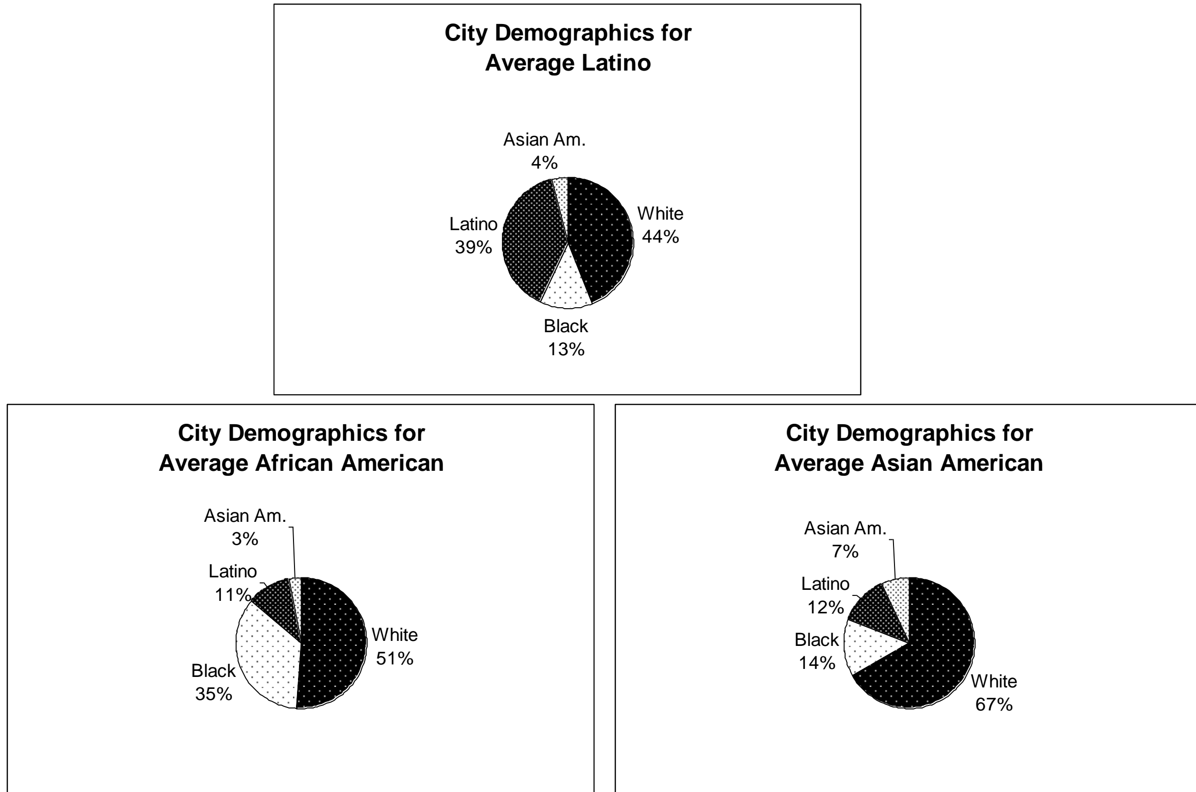
[52] The most recent data we have suggest that half of all blacks would have to move to a different city to achieve an even racial distribution across city lines (Massey 2001, Massey and Hajnal 1995).

[53] Again, with a national sample of 2517 respondents across 1000 municipalities, the ACPS is an ideal tool for this purpose.

[54] By comparison, the national population in 1990 was only about 12 percent African American, 12 percent Latino, and 4 percent Asian American.

Figure 2.3 Minorities Live in Cities with large Minority Populations



In sum, there are strong reasons to believe that voter turnout could have significant effects at the local level. Each of the conditions required for turnout to matter is present at the local level. Turnout is sharply skewed, voters and nonvoters have different preferences, and nonvoters are large enough in number to have a say if they did vote. By this logic, the vast majority of studies of turnout in the United States have been looking in the wrong place. The fact that turnout could matter at the local level does not, however, mean that it actually does. In the rest of the book, I undertake a wide range of tests to determine if and how low and uneven voter turnout affects minority representation in the local political arena.

Chapter Three. Winners and Losers in Mayoral Elections

Written with Jessica L. Trounstine

When Harold Washington walked into Donnelley Hall on election night in 1983, African Americans in Chicago were jubilant. For black Chicagoans, Washington's mayoral victory was a chance to rectify decades of injustice and inequality. It was, for at least one elderly woman standing in the crowd that night, "the miracle… I have been waiting for all my life" (quoted in Travis 1990:193). So when Washington arrived at 1:30am, the celebration was already well under way and 15,000 supporters were hoarse from screaming "Harold! Harold!" The 'pilgrimage,' as Washington called the campaign, had come to an end. For Harold Washington and for many African Americans it was truly 'our turn.'

Victories like Harold Washington's in Chicago or more recently Antonio Villaraigosa's in Los Angeles represent real breakthroughs that could signal the fulfillment of long held dreams. One of the hopes of the civil rights movement was that racial minorities would gain access to the vote and that they would then be able to elect representatives who would help minorities control their own destinies. Although minority leadership hasn't always led to dramatic changes in minority well-being (Smith 1996, Reed 1988, Mladenka 1991), the election of minorities to office has often been followed by significant growth in minority employment in city government (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984, Eisinger 1982), major reforms of police practices (Headley 1985, Lewis 1987), increased efficacy and participation among minority voters (Bobo and Gilliam 1990), and perhaps most importantly, by real shifts in white attitudes toward the minority community (Hajnal 2007).

The larger reality however, is that these electoral victories have been limited in number. The political leadership of the United States remains overwhelmingly white.[55] Although the national population is now roughly 13 percent African American, blacks hold only 1.8 percent of all elected offices nationwide (JCPS 2003). Latinos are even worse off, occupying less than one percent of the nation's elected offices even though they account for 15 percent of the nation's population (or 8 percent of all adult citizens) (NALEO 2008). And Asian Americans hold a negligible fraction of all offices despite representing about 4 percent of the national population (or 3 percent of adult citizens) (APALC 2007). At the local level, the numbers for minority office holders are only slightly better. Nationwide, only 4.3 percent of city council positions are held by blacks. Latinos occupy 2.1 percent of city council positions while Asian Americans hold only 0.3 percent.[56] Mayors are also primarily white. Of all the nation's mayors, only about two percent are black, less than one percent are Latino, and a tiny fraction are Asian American (APALC 2007, JCPS 2003, NALEO 2008, MacManus and Bullock 1993). These numbers reveal that fewer minorities have been elected than we might have expected. Political decisions continue to be made predominantly by whites. [57]

Why are America's racial and ethnic minorities so underrepresented in the halls of power decades after most of the major hurdles to minority access to the vote were removed? Why are

[55] This is not to deny that real growth in the number of minority elected officials has occurred. In 1960, there were almost no elected minority officials to speak of. In that year, only 280 blacks held office across the entire United States and the numbers for Latinos and Asian Americans probably approached zero (Jaynes and Williams 1989). Today there are over 9000 black elected officials in America (JCPS 2003). The number of Latinos in office has more than doubled in the last two decades and nationwide there are now about 5500 Latinos in elected office (NALEO 2008). Asian American representation is also growing rapidly and today there over 600 Asian Americans in office at the federal, state, or local level (APALC 2005).

[56] Figures are from the 2001 ICMA survey.

[57] Racial and ethnic minorities are, of course, not the only groups underrepresented in political offices. Women, for example, represent only about 17 percent of the seats in the U.S. Congress, 16 percent of statewide executive positions, 23 percent of state legislative offices, and 11 percent of the nation's mayoralties (CAWP 2008). Surveys of office holders also indicate that the vast majority come from privileged backgrounds – measured either by education or income (Conyers and Wallace 1976).

racial and ethnic minorities not able to regularly or efficiently translate their numbers into electoral victories?

We believe part of the answer is voter turnout.[58] In a democracy, voters determine electoral outcomes, nonvoters do not. If minorities do not vote or vote less than whites, it increases the chances of the white vote controlling the outcomes of a contest – possibly preventing the election of racial and ethnic minorities to office. The fact that racial and ethnic minorities still generally do not participate at nearly the same rate as the white majority could account for much of the underrepresentation of their communities in positions of power.

The Mayor's Role

The connection between low voter turnout and low minority representation seems logical but is it true? In this chapter, we begin to assess the importance of minority voter turnout by looking at the link between racial and ethnic minority voter participation and mayoral outcomes in the nation's biggest cities. We begin by focusing on the mayor's office because the mayor is in most cases the symbolic leader of the city. Even when the mayor's official powers are not extensive, evidence suggests that most residents believe the mayor influences the course of events on almost every policy issue facing the city.[59] As one mayoral biographer put it, "The job of a mayor of the city, more than any other elective job, reflects an electorate's confidence and trust of a candidate to handle their affairs. Unlike other elective posts, the mayoralty is close to

[58] The unwillingness of the white majority to support minority candidates, institutional barriers such as at-large elections, felon disenfranchisement, the limited economic and social resources of the minority community, and the limited number of minority candidates running for all offices all surely contribute to the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in public office.
[59] A poll undertaken in Washington, D.C., where the mayor's power is limited, found that a clear majority of city residents believed the mayor "can control" or "exact influence" on most major policy issues in the city (Washington Post 1978: A1).

the people, affects their daily lives, their futures" (Levinson 1983:232). [60] In cases where the mayor has the power to veto legislation and shape the budget, the importance of the post is even greater.

Simulating equal turnout

The easiest and one of the best ways to determine if low minority participation affects the outcomes of mayoral elections is to compare the actual outcome of a contest with the outcome had there been even turnout across racial and ethnic groups. If more minorities had voted, would the winner have changed?

The method we use to gauge these effects is fairly straightforward. For each election, we simulate the outcomes given equal voting rates across racial and ethnic groups. We then compare the actual winner to the projected winner under conditions of even turnout. To calculate the simulated vote for a candidate given equal turnout, we simply multiply the proportion of a group that voted for the candidate in the actual election by that group's proportion of the voting age citizen population. Fortunately, since we simulate *even* turnout across groups, we do not have to specify a turnout rate for any group in our simulations. If Latinos, for example, make up 25 percent of the population, under even turnout they would make up 25 percent of the voters. The next step is to add up the numbers for each candidate and each of the racial groups in the city to see what percentage of the total vote the candidate would have received given equal turnout. Thus, the formula for determining the projected vote is as follows: candidate A vote total = (percent white vote for candidate A*percent white in the city) + (percent black vote for

[60] As former mayor Carl Stokes put it, "A US senator, though powerful, exercises no direct control over this constituency. He is physically removed in Washington, his vote one of many. But the mayor lives "down the street," he has authority over the police, he spends the city tax dollar, and he decides when and where the snow is going to be plowed or not plowed (Stokes 1993: 357).

candidate A*percent black in the city) + (percent Latino vote for candidate A*percent Latino in the city) + (percent Asian vote for candidate A*percent Asian in the city). If candidate A garners a higher vote share than the other candidates (and depending on the circumstances more than 50 percent of the vote), she wins.

One concern with this calculation is that it assumes that the voting preferences of each racial and ethnic group would not change if a larger (or smaller) proportion of each group turned out. There are four reasons why we believe that this is a reasonable assumption. First, we compared the policy preferences of local voters and local non-voters using both the 1990 General Social Survey and the 1989 American Citizen Participation Study and found almost no substantial differences between the views of local voters and the views of local non-voters *within* each racial group. [61] Second, a range of other research has confirmed that voters and non-voters of the same race have similar preferences on policy (Kinder and Sanders 1996, Hajnal and Baldassare 2001) and electoral choice (Hajnal 2008 but see Griffin and Newman 2007). Finally, for all elections with exit polls and for cities where both the racial demographics and socioeconomic status of each precinct was available, we looked at differences in voting preferences in mayoral elections between upper- and lower-status member of each racial group. We found that in the clear majority of elections, class differences within each racial/ethnic group were marginal.[62] None of this is to say that differences between voters and non-voters of the

[61] White non-voters were marginally more liberal on a small number of policies than were white voters but there were no substantive and few significant differences between voters and non-voters within the black, Latino and Asian American populations.

[62] To get at class divides within each racial group, we compiled a data set of exit polls covering 26 mayoral and city council elections. Across this data set, we found that within each racial group the gap in the percentage of higher and lower class voters supporting the winner was smaller than ten points in the vast majority of elections. Blacks were never divided by class in their preferences in any significant way. Upper- and lower- status Latinos also almost always had similar preferences. Whites were the only racial group where we found a more regular class divide. Upper-status white voters were in some cases more conservative and more pro-white in their voting preferences than lower-status whites. In every single election and for every racial/ethnic group, the divide across racial groups was much larger than the class divide within each racial group.

same racial/ethnic do not exist. We readily admit that there will be some elections in which non-voters do differ in their preferences from voters of the same racial group but the preponderance of evidence suggests that these differences will be fairly minimal in the vast majority of contests.

We also think it is important to note that these simulations are only estimates of what might happen and not definitive accounts of what would happen were turnout to expand. We simply cannot know for sure how the world of local mayoral elections would change if we were somehow able to expand participation or induce changes in the turnout of particular racial and ethnic groups (Grofman et. al. 1999). One would expect that potential candidates and future election campaigns would respond in important ways to a growing minority vote and that this in turn would affect the kinds of options available to each group.[63] Exactly how local political actors responded would likely depend on the mechanism we use to raise turnout, how increased turnout impacted inter-group relations, and a host of other interrelated factors. Thus, while our simulations represent a reasonable estimate of what might happen, they do not and cannot factor in a myriad of related changes that could occur in the local political environment in response to an expansion of turnout.

To make up for the speculative nature of the findings of the simulations in this chapter, in subsequent chapters we look at the effects of changes in turnout that have actually occurred across different cities and different elections. Combined, these two methods give us estimates of

[63] Certainly, one possibility is that minority gains would reinforce themselves. We know, for example, that the election of minorities to office, at least in the short term, raises minority voting participation (Bobo and Gilliam 1990, Tate 2003). So, if minorities vote more and more minorities are elected, this could lead to further increases in minority turnout and ultimately more and more minorities winning office. One could also imagine negative feedback. If minority voters get disappointed when minority elected officials fail to change the wellbeing of the local minority community, then minority voters might get frustrated and stop voting (Hajnal 2007). In this case, increased turnout and minority victories might only be temporary.

the full potential of turnout changes in the future and of the more limited reality of turnout effects today.

Data

We focus on two different sets of cities in simulating mayoral outcomes. The primary data set consists of simulations of outcomes for recent mayoral elections in the nation's ten largest cities.[64] The primary advantage of this data set is that it is complete; in all ten cities, we were able to acquire all of the data necessary for the simulations. The other advantage is that the data cover recent contests which presumably would be more impacted by America's increasingly diverse population than older contests. The disadvantage is that ten elections is a small number and the results from these major cities may or may not be similar to those of other cities. To address this concern and to offer a broader assessment of turnout effects, we also collected data on votes by race/ethnicity for any contested primary or general election in the nation's twenty largest cities over the past decade. This larger data set of 45 elections should give us a better sense of how wide ranging turnout effects are. The drawback of this data set is that we were only able to obtain estimates for about a half of these elections, causing some concern that the available data may not be representative. By looking at the results of both sets of elections, we hope to provide a reasonable overall account of the effect turnout has on electoral outcomes in large American cities. For those readers who wish to get a closer look at the elections that are included in the analysis, details on the specifics of each contest and the outcomes of the simulations for both data sets are included in the appendix.

To calculate the simulated vote for a candidate given equal turnout, we need two sets of measures: 1) the racial and ethnic makeup of eligible voters in a city and 2) estimates of the voting preferences of each racial and ethnic group in the contest. Obtaining the racial and ethnic

[64] The data were collected in 2003. For each city the most recent mayoral election was chosen.

makeup of each city is not difficult. These figures are available from the 1990 and 2000 Census.[65] Getting the voting preferences of each racial and ethnic group is slightly more complicated. Here we rely primarily on exit polls which are available in most of the largest cities. For a small number of cities, we run ecological inference (EI) using the actual vote by precinct and the racial/ethnic demographics of each precinct to acquire our estimates of racial voting preferences (see King 1997 for a description of the EI methodology and Cho 1998 for some of the limitations of EI).[66] For other cities, we were able to identify several precincts that contained residents who were predominantly of one race/ethnicity and derived estimates of the vote by race using the homogeneous precinct analysis method outlined by Loewen and Grofman (1989:602-603).[67] Finally, for a small set of cities we were forced to use polls that occurred immediately prior to the election. Although we recognize that this is an ad hoc mixture of data and methods, we believe that these are the best sources for our purposes. It is also worth noting that in several of the cities, we simulated outcomes using more than one type of analysis (eg EI vs Exit Polls vs precinct analysis vs opinion polls) and found that the results were nearly identical. For the simulated estimates other than those derived from homogeneous precinct

[65] Since the Census only provides estimates of the voting age population by race and ethnicity for each urban area and does not produce estimates of the citizen voting age population by race and ethnicity, we took statewide figures for the proportion of the adult population of each racial and ethnic group that is non-citizen and then calculated the estimated citizen voting age population by race and ethnicity for each city using these statewide numbers.

[66] EI makes assumptions about the underlying distribution of the data. In our case, one assumption is that the voting preferences of a group are not correlated with the proportion of group members in a precinct. Thus, some caution should be employed when interpreting the EI results.

[67] This method involves a two stage process. In an example where we have only black and white voters in a city, we first get a preliminary estimate of the black vote by averaging the overall vote in all of the precincts that are predominantly black. We then do the same for the white vote. In the second stage, we use our preliminary estimate of the white vote and a measure of the size of the white population in each predominantly black precinct to estimate and subtract out the white vote in each predominantly black precinct. The remainder or left-over votes in all of the predominantly black precincts are added together and averaged to arrive at our final estimate of the black vote. The process is then repeated in predominantly white precincts. Technically, one can continue to reiterate, using each new estimate of the white/black vote to obtain slightly more accurate estimates of the black/white vote but in practice further iterations produced virtually no change in the estimates.

analysis, we calculate confidence intervals around our simulated vote tallies so that we can determine whether changes in outcomes are statistically significant or not.[68]

Outcomes in Individual Mayoral Elections

Does uneven turnout matter in local elections? In Table 3.1 we begin to answer this question by assessing the effects of uneven turnout across racial and ethnic groups in recent mayoral contests in the nation's ten largest cities. In each case, we look to see what would have happened if whites, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans had voted at the same rate. Would the winner have changed? Did any group lose out because they vote less regularly than white Americans? For each election we begin by simulating equal turnout of the citizen voting age population.

Table 3.1. Actual vs Projected Outcomes in Mayoral Elections: Simulating Equal Turnout

	Actual Winner	*Actual Vote Share*	*Change in Vote Share*	*Simulated Winner*
Chicago[a]	Daley	72	0.6*	Daley
Dallas[a]	Miller	55	-1.6*	Miller
Detroit[a]	Kilpatrick	54	-0.6*	Kilpatrick
Houston[a]	Brown	52	-5.5*	***<u>Sanchez</u>***
Los Angeles[a]	Hahn	54	-3.4*	Hahn
New York[a]	Bloomberg	52	-3.1*	***<u>Green</u>***
Philadelphia[b]	Street	50	0.2[#]	Street
Phoenix[b]	Rimsza	59	0.6[#]	Rimsza
San Antonio[c]	Garza	59	13.0*	Garza
San Diego[c]	Murphy	52	-9.7*	**<u>Roberts</u>**

Source: Estimates of voting preferences by race from: [a] Exit Polls [b] Homogenous Precinct Analysis [c] Ecological Inference using actual precinct returns. City demographics from 2000 Census.
* change in vote significant at p<.05 [#] no estimate of significance available

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[68] King's (1997) ecological inference software provides a measure of the uncertainty surrounding the estimate of the voting preferences for each racial/group. We can also calculate a sampling margin of error for the estimate of the voting preferences of each racial/ethnic group in each exit poll given the number of respondents for that particular group. We then aggregate the error by running one thousand simulations adding the estimates for the black, white, Latino, and Asian American votes (weighted by their population in the city) while incorporating the uncertainty surrounding each group's estimate. We incorporate the uncertainty by generating random numbers with a normal distribution, a mean of the actual estimate for the group, and a standard deviation of one half the 95 percent confidence interval for the estimate for the group.

It is important to note that these ten cases are not a random or representative set of cities. In particular, racial and ethnic minorities make up roughly twice as large a proportion of the population in these cities than they do in the national population.[69] This means that the candidates and issues in these cities may be different from the political choices offered to voters in other cities. It also means that uneven turnout across race/ethnicity may matter more here than in smaller cities.

At the same time it is important to note that these are not the only cities with large minority populations. In fact, the last census reported that non-Hispanic whites were a minority of the population in 61 percent of U.S. cities across with populations over 100,000 (Census 2002). Thus, blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans represent a majority of potential voters in most large American cities and could potentially sway the outcome of the vote if they voted.

The simulations of mayoral elections in the ten largest cities are telling. Table 3.1 indicates that three out of the ten elections would have had different outcomes if all racial and ethnic groups had voted at the same rate and racial preferences had stayed constant. In Houston, Orlando Sanchez, a fiscally conservative Latino would have defeated Lee Brown, the incumbent African American mayor, in their non-partisan contest. In New York, Mark Green, an avowed progressive Democrat, would have won his contest over Michael Bloomberg, a moderate Republican in a partisan contest involving two white candidates. Finally, in San Diego, Ron Roberts, a moderate conservative, would have beaten Dick Murphy, a strongly conservative candidate, in a nonpartisan contest also involving two white candidates. Thus, although the new winners were not all minorities or all liberals, each new winner would have brought a significantly different policy agenda to the city. Equal turnout would have made a real

[69] African Americans make up 25 percent, Latinos 31 percent, and Asian Americans 7 percent of the population in these cities.

difference in each of these three contests. The fact that equal voter turnout made a winner out of a loser in thirty percent of the cases strongly suggests that turnout is critical.

Turnout also mattered for vote share. Moving to equal turnout would have altered the original winner's share of the vote by an average of 4.3 percent (either up or down). Since these elections were predominantly two-candidate contests, uneven turnout led to almost a nine point swing in the margin of victory in the average election in these cities. In some cases, such as San Antonio, the simulated vote change far surpassed that figure. Ed Garza's margin of victory over Tim Bannwolf, a more conservative white candidate, would have increased by 26 percentage points had turnout been even.

At the same time, it is clear that turnout did not always have an important effect.[70] In a little less than half of the cases, simulating equal turnout had a marginal effect on the outcome of the contest. For example, by our calculations Kwame Kilpatrick's 8 point margin of victory over fellow African American Gill Hill in Detroit would have been reduced by only 1.2 percentage points given equal turnout of the citizen voting age population. Uneven voter turnout may not always matter but if these ten cases are indicative of what happens elsewhere, it seems clear that the typical local contest is at least in part shaped by voter turnout.

To try to see if the effects of turnout occur more broadly, we now turn to a larger range of elections - specifically primary and general elections over the past ten years in the nation's twenty largest cities. The results of these simulations are summarized in the second row of Table 3.2. They show that when we simulated equal turnout across race and ethnicity for this larger set of 45 elections, we found that low minority turnout was affecting electoral outcomes once again. The simulations show that had turnout been even across racial groups, roughly 13 percent of the

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[70] Nevertheless, as Table 3.1 indicates, in almost all of the cases, simulating equal turnout produced statistically significant changes in the vote outcome.

elections (6 of 45) would have had a different winner. In most cases, the new victor offered a substantially different agenda from the old victor. In addition to the three reversals we saw in Table 3.1, three other reversals would have occurred had blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans voted at the same rate as whites. In Los Angeles, Michael Woo, a liberal Asian American candidate, would have replaced Richard Riordan, a conservative white candidate, as mayor in 1993. In San Francisco in 1991, Frank Jordan, the conservative-leaning white mayor, would have lost out to Angela Alioto a progressive white. Finally, in New York City, the 1997 Democratic Primary would have led to a victory by fiery black candidate, Al Sharpton, instead of Ruth Messinger, a quintessential white liberal.

Table 3.2 The Effects of Even Racial Turnout on Mayoral Contests

	Average Change in Winner's Vote Share	Reversal (winner changes)
Ten Recent Contests	4.3%	30% (3 of 10)
Twenty Cities (All Citizens)	4.4%	15% (6 of 45)
Twenty Cities (All Adults)	5.0%	22% (10 of 45)

If we look not at reversals but instead at the winner's vote share, the main conclusion from this larger data set is that turnout is as important for this broader set of elections as it was for recent elections in the 10 largest cities. Across all 45 contests, had turnout of the population been even, the average change in the winner's vote share would have been 4.4 percent – almost exactly what we found in the most recent elections in the ten largest cities. The exact estimates for average turnout effects should be viewed with some caution since data on the vote by race are only available for about half of the elections, but certainly what Table 3.2 shows is that turnout matters in more than a handful of cases. At least at the mayoral level, the importance of turnout seems likely to extend fairly broadly across American cities.

If we look more closely at each of the individual contests in the larger data set, it is once again clear that turnout did not matter in every contest. In 17 percent of the elections, simulating equal turnout by race and ethnicity altered the winner's vote share by less than one percent. In a little less than a third of the contests, the vote changed by less than two percentage points. What this means is that turnout should not be viewed as a tool to change electoral outcomes in every city. As we will see later, there are specific contexts (eg elections in largely whites cities with no minority candidate) in which voter turnout plays little role.

Overall, however, there is little doubt that turnout is a central factor across the majority of local elections. There is also some question as to whether the results that we have presented may understate the full potential of turnout to transform electoral outcomes. To this point, we have only included voting age citizens in the simulations. That means that all of the Latinos, Asian Americans and others who are eligible to become naturalized citizens are left out. There are obvious reasons to leave these non-citizens out of the electoral equation. Under current American law only citizens can vote in local contests for mayor and city council. In addition, even if these non-citizens could vote, there is some evidence to suggest that they would not vote as regularly as others. Studies have shown that when immigrants - especially those who are poor and less well educated - do become eligible, they participate less frequently than long term citizens in the political process (Cho 1999, DeSipio 1995, Leighley 2001, Verba et al 1995).

Nevertheless, there are also strong reasons to consider what impact this group might have on American politics. For one, most immigrants are eligible to eventually become citizens. For another, there is evidence that the process of acquiring citizenship is at least in part a political process and can be accelerated by political events (Pantoja and Segura 2000, Ramirez 2002). Recent studies have, for example, shown that Latino naturalization and voter registration rates

dramatically increased in California after Proposition 187, the measure that sought to ban public services to illegal immigrants and their children, was passed (Pantoja and Segura 2000, Ramirez 2002). In other words, if spurred on by political events, large numbers of non-citizens could become involved in the political process and could have a say in who wins in a variety of electoral contests. Finally, non-citizens have at times been eligible to vote. In fact, until the 1920s, non-citizens voted in 40 states and federal territories in local, state, and even federal elections (Hayduk 2006). Moreover, there are ongoing efforts to re-instate non-citizen voting. Across the country, there are a number of localities including New York and Chicago that have sought to allow non-citizens to vote certain types of elections. Several towns in Maryland and Massachusetts have already passed laws that give non-citizens the right to vote in school board elections. Given these facts, it is important to consider the effects of including all voting age adults in the analysis.[71]

When we re-ran the electoral simulations using each group's proportion of the total adult population in each city, we found that turnout mattered even more. As the last row of Table 3.2 indicates when we simulated equal turnout of voting age adults, the winner's vote share changed by an average of 5.0 percentage points. In a contest with two candidates –about half of these elections – that means a 10 point change in the margin of victory. By almost any standard, that is a major change in the electoral outcome. Even if that much change does not always lead to a new winner, it is a change that any candidate thinking about running in the future would recognize and would mostly likely react to. In other words, it would certainly impact local electoral dynamics.

[71] As a point of comparison, it would also have been informative to simulate equal turnout across race and ethnicity among registered voters. Registered voters are, at the end of the day, the only group that can vote in local elections. Unfortunately, registration by race is almost never available at the local level.

Moreover, in many cases, simulating even turnout of the adult population did lead to a new winner. In 10 of the 45 elections – or 22 percent – simulating equal turnout led to a different winner. A number of these represent very notable changes. By our calculations, Rudy Giuliani, a conservative, white Republican, would have lost to David Dinkins, a liberal, Democratic African American, in their rematch in New York in 1993. In Los Angeles, James Hahn's first victory over Latino candidate Antonio Villaraigosa would have instead resulted in defeat. Another Latino candidate, Fernando Ferrer, would have won the Democratic primary in New York in 2001, setting up a situation in which Ferrer might very well have won the mayoralty against Michael Bloomberg under conditions of even turnout. Finally, in Houston, Gracie Saenz, a Latino Democrat, would have taken white Republican Robert Mosbacher's slot in the run-off in 1997. Turnout did not always have a dramatic effect in these mayoral elections but it did matter often enough to conclude that low minority voter turnout is a major factor determining the outcomes of mayoral elections in America.

Who Wins

When turnout did matter, it is clear that Latinos were the big winners.[72] The turnout gains for both Latino candidates and Latino voters far surpassed those of other racial and ethnic groups. If one looks from the perspective of the voters themselves, one finds that by all possible measures outcomes moved closer to the preferences of Latino voters than to the preferences of any other group of voters. First, in every one of the ten elections where the simulations led to a different winner, the majority of Latino voters opposed the original winner and supported the new winner. Black voters were almost as successful. In seven of the ten reversals the new

[72] Given the exceptionally low turnout of Asian Americans, one might expect that they would gain at least as much as Latinos by simulating equal turnout. This does not occur because Asian Americans make up a smaller share of the population than Latinos (7 vs 31 percent of the population of these cities), because there are few Asian American candidates in these contests, and because Asian Americans vote less regularly as a bloc than other groups in these elections. The vote by race is detailed in the previous chapter.

winner was backed by a majority of African American voters. Asian Americans also tended to get what they wanted most of the time – coming out on the winning side in 60 percent of the reversals. White voters were the only real losers. The majority of white voters opposed the new winner in 60 percent of the cases.[73]

Second, if we look more broadly at the entire set of 45 elections, we find that Latinos are again the winner if turnout is more even. In the vast majority of the elections, Latino voters gained from the simulations. Across all of the elections, 86 percent of the candidates backed by a majority of Latino voters would have increased their vote share had turnout been even. On average, the gain would have been 5.0 percentage points (3.2 percentage points with the citizen only simulations).[74] Across all of the elections, no other racial or ethnic group comes close to the gains made by Latinos.

These Latino gains would come as no surprise to a legion of political activists and group members who have lamented low Latino turnout and its consequences. As one director of a Latino advocacy group put it, "It leaves you feeling deflated… we just need to convince voters to become much more active. That's when we will make a difference" (Pyle et al 1998:A1). A political consultant in San Antonio echoed these concerns: "We lost the campaign because we ran out of Mexicans. And we are going to keep running out of Mexicans if we don't register them to vote" (Garza 2004). That same consultant also talked about the potential of the Latino vote in the future: "We are going to register a lot of Mexicans. We are going to elect a lot of people and every Anglo politician will respect and fear our vote" (Garza 2004).

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[73] For this analysis of winners and losers, we use the adult population simulations but the basic pattern is the same if we limit ourselves to the simulations using voting age citizens.

[74] Another way to measure a group's preferred choice is simply to single out the candidate that gets the most votes from that group – whether or not that candidate got a majority of the group's vote. When we repeated the analysis with this measure, we got nearly identical results. In the simulations, Latino preferred candidates gained votes 86 percent of the time and garnered on average an additional 5.1 percent of the vote had turnout been even across voting age adults. Asian American preferred candidates came next gaining on average 1.8 percentage points. Black and white preferred candidates neither gained nor lost much.

Comparisons between the other racial and ethnic groups reveal at least one measure where Asian American voters were slightly more successful than either white or black voters. Candidates backed by a majority of Asian American voters gained an average of 2.2 percentage points in the simulations (2.0 percentage points with citizen-only simulations); whereas, African American and white-backed candidates came out roughly even after the simulations.[75] But no matter how the contests are broken down, it is clear that higher turnout helped Latino voters more than others.

Latino candidates also fared well in the simulations. When even turnout projected a different winner, Latino candidates were the ones most likely to be chosen. Four of the ten reversals resulted in a Latino candidate winning. Moreover, in no case did a reversal mean that a Latino winner would be replaced by a winner from a different race. Asian American and African American candidates also gained by this measure – just not as much. African American candidates went from losing an electoral contest to winning that contest in two cases when we simulated even turnout across racial groups.[76] One Asian American candidate, Michael Woo in Los Angeles, emerged victorious after our even turnout projections. By contrast, white candidates were the clear losers across this set of elections. Three white candidates became winners through the simulations but in all three cases they were facing other white opponents. More importantly, a white candidate was on the losing side of the reversal in nine of the ten cases.

[75] However, measured another way, Asian American white, and African American voters all were largely unaffected by the turnout simulations. Roughly half of the candidates backed by each group increased their vote share when we simulated even turnout and the other half lost vote share. Specifically, 58 percent of the Asian American backed candidates increased their vote total. The figure for African Americans was 50 percent and the figure for whites was 57 percent.
[76] However, in one case (Lee Brown in Houston in 2001) an African American candidate went from winning a contest to losing a contest under conditions of even turnout.

Looking not just at reversals but instead at the broader set of elections, the results diverged only slightly. The fifteen Latino candidates running in the 45 contests would have garnered, on average, an additional 4.6 percent of the vote had turnout not been uneven across groups (2.4 percentage points with the citizen-only simulations). Asian Americans candidates - although fewer in number - would have gained even more. The three Asian American candidates who entered these contests would have increased their vote shares by an estimated 7.1 percentage points after the simulations (6.2 percentage points with the citizen-only simulations). By contrast, the 35 black candidates and the 71 white candidates came out roughly even after the simulations.

Combined, these results suggest that existing turnout patterns significantly affect the chances of Latino voters to influence outcomes and the chances of Latino candidates to get elected. The reasons for this pattern are fairly clear. Latinos turnout at much lower rates than blacks and whites and they make up a much greater share of the population in these cities than Asian Americans – the other low turnout group (18 vs 8 percent of the population).[77] The combination of low turnout and a large population means Latinos are less regularly able to translate their preferences into electoral victories. Put more positively, Latinos could make great strides by participating more in local contests.

We also attempted to see if we could learn more about the partisan and ideological implications of turnout in these contests. This is not a straightforward task, since most of the elections are run as non-partisan contests and since categorizing the ideological leanings of each candidate is not always easy. However, for the ten cases where the simulations led to a new

[77] The pattern of winners and losers across the other racial and ethnic groups is also readily explained. Whites were most negatively affected by expanded turnout because they currently have the highest turnout rates. Blacks came out roughly even because their turnout averages somewhere in the middle between whites on the top and Latinos and Asian Americans on the bottom. Asian Americans gained marginally because their turnout is low but their population base is smaller.

winner, we reviewed newspaper articles and other secondary accounts to gauge the political leanings and the partisan affiliations of the candidates. We then compared the characteristics of the actual winner to the characteristics of the projected winner in each of the ten reversals. This comparison reveals that there was a fairly clear ideological and partisan leaning to the reversals. When turnout did lead to a new winner, that winner was likely to be more liberal, and more likely a Democrat. Of the ten cases, we detected a marked shift in ideological leaning in seven contests. In six of these cases, the shift was to the left – a less liberal winner was replaced a more liberal winner. There was less partisan change – in large part because many of the elections only had candidates from one party.[78] Nevertheless, in four cases, the simulations suggest that a Republican winner would have lost to a Democrat had turnout been even. By contrast, only once did even turnout mean that a Democratic winner would have lost to a Republican. Much more work needs to be done on this question but the preliminary indication is that, at the local level, low minority turnout is hurting liberals and Democrats.

When Does Turnout Matter?

As we noted earlier, turnout did not always matter. In fact, our simulations led to a wide range of outcomes. Sometimes simulating turnout had dramatic effects. One of the biggest losers was James Hahn who, by our calculations, would have lost almost 9 percentage points to Antonio Villaraigosa in their 2001 contest in Los Angeles had turnout of the adult population been even across racial and ethnic groups. In other cases, the effect was moderate. Richard Daley's 3.2 point gain on Bobby Rush in the 1999 Democratic Primary in Chicago was typical. And in still others, simulating even turnout made essentially no difference. John Street, for

[78] Two of the ten reversals occurred within a Democratic Primary. Also, in two of the nonpartisan contests, the two main candidates were affiliated with the same party.

example, would have gained less than one half of one percent of the vote in the 1999 general election in Philadelphia had there been even turnout in that city.

This range in outcomes inevitably raises questions about why turnout matters in some cases and not others. We attempted to try to answer this question by looking at a range of factors that one would expect to be related to turnout effects. Unfortunately, with a large number of potential factors, a limited number of elections, an even smaller number of cities, and a fair amount of collinearity between many of the potential factors, rigorous testing of the various hypotheses was difficult. Different model specifications led to slightly divergent results and no complete, robust model of when turnout matters emerged.

In lieu of such a complete model, we focus on the three factors that tended to stand out in bivariate tests. Although these three factors appeared to mediate turnout effects, the bivariate results that we present should be interpreted with some caution, since we do not simultaneously control for other potentially related factors. As one might expect, the first is the race of the candidate. When minority candidates ran, turnout mattered more. The mean change in the vote for minority candidates under the voting age simulations was 5.9 percent compared to only 3.8 percent for white candidates. Elections with Latino and Asian American candidates were especially likely to see large turnout effects. The size of the minority population and in particular the size of the Latino population also seemed to affect the degree to which even turnout altered the outcome of the contest. Elections in cities where the Latino community comprised a third or more of the population produced vote changes that averaged 5.7 percentage points. Elections in cities with smaller Latino populations led to slightly smaller turnout effects – 4.1 percentage points. Given that the contrast was not as sharp as we might expect, we also looked at how much more the Latino population size mattered when a Latino candidate ran.

