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The Local American Voter: Mayoral Election Turnout in Midsized American Cities

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While the determining factors leading to the dismally low levels of voter turnout in national and statewide elections have been well studied, nowhere is turnout lower than in local elections, a particular area that is significantly understudied. Of the limited literature on local and mayoral elections, few examine cities below 250,000 in population. Rather, many examine mega-city elections, which are comparable to congressional or statewide elections. Utilizing an original dataset of 356 midsized (50,000-250,000 in population) American cities from the Midwest, South, and Northeast, this study examines the drivers of mayoral election turnout: election day circumstances, stakes in the game socioeconomic factors, and race. The primary findings are that election day circumstances, especially the timing of the elections, perform best across all models tested, with the stakes in the game variables also being significant. Additionally, these first two measures drive turnout far more than any social, economic, or racial composition of a city's population.

Introduction

Voting is the not-so-secret ingredient in fostering a legitimate democratic system, because voting is the primary method for citizen control of government. However, voting should not be understood as an isolated activity. Not only do voters have to decide among candidates, but they also must make the critical decision to vote in the first place. Scholars of American politics have repeatedly called attention to the low levels of voter participation in both federal and statewide elections (Lijphart 1997; Nagel and McNulty 1996; Campbell et al. 1960); but nowhere is voter turnout lower than in mayoral elections (Bullock 1990; Rice and Schlueter 2004).

In fact, it is not unusual for mayoral elections to attract only one-third or one-forth of the voters federal elections garner. In a longitudinal study of 38 large US cities over a 25-year time period, Caren (2007) reports an average voter turnout of 27 percent, with turnout continuing to wane in every subsequent election. Johnson (2008) calculates an even lower average turnout of 21.65 percent in a sample of slightly smaller American cities. Even though a vote in the local arena holds more weight when compared to federal elections, and that members of the public

highly trust mayors (McCarthy 2014; United States Conference of Mayors 2015), and localities are perceived to affect the lives of everyday Americans to a greater degree (Delli-Carpini, and Keeter 1996), eligible local American voters do not turn out come election day.

Moreover, recent scholarship suggests that Americans are moving from suburbs and rural expanses back towards urban centers around the country (Fishman 2005; Ehrenhalt 2012; Gallagher 2013). While historic trends show an outflow from urban spaces (Mumford 1925), there is a reverse migration currently taking place that is bringing people back within the electoral boundaries of American cities. Additionally, citizens are not exclusively choosing to live in large urban areas although that is the focus of current scholarship on local elections (such as Kelleher and Lowery 2004; Caren 2007; Thomas and Weinschenk 2014). According to 2013 Census Bureau projections, midsized cities, which are between 50,000 and 250,000 in population, account for more than 63.5 million United States citizens. The International City/Council Managers Association (ICMA) in 2014 calculated that there are approximately 785 cities of this size countrywide. This movement, and the growing populations in these midsized cities, has obvious political ramifications (Campbell et al. 1960)[1], both at the local level and all throughout the entire federalist structure. Given these many shifts, studying mayors, and particularly mayoral elections, is critical in understanding the micropolitian climates that are sprinkled throughout the entire country.

Elections for mayors are a different type of electoral species altogether when compared to congressional or presidential elections. A majority of the elections transpire in odd-numbered years, are nonpartisan, and candidates normally lack the campaign resources to advertise uniformly across all constituencies. Many of these institutional aspects are legacies of the

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[1] See especially 441-444.
[2] Calculated by Berry and Gersen 2010.
[3] Although it must be said that not all scholars agree that low turnout in local elections is detrimental. Oliver, Ha, and Callen (2012), for example, argue that one has to take the size, scope, and bias of these 'managerial

Progressive Era reforms, which sought to contend with major political machine cities such as Philadelphia and Chicago. While well intentioned, a number of these reforms have been clearly shown to both depress and skew voter turnout (Kelleher and Lowery 2004; Wood 2002; Lee 1960; Banfield and Wilson 1963). White educated citizens who possess more resources vote at a higher rate in mayoral elections when compared to citizens who are less educated, come from minority ethnic groups, and are members of the lower socioeconomic classes (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1979).

Low voter turnout in American cities raises a number of concerns. The composition of the estimated half a million elected officials[2] in the US who promulgate key municipal decisions and oversee core public functions, such as infrastructure, fire services, and waste management, might be distorted as a result of low turnout. Hajnal (2010), for instance, shows that low turnout in city elections produces disproportionately low descriptive representation of Latinos and Asian Americans both on city councils and within the mayor's office. As a result, scholars have suggested that this skew in descriptive representation leads to a corresponding mismatch in substantive representation in municipal policy outcomes (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005).[3] Priorities in local governmental spending are a prime example. Local governments spend more than 1.5 trillion dollars annually (U.S. Census Bureau 2014), and Hajnal (2010) argues that the low descriptive representation of certain minority groups translates to biased policy outcomes in local government expenditure.

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[2] Calculated by Berry and Gersen 2010.

[3] Although it must be said that not all scholars agree that low turnout in local elections is detrimental. Oliver, Ha, and Callen (2012), for example, argue that one has to take the size, scope, and bias of these 'managerial democracies' into account when examining if low turnout is even a problem in the first place. They argue that local governments are not as powerful as some suggest, and that low turnout is not the 'tragic problem' to local democracy many, such as Hajnal, articulate it to be. Even if turnout was higher, according to Oliver, Ha, and Callen, the relative products of local government would not change. See especially 64-86.

What Drives Voter Turnout in Mayoral Elections?