Here we found a more dramatic effect. Latino population size did not always matter but when a Latino candidate ran in a city with a large Latino population, it almost always meant dramatic turnout effects. There was a nearly 10 percentage point shift in the vote for the nine Latino candidates who ran in cities where a third or more of the population was Latino. That shift was three times larger than the 2.7 percentage point shift that was predicted for the six Latinos who ran in cities with smaller Latino populations. Latino cohesion, not surprisingly, was the other important factor conditioning turnout effects. The predicted change in the vote was three times greater when the Latino population was highly cohesive in their voting preferences than when Latinos were not cohesive.[79]

This pattern of results is not at all surprising. Elections with minority candidates tend to be more racially divided and we would certainly expect turnout to matter more when the different groups voting in the election are more divided. Similarly, given the low turnout of the Latino population, one would expect that larger and more cohesive Latino communities would be linked to big gains when simulating even turnout.

These conclusions are, however, tentative. We need to examine a broader set of elections. We also need to assess a more comprehensive set of factors. One might, for example, believe that the nature of the campaign, the issues being addressed, and recent electoral history would all shape the vote and turnout effects. [80] Finally, we need to test all of these factors against each other in a more complete model that would include other factors like the number of candidates, whether the election was partisan or not, and the size of each racial and ethnic

[79] The cohesiveness measure was simply the percentage of the Latino vote given to the most favored Latino candidate minus the percentage of the Latino vote given to all other candidates. The effects are for the difference between one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean level of Latino cohesiveness.
[80] Although one might expect turnout to matter more if the contestants were from different ethnic or racial backgrounds, we found that the predicted vote change in bi-racial contests was essentially the same as the predicted vote change in elections where all of the candidates were from the same race. The number of candidates, whether it was a primary or a general election, and whether or not the elections were partisan had no clear effect on how much turnout mattered.

group.[81] But the preliminary results do reinforce an ongoing theme. In the local political arena, it is Latinos who are the central actors in any discussion of the implications of uneven turnout.

Conclusion

The results presented in this chapter strongly suggest that turnout matters in the local political arena. Who occupies the office of mayor appears to be closely tied to who votes. Moreover, the potential for turnout to matter is often quite large. Turnout does not affect the outcome of every election in every city but in up to thirty percent of the cases simulating even turnout across racial and ethnic groups leads to a different winner.

This chapter has also suggested that there are clear winners and losers when voter turnout expands. The big winners are Latinos. If minority participation in local contests were expanded, Latinos would gain on two fronts. Importantly, Latino *voters* would have more of a say in these contests and candidates favored by Latinos would likely win more often. In addition, Latino *candidates* would have fared better under conditions of even turnout. Almost half of the reversals resulted in a Latino candidate emerging victorious. And across all of the elections, the simulations garnered Latino candidates an average of 2.4 percent additional votes. Blacks and Asian Americans often came out ahead in the simulations but their gains were not as consistent or as large as the gains made by Latinos. The clear losers were whites. The majority of white voters opposed the new simulated winner 60 percent of the time and a white candidate was on the losing side of the reversals in nine out of ten cases.

Judging by these contests, low voter turnout is an important barrier to the electoral success of racial and ethnic minority communities. If turnout increased among Latinos, Asian

[81] In terms of whether or not the winner changed in the simulations, one other obviously important factor was the original margin of victory. None of the elections with an original margin of victory over ten percentage points was reversed, while half of the elections with an original margin of victory of under ten points were reversed. A reversal also required at least some division in candidate preferences by race/ethnicity.

Americans, and African Americans to match turnout among whites, outcomes in mayoral elections would likely more closely follow the preferences of minority voters.

This is an important benchmark for assessing the potential of turnout to alter politics in American cities. These results do, however, need to be considered in their context. The first feature of these simulations that needs to be considered is the fact that we are simulating even turnout across racial and ethnic groups. Although this is a reasonable test for considering the upper bounds of turnout effects, it is not a pattern of turnout that is regularly attained in real world elections. Low socioeconomic status and other barriers significantly reduce minority turnout. Overcoming these barriers would by no means be an easy task. Thus, one should consider these results as representing the upper bound of how much turnout could affect outcomes.

Another important concern is that these simulations assume that racial preferences would not change if turnout were more even. We cannot know whether this is really the case (Grofman et al 1999). Nonvoters within each racial and ethnic group appear to have similar political preferences to voters from the same racial and ethnic group but it is possible that the process of entering the active electorate might somehow alter the preferences of nonvoters. It is also possible that the entry of many new voters into the contest would change the dynamics of the campaign and the election. One would certainly expect the candidates and campaigns to respond to any change in the balance of power within the electorate. This could help or hurt minorities. With more minority voters, candidates and campaigns should more directly target minority interests and the minority vote.

The other main concern with these results is that they are derived from a limited number of cases. The cities that are included in the analysis are among the largest and most visible cases

but on a number of different measures, they are not representative of the nation as a whole. The magnitude of the turnout problem across the nation could be larger or smaller than what we have seen here. Fortunately, to address all of these concerns, there is a simple solution. One need only examine actual changes in turnout across a wide variety of real world elections. If higher, more even turnout is associated with more minority-friendly outcomes in these real-world elections, we will have firmer evidence of the effects of uneven turnout on minority communities. That is the task to which we now turn.

Chapter Four. Turnout and Representation on City Councils

With Jessica L. Trounstine

The last chapter illustrated the broad potential of voter turnout to alter outcomes in American cities. If America's racial and ethnic groups all turned out to vote at the same rate, winners in urban politics would likely look very different from those we see today. The results of the last chapter are therefore an important benchmark that indicates the degree to which low turnout is hurting America's racial and ethnic minorities.

This chapter asks a second but no less critical question about the effects of turnout. The goal of this chapter is to assess how much real-world changes in turnout across cities and elections affect outcomes. Rather than asking what the world might look like if different racial and ethnic groups all turned out at the same rate, we ask how differently the world looks in places where more voters do show up at the polls. Do cities with higher, more even turnout experience different outcomes than cities with lower turnout? Thus, the chapter provides an account of how much turnout matters from city to city and day to day.

This chapter advances our understanding of the impact of turnout in American democracy in two other important ways. First, it shifts the focus from the mayoralty to city council representation. Most American cities have a city council/city manager form of government where the council – rather than the mayor – is the highest elected body (Hajnal and Lewis 2003).[82] That means that the city council is the primary law-making body in most cities (Pelissero and Krebs 2003). If turnout matters in city council elections, then we know that turnout is an important factor in the urban arena.

[82] Even in cities with an elected mayor, that mayor seldom has veto power over the council or unilateral control of the budget (Hajnal and Lewis 2003).

The other important advance in this chapter is in the scope of the analysis. Rather than look at a handful of elections in a small number of cities, we examine the effects of turnout across a large, representative sample of American municipalities – 3524 to be exact. By looking at this broader set of cases, we can be more confident that our results present an accurate picture of the effects of higher turnout in the nation.

In the analysis that follows, we examine the relationship between aggregate voter turnout and minority representation on city councils. Our results suggest that aggregate turnout is closely tied to racial and ethnic representation on city councils. Higher turnout is associated with substantial gains in the number of Latinos and Asian Americans on councils and marked decreases in the number of white city council members. African American representation is largely unaffected by aggregate turnout but black representation can still be improved by reforms to local institutional structure. Moving to district elections and shifting the timing of local elections to coincide with national or state contests could lead to large gains in black city council representation.

The Data

To determine how much turnout matters in city council elections, we examine the link between aggregate voter turnout and council representation. If turnout matters, racial and ethnic minority candidates should be elected more often in cities with higher and presumably more even turnout. To test the relationship between aggregate turnout and minority representation, we begin with data from the 1986 International City/County Manager's Association survey (ICMA). The 1986 ICMA survey is ideal for several reasons.[83] First, it is the only data source to provide

[83] Although there are more recent ICMA surveys, the 1986 survey is the only ICMA survey that asks specifically about local voter turnout.

figures for local voter turnout across a large sample of America's cities.[84] The ICMA is mailed to clerks in every locality in the United States with over 2,500 residents and has a response rate of 66 percent. In other words, it has extensive coverage of American municipalities. Second, the sampling design of the survey means that the localities that respond are fairly representative of the national urban population. Analysis comparing the socioeconomic status and racial demographics of ICMA cities with the population of all U.S. cities indicates that the ICMA is roughly representative of the nation as a whole (Aghion, Alesina, and Trebbi 2005).[85] Table 4.A.6 in the Appendix details the demographic, institutional, and electoral makeup of cites in the ICMA sample. Third, by polling city clerks directly, the survey is able to provide relatively accurate measures of voter turnout. This is because city clerks are often responsible for compiling and recording data on voter turnout for every election and thus should know the data on registered voter turnout better than anyone else.[86] A range of tests indicates that the registered voter figures reported by city clerks are, in fact, reasonably accurate.[87]

In the analysis that follows we focus on aggregate turnout rather than turnout by racial and ethnic group. We do this for two reasons. First, it is virtually impossible to acquire racial and ethnic candidate preferences or even voter turnout rates by race for more than a handful of the nation's cities. Second, and more importantly, we believe that an analysis of aggregate turnout rates can lead to an equally informative test of turnout effects. The logic of our test is

[84] The federal government does not tabulate local voter turnout and most states also do not compile the data. Other surveys have asked about local voter turnout but none of these contain close to the number of cities available in the ICMA.
[85] Similar analysis comparing cities that responded to the survey with cities that did not indicates that there is no obvious response bias (Aghion, Alesina, and Trebbi 2005).
[86] Other have noted since city clerks are usually designated as the chief municipal elections officials they tend to have unique, first-hand knowledge about the political life of their communities (Schneider et al 1995).
[87] When we compared city clerk turnout figures to actual election returns reported by the board of elections for a sample of elections, we found that the city clerk reports were quite accurate. Similarly, when we compared the reports of city clerks to registration and turnout data published in two studies (Trounstine 2008, Hampton and Tate 1996) we found that the two data sets were once again indistinguishable (mean turnout for same elections 43.1 vs 41.8; p=.76). City clerk turnout reports have also been validated elsewhere (Hajnal et al 2002).

straightforward. As turnout declines across cities, we expect that racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to vote, and so less likely to have a say in electoral outcomes. If this is correct, there should be a strong positive association between aggregate turnout and minority representation.[88]

There is an important assumption behind this test – namely that turnout will be more uneven as turnout declines. Fortunately, there is ample available evidence indicating that this assumption is accurate. Hill and Leighley (1992), Citrin et al (2003) and Jackson et al (1998) have all shown turnout is more uneven at the state level as turnout declines.[89] Others have similarly found that higher turnout national elections are more representative of the class and racial makeup of the population (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).[90] It is also worth noting that turnout is much less uneven for political activities that incorporate larger shares of the population (ie voting) than it is for those that involve smaller shares (ie working on a campaign or attending a protest) (Verba et al 1995). In short, at every level where researchers have looked, higher turnout means more even turnout.

To supplement these findings, which are admittedly not directly focused on local voter turnout, we collected exit poll data for as many local mayoral elections as we could find. We then looked to see if, in fact, higher turnout at the local level means less skew. This more direct

[88] It is, of course, possible that minority candidates will be elected primarily with white support. If true, there should be little relationship between minority representation on the city council and the size of the minority population. As we will see, this is very far from the case. Minority voters appear to be critical to minority candidates.

[89] Hill and Leighley (1992) found that in presidential elections, aggregate turnout and class bias in turnout are correlated at .41 across statesl. We repeated and confirmed this pattern using the entire series of the Voter News Service exit polls, Census data on the racial makeup of each state, and published state level voter turnout figures (McDonald 2008). We then supplemented their work by analyzing the relationship between aggregate state turnout and racial bias in turnout. Our tests indicate that higher state level turnout is associated with marked decreases in the overrepresentation of white voters (r=-.20) and marked increases in the representation of Latino (r=.35) and Asian American (.31) voters.

[90] Our own analysis of the entire series of Voter News Service exit polls also indicates that as national voter turnout increases, the fraction of voters who are minority goes up markedly. Across years, voting eligible turnout is negatively correlated with the representation of white voters (-.28) and positively correlated with the representation of Latino and Asian American voters (.11 and .21 respectively). We found an even starker pattern for education. Here, higher turnout leads to greater representation for those with only a high school education (r=.23) and much more limited representation of those with more than a college degree (r=-.81). Similar analysis that we performed of the state-wide initiative vote in California suggests that the vote becomes substantially more representative by income, race, age, and other socioeconomic characteristics in higher turnout elections (analysis not shown).

test strongly confirms the assumption. Higher registered voter turnout in mayoral elections is associated with a sharp decrease in the overrepresentation of white and black voters and sharp increases in the representation of Asian American of Latino voters. Across these mayoral elections, registered voter turnout was negatively correlated at .47 with the representation of white voters[91], negatively correlated at .69 with the representation of black voters, positively correlated at .47 with the representation of Latino voters, and positively correlated at .68 with the representation of Asian American voters. The same pattern was evident for class. Higher turnout meant residents with limited educations represented a much larger share of the electorate.[92] In particular, registered voter turnout was positively correlated (r=.33) with the representation of non high school graduates among voters and negatively correlated (r-.51) with the representation of those with more than a college degree among voters. The number of cases in our data set of exit polls is relatively small – 20 elections across 5 cities – but all of the available evidence clearly indicates that higher turnout elections tend to be much more representative of the city population.

Although we now know that higher turnout at the local level means less skew, it is still clear that aggregate turnout will only be an imprecise proxy for class or racial/bias. Given the noise in our measure, our results should, if anything, underestimate the magnitude of the effects of class or racial/bias on government spending patterns.[93] Critically, if our small sample of mayoral exit polls is atypical and it turns out there is no underlying relationship between local

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[91] Representation here is measured as the proportion of the group in the voting population (as measured by exit polls) minus the proportion of the group in the adult population of the city (from the Census). The pattern is the same if we use a representation ratio (the proportion of the group voting divided by the proportion in the city population) or a logged representation ratio.

[92] Another test using the ACPS led to roughly similar results. Regression analysis not only shows that education strongly affected the likelihood that each individual survey respondents would report voting in local contests, it also demonstrates the declining impact of education as aggregate turnout increases. Adding interaction terms with education and the registered voter turnout rate for a city reveals that turnout is significantly less skewed by education in cities with higher turnout (analysis not shown).

[93] If this is noise is too severe, our tests should reveal no relationship between turnout and government spending.

voter turnout and the skew of the electorate, our tests should reveal no relationship between turnout and representation.

The analysis that follows focuses primarily on turnout of registered voters rather than turnout of eligible voters. In the ICMA survey, clerks provide enough information to calculate both figures. Specifically, clerks are asked to provide the percentage of eligible voters who are registered to vote and the percentage of registered voters who voted in the most recent city wide election.[94] We focus primarily on registered voter turnout rather than turnout of eligible voters because the former is more accurate than the latter. The problem with using eligible voting figures is that city clerks have to estimate the eligible population. Cities almost never compile figures for eligible voters and there is no outside data source that provides yearly data on local eligible populations. By contrast, cities and counties must compile and record data on total voter turnout and voter registration for every election.

Despite the limitations of the eligible voter data, there are reasons we might want to learn more about the effects of eligible voter turnout. Since different jurisdictions have used a range of registration requirements to exclude or include different segments of the population (Parker 1990, Davidson and Grofman 1994), one might miss a significant part of the turnout story by focusing exclusively on turnout of registered voters. To address this concern, we repeat each of our tests with the turnout of the eligible population. In the end, it does not matter which measure we use. Turnout of registered and turnout of eligible voters are closely correlated (r=.87) and when we repeat the analysis with the percent of eligible voters, we get similar results.

For our test of the link between turnout and minority representation on city councils, we have to be mindful of other factors that might be related to minority representation. Thus, our

[94] Clerks were asked, "Approximately what percentage of registered voters voted in the last election?" and "Approximately what percentage of those eligible to vote in your municipal elections are registered to vote?" Combining the two we were able to calculate an estimate of eligible voter turnout.

model of representation includes a number of important controls. Since a long line of research has shown that minority representation can be related to the institutional structure of local elections, we control for five potentially relevant features of local government: 1) at-large vs district elections, 2) nonpartisan vs partisan elections, 3) the presence of term limits, and 4) the size of the city council (Trounstine and Valdini 2008, Welch 1990, Grofman and Davidson 1994, Engstrom and Mc Donald 1982, Alozie 1992).[95] The dynamics of each of these institutions and their potential links to minority representation are detailed later in the chapter.

We also include measures of educational attainment (percent college graduates), income (median household income), and region, because willingness to vote for minority candidates has at times been linked to socioeconomic status and education as well as region (Sears and Kinder 1971, Williams 1990, Handley and Grofman 1994). Finally, we include controls for the racial and ethnic makeup of the population and the percentage of noncitizens in each city since group size is the best predictor of minority representation (Grofman and Handley 1989, Karnig and Welch 1980, Alozie and Manganaro 1993, Alozie 1992). Like previous research on minority representation, we restrict our analysis to cities where the group being assessed makes up at least five percent of the city population and thus has at least a nominal chance of winning a seat on the council.

Fortunately, the ICMA survey that we use to obtain data on turnout also reports figures for the number of city council members who are white, African American, Latino, and Asian American, and the institutional and electoral structure of each city. Using the ICMA data and merged data on various city level demographic measures from the 1990 Census, we can determine the relative effects of voter turnout, the institutional structure of a city, and city

[95] Several cities had some combination of at-large and single-member districts. Alternate tests indicate that these mixed systems were no more or less likely to produce minority representation than district or at-large cities.

demographics on racial and ethnic minority presence on city councils. Descriptive statistics for all independent and dependent variables for the city council regressions are in the Appendix.

Turnout and Minority Representation

Does higher turnout mean that racial and ethnic minorities are better represented in the nation's city councils? The answer is yes. The main analysis is displayed in Table 4.1 which reports the results of four separate O.L.S. regressions with the proportion of the city council that is white, African American, Latino, and Asian American respectively as the dependent variables.[96] The key independent variable is the percent of registered voters that turned out in the city's most recent election.

Table 4.1. The Determinants of Racial Representation on City Councils

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
Turnout	-.04 (.02)*	.03 (.03)	.05 (.02)*	.05 (.02)**
District Elections	-.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)***	.00(.01)	-.00 (.01)
Concurrent Elections	.00 (.01)	.03 (.01)**	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Partisan Elections	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Term Limits	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)	-.04 (.01)***
Mayor (vs city Manager)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)*	.01 (.02)
Council Size	-.01 (.00)*	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Population (log)	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.01)
Percent Poor	-.33 (.08)***	.38 (.12)***	.16 (.12)	-.01 (.11)
Median Income	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Percent College Grads	-.12 (.05)*	.15 (.08)	.22 (.07)***	.05 (.06)
Percent Latino	-.78 (.06)***	.31 (.09)***	.79 (.05)***	.20 (.08)**
Percent Asian	-.54 (.10)***	.10 (.15)	.06 (.08)	.60 (.06)***
Percent Black	-.55 (.04)***	.58 (.04)***	-.02 (.04)	.13 (.08)
Percent Non-citizen	.81 (.10)***	-.37 (.15)***	-.58 (.08)*	-.39 (.11)***

[96] Since the total number of city council positions in each city is fixed and the number of seats each racial and ethnic group obtains on the council is likely to be related to the number of seats other racial and ethnic groups hold, we repeated the analysis using seemingly unrelated regressions but found that it made little difference to our overall conclusions. We focus on the simpler regressions in Table 4.1 because by analyzing each group separately, we can focus on the cities where the racial/ethnic group in questions represents a sizeable proportion of the population (greater than 5 percent of the population). We want to know, for example, what effect turnout has on Asian American representation in places where they could conceivable be represented rather than assessing the effect of turnout in the majority of American cities where there are almost no Asian Americans to elect.

West	.01 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.02)
Midwest	-.01 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Northeast	.00 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)
Constant	1.16 (.05)***	-.18 (.06)*	-.18 (.06)***	-.02 (.06)
Adj. R-squared	.33	.29	.51	.40
N	1695	567	570	223

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10 **p<.05 ***p<.01

As can be seen in the first row of the table, the results of the analysis indicate that higher turnout in local elections leads to significantly greater numbers of Latinos and Asian Americans on city councils. By contrast, higher turnout reduces white representation on city councils. For African Americans, there is no clear relationship between aggregate turnout and council representation. In other words, the more people who vote, the better Latinos and Asian Americans fare and the worse off whites are. And as we will see shortly, these effects can be substantial.[97]

The pattern in Table 4.1 fits well with what we might have expected had we simply compared the turnout rates of different racial and ethnic groups. Since African Americans vote at rates just below whites, one would not expect them to substantially lose or gain from an increase in turnout. Instead, the two groups likely to gain the most from expanded turnout are the two groups that normally vote the least – Latinos and Asian Americans.[98]

[97] One other point regarding Table 4.1 is worth noting. It concerns patterns of inter-minority conflict and cooperation. The results in the table shed some light on the degree to which different minority groups cooperate with each other in local elections (see also McClain and Tauber 1998). Specifically Table 4.1 suggests that black representation tends to increase as the size of the Hispanic population increases. Similarly, Asian American representation is greater in cities with larger Hispanic populations. The results are, however, somewhat ambiguous. There are two possible interpretations for the pattern. The pattern could be an indication of fairly widespread Hispanic support for black and Asian American candidates and thus could be seen as important evidence of inter-minority cooperation. But the pattern could simply mean that African Americans and Asian Americans are gaining at the expense of low Hispanic participation and thus would offer no clear evidence that these minority groups are regularly forming coalitions.

[98] Why do Asian Americans gain substantially here and less dramatically in our earlier analysis of mayoral elections? We believe there are two main reasons for the difference. First, in this analysis we are focusing exclusively on cities with larger than average Asian American populations (over five percent Asian American). Second it is likely that Asian American voters more united when they have a chance to elect an Asian American candidate. Our entire data set of mayoral elections included only 3 Asian American candidates, whereas the current analysis focuses directly on the success rates of Asian American candidates.

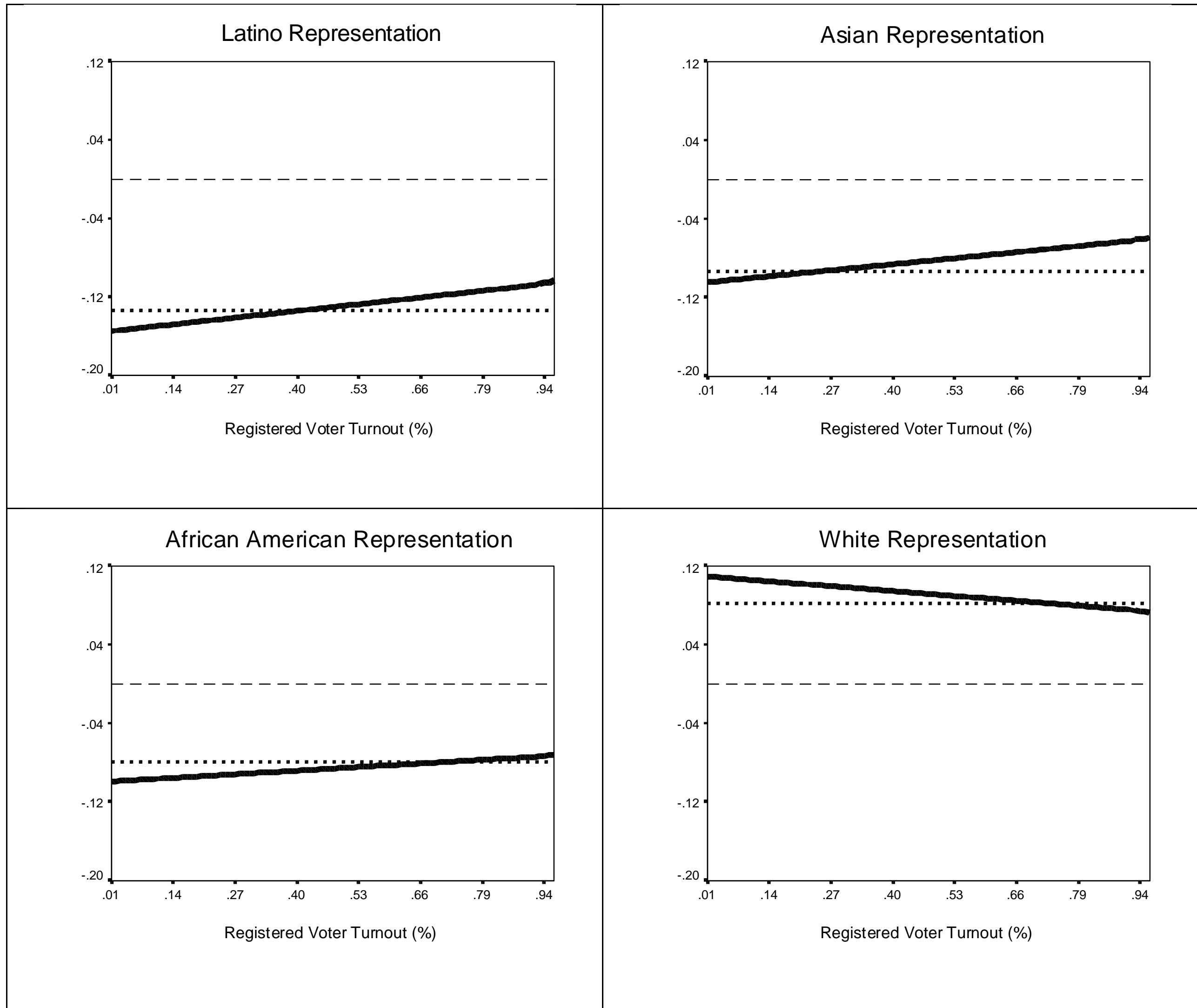
Equity in Representation

To better gauge the substantive effects of turnout on racial/ethnic representation on city councils Figure 4.1 illustrates the effects of turnout on the over/under-representation of each group (the percentage of a given racial/ethnic group on the council minus the percentage of that racial/ethnic group in the city's voting age population) for each of the four racial/ethnic groups. To create Figure 4.1 we re-ran the analysis in Table 4.1 substituting this measure of proportional representation as the dependent variable and then calculated predicted representation rates at a given turnout level for each group. All other independent variables are held constant at their mean level. The regression results, which essentially repeat Table 4.1, are included in the appendix. For comparison purposes each of the four graphs has a dotted line indicating the mean level of over/under-representation for each racial/ethnic group and a dashed line indicating parity or equity in representation.

Before turning to the figure it is worth re-emphasizing that non-whites are greatly underrepresented on city councils nationwide. Latinos are the most under-represented of any group. In cities where they represent five percent or more of the population, Latino representation averages 13 percent below parity. Thus, Stockton California is fairly typical in that Latinos made up 24 percent of the population in the city but only held eleven percent of city council seats (1 of 9 total seats). Las Vegas also might be considered typical. Despite the fact that almost 13 percent of the city population is Latino, none of the 5 council seats were held by Latinos at the time of the survey. Asian Americans average 9 points below parity and African American council representation averages 8 points below parity. Also, for Latinos and Asian Americans, underrepresentation greatly increases as the size of each group grows. In cities where they number at least a quarter of the population, Latinos are 25 points below parity and

Asian Americans are 22 points below parity. Monterey Park California would fit well into this latter set of cities. Asian Americans held only one of the five council seats even though the population of the city was almost 60 percent Asian American.[99]

Figure 4.1. How Turnout Affects Racial/Ethnic Representation on City Councils



The solid line represents predicted values of over/under-representation at different levels of turnout. All independent variables other than turnout are held at their mean value. The dotted line represents the mean value of over/under-representation for a given racial/ethnic group. The dashed line indicates equity or proportional representation.

[99] Horton (1995) provides an insightful account of the how white opposition has led to the underrepresentation of Asian Americans in Monterey Park and of the greater politics of diversity.

The question then becomes, can increased turnout substantially reduce this underrepresentation? As can be seen in the figure, the answer is a qualified yes. In our model increased turnout does not bring Latinos, Asian Americans, or African Americans to equity in representation on city councils but for Latinos and Asian Americans it has the potential to reduce underrepresentation considerably. For Latinos, in a typical city, moving from an election where 10 percent of registered voters turn out (the 10th percentile in terms of turnout) to an election where 69 percent of registered voters turn out (the 90th percentile) would decrease Latino under-representation on the city council by 4.2 percentage points, roughly eliminating one quarter of the 13 point average under-representation of Latinos. [100] A similar increase in turnout could reduce Asian American under-representation in a typical city by 2.8 percentage points roughly accounting for a third of the 9 point average under-representation of Asian Americans. For whites, a similarly large increase in turnout would eliminate roughly a quarter of white over-representation in a typical city council election. Since these simulations hold all other factors involved in these elections constant at their mean levels, they offer a reasonable estimate of how much turnout might matter in a typical city, rather than an exact measure of the effects of expanded turnout at the national level. The results are, nevertheless, impressive. If we seek to expand minority descriptive representation, turnout could be a critical tool.

Although the simulated changes in turnout that we are considering here might seem quite large, it is not unreasonable to expect large changes in turnout at the city level. Large changes in turnout often occur across elections within a single city (Hampton and Tate 1996). Also, as Chapter Six will show, small reforms to local electoral structures can have dramatic effects on voter turnout. Simply changing the timing of local elections to coincide with national elections,

[100] This simulation and others in the rest of the book were calculated using Clarify holding all other independent variables at their mean or modal value (King et al 2000).

for example, increases registered voter turnout by 36 percentage points over turnout in stand-alone local elections. In short, there is reason to believe that if turnout increased, it could substantially increase minority representation in American cities.

At the same time, it is important to note that Figure 4.1 tells us that turnout can rectify only part of the problem of minority under-representation. Clearly, there are other barriers to minority representation - like the costs of running a campaign, finding candidates with the requisite political experience, citizenship requirements, and internal group divisions - that also need to be considered. Addressing unequal turnout is just one element of a larger reform agenda.

To test the robustness of these findings, we re-ran the analysis using two different measures of representational equity. Results for all of these tests are displayed in the Appendix. In one sets of tests, rather than look at small changes in representation, we calculated and used as the dependent variable the number of council seats that a given group was below racial parity. Given that it is impossible to win a proportion of a council seat, simply counting up the number of additional council seats that a group should have to achieve proportion representation in some ways more meaningfully captures the nature of electoral competition in cities. In another set of tests we re-ran the analysis with a logged representation ratio measure developed by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995: see pages 571-577 for a description and explication of the measure). Although the logged representation ratio is harder to interpret, it has the advantage of being unaffected by the size of the group. Both alternate dependent variables led to similar conclusions about the effect of turnout on equity in council representation. Finally, we repeated the main analysis with turnout of eligible voters. The results, which can also be found in the Appendix led to the same basic conclusion. The bottom line for all of these tests is that turnout

is a critical determinant of minority representation. Low voter turnout substantially reduces minority success in city council elections.

Admittedly, our causal story is likely to somewhat over simplify the actual relationship between turnout and minority representation. One possibility is that there may be some feedback between minority representation and voter participation. We know, for example, that in historic elections when minority candidates have a real chance of winning offices that minorities have never held before, the presence of a viable minority candidate sparks high turnout (Hajnal 2006).[101] Record turnout in many of the 2008 Democratic primaries in which Barack Obama sought to become the first black president is just one example of this phenomenon. The record 75 percent voter turnout in Los Angeles in 1969 in response to Tom Bradley's bid to be the first black mayor of that city is another. At the same time, it is important to note that there is little sign that gains in turnout occur much beyond these historic elections. Turnout in Los Angeles, for example, fell in every Bradley reelection bid and by his fourth reelection bid in 1989 had fallen to a depressing 23 percent. The bulk of the evidence, in fact, indicates that gains in turnout are limited in magnitude and brief in duration – generally fading away after the novelty of minority leadership has lost some of its luster (Gay 2001, Hajnal 2007 but see Tate 2003). Most of the time, when minority incumbents run for re-election they face little opposition and win easily in low turnout affairs (Hajnal 2007). Thus, while it appears that gains in turnout in precede minority representation in some rare cases, generally speaking high turnout is not a consequence of minority representation.

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[101] It is, however, not even clear if high turnout drives minority representation in these historic cases. In these cases, it appears that the potential for a transition to minority leadership also sparks heightened turnout among white voters who seek to block the transition. Hajnal (2007), in fact, finds that changes in turnout among whites and non-whites in these elections are extremely highly correlated (r>.90). Thus, high turnout is not associated with net gains for either side.

There is yet another scenario in which the causal arrow is reversed and turnout is more of a consequence than a cause of minority representation. In this second account, a minority representative enacts certain policies that encourage heightened minority turnout in subsequent elections which in turn leads to further expansion of minority representation. There is some evidence, for example, that the establishment of key benefits for senior citizens led to the mobilization of seniors in order to protect and expand those benefits (Campbell 2003). For our purposes, if the end result is heightened minority representation and an expansion of pro-minority policies, it doesn't really matter what comes first. However, we do address the possibility that changes in policy are driving turnout –rather than the reverse – in the next chapter.

The Contingent Effects of Turnout

One of the main goals of this research has been to show that uneven turnout has a more pronounced effect at the local level than at the national level. But this, in many ways, is only part of the story. There are also specific contexts at the local level where we would expect turnout to matter more. In this next section, we consider two such contexts.

One of the biggest determinants of the impact of turnout for any given group is likely to be how large that group is. One would expect increases (or decreases) in turnout to affect minority representation more in cities where the minority in question makes up a larger share of the population. If Asian Americans, for example, make up only a tiny fraction of the population in a given city as they do in cities like Cleveland and Atlanta, it doesn't really matter whether they turnout at a rate of 100 percent or 10 percent. Thus, in Table 4.2, we attempted to determine how the effects of turnout on representation vary by the size of the minority

population. To do so we repeated the analysis in Table 4.1 adding interaction terms for turnout and the size of the relevant minority population.[102]

Table 4.2 Turnout Matters More When Groups Are Larger

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asians
Turnout	-.21 (.09)**	.02 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.00)*
% white*turnout	***.20 (.10)****	**---**	**---**	**---**
% black*turnout	**---**	***-.04 (.07)***	**---**	**---**
% latino*turnout	**---**	**---**	***.29 (.07)*****	**---**
% asian*turnout	**---**	**---**	**---**	***.57 (.06)*****
Districts	.00 (.01)	.01 (.00)***	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Concurrent	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
Partisan	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.02 (.02)	.00 (.00)
Term Limits	.01 (.02)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.02)	-.01 (.00)**
Mayor	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Council Size	-.01 (.00)***	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Pop (log)	-.00 (.01)	.01 (.00)***	.00 (.00)	-.01 (.00)
Percent Poor	-.36 (.08)***	.23 (.04)***	.06 (.03)**	-.02 (.01)
Med. Income	.00 (.01)	.03 (.02)*	.00 (.01)	.01 (.00)***
College Grads	-.12 (.05)**	.03 (.02)	.09 (.02)***	.00 (.01)
% Latino	-.71 (.06)***	.10 (.03)***	.58 (.03)***	.04 (.01)***
% Asian	-.40 (.11)***	.01 (.05)	.06 (.04)*	.13 (.03)***
% Black	-.50 (.05)***	.58 (.03)***	-.02 (.01)	.01 (.01)
% Non-citizen	.81 (.10)***	-.15 (.05)***	-.51 (.04)***	-.39 (.11)***
West	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	.00 (.00)
Midwest	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.00)**	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Northeast	.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)**	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)
Constant	1.13 (.05)*	-.11 (.02)*	-.02 (.02)	.02 (.01)*
Adj. R2	.35	.54	.52	.33
N	1699	1699	1699	1699

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10 **p<.05 ***p<.01

A clear pattern emerges from this analysis. For all minority groups except African Americans the interaction terms are positive and significant indicating that the effects of turnout on representation increase significantly as the group's proportion of the population of a city increases.[103] For example, for Latinos, the effects of turnout are over ten times as great when

[102] We also repeated the analysis in Table 4.2 using a seemingly unrelated regression format but found that it made no difference to the substantive conclusions.
[103] We also looked to see if the relationship between turnout, group size and representation was even more complicated. Specifically, we tested a range of different non-linear forms to determine if group size mattered less after a group made up a majority or more of the population. What we found was that for whites the effects of group size on the importance of turnout were, in fact, non-linear. As the size of the white population increases, turnout

their population is large than when it is small. As one would expect, simulations indicate that there is essentially no net gain from increased turnout when the Latino population is tiny. But when Latinos make up a third of the population, a jump in turnout from low to high turnout increases Latino representation on city councils by over 3 percentage points.[104]

The interaction between group size and turnout for both Latinos and Asian Americans is displayed in Figure 4.2. The figure shows the effect of turnout in cities with small and large Latino and Asian American populations. The dashed line represents the effect of turnout when the minority in question represents a small fraction of the local population. The solid line demonstrates the effect of turnout when the group is large.[105] In each case, it is clear that turnout has a real, substantively large effect when the minority in question represents a large fraction of the local population and a negligible effect when it represents a tiny fraction of the population.

Figure 4.2 The Varying Effects of Turnout on Minority Representation

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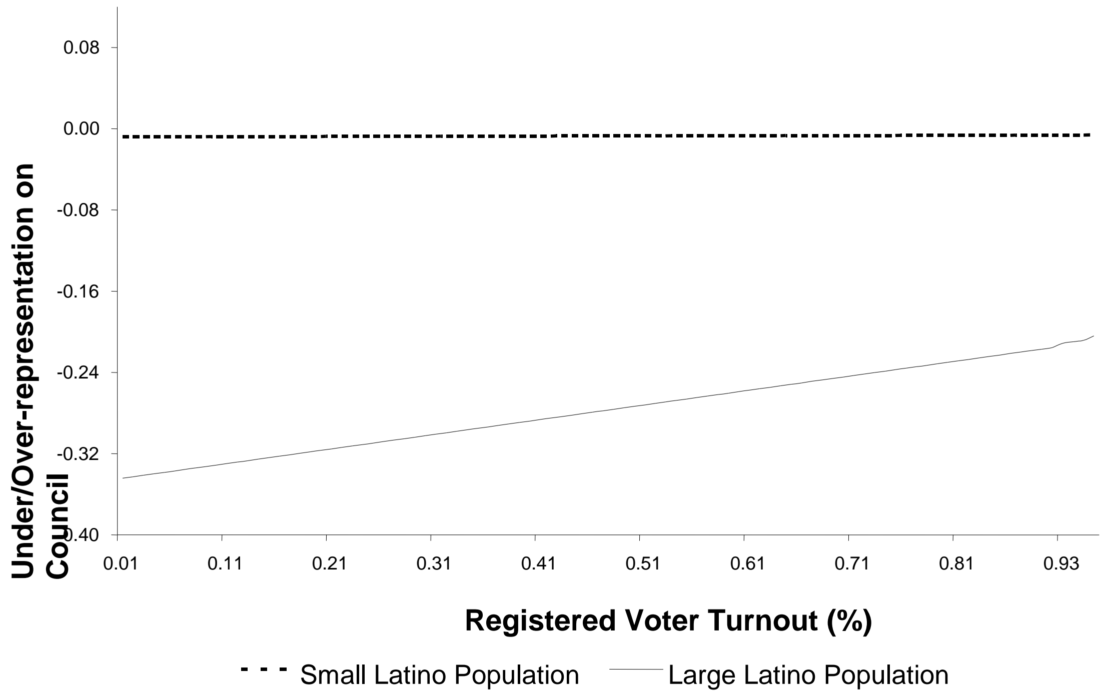
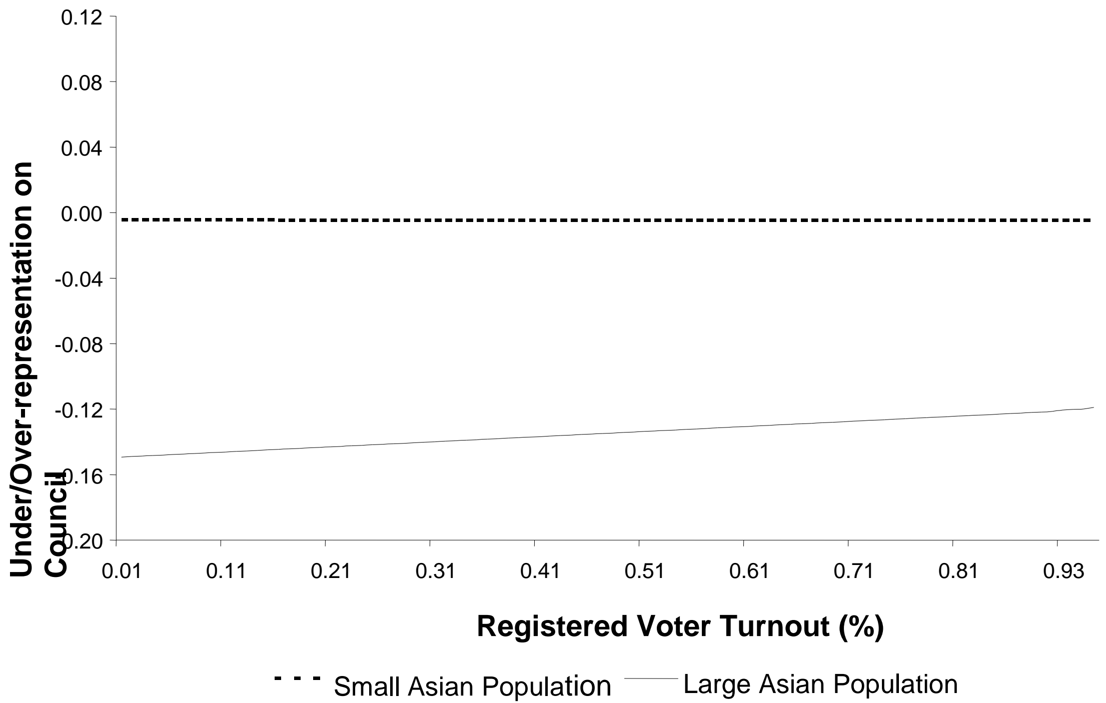
helps whites more but once whites reach a substantial majority, turnout essentially has no effect on white representation. For Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans we found no clear non-linearities – probably because none of the three minority groups was a majority of the population in more than a handful of cities.

[104] These simulations vary the quantity of interests from the 10th to the 90th percentile. For turnout, the simulation is from 14 percent to 69 percent registered voter turnout. For Latino population size that is from .003 percent to .31 percent.

[105] The ‘small’ minority population is the minority group population in the median city of the entire ICMA sample and the ‘large’ minority population represents a city at the 95th percentile in terms of the minority population.


Latino Representation by Size of Latino Population
0.08
0.00
-0.08
-0.16
-0.24
-0.32
-0.40
Under/Over-representation on Council
0.01
0.11
0.21
0.31
0.41
0.51
0.61
0.71
0.81
0.93
Registered Voter Turnout (%)
Small Latino Population
Large Latino Population


Asian Representation by Size of Asian Population
0.12
0.08
0.04
0.00
-0.04
-0.08
-0.12
-0.16
-0.20
Under/Over-representation on Council
0.01
0.11
0.21
0.31
0.41
0.51
0.61
0.71
0.81
0.93
Registered Voter Turnout (%)
Small Asian Population
Large Asian Population

These visual relationships underscore the fact that turnout matters. If a group is large enough to have an influence in the local political arena, then voter turnout will be one of the key determinants of whether that happens. The bottom line is that expanded turnout matters much more to Asian Americans, Latinos, and whites when they are large enough to substantially affect the outcome of the vote.[106]

A second set of contextual factors that could mediate the effects of turnout are the electoral institutions of a city. Perhaps the most obvious case where a local electoral structure might mediate the effects of turnout is district elections. If city council districts in a city are drawn to create one dominant racial group in each district, then turnout should not matter since a that dominant group can turn out in large numbers or small numbers and still win the council seat. By contrast, in at-large elections with a diverse population, who does and who does not turn out to vote could well be critical.

To see if turnout matters less under district elections and more generally to see if other institutions mediate the effects of turnout, we repeated the analysis in Table 4.1 adding interaction terms for turnout and each of the electoral institutions (district vs at-large elections, term limits vs no term limits, partisan vs nonpartisan elections, concurrent vs nonconcurrent election timing, and mayor-council vs city manager form of government). What we found was that turnout effects did not appear to be significantly contingent on the type of electoral system. Given these nonsignificant results and the space that would be required to present all of the interactions for all of the racial/ethnic groups, we do not present the results in full tables. It should, however, be noted that these results cannot definitively rule out institutions as a factor

[106] Importantly, the fact that aggregate turnout only matters when minority groups are large strongly suggests that the turnout effects we see in this chapter are more driven by changes in minority turnout rather than by changes in white turnout. When aggregate turnout in a city is high and minorities are present in large numbers in that city, it appears that minority voters tend to be quite active and well represented within the electorate. It is this increased minority participation that then translates into more minority favored outcomes.

mediating turnout effects. The lack of any significant effect could certainly be because there are no mediating relationships or it could be that the relationships are just more complex than what we can comfortably model here. For example, it could be that district elections only diminish the effects of turnout in cities with large minority population, high levels of segregation, and racially polarized voting patterns (Sass 2000).

Institutions and minority representation

Voter turnout is not the only factor that could affect minority representation. In their quest to expand minority representation, advocates of minority rights have focused much less on voter turnout than they have on institutional reform. Although, as we have just seen, these institutions do not appear to interact with voter turnout to affect electoral outcomes, there is ample reason to expect that local institutions will have a significant, direct effect on minority representation.

America's racial history is replete with cases where the local white population has manipulated the local electoral structure to prevent racial minorities from gaining access to political offices or other political resources (Kousser 1999, Davidson 1999, Foner 1984). As well, when the civil rights movement has been able to successfully challenge many of these structures in the courts, subsequent reform of these institutions has led to dramatic gains in minority representation in many states (Parker 1990).

Among the institutions cited as detrimental to minority or lower-class interests, at-large elections get the most attention (Trounstine and Valdini 2008, Grofman and Davidson 1994, Welch 1990, Bullock and MacManus 1990, Parker 1990, Davidson 1999, Rosales 2000). In an at-large system, if the white population can coordinate and vote for the same set of candidates, they can control every council seat in every locality where they comprise a majority of the active

electorate. By contrast, with district elections if racial and ethnic minorities are at least somewhat residentially segregated – a pattern that exists in almost every American city – then racial and ethnic minorities can influence the outcome of at least one council seat well before they become a majority of the city population. The effectiveness of at-large elections depends on the nature of the white vote and the extent of the racial divide but it is certainly possible that the large number of citywide elections that occur each year around the country could be serving as an effective barrier to minority representation today.

Although at-large elections are the most obvious and frequently cited barrier, four other potentially damaging institutional barriers exist in many American cities: 1) small council size 2) non-partisan elections, 3) off-cycle elections, and 4) council-manager government. [107] Reducing council size or simply maintaining a small number of council seats is a practice that has been linked to minority underrepresentation (Bullock and MacManus 1987, Alozie 1992). By limiting the number of seats on the council, a city can increase the threshold for the number of voters required to control a seat. This can effectively limit minority voters from electing any minority candidates or it can reduce the number of seats controlled by minorities.

Scholars have also wondered whether nonpartisan elections – elections in which party advantage middle class business interests by making politics less intelligible to the average citizen and by reducing the influence of political parties that have traditionally been one of the main mobilizers of lower and working-class interests (Bridges 1997, Welch and Bledsoe 1988, Schaffner et al 2001). Similarly, critics of nonconcurrent elections – local elections that do not coincide with the dates of statewide or national contests – contend that they reduce lower-class and minority influence by making voting in local elections more difficult and by weeding out all

[107] A more recent reform, term limits, has, according to its advocates, had the opposite effect and has served to help minorities by forcing out long term white incumbent leadership and opening up positions that minorities can compete for (Thompson and Moncrief 1993, Copeland 1997, Donovan and Snipp 1994).

but the most regular – usually white and middle class – voters (Bridges 1997). Finally, the replacement of a mayor-council plan of government in which fairly robust executive powers are given to a directly elected mayor with a council-manager system in which the day-to-day operations of the city are overseen by an unelected professional city manager or administrator can be viewed as a way to enable middle and upper class white citizens to hand pick key government officials and to essentially govern away from the light of electoral politics and the influence of lower and working class voters (Bridges 1997).

What makes this set of institutions especially worthy of consideration is the fact that most cities around the country use them. Across the nation, some sixty-four percent of all cities continue to employ at-large elections, just over three-quarters of all U.S. cities hold nonpartisans elections, almost eighty percent hold off-cycle elections away from national and state contests, and a little over one half have a city manager form of government instead of a mayor-council format.[108] If these structures represent barriers to minority success, they are having a widespread effect.

It is not, however, clear that these institutions represent an ongoing barrier to minority representation. Despite arguments highlighting the potentially negative consequences of these structures, empirical evidence is limited. Much of the research findings are based on elections that occurred well into the past. A range of changes including a softening of white attitudes toward minority empowerment raise questions about the ongoing validity of these studies. As well, the growing diversity of America's urban population may have altered the impact of local institutions on minority representation. At least historically, much of the effort of the white community to reduce minority influence has been directed at the African American population. Consequently, most of the research has focused on how these institutions have affected black

[108] Figures are from the 2001 ICMA survey.

representation. This research has confirmed that local structures can be manipulated to reduce black influence in the local political arena (Engstrom and McDonald 1982, Welch 1990). What is less clear is how much this applies to other racial and ethnic minority communities who are often less cohesive in the political arena, have different kinds of relations with the white community, and experience different residential patterns (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005, Massey 2001). Thus, it may be that the factors that impact black representation do little to help or hinder Latino and Asian American representation. There is a small but growing literature focusing on these other groups but its findings are limited and often contradictory (Trounstine and Valdini 2008, Sass 2000, Alozie 1992, Alozie and Manganaro 1993). Ultimately, institutions represent a potentially important but not fully tested alternative avenue to expanding representation.[109]

Our main analysis of institutions tests for the effects of six different local institutional features on minority representation: 1) at-large vs district elections, 2) council size, 3) mayor-council vs city manager form of government, 4) on-cycle vs off-cycle elections, 5) partisan vs nonpartisan elections, and 6) term limits. The results can be found in Table 4.3 which simply presents a subset of the results from the regressions in Table 4.1.

The effect of institutions varies greatly across groups. For African Americans, institutions represent a potentially critical determinant of political representation. The analysis suggests that two reforms, the establishment of district elections and the move to on-cycle elections, could help to significantly expand black representation on city councils nationwide. The finding regarding on-cycle elections is particularly important because it identifies a new and potentially fruitful avenue to expanding black representation. Previous accounts of black

[109] Another serious concern with the findings in the existing literature is that even among the most recent studies, any analysis of institutional effects inevitably focuses on one institution while failing to control for other potentially relevant institutions. Given that the presence of any of these institutional features is correlated with the presence of the other institutional features, it is critical that the empirical model include all relevant institutions.

underrepresentation have overlooked election timing as a mechanism for expanding black officeholding. The finding regarding district elections is also important in that it reaffirms earlier tests which have demonstrated a link between black electoral success and district elections using older data (Grofman and Davidson 1994, Welch 1990, Bullock and MacManus 1990, Parker 1990). By contrast, none of the other proposed institutional solutions such as partisan elections, the mayor-council form of government, or term limits is significantly related to African American city council representation.

For both election timing and district type, the effect of institutional reform appears to be reasonably large. The coefficients in Table 4.3 indicate that moving from at-large to district elections increases the proportion of blacks on the city council of a typical city by a little over three percent, all else equal. Similarly, changing the dates of local elections to coincide with the dates of national elections might reduce black underrepresentation in a city by three percentage points. Combined, the two reforms could have a substantial impact. According to the model, reform on both measures could increase the proportion of blacks on a city council by a little over six percentage points, again all else equal. Given that African Americans average nine points below parity, this represents a significant reduction in black under-representation.[110] Since the vast majority of cities across the nation hold at-large elections and most also hold off-cycle elections, there is significant room for reform. The exact effects of these institutional changes in any given city would likely depend on the racial makeup of each city, the nature of the racial divide in each city, and other local factors. Nevertheless, it seems clear that these two institutional reforms could greatly influence black representation nationwide.

[110] Calculating the exact figure would require an analysis that essentially works through an interaction between the institutional structure of each city and the percent black for each city since these institutional changes would help blacks more in cities with larger black populations. Of course, beyond a certain black population proportion (eg majority black cities), these institutions might not increase black representation. Thus, the formula for determining the exact impact of institutional change on black representation nationwide would be extremely complicated.

Table 4.3. Institutional and Demographic Determinants of City Council Representation[1]

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
INSTITUTIONS				
District Elections	-.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)***	.00(.01)	-.00 (.01)
Concurrent Elections	.00 (.01)	.03 (.01)**	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Partisan Elections	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Term Limits	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)	-.04 (.01)***
Mayor (vs city Manager)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)*	.01 (.02)
Council Size	-.01 (.00)*	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.00)

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10 **p<.05 ***p<.01 [1] This analysis includes controls for the same turnout, region, and demographic measures as Table 4.1.

For white representation, only one institution appears to matter. As minority rights activists have argued, smaller council sizes can aid white representation and hurt minority representation. By keeping council sizes small, cities increase the hurdle for minority groups to elect representatives of their choice. This, in turn, appears to allow whites to dominate even more. The effect is not particularly large, but all else equal for every one extra council seat in the median city in our analysis, our model predicts about a one percentage point decline in white representation on the council. Institutional reform could matter here – however small the effects might be.

For Latinos and Asians Americans, the story is different. Institutional change seems to offer much less hope for addressing inequalities in electoral outcomes.[111] The main exception is term limits, which at least at first glance appear to decrease Asian American representation.[112] This finding is, however, not at all robust to changes in the specification of the model. The absence of clear link between institutional structures and Latino and Asian American

[111] Several of these institutional levers have at least an indirect effect on racial/ethnic representation on city councils. As we will see in Chapter Six, if registered voter turnout is substituted as the dependent variable, all of these institutions (except term limits) do affect voter turnout indicating that they may help minorities by offering an avenue to expand turnout.
[112] Latinos also appear to do better with the mayor-council form of government than with the city manager form of government but the effect is only marginally significant (p<.10) and limited in size.

representation fits well with a small number of recent studies which have found little connection between local institutional structure and Asian American and Latino representation (Alozie 1992, Alozie and Manganaro 1993, Bullock and MacManus 1990 but see Sass 2000 and Trounstine and Valdini 2008).

Why do these institutions matter for black representation and not for Latino and Asian American representation? We suspect that two factors are largely driving this difference. The first is lower levels of residential segregation between the Latino and Asian American communities and the white population (Massey 2001). The average Latino lives in a neighborhood that is only 45 percent Latino and the average Asian American lives in a neighborhood that is only 21 percent Asian American. For African Americans, the figure is 65 percent black (Massey 2001). Lower levels of segregation mean that it is harder to draw districts with Latino and Asian American majorities and consequently more difficult to use districts to expand Latino or Asian American representation. A second potentially important factor explaining the difference between African Americans and other minorities is the degree of racial polarization in the vote (Trounstine and Valdini 2008). As we saw in Chapter Two, the racial divide between white and black voters is much larger than the typical divide between either white and Asian American voters or white and Latino voters. Since Latino and Asian Americans voters are more apt to want to elect the same candidates as whites the way in which votes are counted matters less.

Turnout Effects in More Recent Elections

One concern with the results that have been presented up to this point in the chapter is that they may be outdated. The data, in fact, are derived from elections that occurred almost two decades ago. In the interim much has changed in America. Some of the changes have, if

anything, led to even greater turnout effects. The coupling of dramatic growth in the Latino and Asian American immigrant populations with continued low participation rates among members of both communities means that inequities in 21st Century American democracy could be that much more severe. At the same time, there are other changes that likely have diminished or even eliminated the kinds of turnout effects that were evident in the late 1980s. Growing political apathy among all sectors of the American population could mean that low minority turnout is less of a problem than it once was (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Changes in the nature of race relations and what some perceive to be the diminishing importance of race in American society could have reduced racial divides and consequently diminished the impact of unequal turnout (Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997). Perhaps most important of all, if white voters are now willing to ignore race and vote for racial and ethnic minority candidates, this would mean that minority success is no longer dependent on minority turnout (Thernstrom 1987, Hajnal 2001). In short, it remains unclear whether turnout matters more or less in American elections today than a generation ago. To properly assess the effects of turnout in city councils, we need to see if more recent elections exhibit the same effects.

To that end, we obtained data on recent elections in California. Along with colleagues from the Public Policy Institute of California, in 2000 we polled city clerks in every incorporated city in the state to acquire data on for voter turnout in the most recent city level election and the institutional structure in each city. We then merged this survey data with Census data on the racial makeup and demographics of each city and a list of racial and ethnic minority city council representatives (Segura 1999). With all of these measures, we can repeat our earlier analysis to see if turnout effects continue to shape electoral outcomes.

California is just one state and is obviously not representative of the nation as a whole but California provides an excellent setting for studying the impact of voter turnout on minority representation for several reasons. First, although there are clear differences between the racial makeup of the state and the nation as a whole, those differences suggest that what we see in California today may be what we will see nationwide in the future. California is now a majority-minority state – meaning that racial and ethnic minorities outnumber non-Hispanic whites. Thus, California's racial makeup mirrors the projected makeup of the whole country in the middle part of this century.

Another advantage of using California is its size and diversity. California's large size means that our survey contains enough cities to allow for rigorous empirical analysis. Also, our almost 400 city-observations vary enormously across measures of racial diversity, population size, socioeconomic status, industrial base, urbanization, and most other relevant characteristics. There are cities in California that are comparable to most American cities on most important dimensions.

Finally, examining local voter participation within a single state avoids some problems of unmeasured heterogeneity due to state-level differences such as registration rules and Motor Voter Law implementation.[113] For comparison purposes, Table 4.A.7 in the appendix details the institutional structure and demographics of California cities and the nation as a whole.

One related disadvantage of focusing on California is that it is difficult and in some cases impossible to assess the effect of different institutions on minority representation in the state. California's cities were so transformed by the Progressive movement that there is almost no

[113] To further address this concern, we repeated the national analysis with cities clustered by state in one case and with state fixed effects in another. The basic results did not change substantially.

variation on several key structures. The effects of nonpartisanship, in particular, cannot be evaluated because all cities in the state are required to hold nonpartisan elections.[114]

The mail questionnaire was delivered to every city clerk in every California municipality in late 2000.[115] Of the 474 California cities in existence at the time of the survey, 397 clerks returned surveys with at least some of the necessary responses. Our sample of cities is generally representative of all cities in the state of California. Comparing cities that responded to those that did not revealed few significant differences.[116] A random sample of questionnaire responses was validated using municipal web pages and published newspaper accounts.[117] A copy of the survey is included in the Appendix.

Turnout and Minority Representation in California

A brief glance at the data from California indicates that despite important differences between the state and the nation, the state mirrors the rest of the United States on the measure we are most interested in here – minority representation. As in the rest of the country, racial and ethnic minorities are grossly underrepresented on city councils in the state. In 1998, the year in which the bulk of our cities reported on their local election, the state's political leadership did not come close to mirroring the state's racial diversity. Latinos represented 31 percent of the state's urban population but held only 12 percent of council seats. Similarly, Asian Americans

[114] Similarly, since the vast majority (97%) of California's cities in our sample are council-manager cities, any assessment of the effect of the council-manager form of government on turnout would have to be viewed with extreme caution.
[115] Clerks were asked to provide data on the most recent city election. The largest number of local elections in our dataset (47 percent of council elections) took place in 1998; another 27 percent in 1999, compared to 22 percent who reported on 2000 elections and 4 percent reporting on various pre-1998 elections.
[116] The sample was representative in terms of racial demographics, percentage of residents unemployed, median household income, homeownership rates, regional location and suburb/central city/rural location. There were statistically significant but substantively marginal differences between cities in and out of the sample in the average size of the population, the average household size, and the poverty rate.
[117] Errors were minimal, and any errors that were found were corrected. In a few cases where data were publicly available, missing data were filled in to expand the number of cases in the analysis. For more details on the survey, representativeness of the sample, missing data, and error correction see Hajnal, et al (2002) and the appendix.

accounted for nine percent of the urban population but only 4.7 percent of all council seats. African Americans were the one minority group that came close to proportional representation. Across the state blacks made up 4.2 percent of the population and held 4.9 percent of the council seats.[118] As one would expect, whites were grossly overrepresented. Whites made up 53 percent of the state's urban population and fully 78 percent of the council seats.[119]

Is low voter turnout to blame for the underrepresentation of Latinos and Asian Americans and the overrepresentation of whites? Another look at the data suggests that it could be. California also mirrors the rest of the country in rates of voter turnout. Turnout in local elections in California is low. Across the state, the average city council election brought only 48 percent of registered voters to the polls. Of the entire eligible population, only 28 percent participated in these elections. We will have to do much more to connect this low voter turnout to low minority representation but at least at first glance there is reason to suspect that the link between turnout and minority representation that we saw in the rest of the country is present in California's cities today.

We test this relationship more systematically in Table 4.4.[120] The table shows the effect of voter turnout on council representation for each of the state's four main racial/ethnic groups.[121] Mirroring the earlier analysis of the national data, in this model of minority

[118] Latinos and Asian Americans are still underrepresented if one only includes adult citizens. Latinos make up 18 percent of all adult citizens in the state. Asian Americans account for 10 percent. African Americans are, however, underrepresented in office by this measure. The black community totals 8 percent of all adult citizens.

[119] By comparison, the nationwide figures for 1991 show that blacks, Latinos, and Asian American respectively held only 4.3, 2.1, and 0.3 percent of all city council offices across the country. At that time, blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans comprised 12.3, 9.0, and 3.0 percent of the population respectively.

[120] Once again, we repeated the analysis employing seemingly unrelated regressions but found that it made no difference to the basic conclusions.

[121] The California data represent one case where the distinction between registered voter turnout and eligible voter turnout does make a slight difference. The results with turnout of the eligible population are slightly stronger and are thus displayed here. The pattern with registered voter turnout is similar but significance levels do drop marginally. Given that the two measures of turnout are correlated at .85 across cities in the state, it is not clear why eligible voter turnout is more closely associated with minority representation.

representation, we control for each racial group's share of the local population, the local institutional structure, and a range of city demographic characteristics.[122]

Table 4.4. The Determinants of Racial Representation on City Councils - California

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
Turnout	-.30 (.13)**	.07 (.20)	.26 (.10)**	.-.04 (.09)
District Elections	-.01 (.04)	.01 (.04)	.02 (.03)	-.01 (.02)
Concurrent Elections	.04 (.03)	.00 (.05)	-.05 (.02)*	.02 (.02)
Term Limits	.08 (.03)***	-.02 (.05)	-.05 (.02)*	-.02 (.02)
Population (log)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.01)
Percent Poor	-25 (.36)	.49 (.53)	.30 (.29)	.44 (.24)*
Median Income	.00 (.01)	.03 (.03)	.02 (.01)*	.00 (.01)
Percent College Grads	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	-.02 (.01)**
Percent Latino	-.76 (.14)***	-.04 (.24)	.76 (.11)***	-.20 (.09)**
Percent Asian	-.73 (.13)***	-.04 (.23)	.19 (.10)*	.47 (.07)***
Percent Black	-.64 (.20)****	.90 (.19)***	-.24 (.14)*	.11 (.11)
Percent Non-citizen	-.05 (.29)*	.02 (.55)	.20 (.23)	.29 (.18)
Constant	1.29 (.42)***	.07 (.76)	-.14 (.33)	.06 (.28)
Adj. R-squared	.45	.31	.55	.37
N	217	72	214	153

Source: PPIC Survey 2001, Census 2000. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10 **p<.05 ***p<.01

The results reaffirm the important role that turnout plays in the local political arena. In these recent California elections, there are strong signs that low turnout is hurting racial and ethnic minorities. As the first row of the table shows, increases in turnout are associated with significant gains in Latino representation and significant losses in white representation across the state. Once again, we find no link between aggregate turnout and black representation – a finding that fits reasonably well with the mid-level participation rates of the African American community. The one difference that we see here is for Asian Americans. In this specification and in almost all others we tried, turnout had no effect on Asian American representation in the state. It remains unclear whether this is because there truly is no relationship or because of data

[122] Once again we limit the analysis to cities where the racial group in question makes up at least five percent of the population and thus has at least some chance of determining a council seat.

limitations linked to the noisy nature of our aggregate turnout measure, the small number of cases, or the limited number of cases in our data set with any level of Asian American representation.

The effects that we do see are reasonably large. All else equal, a ten point increase in city level voter turnout is associated with roughly a two and a half percentage point increase in Latino representation and over a three percentage point decrease in white representation. Since each city is likely to respond somewhat differently to changes in voter turnout and since we cannot magically change voter turnout without also simultaneously altering some other feature of the local political arena, these gains represent a rough estimate. Nevertheless, it seems clear that turnout still has real potential to affect electoral outcomes.

Conclusion

These results strongly suggest that previous accounts of national politics have understated the role that turnout can and does play in American politics. At least at the local level, who votes appears to strongly affect who wins. When turnout increases, minority representation on city councils also increases. These results are especially important in light of the method employed in this chapter. We did not simulate even turnout across racial groups. Nor did we model increases in turnout that are not readily attainable in American cities. Instead, we simply compared high to low turnout cities – controlling for a range of key characteristics of these cities - to see how much better represented minorities are in high turnout cities. This comparison shows that racial and ethnic minorities are substantially better off when turnout is higher. Large but attainable increases in turnout can make racial and ethnic minorities much better off. Indeed, creating the conditions for high turnout, at least by our analysis, would eliminate much

of the under-representation of Latinos and Asian Americans and much of the overrepresentation of whites on city councils. This is a very strong indication that turnout matters in the real world of local politics.

These gains in minority representation are important for a number of reasons. The election of minorities to office is an important source of provide for minority residents and often sparks increased trust and efficacy among minorities (Tate 2003, Bobo and Gilliam 1990). Experience with minority leadership can also have critical effects on the white community. Under black mayoral leadership, for example, white racial resentment of the black community diminishes and white acceptance of minority leadership grows (Hajnal 2007). Finally, winners of local contests often serve as the potential pool of candidates for higher office. Barack Obama made it to the U.S. Senate and ultimately the Presidency only serving in the Illinois House. There many other stories of successful local candidates jumping to higher office.

At the same time it is important to note that there are constraints on minority elected officials. Demonstrating that there is a link between turnout and the number of minorities who are elected to office does not necessarily mean that turnout is critical for policy. Simply replacing one leader who is opposed by most of the minority community with another leader who is favored by most of the minority community in many ways represents a significant step forward for minority interests. But that change in leadership does not always mean major changes in policy or substantial improvement in the well-being of members of the minority community. African Americans and Hispanics have been able to use the vote to attain descriptive representation across a range of circumstances but there are certainly cases where that descriptive representation has not led to any kind of real policy transformation (Hero and Tolbert 1995, Smith 1996, Singh 1998). It is also worth noting that policies could change even

without the arrival of new, minority leaders. Thus, if we really want to understand the role that turnout plays in affecting minority representation, we need to begin to consider other aspects of minority representation. We need to consider the effects turnout has on the behavior of candidates once they are in office. In the next chapter, we undertake this new test.

Chapter Five. Turnout and Local Government Spending Priorities

The last two chapters illustrated the dramatic role turnout can play in the local electoral arena. Who wins office seems intricately connected to who votes and perhaps more importantly to who does not vote. But what happens after the election, once candidates enter office? Winning office is a significant first step that can have real consequences for racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups but it is only a first step. The ultimate test of turnout is how it affects what a government does once in office.

Thus, in this chapter, I present one last, critical test of turnout effects in the local political arena. Specifically, I look to see how voter turnout affects one of the most important indicators of government priorities – where they spend their money. Governments serve a variety of purposes but one of their most vital functions is the distribution of resources. Where those resources are distributed and who receives them are among the most fundamental questions facing a democracy. The local political arena is no exception. Nationwide, local governments spend over a trillion dollars annually (Bureau of the Census 2003). Local politics, at its core, is often a battle over who is going to get those dollars. If voter turnout can help determine who wins and who loses this battle, then there can be little doubt that turnout matters a great deal in American democracy.

Winner and Losers in Urban America

Local governments can spend money on any number of different functions or programs. Scholars of urban politics tend, however, to categorize spending into simple categories: redistributive spending, developmental spending, and allocational spending. Redistributive policies are those that target and benefit less advantaged residents. They include functions like

welfare, public housing, health care, and education. Development policy, by contrast, is focused on programs which seek to encourage economic growth and the ongoing economic vitality of a city. Developmental spending includes outlays for highways, streets, transportation, and airports. Finally, allocational policy is spending on a range of basic city services that can be considered housekeeping services. This includes services like parks, police and fire protection, and sanitation. These three categories do not exhaust the entire range of possible spending functions but they do account for most of government spending.[123]

When broken down this way, it is clear that redistribution is not the primary function of local government (Peterson 1981, Logan and Molotch 1987).[124] Of all the money local governments spend, on average only about eight percent is directed toward redistributive functions. Allocational spending (31 percent) and developmental spending (13 percent) are clearly higher on the list of local government duties.[125] Moreover, of the limited funds that do go toward redistribution, fully half are directed toward education, which can also regularly serve more advantaged segments of the community. The most purely redistributive functions account for a tiny fraction of local government spending. On average, cities spend less than one half of one percent of their budgets on public welfare. Spending on public housing programs (2.0 percent) and public health care (2.6 percent) accounts for only a slightly larger portion of the average city budget. In short, the poor and the disadvantaged are not the main target of local government spending.

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[123] In the analysis that follows, spending on these three categories accounts for 52 percent of total government spending on average. Other government functions like debt repayment, insurance costs, and government administration are more difficult to categorize and do not fit neatly into this scheme.

[124] Spending figures are averages from the 1987 Census of Governments. Overall patterns in the 2001 Census of Government were little changed.

[125] Since the direction of local government spending is mandated by state and federal grants, laws, and agencies, these patterns, in some ways, reflect the priorities of state and national government as much as they do local government priorities.

The limited local spending that is directed at the least advantaged segments of the population raises concerns about the well being of this segment of society because federal government expenditures mirror those of the typical local government (Jantti 1997, Devine 1983). In 2005, for example, the federal government spent only about three percent of its budget on public welfare (Bureau of the Census 2006). Housing and health care assistance to the poor also accounted for small fractions of the federal budget (1.1 and 6.9 percent respectively). If the most disadvantaged segments of American society are in need of fiscal assistance from government, it is far from clear that they are getting it.

Given these patterns in both local and federal spending, it is perhaps not surprising to find that inequality is more severe in the United States than in any other industrial nation (Smeeding 2005).[126] At the same time that the top twenty percent of American earners average over 150,000 dollars in income, almost 13 percent of the nation's population – or 37 million people- have incomes below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau 2006, 2002). Inequality in wealth is even more pronounced. The richest five percent of the population owns more wealth than the remaining 95 percent of the population (Keister and Moller 2000). Although figures for inequality in cities are hard to come by, inequality may be even more severe in urban areas where members of the underclass often live in relatively close proximity to America's most exclusive and expensive neighborhoods.

The problem of inequality is exacerbated by the fact that who winds up on the top and who winds up on the bottom is correlated with race and ethnicity. Few blacks or Latinos make it

[126]The gap between rich people and everyone else in the nation is also growing substantially over time (Keister and Moller 2000).

into the upper ranks.[127] Less than two percent of the top15 percent of earners are either black or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau 2002). The bottom rungs of society are, however, disproportionately minority. Blacks and Latinos constitute the majority of the welfare population and well over half of the population living in concentrated urban poverty (Jargowsky 1997, 2003, Blank 2001). Fully a third of the black and Latino communities are poor (Blank 2001).

It is not entirely clear how much local or federal government spending contributes to this inequality – racial or otherwise. However, it is quite possible that limited redistributive spending might have added to the plight of America's more disadvantaged communities and further to argue that changes in local government spending could be part of the solution. If local governments shifted a significant portion of their resources toward less advantaged communities, it is possible that their actions could reduce poverty, improve conditions in disadvantaged neighborhoods, and eliminate some of the hardships faced by the losers in America's urban democracy.[128]

Why then don't local governments do more? The story, as I will show, is a complicated one. But an important explanation that I wish to highlight is low and uneven turnout. Intuitively, there is reason to believe that patterns in who turns out to vote could be a factor. The poorest and least advantaged segments of society - the current losers in the system - are the least likely to turnout. By contrast, the winners - those with wealth and other advantages - are among the most likely to turnout. If individual voters are voting their own interests and governments are

[127] The average African-American family has only 18 percent of the wealth of the average white family (Oliver and Shapiro 1995). The average African-American family has about 60 percent of the income of the average white family (Blank 2001).

[128] There is also no guarantee that more money would help. The literature on the urban underclass, for example, is very mixed in its assessment of where the real problem lies and how we might go about addressing it. Increased spending is critical to many of the proposed solutions (Wilson 1987). But it is less important to many others (Massey and Denton 1993, Mead 1989, Murray 1984).

responding to voters, then the skew in turnout should lead to a skew in policy and specifically to limited spending on minorities and other disadvantaged groups.

At this point, however, the link between turnout and local government spending is only conjecture.[129] To see if low and uneven turnout is at least partially responsible for the limited resources that local governments expend on disadvantaged communities, I look to see if cities with higher and presumably broader turnout shift resources toward less advantaged segments of society. In other words, when more people vote, do cities place a greater emphasis on redistributive spending and other areas favored by minorities and the poor?

Racial Group Policy Preferences

To assess the link between turnout and local policy, we first need to know what different groups of voters want. We need to identify the priorities of racial and ethnic minorities as well as other disadvantaged populations who vote less regularly and contrast these with the priorities of more advantaged interest. Fortunately, these divergent priorities can be exposed by focusing on the three standard spending areas I mentioned earlier: 1) redistributive spending, 2) developmental spending, and 3) allocational spending.

Although it is clear that no racial/ethnic group or other demographic group unanimously prefers one spending area over all, there is ample evidence indicating that spending priorities diverge across groups in the urban context. Surveys of urban residents and evidence from national polls show divergent priorities between poor, minority respondents who vote less regularly and more advantaged, white respondents who vote more regularly. Employing a range

[129] It is worth noting that turnout has been linked to policy outcomes in other contexts. Comparative studies indicate that higher turnout is associated with more left-leaning policies and state level studies have linked state welfare policy to the extent of the class bias in state turnout (Pacek and Radcliff 1995, Bohrer et al 2000, Mueller and Statmann 2003 Hill and Leighley 1992, Hill et al 1995, Avery and Peffley 2005, Fellowes and Rowe 2004, Peterson and Rom 1989).

of surveys of the urban population, Alozie and McNamara (2008), Welch et al (2001), Lovrich (1974), Deleon (1991), and Clark and Ferguson (1983) all find that poor, minority voters are especially concerned about redistribution and social services, while whites and the middle class are especially concerned about attracting businesses and other aspects of development, reducing taxes, and improving their quality of life through better parks and recreation and easier transportation.[130] The differences between advantaged and disadvantaged interests on distributional and developmental policy are the starkest but there are also clear differences on allocational spending. Lovrich (1974), in particular, finds that whites ranked police protection and environmental issues like garbage collection, pollution, and parks and recreation as top urban priorities, while blacks and Hispanics did not. Whites, who generally did not favor greater spending, were nevertheless willing to support increased funding for these kinds of allocational services. National and state level polls also regularly reveal sharp differences in preferences both on overall spending and taxation and on more specific spending areas. Erikson et al (1991), Welch and Sigelman (1993), Verba et al (1995), and Kinder and Sanders (1996) all report that redistributive policies garner more support among racial and ethnic minorities and other less advantaged groups than among whites and other more privileged interests.[131] As Lovrich puts it, there is "a degree of consensus among minority voters as to priorities which cluster very differently from those of Anglo voters" (1974:707).[132] If local governments respond to who actually turns out to vote, then increases in voter turnout that add more disadvantaged, minority

[130] The notion that business interests and other privileged groups regularly seek greater developmental spending is widely supported in the urban politics literature (Logan and Molotch 1987, Swanstrom 1985).

[131] Our analysis of the cumulative files of the National Election Studies and the General Social Survey indicates that less advantaged, minority respondents are more willing to increase spending to expand public services, are less apt to view taxes as wasteful, are more in favor of redistribution in various forms, and are more in favor of education spending than more advantaged, white interests. Similarly, in recent mayoral election exit polls in Chicago and Los Angeles whites revealed that they are relatively more concerned about taxes and development while minorities indicated more concern about jobs and housing (analysis not shown).

[132] Whether, in the end, each of these different spending categories really serves to aid distinct populations is more difficult to ascertain.

voters into the electorate should lead to significant changes in local government spending. As turnout increases, we should see greater spending on redistributive programs and reduced expenditures on allocational and developmental policies.

Alternate Accounts of How Local Governments Work

Turnout is, however, not the only factor that could affect local government decision making. Before launching into a test of turnout, I need to consider and control for a range of other potential influences. In order to do this, I need to develop a model of how local governments work. How do local governments make decisions about policy? What constrains those decisions? Whose voices are heard?

A good portion of all of the research on urban politics has been devoted to answering these questions. This research has spawned four different and often contrasting accounts of what matters in local politics (see Pelissero 2003, Judd and Swanstrom 1994, and Stein 1990 for overviews of this literature).

Perhaps the most well known and the most widely supported of these different perspectives is the economic imperatives model developed by Peterson (1981) and others (Logan and Molotch 1987, Buchanan 1971, Dye 1987, Sharp 1991). According to this view, local government decision making is largely a function of economic considerations. The central driving force in local politics is economic competition across cities (Peterson 1981, Tiebout 1956). In order to avoid economic and social decline, cities need to compete for mobile capital. This severely constrains local governments. Cities cannot tax mobile capital too heavily or redistribute too many resources to less advantaged segments of the population for fear that their actions will motivate businesses and wealthy residents to relocate. Instead they must seriously consider reducing taxes and providing a mix of services that is most likely to attract and/or retain

more privileged economic interests. This should, according to most of these authors, result in a pro-growth focus and a range of spending policies that encourage economic development (Logan and Molotch 1987, Elkin 1987). If this theory is accurate we would expect to see limited redistributive spending. Moreover, if we do see expanded redistributive spending, it is likely to occur in cases where cities have an economic surplus and can afford to expend resources on what should be viewed as costly and unproductive programs.

The main alternative to this economic imperatives model is a pluralist account of urban policy making.[133] Rather than seeing local government decisions as fundamentally driven by economic constraints, pluralists see local policy as fundamentally driven by political considerations (Dahl 1961, Meier and Steward 1991, Goetz 1994, Donovan and Neiman 1992, Cingranelli 1981). The key to understanding local decision making, according to pluralists, is to recognize that elected officials need public support in order to govern and win reelection. Since any official who does not heed public pressure risks losing office, local governments should incorporate the preferences of a range of different citizens when enacting policy. Governmental policy should closely mirror public preferences, especially for important decisions that are highly contested by participants from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. If, for example, most residents in a given locality favor greater redistribution of public resources, one should expect political actors in that locality to enact measures to increase redistribution. In this way, government should be open to influence from a wide range of groups (Dahl 1961).

[133] This pluralist perspective originated as a response to an elitist view of urban politics. After looking at the makeup of local decision makers, elitists claimed that decisions were largely being made by powerful, wealthy individuals with little input from members of other socioeconomic strata (Hunter 1953, Mills 1956, Schattschneider 1970). Although the reputational methods that these early scholars used to identify power brokers have been sharply criticized, an elitist perspective retains prominence and has in many cases been incorporated into the economic considerations model. The ultimate test of each of these perspectives is to see whose preferences are represented in local policy outcomes. – a test that we will undertake in this chapter.

While not entirely dismissing the notion that cities have to compete for people and capital, pluralists argue that there is ample room for politics to be influential. Either because the constraints of the local economic marketplace are not perfectly binding or because a wider range of policies can be considered productive, city officials have considerable space within which they can move policy.[134] What is often less clear within this pluralist model is whether governmental actors need respond to the preferences of all residents or if they can safely listen only to voters. Dahl (1961) and others argue that because of the threat of voting, all interests, whether active or not, are likely to be considered in the decision making process. However, one could certainly argue, as I have done, that governments can often safely ignore residents who are not actively involved in local politics. If this latter perspective is correct, then the preferences of the median voter rather than the median resident will be primary.

Although the economic imperatives model and the pluralist model represent the two primary accounts of urban politics, at least two other perspectives have been put forward by scholars of local politics. According to a third group of observers, local policy is less a function of economic competition or political preferences and is instead more a function of local needs (Mladenka 1980, 1981, Lineberry 1977, Feiock and West 1993, Boyle and Jacobs 1982 but see Koehler and Wrightson 1987, Jones 1981). From this bureaucratic perspective, city governments operate in a technically efficient manner and simply distribute resources and services to those who need them. If true, one might expect governments in cities with large poor populations or severely disadvantaged neighborhoods to expend substantial resources on redistributive functions.

[134]Some argue for example that redistributive spending can make cities more attractive by reducing crime and blight (Deleon 1991, Stein 1990). From this perspective, it is not the inherent nature of the policies and their immediate fiscal impact but rather the distinct mix of public preferences for services and taxes that exists in a particular locale that determines whether a policy helps or hurts a city to compete with other cities.

Institutional structure is a fourth factor that according to many helps constrain local government decisions (Sharp 2002, 1991, Pelissero and Krebs 1997, Sass 2000). Institutionalists tend not to deny the existence of any of the other factors that have already been mentioned.[135] They do, however, contend that governing structures can also change the nature of the local political game and shape the incentives that local political actors face. This institutionalist perspective comes in two variants: one that focuses on local institutions and another that sees the federal institutional structure as more critical.

Although almost any institutional lever at the local level could conceivably help to determine government behavior, institutionalist scholars have focused on a handful of key structures. In particular, nonpartisan elections, the city manager form of government (as opposed to the mayor/council form), weaker mayoral powers, and the absence of term limits are all viewed by at least some urban scholars as reducing the responsiveness of local government to minority or lower-class interests (Bridges 1997, Welch 1990, Mladenka 1989, Clingermayer and Feiock 2001, Lineberry and Fowler 1967, Banfield and Wilson 1963 but see Morgan and Pelissero 1980).[136] Although evidence for many of these relationships is still limited, there is a

[135] Many of those who cite the role of inter-governmental structure believe, in fact, that cities have very little control over their own spending or policy decisions (Kantor 1988). As Sharp and Maynard Moody note, "Cities are… distinctly junior partners in a complex intergovernmental system" (1991:943). However, this conclusion belies the fact that there is considerable variation in local government spending over time within the same city as well as across cities. For example, analysis of Census of Government spending between 1986 and 2006 reveals that across the nation, the average change in city spending on redistributive functions over a five year period was a large as mean spending on redistribution. Thus even Sharp and Maynard-Moody have to note that "when intergovernmental support is accounted for, there remains considerable and intriguing variation in local welfare spending" (1991:935). There is, in short, still much to be explain beyond the federal system.

[136] The exact mechanisms by which each of these institutions would work is not entirely clear. Given that political parties have traditionally been one of the key mobilizers of immigrants and the working class, nonpartisan elections might limit lower class influence by reducing the role of parties. Nonpartisan elections might also reduce lower class influence by making voting decisions less clear and possibly confusing and turning off less educated voters. By taking power out of the hands of elected officials and insulating local government from voters, a city manager form of government could allow wealthier interests to dominate behind closed doors. A lack of term limits might mean less rotation in office - effectively limiting the number of opportunities for new, growing interests to elect candidates and ultimately helping to keep the older, white power structure in place.

widespread belief that reform institutions have been instrumental in maintaining middle-class white control in a number of urban centers (Bridges 1991, Judd and Swanstrom 1994).[137]

Other institutionalists point to the placement of local governments at the bottom of the hierarchy of the federal system as a critical factor in local policy making (Erie 1988, Browning et al 1984, Orfield 1974, Salzstein 1986). Since a quarter of local government revenues are dispensed by state and federal governments and since much of this federal and state funding is earmarked toward specific functions, local governments often have little power to control the direction of their own spending. Thus, rather than reflect the preferences of local actors, local government spending may be more likely to reflect the priorities of state and national government.

Unfortunately, despite decades of research and a wide range of studies, researchers have been unable to offer a clear answer to the question of who or what controls local policy-making. The debate over just how local governments work continues (Trounstine 2008, Stein 2003, Pelissero 2003, Sharp 2002, Clingermayer and Feiock 2001). This debate can, however, be informed by a systematic examination of local government policy making that fully incorporates each of these different perspectives. In fact, the main reason why few clear answers have emerged is that past studies have failed to offer tests that pit each of these different accounts against one another in a fair manner. In most cases, the different sides have largely been talking past each other and when testing their own accounts largely ignore other alternatives. In the jargon of methodologists, all of these existing studies suffer from omitted variable bias. The two most seminal studies of this question provide some of the clearest examples of this phenomenon.

[137] Evidence in favor of this institutionalist view has been limited to very specific outcomes. We have a good sense, for example, of how institutions affect the election of African Americans to city council but we have much less knowledge of how these institutions affect turnout and other aspects of minority representation (Welch 1990, Grofman and Davidson 1994, Engstrom and Mc Donald 1982).

Peterson (1981), for example, in trying to show that economic considerations predominate does not include a single measure of political inputs in his analysis of local government behavior. Simlarly, Dahl (1961) argues that political considerations are central but fails to incorporate potentially critical economic factors into his analysis. More recent studies have tried to incorporate a broader set of perspectives in their empirical models (eg Sharp 2002, Goetz 1994, Feiock and West 1993, Donovan and Neiman 1992) but few of these studies incorporate the range of potential factors. And perhaps most importantly, none has been able to do so while focusing on core government decisions like where governments spend their money.[138]

By offering a more complete empirical model that incorporates political, economic, institutional, and bureaucratic inputs and directly tests the influence of each of these perspectives against each other on major decisions, this chapter will hopefully provided a truer test of exactly how local government works. This chapter will therefore serve two purposes. The first and primary goal is to help answer the main question – does turnout matter. But the second goal and perhaps more important goal is to answer the core question driving the study of local politics – who or what governs local democracy?

Data

To understand how these different factors affect government behavior and specifically to assess the role of turnout in government spending, I need to combine data on voter turnout, local spending, and other features of the local environment. As spending data are available every five years and data on other features of cities are readily available, the main limitation is turnout. The only survey with local turnout figures for a large representative sample of localities is the 1986

[138] Goetz (1994) and Feiock and West (1993), for example, are one of a handful of studies to include both economic and political measures in their analysis but the analysis is limited by the fact that each study only looks at one small subset of policy questions –usually one particular aspect of growth politics.

ICMA. That then becomes the core data set for this study. Once again, since data on the class or racial skew of the local electorate in different cities are simply not available, I use aggregate voter turnout in each contest. As turnout declines across cities, I expect that racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to vote, less likely to get their candidates elected, and ultimately less likely to get their favored policies passed.[139]

For spending data I utilize data from the Census of Governments and focus on the 1987 Census because it has data on local spending for the year *after* the turnout data. Since I am particularly interested in how turnout affects the interests of racial/ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups, I break down government spending and fiscal policy into three different areas that are more or less popular among different segments of the local population: 1) redistributive 2) developmental, and 3) allocational. In line with Peterson (1981), Stein (1990), and other research on local government spending, the specific local government functions that fit into each spending area are as follows: redistributive (welfare, public housing, health services, and education), developmental (highways, streets, transportation, and airports), and allocational (fire protection, corrective services, sewerage, and solid waste). For each of the three spending areas, I measure the proportion of *total* government expenditures that goes to programs in that area.[140]

In each spending area, I only include those specific spending categories that fit clearly. I drop from the analysis categories of spending (like government administration, judicial functions, or insurance) that are harder to categorize. Nevertheless, even among the categories that I do include, there are some specific spending areas that fit less well into the three larger

[139] This is akin to arguing that turnout will be more skewed as turnout declines, a relationship that is discussed in depth in Chapter 4.
[140] In alternate tests, I also measured redistributive, developmental, and allocational spending as a proportion of all spending that went to these three areas (rather than as a proportion of total expenditures across all areas). The results were effectively identical.

categories. Some could argue, for example, that educational spending, is not clearly redistributive as it serves both advantaged and disadvantaged interests. To address this issue, I repeated the subsequent analysis two different ways. First, I dropped specific categories of spending like education that arguably fit less clearly into one of the three larger spending areas. Second, I broke down the larger spending areas into their constituent components and re-ran the regressions focusing on each single spending category. This secondary analysis generally confirmed the primary analysis.[141]

In the analysis, I include the range of other factors that have been linked by past research to local government spending. First, to see if local governments are responding to political considerations and in particular to public preferences, I include a measure of the Democratic presidential vote share at the county level (Bureau of the Census 1986).[142] Specifically, I average the 1984 and 1988 Democratic vote share.[143] Second, to account for economic competition and the belief that governments will only expend substantial resources on redistributive functions when they have considerable financial resources and excess spending capacity, I include a range of measures of overall spending capacity. These include total general revenue, recent changes in government revenue, per capita debt, the existing tax rate, and local bond ratings. Revenue data as well as all tax and debt figures are from the 1987 Census of Governments. Bond ratings are compiled in the City and County Data Book (1986). Third, to see if local governments are more technocratic and are simply providing services to those who

[141] Our primary focus is not on these smaller sub-categories of spending because we believe there is too much noise in these smaller, more specific categories. Variability in functional responsibility across cities means that many cities are not responsible for many of the specific sub-categories. Many cities, for example, have no airport spending and others do not control education. By aggregating to the three larger spending areas, we average out at least some of this noise.

[142] Another factor that might affect spending is the partisan leaning of the city council. However, since 76 percent of the localities we examine hold non-partisan elections, it is impossible to get the partisan makeup of the council.

[143] County boundaries do not always conform well to city geographic boundaries but the county preferences should in most cases provide at least a reasonable approximation of the city preferences. The presidential vote, by city, is unfortunately not available.

need them, I include several measures of need. Specifically, the analysis incorporates the poverty rate in the city, the proportion of the population that is African American or Hispanic, and the citywide crime rate. Demographic data are from the Census (1990). Crime figures are derived from the City and County Data Book (1986). Fourth, since a range of urban theorists have cited electoral institutions as a central influence on government spending decisions and have pointed to reform structures as being particularly unsupportive of minority, disadvantaged interests, I assess the roles of nonpartisan elections, the city manager form of government (as opposed to the mayor/council form), weaker mayoral powers, and term limits.[144] The other institutional structure that could affect American cities is federalism. Specifically, each city is subject to different constraints and opportunities that are related to its status in a federalist system (Stein 2003, Schneider 1989, Chubb 1985). I test for three different aspects of that system. To address the possibility that local government spending may be affected by fiscal constraints placed on city government by state law, I control for the existence of a constitutional or statutory limitation on the amount of debt a city may incur and the presence of constitutional or statutory law mandating a balanced budget for the city (source: U.S. Advisory Commission on Inter-governmental Relations 1993). Also, since local governments that are more successful at tapping into federal or state funds may have more leeway in spending and may thus be able to increase redistributive spending, I included the proportion of all revenue from state and federal governments as a measure of inter-governmental revenue (Schneider 1988, 1989, Chubb 1985). As well, to control for the fact that different localities have different spending mandates imposed on them from above, in alternate tests I included a count of the number of specific spending

[144] In alternate tests, we also try to assess the extent to which each city is run by a machine by including a measure of the percentage of the city's budget spent on payroll jobs. We find that more 'machine-like' cities do, in some cases, spend marginally more on redistributive spending. Including this measure, however, has little effect on the other relationships we examine.

categories (within each of the three broader spending areas) in which the locality spent no money. Data on local institutional structure are derived from the 1986 ICMA survey. Intergovernmental revenue is from the Census of Governments (Bureau of the Census 1987).

Finally, I also take into account a range of smaller features of the local environment that have been shown to be relevant to at least some aspect of fiscal policy. Since the nature of cities differ substantially by region, city type, and city size, I add dummy variables for each region (West, Midwest, Northeast, and South) and city type (suburb and central city) and measures for city size (total population and population growth). Another potentially important characteristic of the urban environment is the number of cities that are nearby. Schneider (1989), in particular, argues that the more local governments a city has to compete with the more constrained its own spending will be. To control for this possibility, I include a measure of the number of incorporated places in the county (Source: Census of Governments 1987).[145] Finally, I control for basic demographics (percent Asian American, percent college educated, percent homeowner, percent non-citizen) that could be viewed as potential influences on government spending decisions. Each of these measures is derived from the Census (1990). Descriptive statistics for all independent and dependent variables are displayed in Table 5.A.1 in the Appendix.

Turnout and Government Spending Priorities

Does turnout affect government spending priorities? In Table 5.1 I begin to answer this question by assessing the effects of voter turnout on three broad categories of government spending. Specifically, the table reports the results of three O.L.S. regressions with the proportion of city expenditures going to redistributive, developmental, and allocational spending

[145] In alternate tests, we also included the number of cities in the local SMSA. The results were nearly identical.

as the dependent variables.[146] The key independent variable is the percent of registered voters that turned out in the city's most recent election. As turnout increases across cities, I expect that racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups are more likely to vote and more likely to have their preferences translated into public policy.[147] **[Table 5.1 Here]**

The results indicate that turnout does matter.[148] As can be seen in the first row of Table 5.1, higher turnout in local elections leads to significantly greater spending on redistributive functions and significantly less spending on allocational programs.[149] Even after controlling for public preferences, spending capacity, and needs, the more people who turn out to vote, the more local governments are likely to spend their money on welfare, public housing, and other redistributive programs and the less likely they are to spend it on waste management and other forms of allocational spending.[150] This implies that if more racial and ethnic minorities and members of other disadvantaged groups do turn out to vote, they may be able to pressure governments into spending on policies that are more in line with their preferences.

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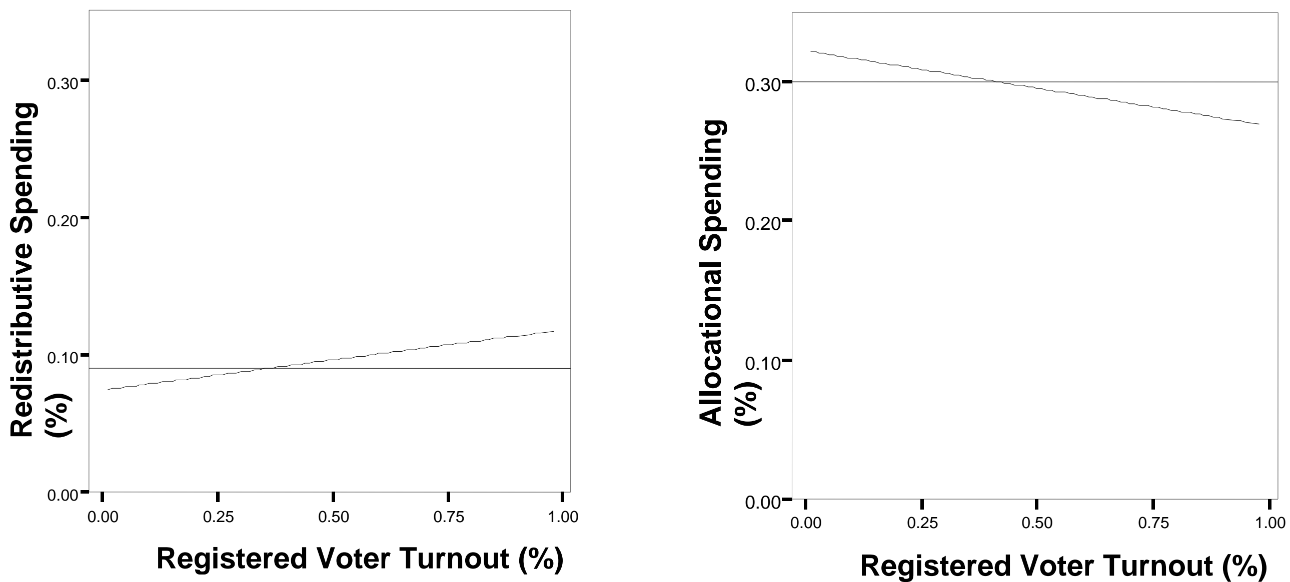
[146] Since it is possible that the proportion of spending going to each area is related to the proportion of spending going to the other two areas, we utilize seemingly unrelated regressions for all of the regressions in this chapter.
[147] The relationship between aggregate turnout and the rerpresentativeness of the voting population is detailed in the previous chapter. The results of a wide range of test indicate that when turnout is higher, it tends to be much more even and Latinos, Asian Americans and less educated residents, in particular, are more likely to be well represented among voters.
[148] We reach the same conclusion if we measure spending as per capita spending rather than as a proportion of government spending.
[149] An analysis of citywide spending is, of course, only part of the story. Much of the political debate focuses on which neighborhoods within the city should get what. For interesting accounts of this other layer of politics see (Boyle and Jacobs 1982, Mladenka 1980, Lineberry 1977, Koehler and Wrightson 1987)
[150] When we re-ran the analysis using sub-categories of spending, we found that areas of spending most closely associated with poor, minority interests were most affected by turnout. Specifically, in terms of allocational spending, the only area where changes in turnout were significantly and substantially linked to changes in spending was waste management - an area that is a higher priority for middle class communities (Trounstine 2004). Spending on parks and recreation and police services, two areas that may be similarly important for middle and lower class interests, were not as clearly related to turnout. Most subcategories of redistributive spending were related to turnout. In particular, we found that increased turnout led to substantial increases in both welfare spending and educational spending. Perhaps most interestingly, the only subcategory of developmental spending where we found a significant relationship with turnout was airport spending. Higher turnout meant less developmental spending on airports. Since airport spending is the area of developmental spending that could be the least popular among poor, minority populations who rarely fly, we might have expected to find the strongest negative relationship here. Given that most cities do not have any fiscal responsibility for airports, this last result may be more suggestive than conclusive.

Figure 5.1 also indicates that the effects of turnout are meaningful. The figure shows the substantive effects of turnout on redistributive and allocational spending – as derived from the regression in Table 5.1. The flat line in each case represents mean spending on each category. The sloped line shows expected spending at different levels of turnout – all else equal.[151]

Figure 5.1 The Effects of Turnout on Government Spending



Increasing the proportion of registered voters who turn out from 19 percent (one standard deviation below mean turnout) to 59 percent (one standard deviation above the mean) would increase the proportion of city government spending on redistributive programs by 1.8 percentage points. This may not seem like a substantial shift. However, given that the average city spends only 7.8 percent of its budget on these redistributive programs, this kind of increase

[151] All other independent variables are held constant at their mean or modal value.

in turnout could potentially increase the amount of redistributive spending by one quarter. As Figure 5.1 shows, the effect of a large boost in turnout on allocational spending is equally large. Moreover, it is not unreasonable to expect large changes in turnout in some cities. As we will see in Chapter Six, simply changing the timing of local elections to coincide with national elections increases registered voter turnout by 36 percentage points.

Turnout is not a panacea. Many cities already have fairly high voter turnout and even the highest turnout cities do not redistribute more than a small fraction of their revenue. Nevertheless, the results here suggest that attainable changes in voter turnout could have a significant impact on how many local governments spend their money and at least partially effect who wins and who loses in local democracy.

A comparison of two cities highlighted in Browning, Marshall, and Tabb's seminal study (1984) provides one of the clearest examples of this phenomenon. According to the authors, Berkeley, California stood out for the generosity of its redistributive programs. Overall Berkeley "allocated more general fund revenues to minority programs than other cities" (1984:144). More specifically, the city "spawned an astonishing array of programs for low income and minority people" including child care, job training, expanded welfare functions, guaranteed youths access to work, and expanded library services in poor neighborhoods (1984:144). By contrast, in Vallejo, the authors found that the city "scarcely moved a muscle...[on] substantive programs" (1984:146). In desperation, minority groups in Vallejo filed suit claiming that the city had failed to distribute facilities and services outside of middle class neighborhoods.

Importantly, another major difference between these two cities is turnout. During the time of the analysis, local registered voter turnout in Berkeley hovered around an impressive 60 percent. By contrast, in Vallejo turnout often fell below 25 percent of registered voters.

Multiple factors surely contributed to the divergent policy programs of the two cities but turnout may have been one of the most important.

Two of the nation's largest cities, Chicago and Dallas, offer a similar lesson about the potential power of turnout. Sharp differences in voter turnout across the two cities are associated with large differences in redistributive spending. Chicago, traditionally one of the highest voter turnout cities spent 13 percent of its budget on redistributive programs. By contrast, Dallas, a city that regularly draws less than 20 percent of registered voters to the polls spent only 3 percent of its budget on the same set of redistributive programs (Hampton and Tate 1996). This sharp divide over redistributive spending occurred despite similar levels of poverty, similar median incomes, and similarly large racial and ethnic minority populations in the two cities. A range of different factors surely contributes to the spending priorities of any city but these examples seem to further illuminate the far ranging consequences turnout can have.

The results in Table 5.1 do, however, reveal one area where turnout has no obvious effects. There is no clear link between turnout and developmental spending. This is, at least at first glance, somewhat counterintuitive. Since developmental spending tends to most directly and most immediately benefit privileged interests in society, it might be the first thing that poor, minority residents would want to cut when they turn out to vote. The fact that developmental spending does not go down when turnout expands may indicate that cities feel they cannot cut developmental spending if they want to remain competitive and continue to attract businesses (Peterson 1981). Consistently high spending on developmental programs may also be a sign that cities, almost irrespective of who is involved in the electoral arena, tend to be dominated by business interests. Turnout and politics may play a role in some areas of local spending but the

imperatives of the economic market and competition between cities appear to be dominant in other areas.

Who or what Governs?

Turnout is by no means the only factor governing spending policy decisions. In addition to testing the effects of voter turnout, the empirical model that I have put forward also offers a revealing look at the broader question of how local government works. Who or what is really determining outcomes? In particular, by incorporating a range of key independent variables in the analysis, Table 5.1 offers an important test of the role that economic, political, bureaucratic, and institutional considerations play in the local political arena.

Perhaps not surprisingly, by offering a broader test that incorporates each of the four main perspectives on urban politics, we arrive at a more complex account of government decision making. No single dimension can fully account for local government decisions. Rather, the model suggests that policy outcomes are a function of at least three of the four different factors highlighted in the literature.

It is clear from Table 5.1 that economic constraints play a critical role. As Peterson (1961) and others have suggested, cities are limited in what they can do, if they do not have an economic surplus. In particular, as Table 5.1 demonstrates, if cities have limited economic resources, policies designed to increase development and economic competitiveness are particularly likely to be maintained or expanded while redistribution is likely to experience the first and most dramatic cuts. The flip side is that the more money governments have to spend, the more generous they can be with redistributive spending. Relatively wealth cities (those at the 90th percentile in revenue) spending 16 percent more on redistributive spending than poorer cities (those at the 10th percentile).

Another interesting finding to emerge from Table 5.1 concerns the role of bureaucratic considerations – or alternatively what could be called 'need'. From a bureaucratic or technical efficiency point of view, one might predict that cities with larger populations in need of government assistance would spend more on redistributive programs. Yet, the analysis finds the opposite. Need is either insignificantly or significantly and negatively related to spending on redistributive functions. Having more poverty, in particular, does not lead to more redistribution as a bureaucratic model would predict but instead leads in the other direction - additional developmental spending. Similarly, cities with larger African American populations are less likely to spend on things like welfare, health, and public housing. The effect is also large. Cities that are about a third black spend 31 percent less on redistributive spending than cities that are less than one percent black – all else equal. In alternate analysis, I also found that cities with higher crime rates spent less of their budgets on redistributive spending.[152] Paradoxically, spending on redistributive functions tends to be at its lowest where it is most needed. These patterns suggest that a bureaucratic model of local politics does not fare well when trying to explain government spending priorities.[153]

These patterns do, however support some of Peterson's (1981) assertions regarding economic constraints. Cities with the greatest need for redistributive spending may be the ones least able to afford to undertake such spending. These relatively poor and relatively unattractive

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[152] We do not include this variable in our base model because crime statistics were only available for a third of the cities.

[153] This should not be seen as a complete refutation of the role of technical knowledge or basic needs in governing local politics. One could argue that these larger decisions about how much of the budget to shift to each of these three basic categories are highly political questions where issues of technical efficiency are largely irrelevant. Smaller policy questions related to program design, program implementation, and the geographic distribution of programs may be where bureaucratic or technical expertise comes more to the fore. Thus, it is not surprising to find that empirical investigations of this latter type of policy question have often found that bureaucratic considerations are primary (Mladenka 1980, 1981, Lineberry 1977, Boyle and Jacobs 1982 but see Kohler and Wrightson 1987, Jones 1981, Feiock and West 1993) .

cities may be too desperate to be able to spend on what some see as inefficient redistributive programs (Peterson 1981).[154]

Economic considerations do not, however, preclude the influence of politics. As table 5.1 also shows, there is plenty of room for political considerations to factor into government decision making. The first and most obvious link is between overall public preferences and policy priorities. As the table shows, the partisan leaning of the local population is critical to local government spending behavior. All else equal, the results suggest that Democratic cities spend 27 more on redistributive spending than Republican cities.[155] And as I already discussed, voter turnout is an important determinant of spending policies. Cities that have higher turnout spend more on redistribution and less on allocational services. All of this provides strong support for a pluralist view of urban politics and suggests that Dahl (1961) and others are correct in maintaining that cities are responsive to citizen demands. The voice of the people is at least in part reflected in public policy.

The effects of local government institutions are also illuminating. Contrary to expectations, reform institutions do not always lead to decreased responsiveness to minority or lower-class interests. The effects of institutions are, in fact, quite mixed. Although diminished mayoral power does lead to less redistributive spending, both non-partisan elections and the council-manager form of government lead to more redistributive spending, and term limits have no clear affect. These results are more in line with recent studies which show that reform institutions can be used by any class of interests (Trounstine 2008). In many cases like San Jose,

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[154] From the perspective of these disadvantaged communities who are in need of these public services, this is yet another motivation to become active in the local political arena. If the most needy members of society do speak through the ballot, the tendency for local governments to ignore their interests when times are tough could begin to be reversed.

[155] The comparison is between cities that voted 57 percent Democratic in presidential contests (one standard deviation above the mean) and cities that voted 24 percent Democratic in presidential contests (one standard deviation below the mean).

where minorities and other less advantaged groups have now won a place in the governing coalition, minorities seem to be able to use the same reform institutions to insulate their own power.

Institutional structure matters in one another way. Federalism appears to function as an additional constraint on spending. State imposed limits on city level debt, for example, lead to significant reductions in redistributive spending. If cities are not allowed to go into debt, it appears to make it that much harder to expend additional resources on the more disadvantaged segments of the population. Debt limits, in fact, have a dramatic effect on redistributive spending. Cities not subject to debt limits spend roughly three times as much of their budget on redistributive spending than cities with limits – all else equal. Intergovernmental revenue also plays a role. As expected, greater inter-governmental revenue allowed local governments to spend more on redistributive functions and to incur less debt (Schneider 1988, 1989).[156] Again, the effect is dramatic. Cities on the upper end of inter-governmental revenue (the 90th percentile) spend almost three times as much on redistributive functions than cities on the lower end of inter-governmental revenue (the 10th percentile). In short, local institutional structure and a city's status in the federal system both greatly influence what a city can or cannot do.

The relationship between redistributive spending and percent black has already been mentioned but is worth highlighting in some detail. The negative relationship between the two measures is particularly interesting. What this relationship suggests is that redistributive spending drops in cities with larger black populations *after* controlling for income. In other words, all else equal, city governments appear to provide less redistribution when the target population is largely black than when the target population is primarily white. Perhaps the best

[156] An alternate explanation for the relationship between intergovernmental revenue and local spending is that federal and state funding constrains local funding by earmarking funds to certain programs.

explanation for this is racial discrimination – a finding that fits well with the literature on national welfare spending and public opinion. Studies in this literature show that white Americans are much less favorable to welfare spending when they know or suspect that the recipients are primarily racial minorities (Gilens 2001).[157]

Urbanists have long debated who or what it is that controls local government decision making. The results presented here suggest that the decisions local governments make are more multifaceted than at least some previous accounts have suggested. [158] What local governments do is a function of a complex interplay of politics, economics, and institutions. Municipal decision makers are businessmen reacting to economic constraints. They are politicians and office seekers who listen to the views of the public and the concerns of voters. And finally, they are rational actors constrained by the particular features of their local institutional structure. If we want to improve local policy outcomes or even if we just want to understand how certain outcomes are reached in our cities, we need to consider the interplay of all of these factors.

Robustness Checks

To help ensure that the results in Table 5.1 do measure the underlying relationship between turnout and spending, I undertook a series of additional tests. First, I re-ran the analysis using turnout of the eligible population rather than turnout of registered voters. This alternate

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[157] This explanation also might account for the pattern I find later in the chapter in California cities. In that state (see Table 5.4) where Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority population and where white voters have regularly used direct democracy to target the Latino population, it is probably not surprising to find that redistribution spending is particularly low in cities with larger Latino populations – all else equal (Hajnal et al 2002).

[158] In addition to offering an assessment of the four main perspectives on local government decision making, Table 5.5 confirms the importance of other factors cited in the urban politics literature. As some might predict, the west was more pro-development and cities in the Northeast spent more on redistributive programs and had higher taxes. Fragmentation or the number of potential competitors in the local county did not, however, work as expected. More cities meant more rather than less redistributive spending. We can think of at least one possible explanation for this. More cities may mean that each individual city is more economically homogenous. And less inequality within a city may mean that residents are willing to spend more on redistribution since the recipients of redistribution are likely similar to themselves.

measure led to the same basic conclusion. Second, to ensure that the results were not due to the fact that different cities have different spending mandates imposed from above, I tested a range of measures of fiscal responsibility or functional assignments (Clark and Ferguson 1983, Stein 1990). In particular, I included a count of the number of specific spending categories that the government in question spent no money on as an additional control variable (eg for developmental spending many cities spent no money on airports and for redistributive spending many cities spent no money on hospitals). This is presumably a measure of the number of functional categories that are not part of the city's responsibilities. Since central cities and suburbs often have different sets of responsibilities, I re-ran the analysis separately for each type of municipality to see if turnout mattered more in one or the other. I also included an interaction between turnout and city size in the analysis to try to get at this possibility.[159] Since cities might have more or different sets of functional assignments across different regions, I also included a series of interactions between turnout and region to assess whether turnout mattered more or less in different regions. In addition, I incorporated a number of different measures of local autonomy - whether the city had home rule, land area, and age of the city - to control for the fact that certain types of cities have more latitude in how they operate. Finally, as noted above, I re-ran the analysis dropping education spending – a function that is one of the largest redistributive spending categories and often completely outside the responsibility of cities. Over all of these tests, I found some signs that greater functional responsibility in a particular area leads to more spending in that area but the basic conclusion about the relationship between turnout and spending did not change.[160] Third, I repeated the analysis using a series of alternate measures of fiscal capacity including total debt, current bond ratings, the current tax rate, and available cash

[159] There was no clear indication that turnout mattered more in larger cities.
[160] There was also some indication that turnout matters more in the northeast but this results was not at all a robust one.

and securities. These tests re-confirmed the importance of fiscal capacity in that several of these measures were significantly related to government spending. Equally importantly, all of the other significant relationships in Table 5.1 remained intact when these alternate fiscal capacity measures were added in (analysis not shown).

The Fiscal Effects of Voter Turnout

There are many ways local governments can affect local policy. They can, as I have shown, affect policy by deciding how to split up the existing revenue pie. But local governments can also affect policy through more fundamental fiscal decisions like raising money via higher taxes or incurring greater debt. In other words, they can change the size of the existing revenue stream. Especially in today's fiscally challenged urban environment, these kinds of fiscal decisions may represent one of the few avenues through which local governments can initiate major policies that affect the well-being of different groups.

To see if voter turnout impacts this broader range of government behavior, in Table 5.2, I assess the link between voter turnout and tax and debt policy. Since the existing survey evidence indicates that racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups not only favor greater government spending but also are more willing than privileged groups to increase taxes to pay for that spending, one should expect that as the size of the electorate expands and the number of relatively needy or disadvantaged voters grows, local governments will choose to increase the local tax rate and the size of the existing debt (Alozie and McNamara 2008, Lovrich 1974, Deleon 1991, Welch et al 2001, and Clark and Ferguson 1983). Put another way, to try to satisfy the increasing demand from less advantaged voters for more services, local governments should raise more money by raising taxes or incurring greater debt. **[Table 5.2 Here]**

Table 5.2 suggests that voter turnout also matters for these more fundamental government policy decisions. Greater turnout translates into substantially higher per capita debt. All else equal, moving from a city one standard deviation below mean turnout to a city at one standard deviation above mean turnout leads almost to a doubling of per capita debt. Greater turnout also appears to lead to increased per capita taxes. The relationship between turnout and taxes in the second column of Table 5.2 is positive but not quite significant. However, an alternate regression using turnout of eligible voters instead of turnout of registered voters shows a substantial, significant, and positive relationship between turnout and local tax policy (analysis not shown). In short, when a larger and more diverse set of residents turns out to vote, governments appear to comply with this increased demand by raising taxes and increasing local debt. The poor and other disadvantaged groups want more government services. If they vote more regularly, they often get funds for those services. This is yet another sign that who votes matters.[161]

The Contingent Effects of Turnout

Turnout should not always matter for these spending decisions. If elections are not competitive and incumbents know that they have very little chance of losing the next election, there is little incentive to respond to the pressures of newly mobilized voters. If however, elections are competitive and an incumbent stands a good chance of losing his or her next election, there is a much greater incentive to be aware of the preferences of new voters and to respond to these preferences. Similarly, if elections are competitive and a challenger wins over an incumbent, there is a real incentive for the new leader to follow the policy preferences of the

[161] Table 5.2 does, however, reveal some more anomalous findings. Specifically, a more Democratic or liberal population is associated with less rather than more debt. We suspect that this is because Democrats (as evidenced by Table 5.2) are more willing to pay for higher taxes, an outcome that leads to less fiscal strain and ultimately less need for debt.

new voting bloc. In short, the higher the turnover and the greater the competition, the more that voter turnout should affect government policy.

To see if the local electoral context helped shape the relationship between turnout and government spending patterns, I added a measure of turnover or competition – the percentage of incumbents who won reelection in the most recent city council election – and an interaction term for turnout and turnover to the regression model in Table 5.1.[162] If, as I suspect is this case, turnout matters more in competitive, high turnover cities, the interaction term should be negative and significant. **[Table 5.3 Here]**

As the first column of Table 5.3 illustrates, competition is an important intervening variable. [163] The interaction term is negative and significant indicating that the effects of turnout on representation are significantly lower in cities with less competitive local elections. I suspect that two processes are at work. In one scenario, expanded turnout is leading to the election of a new and different set of leaders who then institute policies that are more in line with preferences of their core constituency. In a second scenario, in order to try to stave off electoral defeat, incumbents increase redistributive spending to respond to the preferences of an expanded and more diverse electorate.[164] In either case, the fewer incumbents who lose, the less turnout matters. Moreover, this interaction effect is substantial. All else equal, in a highly competitive city where half of incumbents lose their reelection bids, moving from low to high turnout leads to a 43 percent increase in redistributive spending (from 8.2 to 11.7 percent of the budget). In contrast, in an un-competitive city where all incumbents win, moving from low to high turnout

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[162] This incumbent reelection measure comes from responses to the ICMA survey and refers to the incumbents running in the most recent council election.
[163] It might also have been helpful to have another measure of competition like the average margin of victory in council elections. Unfortunately, no such measure is available across the range of cities.
[164] We also looked to see if term limits affected the link between voter turnout and government policy. If, as many believe, term limits increase competition and turnover, voter turnout might matter more in cities with term limits. However, when we added an interaction for turnout and term limits to the regression in Table 5.1, we found it was not significant.

only leads to a 14 percent increase in redistributive spending (from 8.4 to 9.6 percent of the budget).

To further assess how the local electoral context affects the impact of turnout, I looked at the link between voter turnout and racial and ethnic minority representation on the local city council. Presumably, if turnout affects spending by increasing the number of local leaders who represent less advantaged segments of the population, increases in turnout may matter even more when they are accompanied by a shift in racial and ethnic leadership on city councils. Leadership turnover may be important but it may be even more important when racial and ethnic minority leaders enter office. I test this possibility by adding measures of the proportion of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans on the city council and interaction terms for turnout and the racial makeup of the council.[165]

The results, as reported in the second column of Table 5.3, suggest that racial or ethnic minority representation on the city council is not necessary for turnout to affect local government spending priorities. The interaction terms are insignificant and the key independent variable, registered voter turnout, remains significant indicating that turnout matters regardless of the racial and ethnic makeup of the city council.[166] This implies that both white and non-white elected officials are recognizing and responding to changes in who turns out to vote.

Table 5.3 also indicates that the number of black, Latino, and Asian American council members has no direct effect on government spending. Net all of the other factors, having more minorities on the council does not lead to significant shifts in spending. This is probably not surprising given that the model controls for the size of each racial group in the city, voter turnout

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[165] Ideally, we would like to have a measure of change in racial/ethnic representation. There is, unfortunately, no complete data set that has racial representation on city councils by year. The data on council racial/ethnic makeup come from the 1986 ICMA survey.

[166] Table 5.3 also indicates that spending is not significantly related to the proportion of non-whites on the city council. This implies that descriptive representation on city councils has little effect on redistributive spending net the effects of turnout and public preferences.

and public opinion in each city. It also fits with existing research which suggests that the independent effects of minority elected officials are often quite limited (Reed 1988, Smith 1996). This should not, however, in any way lead one to conclude that minority leadership is irrelevant. As I have previously mentioned, minority leadership has been tied to important changes in the attitudes and activities of both the minority community and the white community. Minorities are energized in myriad ways by minority elected officials (Tate 2003, Bobo and Gilliam 1990, Barreto 2007) and whites are reassured by the even-handed nature of most minority leaders (Hajnal 2007). Moreover, in the current analysis when key controls for turnout are dropped, minority representation begins to play at least a marginal role in spending decisions.[167] In this sense, one can view the election of minority officials as an important intermediary step in a process that flows from heightened turnout and ultimately leads to more minority favored policymaking.

One issue I have not yet raised in the analysis in this chapter is the direction of causality. Governments could spend more money on certain policy areas in order to encourage certain groups to turnout at higher levels in the future. For our purposes, it does not actually matter whether turnout increases affect spending priorities or whether spending changes increase turnout. In either case, the interests of more voters (and presumably more diverse voters) are more closely reflected in policy decisions when turnout is higher.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that turnout causes spending changes rather than the reverse. One piece of evidence is temporal. The turnout data are generally from a year or more preceding the spending data. It is impossible for spending that occurs after an election to have caused changes in turnout in the preceding election. Also, it is difficult to

[167] The effects are not particularly large and are not particularly robust to changes in the model specification, but there is some evidence that allocational spending decreases with more African American council members or fewer Asian American council members.

explain how the pattern of spending and tax changes that we see in the data could lead to increases in turnout. Logically, one would not expect increases in taxes to trigger greater turnout among less advantaged groups. More generally, it is not at all clear that increases in spending in one area should lead policy winners to turnout more than policy losers. Changes in spending could increase the turnout of policy losers as much or more than policy winners (but see Griffin and Flavin 2009). In short, there is no obvious story that can readily explain expanded turnout as a function of increased spending on redistributive functions, decreased spending on allocational programs, and higher taxes and debt. As well, anecdotal evidence from many of these cities indicates that major policy changes tend to occur after new a set of candidates is elected rather than before. Finally, as the last set of analyses showed, the effect of turnout depends greatly on having incumbents lose – a pattern that fits better with a causal story that views turnout as a cause of policy change rather than as the result of policy change.

Turnout effects in more recent elections

One concern with the ICMA data is that it could be somewhat out of date. The spending patterns that we have been looking at all occurred around 1986. Given the recent devolution of policy responsibilities from the federal government to local municipalities, the increasingly difficult fiscal situation faced by many cities, dramatic change in the racial and ethnic makeup of the urban population, and a range of other changes in the nature of racial and ethnic relations within our cities, there is at least some reason to suspect that cities may be functioning differently today than they have in the past. In particular, turnout might matter less today than it has in the past.

To test for this possibility, I examine spending patterns in California cities in 2001 and ask whether turnout continues to play a role in determining local government spending priorities.

Focusing on a single state has the added advantage of allowing us to dismiss problems of unmeasured heterogeneity due to state-level differences.[168] Equally importantly, analysis of a second data set provides an opportunity to demonstrate the robustness of the turnout effects.

Details on the California survey, descriptions of key questions included in the survey, and the reasons for focusing on California are detailed in the previous chapter and the appendix. Suffice is to say that California is reasonably good state to choose because it contains a large enough number and wide enough variety of cities to offer a viable empirical test. Similarly, California represents an especially interesting test because the state's racial makeup mirrors the projected future racial makeup of the national population and may thus be a harbinger of what is to come in the rest of the nation.

The test that I use to assess turnout effects in California is the same test that was used to test turnout effects nationwide. Specifically, I look to see if cities with higher and presumably more representative turnout have spending patterns that are more in line with the preferences of members of poor, minority communities who typically vote less regularly. The spending data for California come from the 2001 Census of Governments.

Before embarking on the test, it is interesting to note that the spending priorities of California's cities today are not dramatically different from the spending priorities of the nation's cities in the late 1980s. As was the case with the rest of the nation, California's cities today devote only minimal resources to redistributive spending. Outlays on social welfare account for only about 1.3 percent of the typical budget. Overall, the average California city spends a total of 12.7 percent of its budget on redistribution. As with the larger nation, redistributive spending

[168] As an alternate way of taking into account the non-independence of cases within each state, we repeated the national level analysis with standard errors clustered by state. The results were nearly identical.

in the state is outpaced by both allocational and developmental spending (32 and 16 percent respectively).[169]

If we couple this spending pattern with the fact that voter turnout in California is as low and at least as skewed as the rest of the nation, then there is once again reason to suspect that low and uneven voter turnout could be in part responsible for the relatively limited effort of California's cities to expend resources on less advantaged segments of the population.[170] In Table 5.4, I begin to test this suspicion. The table shows the effect of registered voter turnout on the same three categories of spending we looked at earlier - redistributive, allocational, and developmental spending. Each regression also incorporates an almost identical set of economic, political, bureaucratic, institutional, and demographic controls.[171] **[Table 5.4 Here]**

Once again, turnout is an important determinant of policy outcomes. The results for California do not perfectly mirror the results from the nation as a whole but it is clear that in California as in the broader nation higher turnout is coupled with policies that are more in line with the preferences of most minorities and the poor. Cities in California with higher turnout spend significantly less on allocational spending and significantly less on developmental

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[169] The other important parallel between California and the rest of the nation is that racial and ethnic minorities in the state fall disproportionately toward the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. Although racial and ethnic minorities in California are marginally better off in absolute terms than racial and ethnic minorities nationwide, minorities in the state lag well behind whites on most measures of well-being (Reyes et al 2001). Fully 41 percent of Latinos, 38 percent of African Americans, and 31 percent of Asian Americans in the state can be found in the bottom quartile of the income distribution (Reyes et al 2001). Across the state some 27 percent of Latinos, 22 percent of blacks, and 15 percent of Asian Americans live in poverty. By contrast, only about 8 percent of whites in the state are poor. Judging purely by these aggregate patterns, there is once again reason to suspect at least some sort of connection between government spending priorities and the ongoing difficulties of many members of the racial and ethnic minority population.
[170] Analysis of respondents from the ACPS survey indicates that local voter turnout in California is in some ways even more skewed than voter turnout in the rest of the nation. A logit regression with interactions between race and California residence and socioeconomic status and California residence indicates that race and education play even more of a role in determining local voter turnout in the state than in the rest of the nation. A comparison of the demographic makeup of active voters in L.A. with the overall population of the city using mayoral election exit polls similarly reveals a slightly greater skew in turnout by race and ethnicity than one finds doing similar analysis of mayoral exit polls around the country.
[171] Since all cities in California are nonpartisan, we could not test for the effects of nonpartisanship in the state.

spending – two areas that polls show are less important to minorities and the poor.[172] The finding regarding development policy is significant in that it suggests that at least under certain circumstances, political considerations can impact this arena of government policy – a finding that runs at least somewhat counter to Peterson's (1981) contentions and earlier results from the national data. The other important difference between the state and the nation, is that, at least at first glance, there appears to be no clear relationship between aggregate turnout and redistributive spending in the state. However, when I investigated this relationship more fully, I did find a link between turnout and redistributive spending for at least a subset of California cities. I suspected that the lack of a connection between turnout and redistributive policy was due to the fact most California cities – and especially most smaller cities - do not have any responsibility for a range of social welfare functions. To test this possibility, I re-ran the analysis looking at only the largest half of California cities. In these larger cities, most of whom do provide a range of distributive functions, there is a significant link between voter participation and policy. As I found with the rest of the country, higher turnout means more redistributive spending.

The magnitude of the effects that we see in California is not quite as large as in the rest of the nation but it is still substantial. For the larger cities, a move from a city with turnout that is one standard deviation below the mean (29 percent) to a city that is one standard deviation above the mean (58 percent) is associated with a 33 percent increase in redistributive spending (from 11.8 percent to 15.7 percent of total spending). A similar increase in turnout for a typical city is associated with a 17 percent decrease in development spending and an 11 percent drop in allocational spending. This is not a massive transformation of spending priorities but it is

[172] The allocational category here includes spending on law enforcement. Law enforcements accounts for a much larger share of spending in California than in the rest of the nation and arguably also is a bigger part of the policy debate in California. Thus, it represents a critical component of spending in the state.

enough to have a real impact on many members of the poor population and many racial and ethnic minorities.

In addition to focusing on these three spending categories, I also looked at how turnout affected more fundamental fiscal decisions like tax and debt policy. Using the same empirical model, I found that as with the nation as a whole, increased turnout in California was associated with higher per capita taxes.[173] When a larger and more diverse set of residents turns out to vote, cities in the state appear to respond by expanding costly redistributive policies and by raising taxes to pay for those increased programs (analysis not shown).

Finally, to see if turnout effects in California depended to the same extent on competitive elections as they do in the larger nation, I added a measure of competition – the percentage of incumbents losing reelection – and an interaction for turnout and turnover to the basic regression model.[174] As one would predict, the results suggest that turnout mattered much more when competition was high. All else equal, when elections are highly competitive and half of the incumbents lose, an increase in turnout from 29 to 58 percent of registered voters is associated with a dramatic 200 percent increase in redistributive spending (from 9 to 19 percent of the budget). By contrast, the same gain in turnout meant only a 17 percent increase in redistributive spending in cities were all of the council incumbents won reelection (analysis not shown).

All told, voter turnout appears to play a strikingly similar role in California's cities in recent years than it did across the nation two decades ago. In both cases, higher voter turnout means policies that are more in line with the preferences of minorities and the poor. There is

[173] By contrast, there was no clear link between participation and per capita debt in California. The relationship between turnout and per capita taxes was only significant for larger cities in the state.
[174] We also looked to see if turnout effects were dependent on the racial and ethnic makeup of the city council but once again found racial and ethnic representation on the city council is not necessary for turnout to affect local government spending priorities. Again, this suggests that both white and non-white elected officials are responding to changes in who turns out to vote.

every reason to believe that if the poor and other disadvantaged groups voted more regularly, outcomes would change and governments would serve their interests more closely. [175]

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to answer a series of important questions about the urban political arena. It is, therefore, well worth reviewing the chapter to clarify the key findings and to highlight the main conclusions.

The answers provided by the analysis in this chapter tell two important stories about urban politics. The first relates to turnout. Who votes seems to substantially affect how governments raise and spend their money. When fewer people vote and turnout is presumably more skewed by race, income, and other factors, governments appear to behave differently than when turnout is higher and less skewed. Fewer voters can mean less redistributive spending, more allocational spending, more development spending, lower taxes, and smaller government debt. This suggests that when disadvantaged groups fail to vote, local officials are more likely to be unresponsive to their concerns. Moreover, the effects are substantial. Expanded turnout could increase the amount of money going to redistributive programs by a third. Those who do not vote can and do lose out.

Still on the topic of turnout, these findings should help us not only to recognize that turnout matters, they should help us to better understand where turnout matters. Turnout matters

[175] Interestingly, the results from an analysis of the U.S. sample do differ in significant ways from the results of the California analysis when the focus is on the political, economic, bureaucratic, and institutional factors governing spending. In general, fewer factors are significant in the analysis of California cities. I suspect that is because California's cities generally have less independent control over their own finances and are subject to multiple state level mandates imposed by both the state legislature and the initiative process. Proposition 13, passed by the state's voters, for example, greatly limits the ability of localities to tax their residents. Other voter initiated propositions have helped to ensure that most local revenue is funneled through and somewhat controlled by the state. Another set of propositions has, by earmarking substantial funds for certain programs, gone far in determining the mix of spending that cities can undertake. There seems to be less room to maneuver in urban politics in California.

more when turnout is exceptionally low (more in local than in national elections), where disadvantaged, minority groups represent large shares of the electorate (more in local than in national elections), and where electoral competition is higher (more in some cities than in others). Turnout does not always matter but if the right combination of circumstances is present, large segments of society can lose out when they don't vote.

The second story relates to local government decision making. Urbanists have long wondered who or what governs local policy decisions. The results of a richer model of local government spending indicate that each of the existing one-sided stories is incomplete. Political forces, both in the form of voter turnout and broader public opinion, are critical in determining who gets what in America's cities. However, other factors are also very relevant. The overall balance between redistributional and developmental spending is also strongly influenced by economic imperatives and institutional constraints. We need to take each of these different elements into account, if we want to try to influence what goes on in the urban political arena.

Table 5.1 The Effects of Turnout on Government Spending Priorities

	Proportion of Government Expenditures to….		
	Redistributive Spending	Developmental Spending	Allocational Spending
VOTER MOBILIZATION			
Registered Voter Turnout	.043 (.0249)**	-.004 (.012)	-.054 (.022)**
MASS PREFERENCES			
Democratic Vote for President	.082 (.041)**	-.067 (.024)***	.042 (.046)
SPENDING CAPACITY			
Government Revenue	.381 (.130)***	-.159 (.077)**	-.353 (.144)**
Change in Revenue	.730 (.221)***	-.275 (.132)**	-.869 (.250)***
Median Household Income	-.009 (.005)*	.002 (.003)	.016 (.005)***
NEEDS			
Percent Poor	.016 (.087)	.085 (.052)*	.098 (.096)
Percent Black	-.089 (.039)**	-.037 (.023)	-.036 (.043)
Percent Latino	-.082 (.065)	-.026 (.039)	.086 (.072)
LOCAL INSTITUTIONS			
Mayor vs City Manager	-.045 (.010)***	.011 (.006)*	.026 (.011)**
Mayoral Veto	.027 (.010)***	-.011 (.006)*	-.009 (.011)
Term Limits	.009 (.016)	.006 (.010)	-.009 (.018)
Nonpartisan	.062 (.011)***	-.001 (.006)	-.038 (.012)***
FEDERALISM			
Legal limits on debt	-.061 (.019)**	-.002 (.011)	-.011 (.022)
Balanced budget provision	-.010 (.014)	-.002 (.008)	-.011 (.015)
Total state/federal govt revenue	.317 (.036)***	-.025 (.022)	-.084 (.041)**
CITY TYPE			
Suburb	-.023 (.013)*	.013 (.079)	.063 (.015)***
Central City	.024 (.014)*	-.001 (.008)	-.003 (.015)
Population	-.051 (.017)***	.018 (.007)**	.048 (.013)***
Population Growth	.004 (.011)	-.002 (.006)	-.052 (.011)***
Number of places in the county	.079 (.023)***	.001 (.014)	-.071 (.026)***
REGION			
West	-.023 (.018)	.065 (.011)***	-.043 (.020)**
Midwest	-.013 (.015)	.045 (.009)***	-.059 (.016)***
Northeast	.124 (.018)***	.007 (.011)	-.110 (.019)***
DEMOGRAPHICS			
Percent Asian	-.096 (.103)	-.076 (.061)	-.052 (.114)
Percent College Educated	-028 (.049)	.057 (.029)*	.129 (.054)**
Percent Homeowner	.045 (.041)	.043 (.024)*	-.139 (.046)***
Percent Non-Citizen	.232 (.117)**	-.031 (.070)	-.195 (.130)
Constant	-.055 (.040)	.069 (.024)***	.435 (.045)***
Adj R-squared	.41	.19	.16
N	1066	1066	1066

Source: Census of Governments 1987, ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990,2000. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors ***p<.01 **p<.05 * p<.10

Table 5.2 Local Voter Turnout: Fiscal Effects

	Per Capita Debt	Per Capita Taxes
VOTER MOBILIZATION		
Registered Voter Turnout	1.39 (.554)**	.055 (.034)
MASS PREFERENCES		
Democratic Vote for President	-3.09 (1.16)***	.178 (.072)**
SPENDING CAPACITY		
Government Revenue	12.8 (3.72)***	1.14 (.229)***
Change in Revenue	26.2 (6.36)***	1.25 (.392)***
Median Household Income	.065 (.139)	.011 (.008)
NEEDS		
Percent Poor	-4.48 (2.46)*	-.089(.152)
Percent Black	.955 (1.11)	.006 (.068)
Percent Latino	-.495 (1.85)	-.267 (.114)**
LOCAL INSTITUTIONS		
Mayor vs City Manager	-.174 (.282)	-.054 (.017)***
Mayoral Veto	-.106 (.288)	.032 (.018)*
Term Limits	-.440 (.462)	.018 (.029)
Nonpartisan	.300 (.310)	.073 (.019)***
FEDERALISM		
Legal limits on debt	-.996 (.551)*	.019 (.034)
Balanced budget provision	.084 (.396)	.033 (.024)
Total state/federal govt revenue	-1.70 (1.03)*	.048 (.064)
CITY TYPE		
Suburb	1.47 (.374)***	-.014 (.023)
Central City	-.520 (.396)	.047 (.024)*
Population	-.016 (.003)***	-.012 (.002)***
Population Growth	.619 (.303)**	-.041 (.019)**
Number of places in the county	.031 (.066)	.096 (.041)**
REGION		
West	.385 (.508)	.052 (.032)
Midwest	.376 (.414)	-.026 (.026)
Northeast	-.142 (.503)	.195 (.031)***
DEMOGRAPHICS		
Percent Asian	-.483 (2.94)	-.553 (.182)***
Percent College Educated	-.270 (1.38)	.204 (.085)**
Percent Homeowner	-.124 (1.16)	-.034 (.072)
Percent Non-Citizen	1.31 (3.35)	.435 (.207)**
Constant	2.88 (1.14)**	.013 (.017)
Adj R-squared	06	25
N	1070	1070

Source: Census of Governments 1987, ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors ***p<.01 **p<.05 * p<.10

Table 5.3 The Contingent Effects of Turnout on Redistributive Spending		
	Model 1	Model 2
VOTER MOBILIZATION		
Registered Voter Turnout	.156 (.057)***	.051 (.021)**
LOCAL COMPETITION		
Percent Incumbents Winning	-.031 (.026)	---
Percent Incumbents Winning*Voter Turnout	-.126 (.063)**	---
RACIAL REPRESENTATION ON COUNCIL		
Percent Black on Council	---	.113 (.095)
Percent Latino on Council	---	.005 (.110)
Percent Asian American on Council	---	-.007 (.322)
Percent Black on Council*Voter Turnout	---	-.224 (.209)
Percent Latino on Council*Voter Turnout	---	-.044 (.242)
Percent Asian on Council*Voter Turnout	---	.094 (.628)
MASS PREFERENCES		
Democratic Vote for President	.091 (.042)**	.084 (.041)**
SPENDING CAPACITY		
Government Revenue	.379 (.132)***	.392 (.132)***
Change in Revenue	.711 (.226)***	.702 (.228)***
Median Household Income	-.009 (.005)*	-.009 (.005)*
NEEDS		
Percent Poor	.019 (.089)	.012 (.088)
Percent Black	-.097 (.039)**	-.110 (.051)**
Percent Latino	-.064 (.067)	-.074 (.082)
LOCAL INSTITUTIONS		
Mayor vs City Manager	-.047 (.010)***	-.045 (.010)***
Mayoral Veto	.028 (.010)***	.027 (.010)***
Term Limits	.009 (.017)	.009 (.016)
Nonpartisan	.063 (.011)***	.062 (.011)***
FEDERALISM		
Legal limits on debt	-.062 (.019)**	-.063 (.019)**
Balanced budget provision	-.009 (.014)	-.008 (.014)
Total state/federal govt revenue	.308 (.037)***	.316 (.036)***
CITY TYPE		
Suburb	-.023 (.013)*	-.025 (.013)*
Central City	.022 (.014)	.023 (.013)*
Population	-.050 (.012)***	-.051 (.012)***
Population Growth	.004 (.011)	.004 (.011)
Number of governments in county	.077 (.025)***	.079 (.024)***
REGION		
West	-.027 (.018)	-.026 (.018)
Midwest	-.013 (.015)	-.015 (.015)
Northeast	.128 (.018)***	.122 (.018)***
DEMOGRAPHICS		
Percent Asian	-.082 (.110)	-.096 (.113)
Percent College Educated	-.029 (.050)	-.024 (.049)
Percent Homeowner	.030 (.044)	.040 (.041)
Percent Non-Citizen	.218 (.120)**	.222 (.126)*
Constant	-.076 (.048)	-.053 (.040)
Adj R-squared	39	39
N	1034	1066

Source: Census of Governments 1987, ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and standard errors ***p<.01 **p<.05 * p<.10

Table 5.4 The Effects of Turnout on Government Spending Priorities - California

	Proportion of Government Expenditures to….			
	Redistributive Spending	Redistributive Spending (larger cities)	Developmental Spending	Allocational Spending
VOTER MOBILIZATION				
Registered Voter Turnout	-.005 (.004)	.133 (.053)**	-.088 (.031)***	-.087 (.039)**
MASS PREFERENCES				
Democratic Vote for President	.131 (.071)*	.181 (.087)**	-.061 (.056)	-.048 (.073)
SPENDING CAPACITY				
Government Revenue	-.028 (.161)	-.028 (.197)	.074 (.127)	-.092 (.160)
Median Household Income	-.007 (.005)	-.004 (.126)	.008 (.036)	.035 (.046)
NEEDS				
Percent Poor	.077 (.132)	.315 (.248)	.179 (.104)*	-.287 (.136)**
Percent Black	-.062 (.115)	-.181 (.125)	-.181 (.092)**	-.011 (.011)
Percent Latino	.026 (.060)	-.186 (.086)**	-.133 (.047)***	.219 (.068)***
LOCAL INSTITUTIONS				
Mayor vs City Manager	.051 (.034)	-.013 (.071)	-.015 (.027)	-.004 (.034)
Mayoral Veto	-.009 (.041)	.002 (.041)	-.037 (.032)	-.014 (.041)
Term Limits	-.022 (.016)	-.004 (.017)	-.048 (.120)	.029 (.156)
Concurrent Election	.014 (.015)	-.046 (.022)**	.025 (.012)*	.012 (.016)
FEDERALISM				
Total state/federal govt revenue	.018 (.014)	.160 (.044)***	.009 (.012)	-.019 (.015)
CITY TYPE				
Suburb	.043 (.018)**	---	-.018 (.014)	-.057 (.018)***
Central City	-.005 (.022)	-.043 (.020)**	-.025 (.017)	.012 (.022)
Population	.005 (.006)	.026 (.019)	-.004 (.005)	.004 (.006)
Population Growth	.037 (.022)*	-.084 (.051)*	.017 (.017)	-.037 (.022)
Number of places in the county	-.037 (.289)	.035 (.040)	.049 (.234)	-.123 (.030)***
DEMOGRAPHICS				
Percent Asian	.197 (.071)***	.118 (.080)	-.098 (.055)*	.014 (.072)
Percent College Educated	-.027 (.064)	-.200 (.096)**	.055 (.050)	.015 (.006)**
Percent Homeowner	.033 (.065)	.198 (.117)*	.147 (.050)***	-.048 (.067)
Percent Citizen	-.037 (.141)	-.314 (.208)	-.144 (.111)	.336 (.145)**
Constant	.000 (.168)	-.056 (.355)	.239 (.132)*	.022 (.168)
Adj R-squared	.15	.26	.15	.19
N	412	125	412	412

Source: Census of Governments 2001, PPIC Survey 2001, Census 2000.
Figures are coefficient and their standard errors ***p<.01 **p<.05 * p<.10

Chapter Six. Raising Voter Turnout

The problem is clear. Lower levels of voting are tied to lower levels of representation. The fact that racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups vote less regularly than others means that their favored candidates often fail and their preferred policies often are not enacted.

Unfortunately, identifying a problem is often easier than finding a solution to that problem. The problem of low voter turnout is no exception. Over the years, the number of scholars and observers who have lamented low and uneven voter turnout is large (Verba et al 1995, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Piven and Cloward 1988, Lijphart 1997). The number and range of reforms that have been suggested to address the problem is just as substantial. What's more, many of these reforms have not only been suggested, many have also been adopted. Since turnout began falling in the United States in the 1960s, considerable effort has been undertaken to try to stem the tide of turnout decline. Numerous laws have been passed to reform institutions and alter electoral rules to make the vote more accessible. The Voting Rights Act, for example, was passed and extended. Motor Voter is now in place across the country. In most states and localities, registration deadlines have been loosened (Highton 2004). Absentee voting and vote-by-mail options have expanded dramatically (Gronke et al 2007). Voting, by all accounts, is now more open and easier than it was decades ago (Wattenberg 1998). The fact that low voter turnout is still a problem is not for lack of trying.[176]

[176] At the same time, overall mobilization may have declined. Political parties continue to expend vast resources both in terms of man hours and dollars to try to get voters to the polls. In the last presidential election, for example, over $350 million was spent on get-out-the-vote drives (Moss and Fessenden 2004). But there is evidence that partisan mobilization efforts have declined over time. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) estimate that decreased mobilization by parties accounts for about half of the decline in turnout in national elections between the 1960s and 1980s. On the other hand, there are signs that other groups are beginning to take the place of parties. The Southwest Voter Registration and Education Project, for example, was created in the late 1960s and now spends almost a million dollars annually to get Latinos involved in the electoral process.

Is there anything we can do at this point? In this chapter, I look for new and viable solutions to the problem of low voter turnout. Although there is a wide ranging literature aimed at understanding why we participate in politics and an even larger community of scholars, journalists, and political activists who have fought for changes to expand participation, one potentially important solution has been largely overlooked. In this chapter I assess the role that reforms to local electoral institutions can play in expanding turnout. Analysis of turnout across cities in America will show that most cities retain electoral structures that discourage voting. A small number of institutional reforms that are relatively easy and relatively costless to enact could greatly expand participation at the local level.

Potential Solutions

I begin this chapter by providing an overview of the main factors that are known to drive voter participation. In describing each of these factors, the goal is to try to identify reforms that not only have the potential to address the problem of low voter turnout in theory but that also could be feasibly implemented in reality. Although a range of different factors are closely tied to turnout, reform on most measures is difficult or impossible for either political or economic reasons. As we will see, finding reforms that could have a substantial effect on turnout and that could actually be implemented will point us in a clear direction.

The literature identifies four main sets of variables that impact political participation: 1) individual resources, 2) psychological engagement, 3) mobilization, and 4) institutions.[177] I deal with each in turn.

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[177] Aside from these four main factors, scholars have identified at least two other sets of variables that help to explain voter participation. First, a series of studies have highlighted a wide range of contextual influences. Neighborhood characteristics can, for example, play a central role in driving participation (Huckfeldt et al 1993, Cohen and Dawson 1994, Alex-Assensoh 1998). Similarly, friendship networks and other social interactions can

The standard account of political participation focuses first and foremost on individual resources. Those who have the time and ability to easily engage in political activities tend to be active. Those with fewer such resources are apt to fail to participate. "For people whose resources are limited," Rosenstone and Hansen note, "politics is a luxury they often cannot afford" (1993:13). The critical variable in this story is often socioeconomic status and probably the best known finding about voter participation is that citizens of higher socioeconomic status participate more (Verba and Nie 1972, Verba et al. 1995, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). The effects of socioeconomic status, as we saw in Chapter Two, can be dramatic. Those with a college degree, for example, are almost twice as likely to report voting in local elections as those with less than a high school degree. And while education is perhaps the strongest predictor of individual level participation, a range of different socioeconomic attributes like income, employment status, and occupation are also strongly correlated with turnout. Precisely why each of these relationships is significant is not entirely clear but many point to the fact that higher socioeconomic status is associated with a host of resources like time, money, and cognitive ability that are important for participation (Verba et al 1993, 1995, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).[178]

Beyond socioeconomic status, a variety of other personal characteristics have been linked to voter participation. Studies have shown a strong relationship between one's stage in the lifecycle, one's gender, and the propensity to vote (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).[179] Others have noted the unique hurdles that immigrants and their children face in getting involved in the

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affect one's likelihood of political involvement (Mutz 2002, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1993). Second, it also may be that genetics play a role in determining one's level of participation in the political arena. Fowler and Dawes (2008), in particular, have interesting new research that focuses on twins and attempts to tie genes to an individual's propensity to vote.

[178] Education, in particular, increases one's capacity for understanding and working with complex, abstract subjects like politics. It may also foster democratic values that instill a sense of civic duty (Verba et al 1994).

[179] In general, younger voters are often not yet politically engaged and tend to be inactive. Men are typically more active than women.

political arena. Participation rates among immigrants and their children typically remain low until they gain citizenship, acquire basic language skills, and become familiar with the contours of the American polity (Ramakrishnan 2005, Wong 2001, Cho 1999, De Sipio 1995). [180]

Finally, race and ethnicity have also been tied to voter participation. Specifically, Latinos and Asian Americans have been shown to participate at substantially lower rates than whites (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999, Hajnal and Baldassare 2000, Uhlaner et al. 1989). African Americans, as we have seen, fall somewhere in the middle. Whether these apparent racial differences can be attributed to race itself is questionable. At least for Latinos and African Americans, most, if not all of the difference between their participation rates and those of whites is accounted for by socioeconomic status and citizenship factors (Leighley 2001).[181] The reason for lower participation rates among Asian Americans does, however, remain something of a mystery (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999, Lien 1994).

The combined effect of all of these individual characteristics is dramatic. Knowing only a brief list of individual attributes we have a very effective formula for predicting participation. As Wolfinger and Rosenstone long ago noted and as others have repeatedly found, “Some sets of voters are almost sure to vote, while others are almost as certain to stay home” (1980:5).

A variety of psychological predispositions make up the second major component behind participation (Lawrence 1981, Wattenberg 1998, Crotty 1991, Schlozman et al 1995). As Campbell and the co-authors of *The American Voter* note, “the decision to vote… rests immediately on psychological forces” (160:90). Physical attributes may help to explain who votes but they don’t tell us why the vote. Individual orientations toward the political arena are

[180] Yet, another individual demographic characteristic associated with turnout is residential mobility. Due to the various time and information costs associated with registration and voting, people who have moved recently are much less likely to vote than those who are longtime residents of a community (Squire and Wolfinger1987).
[181] Although race itself may not be directly related to participation, it is clear that group consciousness, or a sense of attachment to a reference group, has induced marked increases in political participation for certain racial and ethnic groups at different times (McAdam 1992, Miller et al 1981, Lien 1994).

the critical last step in explaining participation. A range of different attitudes have been identified as being key to participation but perhaps the most obvious is interest in the political arena. Individuals who express more interest in politics or in a particular electoral contest are, not surprisingly, much more apt to be involved (Brady et al 1995, Berelson et al 1954). A range of studies have also demonstrated that people with a sense of political efficacy are significantly more likely to become involved in politics (Craig 1979, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).[182] Those who believe that they have a voice and feel that their actions will effect change are considerably more likely to participate. Rational choice theorists also highlight the role that perceived benefits that can play in the voting decision. From this perspective, individuals who strongly prefer one of the parties or one of the candidates are likely to anticipate greater policy benefits (or losses) from the outcome and are thus much more apt to become active than those who are more indifferent. This logic may underlie the widely demonstrated link between strength of partisanship and electoral participation (Verba et al 1995, Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, Finkel and Opp 1991). There are also a range of normative beliefs about democracy and citizen participation that appear to influence the propensity to vote. Many of us, for example, feel a strong sense of civic duty that appears to compel us to participate (Schlozman et al 1995, Campbell et al 1960). Finally, it is likely that some individuals simply enjoy the hurly burly of politics more than others. For those who enjoy politics, voting, rather than representing a burden, may be an activity from which they derive psychic gratification.

In sum, many believe that psychological engagement can "provide the desire, knowledge, and self-assurance that impel people to be engaged by politics" (Verba et al. 1995:354).

[182] There is, however, a concern that efficacy is a result rather than a cause of participation (Finkel 1985). It is difficult to know what the true causal direction between engagement and activity since political activity appears to enhances most forms of psychological engagement (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Verba et al 1995).

Combined, these different measures of engagement can strongly predict why some people vote and why others stay on the sidelines. Although there is certainly some question about just where individual attitudes should be placed in the causal funnel that leads to participation, there is little doubt that an individual's political orientation can be a critical driving force on the path to political activity.

Mobilization is the third basic factor that contributes to our understanding of voter turnout. Parties, candidates, and other individuals and organizations spend a great deal of time trying to get us to the polls to vote for one side or the other. This effort seems to pay off (Niven 2004, Hackey 1992, Leighley 2001). Green and Gerber (2000, Gerber and Green 2000) have used a series of field experiments to convincingly demonstrate the efficacy of personal canvassing and direct mail. These tactics, especially when contact comes from a member of one's own racial and ethnic group appear to work for all racial and ethnic groups (Ramirez and Wong 2006). Recruitment through organizations like churches and unions is an alternate and at times equally effective mobilization technique (McAdam 1992, Olsen 1972).

The advantage of focusing on mobilization is that it goes much further than the other two factors in explaining when people participate. Individual resources and attitudes help to determine who participates and why they participate but they do much less well explaining why we vote in some contests and not in others. Given that turnout can and does vary from as high as 70 percent voting age turnout in the most hotly contested presidential races to lower than 10 percent turnout in some local contests, it is clear that there is a lot to be explained. [183] Mobilization does not account for all of this variation over time and context but it is an important contributing factor.

[183] The fact that in a given type of election many citizens are either habitual voters or habitual non-voters (Plutzer 2002, Green and Shachar 2000) should not be taken as indicating that turnout in different kinds of elections (eg presidential vs mayoral) is consistent.

As Rosenstone and Hansen note, when parties, candidates, and other interested groups and individuals "make the effort, the people they contact are far more likely to participate" (1993:170). The fact that about a quarter of the population is contacted during a typical presidential campaign is strongly related to the high turnout in these elections (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Similarly, the fact that these face-to-face efforts at recruitment have declined significantly in recent decades may explain part of the decline in turnout that we see across the nation. The efforts of a range of political actors to bring people to the polls determine a lot about who participates and more importantly when they participate.

The last and arguably the most important factor driving turnout is institutional design. Participation, as Powell, and many others have pointed out is "facilitated or hindered by the institutional context within which individuals act" (1986:17). The logic is simple. Reforms that reduce barriers to participation or the cost of participation tend to increase turnout. [184] From larger structural features such as the distinction between plurality and proportional representation to smaller adjustments relating to election day voting procedures, there is ample evidence that this logic applies and that institutions matter.[185] For example, by tying electoral outcomes more closely to the vote, proportional representation appears to increase turnout by several percentage points over plurality systems (Powell 1986, Jackman 1987, Franklin 1996). Smaller features related to registration and voting procedures can also affect turnout. Turnout in places with automatic registration, for example, far outpaces turnout in nations, states, and localities that require registration weeks or months in advance (Jackson et al 1998, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1993 , Wattenberg 1998). At the state level, estimates suggest that strict registration barriers at

[184] There is also a fairly widespread concern that electoral features that reduce turnout also tend to decrease the representativeness of the active electorate. As Rosenstone and Hansen put it "Onerous election laws make people, especially underprivileged people, much less likely to exercise their rights as citizens" (1993: 210).

[185] Electoral rules are deemed to be the primary reason why turnout in American elections lags well behind most other countries. As Powell notes, "The American institutional setting – particularly the party system and the registration laws – severely inhibits voter turnout" (1986:17).

one time reduced turnout by 15 percentage points over the most relaxed registration requirements (Kelley et al 1967). More blatant barriers like poll taxes and literary tests have at different times in American history effectively eliminated major segments of the voting public (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). There is, in short, a rich and largely uncontroversial field of research that ties institutional design to voter participation.[186]

Feasible Solutions

Given that each of the four different factors we have looked at has a strong relationship to voting, each represents a potentially important arena for reform. If we could identify feasible reforms in any of these four areas, we could affect real change in the voting population. The question then becomes – where is reform possible? Of these four factors, is there anything that affects turnout that we have the power and the political will to change?

The answer in the case of individual resources, psychological engagement, and mobilization is probably no. The effects of individual resources are clear and large but they hold little hope for reform. For lots of reasons, we might like to improve the socioeconomic status of large segments of the population but we have no clear means of doing so. Knowing that that income increases the propensity to vote is notable but that knowledge leads to few real policy solutions to nonparticipation. Similarly, despite the strong link evident between individual attitudes and voter participation, there is not much we can do to affect attitudinal change. We might want to manufacture greater civic duty, for example, but we have little known means of doing so. Mobilization is a slightly more complex story. Here not only do we know what works

[186] The few institutional features that have been mentioned only scratch the surface of the entire range of institutions that have been at one time or another linked to turnout. A longer list might include the voting age, residency requirements, and a range of rules related to the act of voting itself (easier and longer access to polls, ballot design, vote by mail, absentee ballots). Most of these features, however, have less dramatic effects on turnout.

but we can occasionally do something about it. Recruitment in the form of door-to-door drives, mass mailings, and telephone campaigns can and does increase turnout (Green and Gerber 2000, Gerber and Green 2000). The problem is that mobilization is costly. Green and Gerber (2000) estimate that it costs roughly $8 to mobilize one additional voter. The question then becomes - who will spend the money to significantly expand turnout beyond what we see today. Political parties, candidates, and interest groups who compete in politics have an incentive to mobilize as many of their supporters as possible to gain an electoral advantage but that incentive must be balanced against the costs of mobilization and any other endeavors that the money can be used for. Given these considerations, it appears that political groups have made the calculation that further mobilization is not cost effective. Short of reducing the costs of mobilization or increasing the effectiveness of contacts, there is little one could do to encourage more mobilization.[187] Although examining individual resources, individual attitudes, and mobilization may help us to understand who votes, why they vote, and when they vote, studies that focus on these three factors generally offer little advice to those interested in addressing the problem of low turnout.

Institutional change represents a far more interesting case for reform. Institutional reform is possible. Institutional change occurs regularly across all kinds of different contexts. Institutional reform is relatively easy. Often all that is required for change to occur is for legislatures to pass new laws. Institutional reform is also relatively inexpensive. The institutional changes that legislatures or other agencies enact often incur taxpayers no additional financial outlays. And, in many cases, there are few normative grounds on which to challenge institutional reform. Many reforms can readily be supported on democratic or moral grounds.

[187] Government could shoulder the burden and get involved in mobilization but that is a costly step that is unlikely to get much support.

Perhaps more importantly, from a social science perspective, institutional reform is a proven commodity. Concrete institutional changes have had clear, demonstrable effects on turnout. As I briefly mentioned, institutional reform at the national level has already had a noticeable impact on turnout rates. The move by the US to liberalize its requirements for exercise of the franchise –including a shift in registration deadlines, reduced residency requirements, and the like - have, by some estimates, increased turnout by ten to twenty points (Highton 2004, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Kelley et al 1967). Cross national comparison also indicate that institutional changes can have dramatic effects on participation (Blais 2006).

The question is whether any more feasible reforms are left. Have we enacted all of the reasonable and effective changes that we are likely to enact? Early closing dates for voter registration have all but disappeared, residency requirements are minimal, and poll taxes and literacy tests are long gone. The problem at the national level is that the remaining large scale changes that have been advocated are all going to be exceedingly difficult to enact. Advocates of minority rights have, for example, asked the nation to consider switching to some form of proportional representation or even to cumulative voting (Wattenberg 2002, Bowler et al 2003, Guinier 1994). Eliminating the need to register to vote is another solution offered by some. Still others have talked about paying for voting.[188] Yet another possibility is making the ballot less complicated by reducing the frequency of elections or eliminating the number of elected offices. The total number of voters could also be expanded by allowing non-citizens to vote or by streamlining the citizenship process. Certainly, we could get almost full participation by taking more invasive actions like making voting compulsory (Lijphart 1997).

[188] One interesting option that has been tried at the state level is to hold a lottery that gives one lucky voter gets a million dollars each election. It is, however, not yet clear what effect this will have on turnout.

Unfortunately, each of these recommended reforms, as Ruy Texeira and others note "involves some very large changes in the structure and functioning of the American political system" (1992:154). The result is that all of these options seem like non-starters. Some are unconstitutional, others are antithetical to American values, and many would cause a "political disruption of unknown magnitude" (Texiera 1992:154). Each represents a change that would almost certainly help voter turnout. But each is not at all feasible in the short term. These reforms are, in short, interesting ideas that we would never implement.

There are other, smaller reforms that we could conceivably enact. We could continue to make voting easier and less time-consuming. No-excuse absentee voting has, for example, already spread to 24 states and there is little reason to prevent it from being implemented in the rest of the nation. Other forms of early voting including vote-by-mail and early in-person voting have also grown rapidly. A number of states have also tried to reduce lines by increasing the number of polls, extending polling hours, and installing better, more efficient voting booths (Stein and Vonnahme 2008, Dyck and Gimple 2005,Haspel and Knotts 2005,Gimpbel et al 2006). Others have tried to increase turnout by mailing sample ballots and information about the location of polling places or giving employees time off to vote (Wolfinger et al 2005).

Unfortunately, these more minor changes also tend to have more minor effects. According to the research, early voting in all its forms (no-excuse absentee voting, vote-by-mail, and early in-person voting), weekend or holiday voting, extended polling days, providing information on the ballot and polling places, and time off for voting have all had a limited or even insignificant impact on turnout (Franklin 1996, Karp and Banducci 2000, Wolfinger et al 2005, Gronke et al 2007, Norris 2002, Franklin 2004). Results for reforms to polling locations and polling types are more promising. In particular, studies investigating polling location have

generally found that decreasing the distance that residents have to travel to polls can substantially increase participation (Haspel and Knotts 2005, Dyck and Gimpel 2005, Gimpel et al 2006). The effects are greatest for residents who have no access to a car but even for those with a vehicle, small decreases in distance to the polls can increase the probability of voting in a local electoral contest by 5 percent (Haspel and Knotts 2005). Similarly, research into vote centers – centralized locations where all residents of a city can vote - suggests that these centers can increase turnout by 3 percent or more (Stein and Vonnahme 2008). There is thus little doubt that institutional reform can still matter.

But the end result of even these successful reforms is likely to be a less than dramatic change in the nature of the voting public. The gains are real gains but they are modest gains (Blais 2006, Southwell 2004). In the end, as Gronke and his co-authors conclude, it is clear that these reforms "have, at best a small effect, and are unlikely to solve the challenge of low voter participation in the United States" (2007:639).[189]

Local Institutional Reform

Fortunately, there is one area where reform remains feasible and where changes in turnout could be dramatic. Local electoral institutions represent an especially attractive target for reforms for at least three reasons. First, there is the ongoing perception that local electoral institutions are a primary – if not the primary – determinant of voter participation at the local level.[190] For decades, scholars of urban politics have suggested that local institutions associated

[189] One can come up with a list of other possible reforms including a shortened campaign, the elimination of the electoral college, more debates on TV that have not been clearly linked to turnout (Patterson 2002, Wattenberg 2002). Or one can raise issues related to negative campaigning, the ideological convergence of candidates, and the ideological polarization of the parties that may be linked to turnout but that have no clear solutions.
[190] This mirrors perceptions and findings at the cross-national level. Institutional context explains more of the variation in turnout across nations than any other factor (Powell 1986).

with the Progressive reform movement have served to dramatically reduce voter turnout (Bridges 1997).

Moreover, there is a clear logic behind these perceptions. Three Progressive reforms stand out as having, at least intuitively, close connections to turnout. Reform to local election timing has perhaps the clearest consequences and the greatest potential for increasing participation (Lijphart 1997). By moving the dates of local elections to coincide with much higher turnout statewide primaries or general elections, it becomes almost costless for voters who participate in statewide elections to also vote in local elections - they need only check off names further down the ballot. With one small step, the number of local ballots cast might almost immediately increase to levels nearly on par with national elections.[191] By replacing an unelected city manager with an elected mayor (or simply by strengthening the powers of the elected mayor) one can increase the direct control that voters have over city affairs – a change that may provide an additional incentive to turn out (Alford and Lee 1968, Karnig and Walter 1983, Bridges 1997). Similarly, by switching from the nonpartisan local elections in which party labels are not included on the official ballot to partisan elections one could make political choices more familiar to voters and increase the mobilization efforts of parties – two steps that are likely to be associated with gains in turnout (Schaffner, Wright, and Streb, 2001, Karnig and Walter 1983, Espino 2001).

Although these three institutional reforms are perhaps the most obvious, they do not constitute the limit of local institutional change. One could also make arguments about the relevance of at least three other institutional features –term limits, direct democracy, and larger council size - for expanding voter turnout. If the logic behind even some of these different

[191] Within the United States, concurrency between gubernatorial and presidential elections and between congressional and presidential elections already substantially increases turnout in the lower tier contests (Boyd 1989).

institutional reforms proves to be accurate, then institutional reform could very well hold the key to expanding participation in the local arena.[192]

A second reason to focus on local institutional structure relates to the ease with which these different institutional features can be altered. Although it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for local policymakers to affect the demographic or socioeconomic characteristics of their localities, the same cannot be said for local institutional structure. Municipalities generally have the ability to alter the way they conduct elections simply by passing an ordinance or by altering a city charter. Even changes to the local form of government and other major institutional reforms are relatively easy to enact. These kinds of changes can be done internally by the city council, by putting an initiative before voters, or through the passage of a new state law. Put plainly, city-level electoral institutions lend themselves readily to practical policy interventions.

Finally, local institutions are an attractive avenue for reform because most municipalities in America retain structures that are probably far from optimal in terms of encouraging participation. The most recent IMCA survey indicates that the vast majority of all municipal elections in the U.S. are not held concurrently with presidential contests (see also Wood 2002). More than half of the nation's cities currently operate under a council-manager form of government rather than mayor-council form. As well, three-quarters of all municipalities hold nonpartisan rather than partisan electoral contests. There is clearly a lot of room for reform.

For all of these reasons, for the remainder of this chapter I focus attention on local electoral and governing institutions and their potential for enhancing turnout. Unfortunately,

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[192] Although the logic linking these three institutional forms to turnout is somewhat less clear, there are some who maintain that each is likely to affect voter participation (Hahn and Kamieniecki 1987, Rosales 2000). We also considered including a test of district vs at-large elections in our model but felt that there was even less of a clear theoretical link between the type of district and turnout.

although there is reason to suspect that institutional reform could be a key to expanding local voter turnout, there is limited empirical evidence tying these institutional features to voter participation. The preliminary evidence is certainly encouraging. Studies of a small number of cities have linked the mayor-council form of government and partisan elections to higher local turnout (Hajnal and Lewis 2003, Wood 2002, Caren 2007, Karnig and Walter 1983, Espino 2001, Schaffner, Wright, and Streb 2001). Other studies have found an even stronger relationship between election timing and turnout (Espino, 2001, Hampton and Tate, 1996). And some research into institutional features like direct democracy, council size, and term limits has occasionally found significant relationships – even if other studies have had mixed results (Thompson and Moncrief, 1993, Tolbert et al. 2000,).

This research has, however, been limited in a number of critical ways. With few exceptions, these studies have not been able to simultaneously assess the entire range of relevant local institutional features. This is critical given that many of the key institutional features are highly correlated. The fact that Progressive movement in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century successfully pushed for many of the institutions that are alleged to suppress turnout means that localities that have one of these institutions are likely to have all of them. We cannot know the effect of one institution without simultaneously considering the role of all of them. Most importantly, few studies have included in their analysis the one reform that has the greatest potential to expand turnout – the move to on-cycle local elections from off-cycle local elections (but see Caren 2007, Wood 2002). Obviously, any study that does not control for the main factor driving turnout is likely to be flawed.

Equally problematic is the tendency to base conclusions on a small number and generally unrepresentative sample of localities. Bridges (1997), for example, offers an insightful analysis

of turnout in cities in the Southwest but whether these results are applicable to the nation as a whole is unclear. Other studies that focus on big cities (Caren 2007) or on a small hand-picked set of places (Wood 2002) are also limited by their sample. If we want a more definitive account of the effects of local institutions on turnout, we need a more systematic and comprehensive study.

Data

To assess the impact of each of these institutional features on turnout, I turn once again to the 1986 ICMA survey data – the only available data source that has turnout figures for a nationally representative sample of localities. Later in the chapter, I look at more recent elections in California.

I use two different measures of turnout: the percentage of *registered* voters who cast ballots for local office in a given election and the percentage of *voting-age residents* who cast ballots. I focus heavily on turnout of registered voters because I believe that it is likely to be the measure most directly affected by changes in the local institutional and electoral context. Registered voters have already cleared the major entry barrier to political participation (registration) and thus whether or not they vote is likely to be closely related to conditions at the time of the election.

At the same time, if we want to know how likely the entire adult population is to participate in local elections, it is important to examine turnout of the voting-age population as well. Although registration procedures are set by state and federal laws, they are typically administered by county officials, who historically have had a fair amount of latitude in making decisions about registration procedures. Across the cities in the sample, there was a wide degree

of variation in the registration rate (mean 63.8 percent, standard deviation 16.2 percent). Moreover, given that the intermediary step of voter registration has at times in the past been used to exclude certain segments of the electorate (Davidson and Grofman 1994), it is possible that the institutional features that drive turnout of registered voters differ from those that expand the participation of the voting age population. In practice, turnout of registered voters and turnout of the voting-age population are very highly correlated among cities in the sample (r = .85), and the factors that lead to increased turnout of registered voters also tend to increase turnout of the adult population.

The ICMA survey asked city clerks to report on eight potentially relevant institutional characteristics. In line with previous research, cities were categorized as having either a council-manager form of government, where the day-to-day administration of the city is run by an unelected professional city manager, or a mayor-council form of government.[193] Beyond form of government, I focused on several features of council elections including whether all members of the council are elected at the same time or staggered across two different elections (staggered elections), whether or not party labels are included on the ballot (nonpartisan elections), whether or not there is a limited lifetime term for council members (term limits), and the total number of seats on the city council (number of seats). Election timing was based on an ICMA question that asked for the date of 'the most recent municipal elections.' Using the month and year I was able to identify municipalities that held their most recent election in November of the last presidential election and those that held their last election at the same time as the last midterm

[193] In practice, variation *within* the two forms of government (council-manager and mayor-council) may now be as important as the distinction *between* the two plans. Cain, Mullin, and Peele (2001) have detected a number of hybrid forms and have illustrated cases where, despite the presence of the council-manager system, mayors have extensive managerial and agenda-setting powers. For this reason, in alternate tests we also assess the effects of mayoral powers.

Congressional elections. I refer to these as on-cycle or concurrent elections. All other elections are categorized as off-cycle or nonconcurrent contests.[194]

Local institutional characteristics are not the only factor that could affect aggregate voter turnout at the local level. To ensure that analysis of city-level institutions is not biased by differences in demographic characteristics across cities, I include controls for a familiar set of demographic variables – educational status (percent with a college degree), income (median household income), race (percent black, Hispanic, and Asian American), age (percent 18 to 24 and percent over 65), and poverty (percent poor).[195] In addition, I include a measure of the mobility of the population (percent of residents who have moved in the past five years), the proportion of the local population that is institutionalized, the proportion of the population that is non-citizen, the total city population, and regional dummies since each of these measures has been linked to turnout in some forum (Hajnal and Lewis 2003). Data for each of these demographic measures are derived from the 1990 United States Census.

Results

We already know that local voter turnout is low. In the sample of municipalities, 39 percent of registered voters turned out to vote. That compares to a turnout rate of 89 percent in the last presidential election. What I have not yet shown is how much variation there is in local voter turnout. Despite the generally low levels of turnout, there are enormous differences in voting rates across communities.[196] As Figure 6.1 reveals, turnout rates vary dramatically across

[194] There is likely to be some error inherent in this measure as "the most recent election" in a locality may not be a council election but could instead be a mayoral election or some other kind of local contest. Fortunately, the error, to the extent that it exists, will bias our estimates of election timing downward. Thus, we essentially have a lower bound for the effects of timing.
[195] Since each of these factors is measured at the aggregate, city-wide level, we will not attempt to infer any causal relationship about individual behavior from these measures.
[196] The standard deviation for registered voter turnout is 20 percentage points.

communities. The figure, which shows the distribution of registered voter turnout across American municipalities, indicates that while some cities attract less than 10 percent of registered voters to the polls, other cities draw upwards of 90 percent of registered voters.

FIGURE 6.1 HERE

This variation matters because it tells us that some cities are able to get voters to the polls. Thousand Oaks, California, for example, was able to get 79 percent of the registered electorate to vote in its city council election in 1984. Why did so many residents participate in that contest? And more generally, what is it about high turnout cities that leads to expanded participation rates? Is it just that municipalities with large well educated and generally high socioeconomic status individuals get higher turnout or is there something more to the story? Do institutions matter as well? In the rest of this chapter, I explore some of the possible systemic factors that underlie this variation.

In Table 6.1 I begin the investigation of the factors that drive local voter turnout. The table displays the results of two OLS regressions with registered voter turnout and eligible voter turnout as the dependent variables. The analysis indicates that a healthy portion of the differences in turnout among the nation's municipalities can be explained by one simple factor—the timing of the local election.[197] As the first coefficient in first row of table 6.1 indicates, coupling local council elections with a presidential election leads to a 29 point increase in registered voter turnout – all else equal. Given that on average, only 39 percent of registered voters turn out in a typical contest, that gain almost represents a doubling of turnout. Scheduling local elections with midterm elections is not quite as effective but still leads to a boost in turnout of about 13 percentage points. I obtain similar results if I look at turnout of eligible voters. As

[197] The adjusted R squared for the first regression in Table 6.1 falls to .12 from .26 when the two timing measures are dropped from the model suggesting that timing is the most important factor in explaining turnout.

can been seen in the second column of Table 6.1, controlling for a host of other factors, presidential elections are associated with eligible voter turnout that is 17 percent higher than "local-only" elections; midterm elections are associated with turnout of 9 percent more eligible voters. Simply by shifting the dates of local elections, municipalities can transform the dynamics of their elections.

Given that the vast majority of cities in the nation continue to hold off-cycle elections, reform to election timing could play a critical role in efforts to expand local voter participation. Across the nation only 6.7 percent of all municipalities held local elections that coincided with presidential contests. Even less (3.5 percent) held elections concurrently with midterm Congressional elections. That leaves almost 90 percent of all cities with the ability to greatly increase turnout by shifting election dates.

What makes timing even more appealing as a policy lever is that there are strong incentives – aside from increasing participation – to switch to concurrent elections. In fact, the primary motivation for this move has usually been cost savings. In most states, municipalities typically pay the entire administrative costs of stand-alone elections but only a fraction of the costs of on-cycle elections. Since municipalities usually only pay a small portion of the costs of concurrent elections, local officials tend to view a move to on-cycle local elections as a way to cut the costs of administering elections. The city of Concord, California, for example, recently estimated that the cost of running a stand-alone election would be $58,000—more than twice as much as the $25,000 estimate for running a consolidated election (Simerman 1998).

Other Institutional Arrangements: Making Elections Matter

Although election timing is the most important factor in explaining local voter turnout, the analysis indicates that other aspects of institutional structure do have some effect on participation. As Table 6.1 demonstrates, form of government is also related to turnout. As expected, cities where an unelected official, the city manager, attends to the daily operations of the city rather than an elected official, the mayor, voter turnout is about four points lower – all else equal. These results provide corroboration of earlier research assessing the dampening effect of the city-manager form of government on voter turnout (Wood 2002, Alford and Lee 1968, Dixon 1964, Karnig and Walter 1983, 1993). In alternate tests, I also looked to see if the extent of the formal powers of the mayor's office affected turnout.[198] If voter participation is a function of the importance of the election then localities where the mayor has more expansive authority should have higher voter turnout. The results confirm this intuition. Cities where the mayor has the power to veto legislation tend to garner especially high turnout.[199]

Staggered elections also have a reasonably large impact on turnout. Turnout in municipalities that stagger city council elections across two different dates is nine points lower than turnout in places that elect all of their council members at the same time. These patterns suggest that voting is quite logical. When there is more at stake and voters have more direct power over local outcomes, they tend to participate more regularly.

Nonpartisanship also lowers turnout. Cities that hold partisan primaries and that place party labels on their ballots tend to garner three percent more voters than cities that do not allow parties to be involved in the electoral process. Presumably, this boost in turnout is related to the additional mobilization that political parties undertake as well as to the ease of using party labels to identify a favored choice. Interestingly, direct democracy has a negative effect on turnout.

[198] Mayoral power is relevant in these city council elections because many, if not most, localities hold their mayoral election on the same day as their city council election.
[199] In most of the regression models we tested this mayoral veto measure was positive and marginally significant.

Municipalities where citizens can place initiatives on the ballot have, after controlling for other factors, two points lower turnout on average than municipalities where there is no provision for direct democracy. At first glance, this runs counter to expectations but it may fit a broader logic of voting. It may be that local legislatures are less active when direct democracy is available. At least at the state level, Gerber (1999) has shown that legislators in states with the initiative tend to shy away from dealing with controversial measures that could cost them votes. The result is that direct democracy grows in importance and legislatures decline in importance (Schrag 1998). If true at the local level, voters may have less motivation to vote for or against council candidates when direct democracy is part of the democratic process.[200]

As can been seen in column two of Table 6.1, most of these institutional effects persist when one looks at eligible voter turnout.[201] There is, in short, ample evidence to indicate that institutions matter. Reform to all four of these factors could, in combination, have a substantial effect on turnout. Taken together, movement to the mayor-council form of government, non-staggered council elections, and partisan contests, and the elimination of direct democracy could, by the model, increase registered voter turnout in a typical city by 18 percent. Timing is the most critical factor but reform to these four other institutional features is well worth considering.[202]

Again, there is reason to believe that reform to these institutions is feasible. As has previously been noted, most cities do not have an institutional structure that is optimal for voter turnout. Mayor-councils are present in only 44 percent of all localities in the sample. Non-

[200] Importantly, cities that allow for direct democracy tend not to use it all that regularly (Hajnal et al 2002) so there is typically no initiative on the ballot in a given election. As we will see later in the chapter, when there are measures on the ballot, direct democracy can boost turnout.
[201] Nonpartisanship and direct democracy become marginally insignificant when we focus on turnout of eligible voters.
[202] This findings mirrors work by Caren (2007) which found that institutions played a major role in shaping turnout in a small set of large U.S. cities.

staggered council elections are also fairly rare (20 percent). And partisan elections occur in only 28 percent of all American localities.

Another reason to believe that reform is feasible is the relative regularity with which many of these institutions are reformed. Throughout the last century, numerous alterations have been made to the basic governing structure of cities in the United States and changes are still routinely considered for a variety of reasons (Bridges 1997, Welch and Bledsoe 1988). An examination of city structure using ICMA surveys from 1986 to 2001 indicates that in a typical five year period just over ten percent of all municipalities altered their form of government (changing some aspect of the relationship between the mayor, city council, and city manager), one percent moved away from (or to) nonpartisan elections, and five percent switched from (or to) staggered elections.[203] Changes in these institutions and electoral laws are, in short, far from unprecedented.

The potential of institutional reform does not, however, extend to all of the institutions I examined. The results in Table 6.1 indicate that term limits do not increase or decrease turnout over district elections. Given the lack of a clear or compelling theoretical connection between term limits and voter turnout, this is perhaps not surprising.[204] There is also no evident link between the size of the city council and turnout.[205]

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[203] In addition, four percent altered the number of seats on the city council, two percent enacted or ended terms limits for the council, and almost ten percent made the switch between at-large and district elections.

[204] There is some speculation that the growing use of term limits has affected voter turnout, although the direction of the effect is unclear (Thompson and Moncrief 1993). By forcing incumbents out of office, term limits are seen by some as a tool to level the playing field, encourage more candidates to run for office, and ultimately make elections more competitive and dynamic (Copeland 1997). Thus one might suspect that term limits increase turnout. However, an unintended consequence of term limits at the municipal level may be to decrease turnout by increasing voter confusion and disinterest by introducing a greater number of "unknown" non-incumbents into electoral contests (Rosales 2000).

[205] The findings regarding city demographic characteristics also tend to match expectations. Cities with smaller populations, a greater proportion of elderly residents, less geographically mobile populations, and fewer Latino residents experienced greater voter turnout.

To help ensure that the relationships we see in Table 6.1 accurately measure the underlying relationships between local institutions and turnout, I performed a series of additional tests. One aspect of local elections that Table 6.1 overlooks is the context of each local election. Although there is limited available data on each individual election, I do have information on perhaps the most pivotal factor in each contest – how competitive it is. Studies at different levels indicate that competition is a key variable driving turnout and there is little reason to doubt that it is relevant here as well (Cox and Munger 1989). To account for competition, in alternate tests I add a measure that tabulates one aspect of competition – the percent of incumbents who are reelected in each city. The measure is not a perfect gauge of competition. Nevertheless, when it is tested, I found no link between the rate of incumbent failure and turnout. More importantly, when I add this measure of competition to the model in Table 6.1, it has no noticeable effect on the rest of the results.

Another concern with Table 6.1 is that it does not explicitly consider state level dynamics. States set registration laws and they have, at least in the past, used those laws and other levers to bias electoral competition and exclude certain segments of the electorate (Davidson and Grofman 1994). Although reforms in recent decades have greatly reduced the ability of states to set their own registration procedures and some scholars find that state laws today are almost of no consequence to voter turnout, there are two areas in which states retain some autonomy and may still influence the turnout of different segments of the electorate (Highton 2004). The first law pertains to the state registration deadline. States can set their own voter registration deadlines and variation in those deadlines may continue to be linked to turnout (Highton 2004).[206] The other important decision that states can still make relates to felon disenfranchisement. States can choose to what extent those convicted of crimes are barred from

[206] All states have, however, limited deadlines to 30 days or less.

electoral participation. There is, in fact, a growing concern that as the number of convicted felons grows and as felon disenfranchisement laws become more strict, large swaths of the public will be left out and electoral results will be altered (Manza 2006). Both to ascertain the effects of these state level dynamics and to test the robustness of the local level results, I added variables that measured the registration deadline and the strictness of felony disenfranchisement to the model in Table 6.1.[207] This alternate analysis suggests that both state level institutional features matter. Same day registration increased local voter turnout in the analysis by six points over states that restricted registration to 30 days or more and the loosest felon disenfranchisement laws increased eligible voter turnout by five points over the strictest laws.[208] The inclusion of both variables, however, did little to alter the impact of local institutions on turnout.

Although these tests increase one's confidence in the role that local institutions play, I still cannot rule out the possibility that there are other, unrecognized features of the state political arena that interact with local institutions and impact turnout. To more fully account for any unidentified state level influences, I employed two tests.[209] First, in the regression model in Table 6.1, I clustered the errors by state. Second, I repeated the analysis using state fixed effects – essentially adding dummies for every state. These tests confirmed that the original findings highlighting the influence of local level institutions.[210]

Another valid concern is that the local institutions we are studying here could be manipulated by strategic politicians in an effort to retain power (Trounstine 2008, Aghion et al

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[207] To test the effects of felon disenfranchisement we grouped states into those that a) bar convicted felons for life, b) bar felons currently in prison or on parole, c) bar felons currently in prison, and d) allow felons in prison to vote under some circumstances.

[208] The finding regarding registration deadlines parallels results for national level elections (Highton 2004, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993)

[209] A third way to deal with this concern is to assess the effects of institutions in a single state. This is precisely what we do later in this chapter.

[210] The one exception was that the effect of nonpartisanship was marginally reduced in this alternate model.

2004). If local officials respond to electoral threats by re-structuring local institutions, then the endogeneity of local institutions could affect the results. There are, however, several reasons to suspect that this dynamic is largely irrelevant for this analysis. First, the one institutional reform that has been demonstrated to be endogenous – shifting between district and at-large elections – has no clear theoretical link to voter turnout and was not significantly related to voter turnout in alternate tests that I performed. Second, the institutional feature that is by far and away the most important in determining turnout – election timing – is uncorrelated with conditions that have typically led local elites to alter local institutions. Specifically, I find that the presence of off-cycle elections is unrelated to the size of the racial and ethnic minority population (either linearly or curvilinearly) or to being under the authority of the Voting Rights Act. Thus, there is little evidence that white minorities are shifting to off-cycle elections to retain local control in cities with large and growing racial and ethnic minority populations.[211] Nevertheless, since it is possible that local elites could have modified other local institutions to serve their own interests, I performed a series of two-stage-least-squares regressions that explicitly modeled the endogeneity of local institutions.[212] None of these tests revealed substantial changes in the effects of institutions on turnout.

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of the analysis presented so far relates to the dated nature of the elections. Major changes that have occurred in the local political arena since the late 1980s could have significantly altered the relationships in Table 6.1 Declining municipal turnout, dramatic growth in the immigrant and racial minority populations, and institutional

[211] Off-cycle elections are also not more prevalent in cities incorporated during the Progressive Era when many maintain that middle-class elites were trying to alter local institutions to rest local control from the poorer masses (Bridges 1997). Nor are off-cycle elections more prevalent in the West where Progressives garnered the most control. In fact, the opposite is true. More municipalities in the West hold on-cycle elections than in other regions.
[212] In the first-stage we used the year of incorporation, being under the Voting Rights Act, and regional dummies as instruments to predict local institutional features. Then, in the second stage, we used the exogenous local institutions and the same list of controls to predict turnout.

developments such as the growth of direct democracy and the rise of outsourcing could all have impacted the dynamics of local voter turnout. Fortunately, by turning to a more recent data set of elections in California, I can address this final limitation.

The Ongoing Influence of Election Timing

To get a more recent assessment of the role that local institutions play in shaping voter turnout, I turn again to the 2001 survey of cities in California. The goal here is to repeat the original analysis in Table 6.1 as closely as possible to determine if the institutions that drive turnout have changed over time. The California survey, its methodology, and coding of its variables are detailed in Chapter Three and in the Appendix.

California provides an excellent setting for studying the impact of local institutions on voter turnout, for several reasons. First, on most institutional dimensions that we are interested in there is considerable institutional variation across cities in California (see the Appendix). A second related advantage to California is its size and diversity. The 350 city-observations vary enormously across measures of racial diversity, population size, socioeconomic status, industrial base, urbanization, and most other relevant characteristics. California's cities are not representative of the nation as a whole, but there are cities in California that are comparable to most American cities on most important dimensions. In short, California provides a large sample with enough variation for a wide-ranging analysis of the relationship between institutional context and turnout. Third, California and its cities have been on the forefront of many of the more recent trends in local governance. Relatively new developments like local term limits and the contracting out of municipal services have been widely adopted in the state and thus can be more closely appraised in California than elsewhere. The trend toward direct democracy has

also been more pronounced in California than in most other states. As a result, California offers a suitable venue to examine the effects of local ballot propositions.

The California data have one additional advantage. Namely, I can assess election timing in a more discerning and accurate manner with the survey of California's cities than with the ICMA data. One limitation of the ICMA data is the imperfect nature of the election timing measure. Due to the vague nature of the ICMA question wording, I cannot be certain whether city clerks are providing election timing about a city council election, a mayoral election, or some other regular local election. Most of the ICMA responses almost surely pertain to council elections but there will be some error in the measure. As well, the ICMA question wording, only allows us to isolate elections that were held concurrently with Presidential and midterm Congressional elections from all other elections.

The California survey permits us to improve upon the timing measure in two ways. First, since the California survey asks specifically for the dates of the council and mayoral elections, I know for certain which type of election the data are from. Second, the California survey allows for a more refined measure of timing. Specifically, I can now classify election dates as falling into one of the following five categories: presidential election, midterm congressional election (also gubernatorial, in California), presidential primary, odd-year November election, or completely off-cycle election.[213]

Aside from timing, there are only a few other differences between the California model and the national model in Table 6.1. The reformed nature of California's cities means that one cannot effectively evaluate the impact of several institutions. Nonpartisanship cannot be evaluated in California because every city in the state holds nonpartisan elections. Similarly, since state law obliges all cities in California to embrace direct democracy, I examine the impact

[213] This last category is comprised of "local-only" contests, generally held in the spring.

of the active use of initiatives on turnout rather than the existence of the institution. As we will see, this distinction matters. Each city with a citizen initiative on the ballot was coded 1 and 0 otherwise. The preponderance of the council-manager form of government in the state also makes it difficult to assess the impact of form of government on turnout. Since almost all cities in the state (97 percent) categorized themselves as council-manager cities, any assessment of the effect of the council-manager form of government on turnout should be viewed with caution. Finally, I am able to include the same list of demographic controls (from the 2000 Census). Once again, I ran two parallel estimations, one geared at explaining turnout of *registered voters*, and one seeking to explain the turnout of *adult residents*.

Timing is (almost) everything

The analysis of California's cities confirms the importance of election timing. The results, as reported in Table 6.2, indicate that scheduling local elections to occur on the dates of statewide and national contests has the potential to dramatically alter the existing pattern of local voter turnout in the state. Controlling for a host of other factors, presidential elections are associated with turnout of registered voters in city elections that is 37 percent higher than "local-only" elections; gubernatorial elections and presidential primaries are associated with municipal turnout of 25 to 27 percent more registered voters. The results for turnout of the adult population – displayed in the second column of Table 6.2 - are just as impressive. The analysis indicates that turnout of the adult population is between 24 and 12 percent higher in on-cycle elections than in off-cycle contests. In fact, about half of the differences in turnout among California cities can be explained by timing.[214] **[TABLE 6.2 HERE]**

[214] A regression explaining turnout rates and using *only* the timing dummy variables, explains 51 percent of variation for turnout of registrants and 32 percent for turnout of adults.

The importance of turnout becomes even more visible when these results are presented graphically. Figure 6.2 shows the predicted turnout rates under different timing scenarios holding all other local factors constant at their mean or modal. As Figure 6.2 illustrates, predicted turnout rates for the typical California city vary dramatically depending on whether that city holds its election concurrently with other contests. The typical city that holds off-cycle elections can expect only about a quarter of registered voters to turn out. By contrast, an average city with a local election that coincides with a presidential contest is likely to get well over sixty percent of all registered voters to the polls. As the figure also shows, differences in eligible voter turnout due to timing are almost as large. **[FIGURE 6.2 HERE}**

An alternate examination of turnout in mayoral elections for cities that held mayoral elections in the state led to nearly identical results. Shifting to on-cycle mayoral elections increased turnout anywhere from 9 to 35 percent (depending on which type of national election and whether the focus is turnout of registered voters or adults) over off-cycle mayoral elections.[215]

Moreover, when I looked at turnout over time in individual cities in California that had recently switched from off-cycle to on-cycle local elections, it was once again clear that changes to election timing have dramatic effects. In San Diego, for example, the number of voters participating in the three mayoral run-off elections that occurred after the city switched to on-cycle elections in 1983 was 114 percent higher than turnout in the three previous run-off elections.[216] The growth in city council turnout in Santa Monica was almost as impressive. Turnout in the three on-cycle elections that followed the city's move to on-cycle elections averaged 60 percent higher than turnout in the three previous off-cycle council elections despite

[215] The small number of mayoral elections did, however, lead to less stable and less robust estimations for the other institutional variables in the analysis.
[216] San Diego's population only grew 49 percent over that time period.

the fact that city's total population fell after the transition. By all accounts, participation in local elections depends critically on the timing of those elections.[217]

California, like the rest of the nation, is also ripe for reform on this dimension. In the state, more than one third of the cities held their elections on a date that was not in the electoral "prime time" of a statewide election. Put another way, the vast majority of cities could benefit from a change in the timing of local elections. I estimate that if all cities in the state that hold off-cycle elections switched their elections to a presidential election date, approximately 1.7 million more Californians would have cast a ballot in their most recent city council contest (roughly a 31 percent increase in participation in these contests).

Fortunately, many cities in the state have either already changed electoral timing or are actively considering such changes (Simerman 1998). More than 40 percent of the city clerks responding to the survey indicated that their city has made a change in the timing of municipal elections in recent years, with the vast majority of those switching from stand-alone elections to elections concurrent with statewide contests. [218] The move to consolidated elections has, in fact, occurred for all kinds of local contests. In Contra Costa County, for example, 55 cities, school districts, and special districts (out of 73 total local governments) were running consolidated elections as of 2000 – up from just 36 in 1996 (Rohrs 2000).

Evaluated on the basis of a city's administrative costs *per vote cast*, the fiscal advantages of this move to concurrent elections are clear in California as well. For example, San Francisco

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[217] Another aspect of city election timing that could potentially affect turnout is whether city elections are consolidated with elections for other *local* offices like city treasurer. Additional analysis, however, found no such effects. Furthermore, holding both the mayoral and council election on the same day did not appear to spur significantly higher turnout. In short, consolidating local elections with statewide elections—as opposed to consolidating various categories of local elections—is the step most likely to yield local turnout gains.

[218] Specifically, of the 308 clerks answering this question, 94 (30.5 percent) indicated a change from nonconcurrent to concurrent elections, 3 (1 percent) switched from concurrent to nonconcurrent dates, 37 (12 percent) indicated a change from one nonconcurrent date to another, and 137 (56.5 percent) indicated no change. This calculation excludes 94 cities, or about one quarter of the total number of respondents, who did not answer this question. Most likely these cities did not change the timing of their elections.

election officials estimated that the December 2001 runoff for city attorney cost the city $29 per ballot cast. The expensive price tag for this stand alone election led city officials to seriously debate the merits of an "instant runoff" voting system so that the November election would be decisive and no runoff would be required (Lelchuk 2001).

Beyond Timing

Although timing is clearly the most important factor in explaining local voter turnout, at least one other aspect of the local institutional structure did have some effect on participation. Cities with local ballot questions placed before the voters tended to have higher turnout. This is true both for turnout of registered voters and turnout of all adults. Where there are one or more voter initiatives on the municipal ballot, cities tend to draw about 6 percent more registered voters to the polls. This fits with the conventional wisdom concerning the mobilizing effects of direct democracy and mirrors results at the state-wide level (Tolbert et al 2000).[219] Coupled with the national analysis these results suggest it is active use of direct democracy, not merely the possibility of direct democracy that spurs turnout.

Beyond election timing and the use of direct democracy, I found only limited evidence of institutional leverage on voter turnout in the state. As with the national results, there was no clear link here between term limits and turnout. Contrary to the earlier findings, the distinction between mayor-council cities and council-manager cities made little difference to turnout in

[219] Existing evidence suggests that statewide initiatives have sparked greater participation (Tolbert et al. 2000). Certain statewide initiatives like Proposition 187, which sought to eliminate services to illegal immigrants and their offspring, have been linked to greater participation by specific segments of the electorate, such as Latinos (Pantoja and Segura, 2000).

California.[220] It may be that the increasingly hybrid nature of city structures has made the mayor-manager distinction less critical in the state (Cain, Mullen, and Peele 2001).[221]

The one arena where additional tests revealed significant institutional effects relates to service delivery arrangements. One of the more recent and pronounced trends in local governance is a move toward contracting out and other forms of "outsourcing" city services (Stein 1990, Miller 1980). In an effort to reduce costs and provide more efficient services, cities in California and elsewhere have chosen to contract services such as police protection or garbage collection to private firms, special districts, the county government, or other nearby local governments. In some "contract cities," particularly prevalent in Southern California, few local public services are actually directly carried out by city employees. Under these circumstances, some measure of direct influence is removed from the hands of city elected officials, potentially reducing interest in local politics and depressing turnout.

The results for service delivery indicate, once again, that residents turnout more when their vote matters more. Alternate tests reveal that cities that provide more services with their own staff (as opposed to contracting out to firms or making service arrangements with other local governments) tend to draw a larger share of voters to the polls. Each additional service provided by city staff - of the five services asked about in the survey (fire, police, library, sewerage, and garbage) - is associated with approximately 1 percent higher turnout among registered voters. Citizens appear to be more inclined to vote when the officials up for election have more direct control over the basic services that affect their quality of life.

[220] Given that 97 percent of cities in the state were council-manager cities, this finding should, however, be taken with considerable skepticism.
[221] Alternate tests also revealed that a mayoral veto and mayoral authority to develop the city budget did not significantly increase turnout.

To test the robustness of these California findings, I ran a series of additional regressions that incorporated other potentially confounding factors into the analysis. The bulk of these tests focused on the context of the specific election and in particular on how competitive the contest was. Given the strong relationship between competition and turnout in other types of electoral contests, it is important to consider it here as well (Cox and Munger 1989). I was able to measure competition in these cities with three measures: the number of candidates, the number of incumbents running for reelection, and the percent of incumbents winning reelection. When these new variables are added to the model in Table 6.2, I find that competition does matter. Namely, in cities where incumbents were relatively secure and seldom lost, turnout was substantially lower. The addition of these contextual variables did not, however, affect any of the other relationships that have already been highlighted. Finally, in a diverse state with rapidly changing demographics, one might also expect contests for local office to draw more attention or seem more salient if the contestants are from different ethnic or racial backgrounds. However, I found that different measure highlighting bi-racial elections were not significantly related to turnout and none noticeably affected the other results in Table 6.2.

The results for California tend to highlight the importance of election timing while mostly downplaying the significance of other local institutional features. It is, however, possible that these other institutions do play a key role under certain circumstances. One could argue that local institutional structure should only be important in off-cycle elections when local contests are not overshadowed by turnout for national or state contests. In stand-alone local elections, where the only thing that drives voters to the polls is the local contest itself, local institutions could play a more critical role. To test for this possibility, I ran separate regressions for peak-cycle elections (presidential primary and general elections and midterm congressional elections)

and off-peak local elections (odd-year November and completely off-cycle) in California. There was, however, no noticeable change in the effect of local institutions on turnout across these two types of elections.

Conclusion

Turnout in local elections is generally low but it is not universally low. More than a few cities in the nation manage to draw large numbers of their citizens to the polls. Analysis of the differences between these and other cities suggests that local institutions play a critical role in affecting voter participation. The results show that the largest part of this variation can be explained by timing—the date on which the election is held. Concurrent elections—that is, those city elections held on the same day as a presidential or congressional election—had turnout that is much higher than off-cycle city elections.

Beyond timing, there are a handful of other interesting correlates of turnout. Cities with an elected mayor, council seats that are elected all at the same time, partisan elections, active use of direct democracy, and more city controlled public services all entice a larger share of voters to the polls. The general pattern here is that cities can increase turnout by giving more decision making power to the people. When city government is less insular and votes are more consequential, interest expands and turnout increases. Combined, reform to timing and these other institutions could double local turnout.

The ease with which these institutions could be changed in the future, the relative frequency with which they have been altered in the past, and in some cases the cost savings involved with electoral reform all make these kinds of reforms feasible. Moreover, the fact that the vast majority of cities retain suboptimal 'unreformed' structures means that institutional reform has enormous potential. For policy makers the implications are clear. If expanded

participation is a primary goal, then institutional reform is the target and the best single reform in any potential arsenal of institutional changes is a move to on-cycle local elections.

There are, however, limitations. While an important first step, local institutional reform would ultimately only lead to incremental improvement. Limited citizen participation is a nationwide problem that cannot be fully addressed with solutions at the local level. In the end, regardless of what local institutional reform occurs, local turnout is unlikely to exceed participation rates currently experienced in statewide and national contests.[222]

Moreover, although the cost savings associated with on-cycle elections and the ease with which other institutions can be changed have led a considerable number of municipalities across the nation to alter their local institutional structures in directions that would benefit participation, there is likely to be some resistance to further change. It is very possible that some local elected officials will oppose a move to on-cycle elections because it might alter the electoral balance of power in their cities and hurt their chances for reelection. Change is possible but far from assured.

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[222] Also, although it is clear that reform to local institutions could increase local voter turnout, it is less clear how this increased turnout would affect the representativeness of the electorate and the face of urban democracy. Further work linking the demographic makeup of the active voting population with each of these institutions would be required before we could know how reform would alter the balance of electoral power between racial and ethnic groups or between more and less advantaged segments of the urban population. It is also far from apparent if increased voter participation in the local political arena would lead to greater civic engagement. Although voter participation is closely correlated with greater trust, efficacy, and satisfaction in government, increasing turnout would not guarantee improved engagement in local communities along such important dimensions as serving in neighborhood organizations or attending community meetings (Craig 1979).

Table 6.1. The Determinants of Voter Turnout in Municipal Elections

	Turnout of Registered Voters	*Turnout of Eligible Adults*
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS		
Election Timing		
Presidential Election	.29 (.02)***	.17 (.02)***
Midterm congressional	.13 (.02)***	.09 (.02)***
Form of Government		
Mayor/council form of government (vs council/manager)	.04 (.01)***	.03 (.01)***
Electoral Institutions		
Staggered Council Elections	-.09 (.01)***	-.05 (.01)***
Nonpartisan Election	-.03 (.01)***	-.02 (.01)**
Number of Council Members	.00 (.02)	.02 (.02)
Term limits	-.02 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Initiative provision	-.02 (.01)**	-.01 (.01)
CITY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS		
City population (natural log)	-.03 (.01)***	-.03 (.01)***
Percent college educated	.04 (.05)	.14 (.05)***
Median household income	-.02 (.00)***	-.02 (.00)***
Percent black	-.03 (.04)	-.06 (.04)
Percent Hispanic	-.12 (.06)*	-.13 (.06)**
Percent Asian	.04 (.11)	.02 (.11)
Percent Non-citizen	.17 (.12)	.00 (.12)
Percent aged 18 to 24	-.02 (.01)*	-.00 (.01)
Percent aged 65 or older	.03 (.01)**	.02 (.01)
Percent lived in same house for 5 years	.13 (.05)**	.21 (.05)***
Percent institutionalized	.05 (.25)	.14 (.22)
REGIONAL CONTROLS		
West	.08 (.01)***	.07 (.010***
Midwest	.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)***
Northeast	.05 (.02)***	.04 (.01)**
Constant	.66 (.07)***	.45 (.07)***
Observations	1691	1260
Adjusted R-squared	.26	.23

Notes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. OLS Regression.

Table 6.2. The Determinants of Voter Turnout in California Municipal Elections

	Turnout of Registered Voters	*Turnout of Eligible Adults*
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS		
Election Timing		
Presidential	36.6 (3.0)***	23.9 (2.4)***
Presidential primary	24.8 (4.3)***	12.3 (3.5)***
Midterm congressional	27.3 (2.3)***	16.9 (1.9)***
Odd-year November	2.6 (2.6)	-1.4 (2.1)
Form of Government		
Mayor/council form of government (vs council/manager)	7.9 (6.7)	6.0 (5.5)
Other Electoral Institutions		
Number of Council Seats	-1.2 (.89)	.31 (1.5)
Term limits	-1.1 (2.6)	-2.5 (2.1)
Initiative on the ballot	5.9 (2.9)**	5.5 (2.4)**
CITY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS		
City population (natural log)	1.2 (.89)	-1.4 (.72)*
Percent college educated	.30 (.11)***	.31 (.09)***
Median household income	-.00 (.06)	-.00 (.04)
Percent poor	-.01 (.21)	-.14 (.17)
Percent black	-.49 (.27)*	-.41 (.22)*
Percent Hispanic	.08 (.09)	.02 (.07)
Percent Asian	-.12 (.11)	-.12 (.09)
Percent Citizen	-.03 (.20)	.40 (.16)**
Percent aged 18 to 24	-.00 (.37)	-.09 (.31)
Percent aged 65 or older	.44 (.19)**	.12 (.16)
Percent lived in same house for 5 years	-.14 (.12)	.01 (.10)
Percent institutionalized	.48 (.17)***	-.11 (.14)
Constant	41.3 (25.4)	-9.4 (20.7)
Observations	209	210
Adjusted R-squared	.65	.68

Notes: *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. OLS Regression.

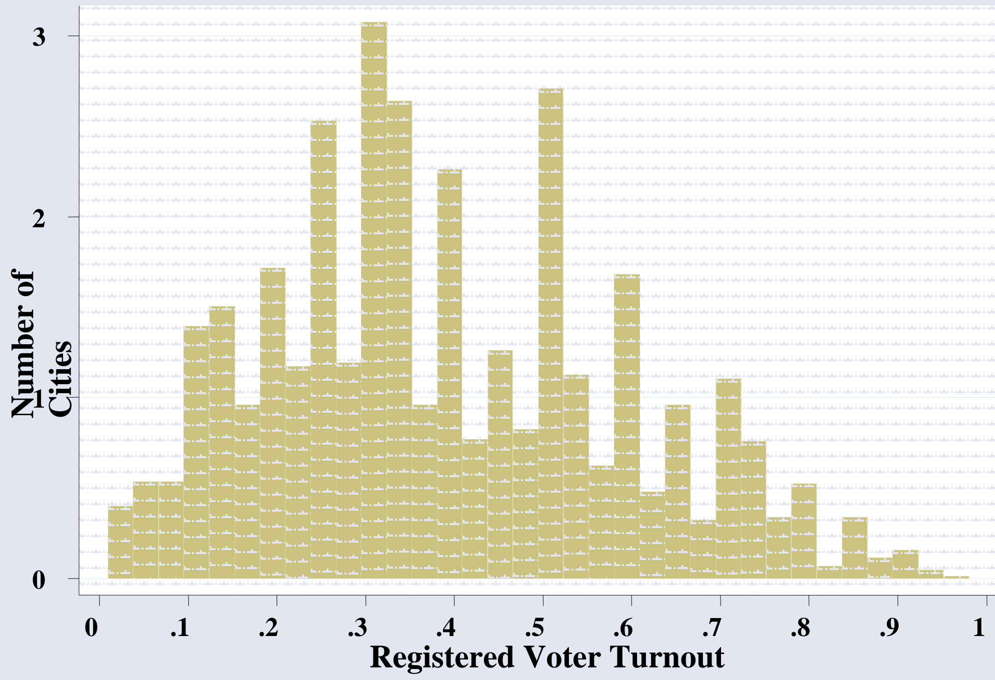
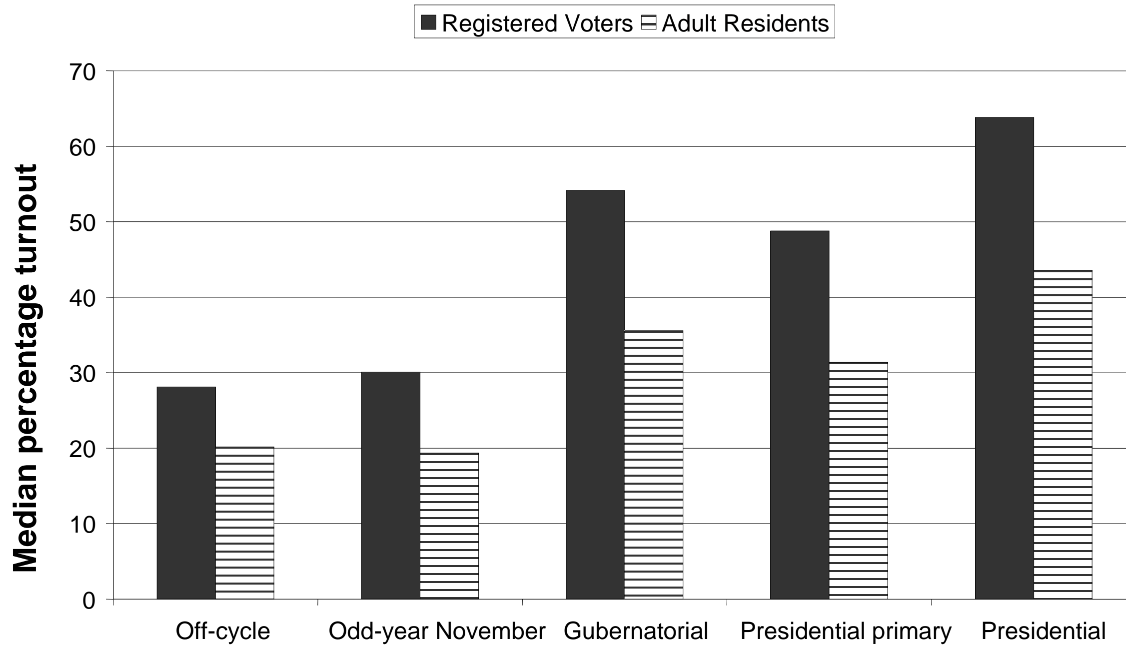


Figure 6.1 Variation in Voter Turnout Across the Nation
Number of Cities
0
1
2
3
0
.1
.2
.3
.4
.5
.6
.7
.8
.9
1
Registered Voter Turnout

Figure 6.2: Variation in Turnout by Election Timing
(Controlling for Other Factors)



Chapter 7 The Broader Implications of Uneven Turnout

This book has shown that who wins and who loses in local democracy is shaped in no small part by who votes. If the participation of each of America's racial and ethnic groups were even, we would likely see outcomes that diverged sharply from what we see today. Change would perhaps be most dramatic in mayoral elections where up to a third of the elections I examined could have ended with a different winner had turnout been even. But the analysis presented here suggests that city council representation could also be transformed by expanded turnout. If we could greatly increase turnout, we might eliminate almost one quarter of the underrepresentation of Latinos and Asian Americans on city councils across the country. Finally, there is evidence that turnout is closely linked to the policies that governments pursue. Municipalities with higher turnout spend more on welfare and other redistributive programs favored by minorities and less on areas favored by more advantaged white interests.

One implication of this set of findings is obvious – in one context in American democracy voter turnout matters. At the local level, turnout affects who wins the mayoralty, who occupies the city council, and where local governments spend their money. Turnout is, in short, central to any discussion of local democracy. Many will argue that we already know this and that the importance of turnout is readily visible in almost every political arena. But that is not what empirical studies of the American electorate tend to say. The bulk of the published work concludes that nonvoters are very much like their voting brethren (Ellcessor and Leighley 2001, Bennett and Resnick 1990, Norrander 1989, Highton and Wolfinger 2001). As Ruy Texeira notes, "whatever the pernicious effects of low voter participation may be, the communication of skewed and unrepresentative policy preferences should not number among them"(1992:101). And when it comes to actually counting votes, these scholars are adamant that

having everyone vote would do very little to alter outcomes (Highton and Wolfinger 2001, Petrocik 2003). John Petrocik is certainly not alone in claiming that "Election returns, whether looked at longitudinally by election district, in the aggregate, or as pooled cross sectional time series do not show a turnout bias"(2003:21).

The findings in this book, therefore, represent an important addition to the existing body of work on American democracy. An account that places turnout squarely at the center of American politics challenges much of what we know about electoral participation in America democracy. The kind of evidence I present here is critical in establishing the central role that turnout can play in American democracy.

The sharp contrast between this book and most other studies of turnout in American politics raises one other important implication. The contrast between sizeable turnout effects at the local level and the near irrelevance of turnout in almost every study of national elections tells us that it is imperative that we not limit the study of American politics to national elections. Broad conclusions about the merits of American democracy based exclusively on assessments of national politics are likely to be misleading. If we truly want to understand democracy in America, there is a vital role for the study of urban politics.

For those interested specifically in the welfare of racial and ethnic minorities, there is a distressing tale here. We must acknowledge that racial and ethnic minorities are losing out in the local political arena because of their irregular political participation. Limited participation has helped to restrict the number of minorities in office and contributes greatly to the gross underrepresentation of Latinos and Asian American in elected positions across the country. Low and uneven participation is also a culprit in the skewed nature of local government spending priorities. Where turnout is low, government spending priorities tend to mirror those of more

advantaged white interests. Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans regularly end up on the losing side of local democracy because their voices are more muted than they could be. If we care about the well-being of members of the black, Latino, and Asian American communities, we need to find ways to address these worrying patterns.

All of this raises questions about the democratic process itself. The fact that governments are responding less to the least advantaged members of society than to other groups is a sign that democracy, as we practice it today, may be fundamentally flawed. These kinds of inequities are particularly troublesome in an era when local governments in America spend over a trillion dollars each year and implement a wide range of the policies that affect the day-to-day lives of most Americans. In light of the critical role that turnout seems to be playing in the lives of Americans, we might want to seriously consider reforms that would address America's low and uneven turnout.

There is, however, some hope here. Outcomes in local democracy are not set in stone. Indeed, there is dramatic variation across different locales and contexts. In some places minority participation is broader and outcomes more equal. When racial minorities and members of other disadvantaged groups vote more, American democracy often serves them better. If we could find ways to expand participation, then we might be able to address many of the problems of minority underrepresentation.

Fortunately, one of the other conclusions of this study is that reform is possible. The few high turnout cities in the nation provide a lesson for anyone interested in expanding turnout. The analysis presented in the previous chapter indicates that small changes in local institutional structure can dramatically expand voter participation nationwide. More specifically, one minor reform - changing the dates of local elections to coincide with the dates of state and national

elections - could increase turnout by 29 to 37 percentage points. Given that most cities across the country still hold off-cycle elections, that the shift to on-cycle elections would save cities money, and that reform would usually only require the approval of the local city council, it is an effective reform that could be widely and relatively easily implemented.

Other institutional reforms could also help. Moving to a mayor-council form of government where the chief city official is elected rather than appointed, holding the election of every council seat at the same time rather than staggering them across different elections, and switching to partisan elections at the local level all have consequences for turnout. If we combine all of these institutional reforms, it is possible that we could double local voter turnout nationwide. This would not guarantee fair and equitable representation but it might move us a long way toward it.

Before attempting to implement these kinds of reforms, we do, however, need to weigh the benefits of increased participation against other unintended consequences of an expanded electorate. Do we really want more people involved in the political process? [223] Historically, any attempt to make voting easier and to expand participation has been met with the objection that it would dumb down the electorate (Berelson et al 1954, Lippmann 1965).[224] Reducing barriers to voting would, according to some, bring less interested and less well informed segments of the public to the voting booth. The result is that government policy would ultimately serve the public interest less well than it does today.

[223] One might wonder if non-voting is merely a sign of satisfaction with the political system and therefore not to be trifled with. But it appears that non-voting is much more apt to be correlated with distrust, a lack of efficacy, and dissatisfaction with democratic outcomes (Crotty 1991, Finkel 1985, Guterbock and London 1983 but see Miller 1980).

[224] Some have also voiced concerns that expanded participation could be linked to increased volatility in democracy (Berelson et al 1954). However, I could find no empirical literature to support this assertion.

It is not , however, clear that new voters would be much less capable than existing voters. Political knowledge is tied to political participation but the correlation is not particularly strong (Verba et al 1995). Americans - whether they vote or not - tend to be poorly informed about the political issues of the day (Delli Karpini and Keeter 1989).[225] As we have seen at various points in this book and as others have more clearly demonstrated, participation seems to be more a reflection of differential resources than of differential knowledge (Verba et al 1995).

These concerns about expanded participation also need to be balanced against other potentially positive by-products of increased political involvement. Voting is itself a potentially powerful educational tool. The act of voting provides citizens with an extra incentive to engage in information gathering. Indeed, research suggests that active participation encourages citizens to learn more about the functioning of government and the issues that are currently under debate (Bennett and Resnick 1990, Delli Karpini and Keeter 1989). Thus, by restricting participation we may actually increase the likelihood that policy decisions will reflect an inaccurate and incomplete understanding of the available policy options.

Nonparticipation at the local level is especially problematic in that citizens lose out on a relatively easy opportunity to learn about and become engaged in democracy. Given the small size of local government and the almost daily interactions that citizens have with local governments who deliver a range of basic services, it is probably easier for citizens to become familiar with the public realm at the local level. Local politics, therefore, could and should be the training ground of a democratic citizenry.

Heightened participation also has the potential to alter the way citizens think about government and their role in democracy. Studies have repeatedly shown a close link between

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[225] Also as Lupia (1994) shows, voters need not be experts on a given topic to be able to find informational cues (such as endorsements) that help them determine how they should vote.

participation on one hand and trust, efficacy, and civic duty on the other (Finkel 1985, Bobo and Gilliam 1990). Voting can be an activity through which citizens begin to become empowered in the democratic process (Oliver 2001). It can also be an avenue through which they begin to gain trust in government and acquire belief in their own political efficacy (Oliver 2001). The fact that so few citizens participate in American elections is likely to be at least a contributing factor to the decreasing levels of trust in government, political efficacy, and sense of civic duty that have alarmed so many observers of American politics (Baldassare 2000, Bennett and Resnick 1990, Lipset and Schneider 1983).

A greater sense of community is another potential consequence of expanded participation. According to at least some scholars, engaging in civic activity can spur community ties and the attachment of individuals to the larger collective (Putnam 2000). Finally, we may want to encourage participation because it can serve to raise the legitimacy of a democratically elected government (Pateman 1970, Gans 1978, Verba et al 1995). Democracy operates on the will of the people. If a small minority of the population elects its leaders, these elected officials may lack the broad authority necessary to govern effectively.

In the end then, it seems unlikely that we would hurt democracy by expanding participation. Gains in the legitimacy of the system, growth in political efficacy, and increases in individual capacities should mitigate any loss in competence brought about by bringing less informed or less interested citizens into the voting booth. And even if new voters do prove to be considerably less knowledgeable than existing voters, a system in which minorities and other less advantaged demographic groups are disproportionately excluded from the political arena seems indefensible. In the end, the doctrine of "one person, one vote"—a bedrock of democratic theory—probably outweighs any concerns about expanding the local electorate.

Along with this broad concern about the inclusion of less interested and less well informed voters, one can add more specific objections to the kinds of institutional reforms that have been endorsed here. There are at least a couple of concerns about holding local elections concurrently with national contests. One fear is that the attention that voters pay to the local political arena might be diminished under on-cycle elections. Local contests might be overshadowed by more important statewide or national contests that are held on the same day.[226] Other observers have raised concerns that concurrent elections would make it harder for challengers to raise campaign funds, which would mean that municipal incumbents might find it easier to ignore voters and their concerns. If true, concurrent elections might alter the competitive dynamics of local elections by providing incumbents with increased protection.[227] Finally, by coupling local elections with national contests and by making local elections partisan, it is likely that political parties would begin to play a much larger role in local elections – a change that would likely draw both strongly positive and negative reactions, depending on the observer.

Overall, these concerns are solid arguments for civic education, voter outreach campaigns, higher quality media coverage of local races, and intensive campaigning by candidates for mayor and council. They are, however, not compelling enough to schedule local elections so as to knowingly reduce public participation. Ultimately, local policy makers will have to decide for themselves. But in an increasingly diverse nation where local governments have considerable influence over our daily lives, political equality and enhanced citizen participation are important enough goals that they are likely to offset any of these reservations.

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[226] The coupling of local elections with national or statewide contests might also, in and of itself, affect knowledge and understanding since it would lead to longer, more complex ballots that might increase voter confusion.
[227] In the California data set I find the opposite pattern - a marginally higher incumbent reelection rate in off-cycle elections

Race in American Politics

A second important theme that has emerged in this book concerns race and its role in the urban political arena. The data that have been presented here provide one of the most systematic assessments of the state of racial politics in America's municipalities. The patterns that emerge from our analysis of of mayoral contests across the country provide a telling picture that helps to answer a number of critical questions related to America's racial divisions and coalitions.

One of those questions is whether whites, blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans can each be considered 'groups' in the sense of forming cohesive voting blocs. The data are unequivocal. Even voters from the least cohesive group, Asian Americans, vote for their group's preferred candidate 64 percent of the time. Whites, Latinos, and African Americans are all substantially more cohesive – voting together 69, 70, and 83 percent of the time respectively. Mayoral politics is, at least in part, the story of four different racial and ethnic groups sorting out who wins and loses.

The other pattern that is evident in the urban vote is pronounced division across the four groups. Blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asian Americans often disagree over who should win office. The division between African American and white voters is especially large – a 42 point gap between one group's support for the winning candidate and the other group's support for the same candidate – but there were also sizeable divides between black and Latino voters and black and Asian American voters. America's urban centers appear to be staging grounds for fairy rigorous racial and ethnic competition. If an inter-racial coalition did emerge – albeit a weak one with lots of cracks – it was between Latinos, Asian Americans, and whites.

Who Governs Local Politics?

A third important theme of this book concerns governance and responsiveness in the local political arena. Just who is it or what is it that governs cities? This is a core question driving the study of urban politics yet it is one that has greatly challenged researchers. Fortunately, by providing a test that incorporates each of the different theoretical accounts of urban power, that includes a large, representative sample of municipalities, and that focuses on major government spending decisions, this book has managed to provide some insight into the basic forces driving local democracy.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this more inclusive test leads us to a view of local government decision making that is more multi-faceted than most previous studies have suggested. Peterson (1991) is correct in arguing that economic constraints are critical in shaping the balance between redistributive, allocational, and developmental spending. Competition across cities means that municipalities – especially those that are fiscally challenged – often have to limit redistributive spending in favor of more economically productive development projects. But Peterson's account is far from complete. Pluralists like Dahl (1967) also get support here. Political imperatives both in the form of voter turnout and public opinion also matter. When voters or the broader public want to expand welfare and shift resources to disadvantaged communities, local governments can and do respond. The other factor that is critical in understanding who wins in urban democracy is institutional structure. How government is set up has strong effects on what it does. Local government spending is constrained by a range of institutional factors from at-large districts, to constitutional debt limits, and rules regarding tax increases. What matters less in how cities spend their money is bureaucratic need. Places with larger poor communities, for example, do not spend more to try to alleviate conditions in these communities. There is, if

anything, evidence of bias against one of the most disadvantaged groups. All else equal, cities spend less on welfare, health, and housing when African Americans are likely to be the target of that spending. Add it all together and the conclusion is that there is no simply story of who governs local democracy. If we want to try to improve outcomes in any local context, we have to be aware of all of the different factors shaping governmental decision making.

Turnout and its Consequences for Other Groups and Contexts

In writing this book I chose to focus on the consequences of uneven turnout for racial and ethnic minorities. Although there are good reasons for directing the bulk of our attention to the welfare of Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans, racial and ethnic minorities are not the only members of America's electorate that may be imperiled by low turnout. There are a range of other groups whose patterns of participation and representation parallel those of African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans. Racial and ethnic minorities may be the ones most hurt by low turnout in America but their story is far from unique. There is reason to believe that the implications of turnout in the local political arena extend far and wide.

In the remaining pages of this book I consider the implications of uneven participation for other groups and different contexts. The goal in each case is not to prove that turnout is critical. In fact, the evidence that I put forward in each case will be quite limited. I merely wish to point out that the impact of uneven participation could be much broader than what I have demonstrated here. The bottom line in each case is that there is plausible connection between turnout and the welfare of that particular group that warrants further investigation.

Class

One of the most compelling accounts of potential bias relates to class. The parallels with race are obvious. First and foremost is the under-participation of America's lower classes. As we saw in Chapter Two, the skew in participation in local elections by class is almost as severe as it is with race. Those who are well educated (a college degree or more) report voting in local elections at almost twice the rate of those with less than a high school degree. Alternatively, if we define class by income levels, the gap in participation remains large. Fully 65 percent of those in top quarter of the income scale report voting in local contests compared to just under 40 percent of those at the bottom end of the scale. Studies of turnout in other elections at the state and national level find almost identical patterns of class based participation (Verba et al 1995, Citrin et al 2003).

The other key parallel is divergent preferences. In almost every arena in democracy, class divides emerge. If we look first at voting in local elections, it is evident that lower class voters tend to favor somewhat different candidates from upper class voters. Across the 30 elections for mayor, city council, comptroller, and city attorney for which I have exit poll data, the percentage of lower status voters who favored the winning candidate differed by 20.2 percentage points on average from the percentage of upper status voters who favored the same candidate.[228] Analysis of the vote in national contests for President, Congress, and the Senate reveal comparably large class divisions.[229] If we focus on policy preferences, a brief overview of major national public opinion surveys reveals that the preferences of those near the bottom of America's class hierarchy diverge from the views of those near the top.[230] On almost every issue

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[228] These results are from available exit polls in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Detroit for primary and general elections in the last 25 years.
[229] The gaps vary from contest to contest but in the American National Election Study series as well as in the General Social Survey it is rare to find an electoral contest where the class divide is less than 10 percentage points.
[230] Similar class divisions emerge in direct democracy as well. Analysis of a series of 195,000 votes on 51 proposition over a 20 year period in California indicate that class divides average around 10 percentage points – meaningful but once again somewhat smaller than racial divides on these same measures .

asked about in the American Citizen Participation Study significant class differences emerged and in many cases those differences were substantial.[231] By any measure we might want to consider, there are important class divisions in American politics.

The last condition required for turnout to matter also applies to class. The group that votes less frequently – the lower classes – has enough members to have a real say if they were to vote more regularly. Welfare recipients may only account for two percent of the population and thus may not have the numbers to sway outcomes but most means of defining the lower class point to the potential power of this population. Whether we are focusing on unskilled laborers, on those without a high-school education, on those with incomes below the poverty line, or on almost any other conceivable dividing line, the 'lower' class is large enough to make a difference.[232]

The key conditions are all being met. Members of the lower classes under-participate, they have different preferences from more advantaged and active voters, and they are large in number. In sum, there is every reason to suspect that skewed turnout has wide ranging consequences for how well different classes are represented in American democracy.

Moreover, these suspicions have been borne out by at least some empirical tests. Three recent studies have found that the legislative actions of Congress members are more strongly influenced by the opinions of affluent and middle-class constituents than they are by the preferences of their lower class constituents (Bartels 2008, Gilens 2005, Griffin and Newman 2008).[233] In the starkest case "the opinions of millions of ordinary citizens in the bottom third of

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[231] A similar pattern is evident in the ANES and GSS series.
[232] This is true whether we focus on the local, national, or state level electorate.
[233] Government spending patterns also do not seem to be closely aligned with the preferences of most members of the lower classes. As we have already seen, local governments spend only a tiny fraction of their budgets on redistributive spending. Areas like public housing, public health, and welfare also make up a minute fraction of federal government spending. Members of the lower class are far from united in their policy preferences but there is little doubt that a plurality of lower class citizens would favor increased redistribution. The sparse spending directly

the income distribution [had] *no* discernible impact on the behavior of their elected representatives" (Bartels: 2008:4). This unequal representation has not yet been tied to differences in electoral participation but the writing is on the wall. More research needs to be done but all indications are that lower class Americans are losing out in American democracy because they vote less regularly than their more advantaged counter-parts.[234]

Other Demographic Biases

Beyond race and class, the data are sparser and the case for under-representation is more uneven. Nevertheless, there is still reason to suspect that the political representation of other kinds of demographic groups could be impaired by low turnout. On factors like age, religion, and sexuality, there are both signs of uneven turnout and disparate preferences. Differences in turnout across age are especially well documented and especially large (Verba et al 1995, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). In local elections the ACPS data reveal that younger Americans (18-24 year olds) report voting in local contests at roughly half the rate of older Americans (49-59). Age is also a factor that can at least at times lead to divisions in the vote. Although most of the mayoral exit polls that are available show minimal differences in candidate preferences across age, many of the racially charged bi-racial elections do elicit major divisions across age groups – with older Americans being much more unwilling to support minority candidates. At the national level, surveys also tend to show minimal differences by age on most

targeting the poor and other disadvantaged groups at least hints at the possibility that the electoral influence of the lower class is being diminished by its limited participation.

[234] One question that this raises relates to the relative roles of race and class in driving unequal representation. How much of the uneven responsiveness we see is due to racial differences in participation and how much of it is due to uneven class participation? While the two factors are highly correlated and therefore difficult to disentangle, the preliminary evidence suggests that race is more central. First, there is the fact that racial differences in participation are larger than class differences. As well, racial divides in political preferences tend to be larger than class divides. Moreover, in the mayoral elections for which I have exit poll data, controlling for education and income does little to reduce racial divides. Finally, it is worth noting that within each racial and ethnic group there are no substantial differences of opinion across class lines in most of these elections. Blacks of all incomes have similar preferences in almost every election. Among Latinos, small class differences emerge in only a handful of cases. Class divides are only common among white voters where higher class status is associated with more conservative views or more opposition to minority candidates (see also Hajnal 2008).

economic policy questions and in most partisan elections.[235] But on issues like the environment and women's equality age-based divides do emerge. Thus, there is a real possibility that younger Americans could be adversely affected by their relatively low turnout.

Differences in turnout and preferences across religion are probably less pronounced but nevertheless still potentially significant. Jews, for example, outvote other denominations by large margins and on social morality policy questions substantial divisions between Jews and members of other religions do emerge (Leege and Kellstedt 1993, Miller and Shanks 1996).[236] Evangelicals may be another denomination with higher rates of political participation and divergent policy preferences (Miller and Shanks 1996). In mayoral exit polls, patterns are varied but many local elections do exhibit reasonably sharp religious divisions in the vote.

Data on turnout and vote preferences by sexual preferences are even harder to come by (but see Bailey 1999 and Hertzog 1996). There are reports that gay and lesbian turnout exceeds heterosexual turnout but the gap is often small and sample sizes often limited. There is also little doubt that gay and lesbian preferences on a number of social morality issues diverge sharply from the views of heterosexuals (Hertzog 1996). And there is even some evidence - albeit a small number of cases – of a substantial gap in voter preferences by sexual orientation in the mayoral exit polls that I examine.

The one area where turnout is almost assuredly not affecting representation is gender. Women and men do have divergent preferences on a number of important policy questions but turnout rates for women and men are almost identical. Some 57 percent of women report voting

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[235] In the most recent Presidential contest, more dramatic age-based divisions did emerge. But younger voters did participate at higher rates in this contest and their preferred candidate – Barack Obama- won handily. So it is hard to argue that low turnout hurt younger Americans in that contest. It remains to be seen whether large age divisions persist and whether younger citizens revert to their customary low rates of participation.

[236] In the ACPS data, 80 percent of Jews report voting in local contests compared to only 57 percent of Catholics. The gap is reduced in the ANES national election data (82 vs 70 percent participation).

in local elections, a figure that is strikingly similar to the 59 percent of men who report voting in these contests. The gender gap in turnout is equally small in national elections.

The bottom line is that for a wide range of different demographic groups critical parallels with the racial and ethnic case exist. Racial and ethnic divisions in the political arena are generally the most pronounced and gaps in turnout across racial groups are rarely surpassed in American elections but turnout does vary across a host of demographic characteristics and divisions in political preferences do exist for many of these groups. The effects of turnout in local democracy could involve many groups that I have ignored in this book.

State Politics

The effects of turnout in American politics could also extend beyond the local political arena. In addition to considering different demographic groups, one might also consider different electoral contexts. The big picture that I have presented is one of the contrast between local democracy and national democracy. But there is at least one other political arena – statewide politics – where the implications of turnout have not been fully considered. Given important similarities between local and state politics, there is at least some reason to believe that state level elections for governors, attorney generals, and state legislators represent yet another arena where uneven turnout could filter through to the election of candidates and the enactment of policies.

Exactly what the likelihood is that turnout is shaping outcomes in state politics is difficult to tell. Although there are some similarities with local politics, state politics differs from local politics in critical ways. One key difference between states and localities is in the degree to which minorities and other demographic groups are geographically concentrated. Segregation is much less pronounced at the state level than it is at the local level. The typical Latino, for

example lives in a city that is 39 Hispanic but resides in a state that is only 21 percent Hispanic. Likewise, the average African American resides in a city that is 35 percent black and in a state that is only 17 percent black. Segregation by income, education, and other measures of well-being is also much more pronounced at the local level. That means that the potential for minorities and other disadvantaged groups to sway outcomes will be less pronounced in the states where they live than it is in the cities where they live.

The other obvious difference between state and local politics that could mitigate the impact of turnout at the state level is the relatively high levels of voter participation in state level politics. Elections for governor, state legislatures, and other state level offices typically draw around 44 percent of all voting age adults to the polls.[237] That is almost double the most recent figures for municipal elections. High turnout means both that there is less room for turnout to grow and diminished chances of a severe skew to turnout.

Although these patterns serve to decrease our expectations about the importance of turnout in state level politics, they do not rule out the possibility altogether. Segregation by race or class may be more limited at the state level than it is at the local level but there are still some American states with large minority populations. Blacks, for example, make up 35 percent of the state of Mississippi and Latinos account for 42 percent of the New Mexico population and are potentially powerful voting blocs in California, Texas, Nevada, and Florida. America now has four majority-minority states. As well, high average turnout does not mean that all states are immune to low participation. In the vast majority of states that hold their statewide contests on the same date as national elections, state level turnout generally mirrors the relatively robust turnout in presidential or Congressional elections. But for the handful of states that hold statewide elections in off-years turnout can drop dramatically.

[237] This is the average for all state-wide contests between 1978 and 2002. Data are from McDonald (2008).

There are also at least two critical parallels with local politics. First, the data suggest that racial and ethnic divisions in state politics are just as pronounced at the state level as they are at the local level. The largest divides are between white and black voters. In Congressional House contests the black vote for the Democratic candidate differs on average from the level of white support for the same candidate by a robust 41 percentage points (Hajnal 2009). In Senatorial elections, the black-white divide averages 36 points. More typical racial divides between the white, black, Latinos, and Asian American populations in these elections average around 20 percentage points. Anecdotally, state legislative elections appear to generate just as much racial division (Handley and Grofman 1994, McCrary 1990).

Second, despite relatively high turnout in state contests, participation at the state level tends to be quite skewed. Using the Current Population Survey to assess the class based skew in voter turnout in each state, Hill and Leighley (1992) found that in the average state, high income citizens are 50 percent better represented in the state electorate than are poor citizens. Since state contests generally coincide with national contests, the racial skew in the state electorate mirrors the racial skew evident in national elections. That means that whites out participate Latinos and Asian Americans by almost two to one in these contests (67 percent vs 47 and 44 percent respectively). Blacks also lag behind but not as severely (60 percent turnout).[238] The skew in turnout may not be as pronounced at the state level as it is in many cities around the country but there is still cause for concern.

Although these different patterns suggest that the state context is far from immune to the potential of skewed turnout biasing outcomes, empirical tests of this possibility have been decidedly mixed. Several studies have examined the implications of uneven turnout in Senatorial and Gubernatorial elections and have generally found limited effects (Nagel and

[238] Figures are from the 2004 Current Population Survey for voting age citizens.

McNulty 1996, Citrin et al 2003). Nagel and McNulty, in particular, conclude that "the overall relationship between turnout and partisan outcomes has been insignificant" in these statewide elections (1996:780). Citrin and his co-authors go so far as to simulate even turnout by race, yet still find that "very few election outcomes would have changed had everyone voted" in these statewide contests (2003:75).[239] Other tests do, however, find more substantial turnout effects. In particular, studies that focus on policy outcomes rather than on electoral outcomes tend to find a link between turnout and democratic outcomes. Several different teams of researchers have demonstrated a link between a state's turnout and its welfare and tax policy (Hill and Leighley 1992, Hill et al 1995, Avery and Peffley 2005, Fellowes and Rowe 2004, Peterson and Rom 1989, Martinez 1997).

If we want to know the full extent of how much turnout does or does not matter at the state level, more study is needed. We need to consider the effects of turnout beyond the confines of welfare and tax policy. Does state turnout, for example, affect the larger spending patterns of states? We also need to examine the link between turnout and elections for state legislators and other sub-state level positions. We know almost nothing about the turnout and its consequences for the election of State Senators and House members. And perhaps most importantly, researchers have not yet been able to tackle the question of how state turnout affects racial and ethnic minority representation. Is low state level turnout associated with fewer minorities in office? And do minority voters in states with lower than average turnout end up on the losing side of the vote? Given the low participation rates for Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans in these contests and their relatively disadvantaged status in American society, these are critical questions.

[239] It is, however, worth noting that Citrin et al (2003) do find that the bias due to turnout varies considerable across states. There are a handful of states where turnout matters more regularly.

Beyond Voting

The logic that has been presented here does not have to be confined to the act of voting. Voting may be at the heart of the democratic process but other activities from campaigning to letter writing also influence the functioning of democracy. So what of participation beyond voting? Other forms of participation tend to be even more skewed than voting (Verba and Nie 1972, Verba et al 1995). Latinos, for example, are better represented at the ballot box than they are in campaign contributions. Low voter turnout among Latinos means that they represent only three percent of all active voters but even lower rates of campaign giving mean that Latinos account for only two percent of all financial contributors.[240] Similarly, the rich may be overrepresented among voters (4 percent of all voters vs 3 percent of all adult citizens) but they are even more overrepresented among campaigners (8 percent of all campaign hours according to Verba et al 1995). If voting is "the most egalitarian" of all of the political acts, it is quite possible that more severe imbalances in participation for other political acts such as campaign contributions or letter writing are leading to even greater inequalities in political representation. If true then the biases we have exposed in this book could represent only a small fraction of the bias in American democracy.

Future Trends

Lastly, what of the future? The ongoing wave of immigration that is transforming the racial and ethnic make-up of this nation brings both peril and promise. There is a very real possibility that things will get worse. As Latinos and Asian Americans become ever larger portions of the urban electorate their potential influence will increase but so too will the odds that they regularly lose out due to lower turnout. Latino and Asian American non-voting is still only

[240] These figures are from Verba et al (1995). Rich is defined as earning over 125,000. All figures are derived from presidential voting.

symbolically important in places where Latinos and Asian Americans make up a tiny fraction of the electorate. But the effect of non-voting is likely to be increasingly central as immigration spreads throughout the country and Latinos and Asian AMericans make up larger and larger shares of the local electorate. With whites projected to become a minority of the national population by the middle of this century, uneven turnout by race and ethnicity could even begin to be central in national contests.

But there is promise as well. If we can acknowledge how much low turnout hurts these groups, then the impetus for change both within and outside these communities may grow. And if we care enough to alter the institutions that play a major role in limiting the participation and representation of Latinos, Asian Americans, and African Americans, then we may be able to give members of these groups something akin to a full voice in American democracy. Time will tell whether we move forward or fall further behind in our efforts to be a truly inclusive democracy.

APPENDIX

Table 3.A.1 Twenty City Times Series Data Set: Election Outcome, Simulation Results, Demographics, and Institutions

City	Election Type	Year	Winner	Actual Vote Share	Simulated Vote Share	Simulated Change in Winner's Vote	Simulated Winner	% Latino	% Citizens Latino	Partisan/ Non Partisan	Form of Government
Baltimore	Democratic Primary	1999	O'Malley	53%	45%	-7.63%	O'Malley	1.64%	0.53%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Baltimore	Democratic Primary	1995	Schmoke	60%	66%	5.69%	Schmoke	1.64%	0.53%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Baltimore	General	1991	Schmoke	72%	69%	-3.35%	Schmoke	1.03%	0.32%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Chicago	Primary	1999	Daley	72%	73%	1.50%	Daley	22.83%	14.26%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Chicago	Democratic Primary	1995	Daley	66%	64%	-2.17%	Daley	22.83%	14.26%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Chicago	General	1995	Daley	60%	58%	-1.62%	Daley	22.83%	14.26%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Chicago	Democratic Primary	1991	Daley	63%	54%	-8.97%	Daley	19.61%	11.75%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Chicago	General	1991	Daley	71%	62%	-9.42%	Daley	19.61%	11.75%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Columbus	General	1999	Coleman	60%	53%	-7.26%	Coleman	2.26%	2.02%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Columbus	Primary	1999	Teater	37%	37%	0.43%	Teater	2.26%	2.02%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Columbus	Primary	1999	Coleman	39%	38%	-0.84%	Coleman	2.26%	2.02%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Columbus	Primary no run-off	1995	Lashutka	67%	76%	9.08%	Lashutka	2.26%	2.02%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Columbus	Primary no run-off	1991	Lashutka	52%	56%	3.72%	Lashutka	1.07%	0.92%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Dallas	General	2002	Miller	55%	53%	-1.64%	Miller	31.19%	25.64%	Non Partisan	Council Manager
Dallas	Primary No Run-off	1995	Kirk	62%	51%	-11.50%	Kirk	31.19%	25.64%	Non Partisan	Council Manager
Detroit	General	2001	Kilpatrick	54%	53%	-0.55%	Kilpatrick	4.61%	3.20%	Non	Mayor

										Partisan	Council
Houston	**General**	**2001**	**Brown**	**52%**	**47%**	**-5.32%**	**Sanchez**	**33.62%**	**28.27%**	**Non Partisan**	**Mayor Council**
Houston	General	1997	Brown	53%	52%	-1.49%	Brown	33.62%	28.27%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Houston	Primary	1997	Brown	42%	32%	-9.88%	Brown	33.62%	28.27%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Houston	**Primary**	**1997**	**Mosbacher**	**29%**	**26%**	-2.62%	**Saenz**	**33.62%**	**28.27%**	**Non Partisan**	**Mayor Council**
Houston	General	1991	Lanier	54%	56%	2.03%	Lanier	27.63%	22.32%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Houston	Primary	1991	Turner	35%	34%	-0.95%	Turner	27.63%	22.32%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Houston	Primary	1991	Lanier	44%	54%	9.47%	Lanier	27.63%	22.32%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Los Angeles	General	2001	Hahn	54%	50%	-3.29%	Hahn	40.89%	30.51%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Los Angeles	Primary	2001	Villaraigosa	30%	33%	3.26%	Villaraigosa	40.89%	30.51%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Los Angeles	Primary	2001	Hahn	25%	24%	-0.56%	Hahn	40.89%	30.51%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Los Angeles	Primary	1997	Riordan	61%	62%	0.80%	Riordan	40.89%	30.51%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Los Angeles	**General**	**1993**	**Riordan**	**54%**	**48%**	**-5.71%**	**Woo**	**39.92%**	**28.51%**	**Non Partisan**	**Mayor Council**
Los Angeles	Primary	1993	Riordan	33%	17%	-15.96%	Riordan	39.92%	28.51%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Los Angeles	Primary	1993	Woo	24%	40%	16.19%	Woo	39.92%	28.51%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Memphis	General	1995	Herenton	74%	69%	-4.54%	Herenton	2.94%	0.00%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Memphis	General	1991	Herenton	49.45%	55%	5.45%	Herenton	0.73%	0.00%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
Milwaukee	General	1996	Norquist	60%	58%	-1.66%	Norquist	10.21%	5.66%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
New York	**Democratic Primary**	**2001**	**Green**	**51%**	**55%**	**3.64%**	**Ferrer**	**24.71%**	**20.36%**	**Partisan**	**Mayor Council**
New York	**General**	**2001**	**Bloomberg**	**52%**	**49%**	**-3.31%**	**Green**	**24.71%**	**20.36%**	**Partisan**	**Mayor Council**
New York	General	1997	Giuliani	57%	58%	1.32%	Guiliani	24.71%	20.36%	Partisan	Mayor

										Council
New York	General	1993	Giuliani	51%	51%	0.04%	Guiliani	24.36%	18.97%	Partisan	Mayor Council
New York	Democratic Primary	1989	Dinkins	51%	56%	5.43%	Dinkins	24.36%	18.97%	Partisan	Mayor Council
New York	General	1989	Dinkins	50%	53%	3.15%	Dinkins	24.36%	18.97%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Philadelphia	General	1999	Street	50.20%	51%	0.58%	Street	7.09%	5.66%	Partisan	Mayor Council
Phoenix	General	1995	Rimsza	59%	61%	1.62%	Rimsza	29.04%		Non Partisan	Council Manager
San Antonio	General	2001	Garza	59%	76%	16.81%	Garza	55.03%	48.36%	Non Partisan	Council Manager
San Diego	**General**	**2000**	**Murphy**	**52%**	**42%**	**-9.74%**	**Roberts**	**21.38%**	**14.60%**	**Non Partisan**	**Council Manager**
San Francisco	Runoff	1999	Brown	60%	54%	-6.08%	Brown	12.76%	8.90%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
San Francisco	Runoff	1995	Brown	57%	52%	-4.56%	Brown	12.76%	8.90%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
San Francisco	Primary	1991	Agnos	28%	30%	2.13%	Agnos	13.91%	9.37%	Non Partisan	Mayor Council
San Francisco	**Primary**	**1991**	**Jordan**	**32%**	**23%**	**-9.01%**	**Alioto**	**13.91%**	**9.37%**	**Non Partisan**	**Mayor Council**
San Francisco	**Runoff**	**1991**	**Jordan**	**52%**	**49.94%**	**-2.06%**	**Agnos**	**13.91%**	**9.37%**	**Non Partisan**	**Mayor Council**
San Jose	Primary no run-off	2002	Gonzalez	56%	56%	-0.72%	Gonzalez	26.80%	19.97%	Non Partisan	Council Manager
San Jose	General	1998	Gonzalez	52%	54%	2.15%	Gonzalez	26.80%	19.97%	Non Partisan	Council Manager
Washington	Primary	1998	Williams	50%	54%	4.29%	Williams	7.33%	0.00%	Partisan	Mayor Council

Table 4.A.1 The Determinants of Racial Representation on City Councils –*Eligible Voter Turnout*

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
Eligible Voter Turnout	-.05 (.02)*	.03 (.04)	.09 (.04)**	.04 (.04)
District Elections	-.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)*	.00(.01)	-.00 (.01)
Concurrent Elections	.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)*	-.03 (.01)**	-.01 (.01)
Partisan Elections	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Term Limits	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)	-.04 (.01)*
Mayor (vs city Manager)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.02)
Council Size	-.01 (.00)**	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Population (log)	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.01 (.01)
Percent Poor	-.38 (.10)*	.51 (.13)***	.32 (.13)**	.03 (.12)
Median Income	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Percent College Grads	-.09 (.05)*	.14 (.09)	.20 (.07)***	.07 (.06)
Percent Latino	-.78 (.07)***	.42 (.11)***	.82 (.06)***	.23 (.08)***
Percent Asian	-.71 (.12)***	.51 (.22)**	.00 (.09)	.69 (.06)***
Percent Black	-.51 (.04)***	.55 (.04)***	-.06 (.05)	-.01 (.08)
Percent Non-citizen	.94 (.13)***	-.60 (.17)***	-.67 (.09)***	-.43 (.13)***
West	.00 (.01)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.02)
Midwest	-.01 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)
Northeast	.00 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.02 (.02)	-.00 (.02)
Constant	1.15 (.05)***	-.17 (.07)**	-.21 (.06)***	-.10 (.06)
Adj. R-squared	.32	.49	.58	.55
N	1264	423	392	148

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. OLS Regression.

Table 4.A.2 The Determinants of Racial Representation on City Councils – *All Cities*

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
Turnout	-.04 (.02)**	.01 (.01)	.02 (.01)***	.01 (.00)*
District Elections	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.00)***	.00(.01)	-.00 (.01)
Concurrent Elections	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
Partisan Elections	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.02 (.02)	.00 (.00)
Term Limits	.01 (.02)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.02)	.01 (.00)**
Mayor (vs city Manager)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.01 (.02)
Council Size	-.01 (.00)***	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Population (log)	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.00)***	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.01)
Percent Poor	-.37 (.08)***	.23 (.04)***	.16 (.12)**	-.02 (.01)
Median Income	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.00)***
Percent College Grads	-.13 (.05)***	.03 (.02)	.22 (.07)***	-.00 (.01)
Percent Latino	-.76 (.06)***	.10 (.03)***	.68 (.02)***	.20 (.08)***
Percent Asian	-.51 (.09)***	.01 (.05)	.06 (.04)	.42 (.02)***
Percent Black	-.57 (.04)***	.57 (.02)***	-.02 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Percent Non-citizen	.81 (.10)***	-.15 (.55)***	-.50 (.04)***	-.13 (.02)***
West	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Midwest	-.02 (.01)	.01 (.01)**	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)
Northeast	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)**	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Constant	1.15 (.05)***	-.11 (.02)****	-.18 (.06)*	-.02 (.00)**
Adj. R-squared	.35	.54	.52	.29
N	1699	1699	1699	1699

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. OLS Regression.

Table 4.A.3 The Determinants of Racial Representation on City Councils –*Number of Seats Lost*

	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
Turnout	-.17 (.19)	-.35 (.14)**	-.22 (.12)*
District Elections	-.25 (.07)***	.06(.06)	.03 (.07)
Concurrent Elections	-.21 (.07)**	.07 (.06)	.02 (.05)
Partisan Elections	-.08 (.09)	.13 (.10)	-.05 (.09)
Term Limits	.04 (.14)	.04 (.09)	.22 (.07)*
Mayor (vs city Manager)	-.01 (.08)	-.09 (.07)	-.09 (.07)
Council Size	-.07 (.02)***	.10 (.02)***	.08 (.02)***
Population (log)	-.04 (.03)	.01 (.03)	.00 (.03)
Percent Poor	-2.9 (.78)***	-.45 (.68)	.13 (.56)
Median Income	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Percent College Grads	-1.3 (.52)*	-1.3 (.39)***	-.19 (.29)
Percent Latino	-1.9 (.59)***	1.3 (.29)***	-.78 (.41)**
Percent Asian	-.73 (1.0)	-.29 (.46)	2.3 (.32)***
Percent Black	2.9 (.25)***	-.04 (.25)	-.51 (.42)
Percent Non-citizen	1.8 (.98)*	3.0 (.45)***	1.5 (.58)***
West	-.14 (.15)	-.09 (.08)	-.02 (.10)
Midwest	-.26 (.09)*	-.12 (.10)	-.07 (.10)
Northeast	-.10 (.02)	-.03 (.11)	.07 (.12)
Constant	.59 (.41)	.28 (.33)	-.25 (.31)
Adj. R-squared	.30	.43	.39
N	611	595	230

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. OLS Regression.

Table 4.A.4 The Determinants of Racial Representation on City Councils – *Logged Representation Ratio*#

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
Turnout	-.05 (.02)**	.18 (.18)	-.04 (.10)	.39 (.18)*
District Elections	-.01 (.01)	-.02 (.06)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
Concurrent Elections	.00 (.01)	-.03 (.06)	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Partisan Elections	-.01 (.01)	.31 (.08)***	-.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Term Limits	-.01 (.02)	.11 (.12)	-.00 (.02)	-.04 (.01)***
Mayor (vs city Manager)	-.00 (.01)	-.06 (.07)	.02 (.01)	.01 (.02)
Council Size	-.01 (.00)***	.03 (.01)**	-.01 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Population (log)	-.01 (.00)	-.04 (.03)	-.05 (.02)**	-.00 (.01)
Percent Poor	-.12 (.09)	1.1 (.74)	1.2 (.49)	-.01 (.11)
Median Income	-.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)
Percent College Grads	-.13 (.05)**	-.24 (.48)	.18 (.31)	.05 (.06)
Percent Latino	.70 (.05)***	-.46 (.50)	-1.0 (.21)***	1.2 (.61)**
Percent Asian	.93 (.10)***	-2.2 (.94)*	.10 (.38)	-.68 (.46)
Percent Black	.47 (.03)***	-1.8 (.23)*	-.40 (.20)**	.98 (.64)
Percent Non-citizen	.84 (.10)***	-.42 (.87)	-.26 (.36)	-2.6 (.88)***
West	.00 (.02)	.43 (.13)***	-.06 (.06)	-.03 (.15)
Midwest	.00 (.01)	.21 (.08)**	.29 (.08)***	.14 (.17)
Northeast	-.02 (.02)	.34 (.11)***	.05 (.09)	.06 (.19)
Constant	.13 (.05)***	-.05 (.38)	.34 (.25)	.65 (.52)
Adj. R-squared	.55	.21	.22	.28
N	1481	534	492	190

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. OLS Regression. # DV=log(% on council / % in city pop)

Table 4.A.5 The Determinants of Racial Representation on City Councils – Proportional Representation

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
Turnout	-.04 (.02)*	.03 (.03)	.05 (.02)**	.05 (.02)**
District Elections	-.01 (.01)	.03 (.01)***	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
Concurrent Elections	-.00 (.01)	.03 (.01)**	-.01 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Partisan Elections	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Term Limits	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)	-.04 (.01)***
Mayor (vs city Manager)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)*	.01 (.02)
Council Size	-.01 (.00)***	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Population (log)	-.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.00)	-.00 (.01)
Percent Poor	-.30 (.08)***	.39 (.12)***	.16 (.12)	-.01 (.11)
Median Income	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Percent College Grads	-.12 (.05)***	.15 (.08)	.22 (.07)***	.05 (.06)
Percent Latino	.20 (.06)***	.31 (.09)***	-.21 (.05)***	.20 (.08)**
Percent Asian	.45 (.10)***	.09 (.15)	.06 (.08)	-.40 (.05)***
Percent Black	.44 (.04)***	.42 (.04)***	-.02 (.04)	.13 (.08)
Percent Non-citizen	.81 (.10)***	-.37 (.15)**	-.58 (.08)***	-.39 (.11)***
West	.01 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.02)
Midwest	-.01 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)
Northeast	.00 (.01)	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	-.00 (.02)
Constant	1.16 (.05)***	-.19 (.06)***	-.18 (.06)***	-.02 (.06)
Adj. R-squared	.34	.29	.46	.40
N	1695	567	570	223

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors
*p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01. OLS Regression.

Table 4.A.6 Descriptive Statistics for the 1986 ICMA Survey[1]

Variable	MEAN (STD DEV) All Cities	MEAN (STD DEV) Racial/Ethnic Group >5% of City Population
Proportion White on the City Council	.90 (.22)	.90 (.20)
Proportion African American on the City Council	.05 (.12)	.14 (.18)
Proportion Latino on the City Council	.02 (.11)	.07 (.18)
Proportion Asian American on the City Council	.003 (.02)	.02 (.07)
White Over/Under-representation on the City Council	8.3 (19.1)	8.3 (19.1)
African American Over/Under-representation on the City Council	-3.2 (9.2)	-8.1 (13.5)
Latino Over/Under-representation on the City Council	-.4.9 (9.4)	-13.3 (13.8)
Asian American Over/Under-representation on the City Council	-2.9 (3.1)	-9.4 (7.4)
Turnout of Registered Voters	.39 (.20)	----
Turnout of Eligible Voters	.27 (.17)	----
Percent Latino	.07 (.14)	.20 (.19)
Percent Asian	.02 (.04)	.11 (.08)
Percent Black	.08 (.15)	.22 (.18)
Percent Non-citizen	.04 (.07)	----
Population (log)	9.7 (1.1)	----
Percent in Poverty	.11 (.08)	----
Median Household Income	34399(16554)	----
Percent College Graduates	.21 (.13)	----
At-Large City Council Elections (1-yes, 0-no)	.64 (.48)	----
Concurrent Local Elections (1-yes, 0-no)	.15 (.36)	----
Nonpartisan Local Elections (1-yes, 0-no)	.72 (.45)	----
Term Limits for City Council (1-yes, 0-no)	.04 (.20)	----
Mayor-Council Form of Government (1-yes, 0-no)	.44 (.50)	----
City Council Size	6.2 (2.2)	----

[1] Demographic data are merged in from the 1990 Census

Table 4.A.7 Municipal Institutions and Demographics: California vs the U.S.

	California[a]	*United States*[b]
INSTITUTIONS		
Form of Government		
Council/city manager form	97%	52%
Mayor/council form	3	32
Election Timing		
Presidential	10	---
Presidential primary	5	---
Midterm congressional	49	---
Odd-Year November	18	---
Off-Cycle	19	---
Concurrent	---	21
Nonconcurrent	---	79
Other local elections held the same day	54	---
District Type		
At-large council elections	93	64
District method	5	18
Combination	2	18
Term Limits		
Term limits—council members	18	9
Mayoral Authority[c]		
Mayor develops (or jointly develops) the budget	3	13
Mayor has veto power	6	28
Nonpartisan Elections	100	76
DEMOGRAPHICS[d]		
White Non-Hispanic	43	71
Latino	36	13
African American	7	13
Asian American	13	4

Notes: --- indicates data not available

[a] California data are from 2000 PPIC survey of city clerks.

[b] National data derived from the 2001 Municipal Form of Government Survey conducted by the International City/County Management Association except for election timing which is from Wood (2002).

[c] For directly elected mayors only.

[d] Racial Demographics from the 2000 Census

Voter Turnout in Municipal Elections:

A Survey of California City Clerks

Thank you for assisting us in our research on voter participation in California municipal elections. **Please complete the brief questionnaire below and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope**. If you are unable to answer certain questions, please answer all of the other questions and return the survey. Your information is still very important to us. The data you provide will be the basis of important research on voter turnout in cities across the state. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Project Directors:

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San Francisco, CA 94111
(415) 291-4400 phone
(415) 291-4401 fax

City:

Code:

THE ANSWERS GIVEN ARE THE MEAN RESPONSE OR FREQUENCIES

Q-1. How is your **mayor** (chief elected official) selected? (*Check the most appropriate response.*)

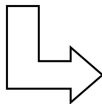
33.4% Voters elect the mayor directly

54.7% Council selects the mayor from among its members

1.5% Council member receiving most votes in the election becomes the mayor

9.5% Council members rotate into the position of mayor

0.0% Other (please specify) ___________________________



If voters DO NOT elect the mayor directly, please skip ahead to question *Q-11*. Your responses to the other questions are very important to us.

Q-2. What was the date of the most recent election for **mayor** held in your city? (Please enter the date of the general mayoral election, NOT the runoff, if any.)

_________ _______ , _________
month day year

Q-3. How many voters in your city cast ballots for mayor in that election?

____16,031___

Q-4. How many **registered voters** were there in your city at the time of that election?

_____39,336__

Q-5. How many mayoral candidates were listed on the ballot of that election?

_____2.7_____

Q-6. Was there an **incumbent** standing for reelection?

72.2% yes 27.8% no

A. If yes, did the incumbent win the election?

86.5% yes 13.5% no

Q-7. What percentage of the vote for mayor was captured by the top two candidates in that election?

a. 1st Place ___62.9_% b. 2nd place __19.4_%

Q-8. Was there a subsequent runoff election?

6.0% yes   94.0 % no

Q-9. What is the race/ethnicity of the first and second place finishers in the mayoral election referred to in question Q-2? (*Check the most appropriate response.*)

	1st Place	**2nd Place**
a. White, not Hispanic	79.5%	77.3%
b. Black, not Hispanic	4.1	7.2
c. Asian, not Hispanic	0.8	2.1
d. Hispanic, of any race	15.6	12.4
e. Other (please specify)	0.0	1.0

Q-10. Was there also an election for one or more council seats on that day?

95.5% yes   4.5% no

All respondents, please answer the following questions.

Q-11. Please enter the date of the most recent **city council** election. (Please use the most recent regular election, not a special election to fill a vacated seat, etc.)

__________ _______ , _________
month day year

Q-12. How many **city council seats** were chosen in that election?

___2.5_______

A. How many **total candidates** appeared on the ballot?

_____6.3_____

B. How many **total seats** are there on the city council?

_____5.0_____

Q-13. How many voters in your city **cast ballots for city council races** in that election? (*If council are elected **by district** please indicate the total number of ballots cast citywide. If council seats are elected **at large**, please indicate the total number of ballots cast in the council race with the greatest turnout.)*

____11,050__

Q-14. How many **registered voters** were there in your city at the time of that election?

___23,099___

Q-15. How many **incumbents** ran for reelection to council in that election?

_____1.6_____

A. How many of those incumbents were reelected?

_____1.4_____

<u>For the following questions</u> (*Q-16* through *Q-22*), please refer to the most recent mayoral election if the mayor is directly elected by the voters. <u>If not</u>, please refer to the most recent city council election.

Q-16. To the best of your knowledge, were there any organized attempts to purge the registered voter roll (removing voters who had died, moved, etc.) in the three years prior to that election?

<u>47.8%</u> yes <u>52.2%</u> no

Q-17. Were voters in your city selecting any other local officials in the election held on that day? (*Please check <u>all</u> applicable offices.*)

<u>17.7%</u> City attorney or city treasurer
<u>23.8</u> Other city office(s)

<u>25.5</u> County supervisor(s)
<u>15.0</u> County treasurer or sheriff or other county office(s)
<u>45.6</u> School board member(s)

Q-18. How many **city-level** propositions were on the ballot in that election? (*Please indicate the number of each type.*)

__.14___ citizen-sponsored initiatives
__.56___ propositions placed by council

Q-19. In your judgment, how much popular interest or controversy among voters was generated by the city-level **ballot questions** in that election? (*Check most appropriate response.*)

<u>14.6%</u> More interest/controversy than most elections in this city
<u>10.9</u> About the same as most other elections in this city
<u>4.3</u> Less interest/controversy than in most elections in this city
<u>70.2</u> There were no municipal ballot questions in that election

Q-20. How many **citizen-sponsored initiatives** were on the ballot in the years 1997, 1998, and 1999 (all elections)? Again, please consider only **city-level** ballot questions.

Total number of initiatives 1997-99: ___.53_____

Q-21. Over the years from 1997 through 1999, were any **recall initiatives** filed against the Mayor and/or council members?

8.0% Yes 92.0% No

A. If yes, were any successful?

67.7% Yes 32.3% No

Q-22. Recognizing how complex a community's affairs are, please review the following general statements and select the one that best describes **elections** in your city in the last five years, compared to other municipalities in your region:

35.4% Our elections are low-key affairs with no major controversies

51.1 Elections are generally low-key, but there have been some notable controversies

13.5 Our city often has controversial elections

We conclude the survey by asking several basic questions about the structure of government in your city. PLEASE NOTE: In answering these questions, refer to the conditions in your city at the time of the mayoral or city council election you answered questions about above, not the current conditions, if different.

Q-23. What is the length of the mayor's term of office? (Important: If the chief elected official is a member of the council, specify the term for the position of mayor, not of council member.)

___2.1_ years

Q-24. Is the **mayoralty** in your city considered a full-time or part-time office? (Generally, the office is considered full-time only if it carries a full-time salary.)

3.2% Full-time 92.8% Part-time 4.0% Don't know

Q-25. Does the **mayor** in your city have the authority to **veto** actions of the city council?

3.6% yes 96.4% no

Q-26. Does your city **limit the number of terms** either the mayor or city council members can hold?

Mayor*: 27.3% yes 72.7% no

City Council: 18.5% yes 81.5% no

(*Responses for directly-elected mayoralties only.)

Q-27. Which of the following statements best describes the structure of governance in your city?

2.5% **MAYOR-COUNCIL** Elected council or board serves as the legislative body. The chief elected official is the head of government, generally elected separately from the council, with powers that may range from limited duties to full-scale authority for the daily operation of the government.

97.0 **COUNCIL-MANAGER** Elected council or board is responsible for making policy. A professional administrator or manager appointed by the board or council has full responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the government.

0.5 Other (*please specify*:__________________________)

0.0 Not sure

Q-28. What methods are used to elect council members in your city? Fill in the **number of seats** elected by each method.

a. **At-Large,** elected citywide 92.5%

b. Elected from **districts** 5.4

c. Members represent districts, but are elected citywide 2.1

d. Other method 0.0
(*please specify*: ________________________________)

Q-29. Who has the overall responsibility for **developing the budget** submitted to the council? (*check one*)

0.3% Mayor

92.1 Chief Administrative Officer (city manager or equivalent)

1.0 Mayor and CAO are jointly responsible

6.6 Other (*please specify*:_________________________)

Q-30. Regarding each of the following services in your city, are they mainly carried out by **city government** personnel, by **county** personnel, by a **special district** government, or by a **private company under contract** with the city? (*Please check the appropriate response for each service. Leave item blank if the particular service is not provided within your city.*)

	City staff	**County**	**Special District**	**Private Firm**
Police Services	72.1%	26.6%	0.8%	0.5%
Fire Services*	54.9	26.8	14.9	0.5
Library Services	30.1	64.8	4.9	0.3
Sewer Services	65.0	10.7	18.0	6.3
Garbage Collection	16.2	0.8	1.0	82.0

Q-31. Has your city **switched the timing** of mayor/council elections at any time in recent years?

30.6% Yes, switched from "stand-alone" city elections to elections consolidated with statewide primary or general elections
1.0 Yes, switched from consolidated elections to stand-alone elections
68.4 Other type of change or no change in election timing

B. If your city switched, when was the last election using the previous format?

_________ _______ , ________
month day year

Q-32. A. Has your city made any changes in the **structure of city government** (mayor/council, council/manager etc.) in recent years?

4.3% yes 95.7% no

B. Has your city made any changes in the **way council members are elected** (district, at-large, etc.) in recent years?

4.1% yes 95.9% no

If the answer to either Q-32A or Q-32B is yes, please describe the change, and list the date it took effect, on the back of this questionnaire.

Q-33. Please indicate your job title: ____________________

*An additional 2.8 percent of cities indicated volunteer fire departments.

Table 5.A.1 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR MERGED ICMA AND CENSUS DATA			
Variable	**Mean (Std Dev)**	**Min**	**Max**
Distributive Spending	.08 (.15)	0	.89
Developmental Spending	.13 (.10)	0	.95
Allocational Spending	.31 (.17)	0	.99
Per Capita Taxes	.25 (.31)	0	11.0
Per Capita Debt	.88 (4.40	0	161
Registered Voter Turnout	.39 (.2)	.01	.98
Government Revenue ($Mills)	.02 (.10)	0	3.4
Change in Revenue($Mills)	.005 (.02)	-.11	.89
Median Household Income (Thousands)	3.4 (1.7)	.62	15
Percent Poor	.11 (.08)	0	.53
Percent Black	.08 (.15)	0	.99
Percent Latino	.07 (.14)	0	.98
Percent Non-Citizen	.04 (.07)	0	.68
Mayor vs City Manager	.44 (.50)	0	1
Mayoral Veto	.32 (.47)	0	1
Term Limits	.04 (.20)	0	1
Nonpartisan	.72 (.45)	0	1
Total state/federal revenue (%age of all revenue)	.16 (.21)	0	1
Legal limits on debt	.04 (.20)	0	1
Balanced budget provision	.13 (.33)	0	1
Number of places in the county (Hundreds)	1.5 (1.5)	1	824
Suburb	.54 (.50)	0	1
Central City	.07 (.26)	0	1
Population (Thousands)	21(7.1)	0	3485
Population Growth (Percent)	.12 (.48)	-.89	24.7
West	.15 (.36)	0	1
Midwest	.30 (.46)	0	1
Northeast	.26 (.44)	0	1
Percent Asian	.02 (.04)	0	.69
Percent College Educated	.21 (.13)	0	.78
Percent Homeowner	.65 (.15)	.07	.99
Percent Black on Council	.04 (.11)	0	1
Percent Latino on Council	.02 (.11)	0	1
Percent Asian American on Council	.00 (.02)	0	.67
Percent Incumbent Reelected	.33 (.22)	0	1

Table 6.A.1 Descriptive Statistics for California Cities in PPIC Survey

	Mean (Std Dev)	Minimum	Maximum
Dependent variables			
Turnout of registered voters		7.3	88.6
Turnout of adult residents	32.3 (16.3)	6.7	78.8
City population characteristics			
City population (natural log)	9.8 (1.2)	5.3	12.2
Median Household Income	54850 (29899)	19863	200001
Percent College Graduates	24.4 (17.3)	1.5	71.0
Percent in Poverty	12.6 (8.1)	1.2	39.3
Percentage black	2.7 (3.8)	0	22.5
Percentage Hispanic	28.2 (25.3)	2.2	98.3
Percentage Asian	8.7 (11.3)	0	61.5
Percentage aged 18 to 24	8.5 (3.3)	.16	30.9
Percentage aged 65 or older	12.4 (5.5)	2.3	42.1
Percentage lived in same house for 5 years	46.4 (9.5)	11.3	70.8
Percentage institutionalized	1.8 (5.9)	0	56.2

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