Given the practical and symbolic importance of voting in local elections, it is essential to understand what drives turnout in mayoral elections, as those specific drivers may differ from the causal forces at work at the state and national levels. Although disagreements are present regarding the determinants of mayoral election turnout, three main models have come to the forefront: election day circumstances, the stakes in the game, socioeconomic factors, and race. By taking these three competition schools of thought and deriving a causal model for voter turnout, this study will achieve a better understanding of the variance in voter turnout in midsized American cities. This study will result in the understanding o which school of thought has the greatest amount of explanatory value.

Election Day Circumstances

Electoral rules and the many factors that surround the day of election, such as political culture for example, have a profound influence on voter turnout (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Hajnal and Lewis 2003; Caren 2007; Wood 2002; Berry and Gersen 2010; Sharkansky 1969). Historically, many measures have been implemented to depress turnout of certain portions of the population, e.g. literacy tests and poll taxes. Although depressive practices have *mostly* been abolished, certain electoral rules continue to significantly influence turnout. Additionally, depressive practices that lower turnout could possibly have more pronounced effects, as the elections get smaller in size and scope. In a study of California cities, Berry and Gersen (2010) show that jurisdictions that transitioned to on-cycle,[4] or even year, elections witnessed an average turnout increase of approximately 17 percent; which translates into almost doubling turnout. Other studies concur that this particular timing variable exerts the strongest influence on turnout at the

[4] According to their particular survey, approximately 40 percent of the cities made the policy change (47).

mayoral level (Wood 2002, Hajnal and Lewis 2005; Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014). Hence, it follows that:

> *Hypothesis 1*- Mayoral elections that coincide with elections for other major political offices at the national or statewide level will garner higher turnout, than will elections that are not synchronized with higher office elections.

Similar to other elections, mayoral contests do not transpire in a social vacuum, and candidates usually have to lead a significant campaign effort in order to win an election. In this respect, mayoral elections are strikingly similar to other elections that are better understood by scholars (Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014; Trounstine 2012; Caren 2007). Incumbents have a pronounced advantage, campaign expenditures closely correlate to voting share, and challengers must overcome a wide variety of obstacles to get elected. Electoral competitiveness is the underlying concept in all of these studies of mayoral campaigns, and suggests that:

> *Hypothesis 2*- The more competitive the mayoral election, the more citizens will turn out to vote.

Lastly, cities all have a distinct political culture, and no scholar more extensively wrote on and studied the regions of the United States and the corresponding political cultures than Daniel Elazar (1966). For Elazar, political cultures are the particular patterning of orientations to political action in which each system is embedded. In his extensive research, he defined three overarching types of political culture (Moralist, Individualist, and Traditionalist) and went further to identify which of these three applies to each state and 228 sub-areas of the states (Elazar 1966). Elazar hypothesized that regions with predominately moralist political culture, a particular culture that prides itself on popular participation, will have higher turnout than areas with individualistic or traditional political culture, both of which are more skeptical to mass mobilization of voters. Although

much of what Elazar used to derive his theories were state and national level election statistics, these political cultures usually surround and encircle cities, no matter what the population size might be. Thus, it logically follows that:

> *Hypothesis 3*- Cities within states that exhibit a moralistic political culture will have higher turnout in mayoral elections than cities within states with individualistic or traditional political cultures.

Stakes in the Game

Citizens, according to rational choice theory, are more likely to vote when the benefits of voting outweigh the costs or burdens of doing so. In this school of thought, citizens who have more at stake in any given election are expected to vote at a higher margin (Rice and Schlueter 2004; Kelleher and Lowery 2004). And, citizens who partake in 'adult roles' (Highton and Wolfinger 2001) possess more of a stake in the city that they call home. The motivation of voters in this school of thought is mostly material rather than simply ideological.

Both being married and having children are important 'adult roles' that have ramifications in local politics and elections. Once married and raising a family, voters have higher stakes in the game because they become more invested in their respective communities. Stakes increase as a function of aspiring to raise a family in the best possible environment. Certain family activities might also shift preferences in local programs and amenities (such as park districts, school systems, and public safety initiatives). Married families are also less likely to be transient and move from city to city, which itself raises their electoral stakes in the game.

In terms of political participation, married citizens have been shown to vote at a higher margin when compared to unmarried citizens (Kingston and Finkel 1987).[5] While this marriage gap is present in national and state level elections, it may be more pronounced at the local level given the many policy authorities delegated towards local governments. In addition to married

[5] Kingston and Finkel (1987) show a 14 percent difference between married and single citizens.

families, the actual age of the citizens within a city has also been shown to be an important factor in predicting voter turnout (Hajnal and Lewis 2003; Jurjevich et al. 2014). In fact, Jurjevich et al. (2014) show that age might be one of the most important determinates in turnout at the mayoral level. As a citizen ages, they are not only more likely to stay within the city they are currently living in, which increase their stakes in the game, but they too have been shown to vote at a higher margin than younger voters.

William Fischel's (2011) homevoter hypothesis alludes to the stakes in the game because local elected authorities, where the mayor is the chief elected official, direct a variety of local policies, such as property taxes, land use policy, and permit practices. This type of governmental capacity, as a result, may affect voter turnout at the local level. Not only do homeowners vote at a higher margin than renters (Kahn and Kenney 1999; Gay 2012), but they also have higher stakes in the electoral game of local politics given the taxing and planning powers devolved to local governments. Consequently, given the scholarship regarding rational choice theory and its chances to be devolved to the city level, it logically follows that:

> *Hypothesis 4*- Cities that have more voters with elevated stakes in the game of mayoral elections will experience higher voter turnout.

Socioeconomic Characteristics and Race

A number of socioeconomic characteristics in cities have been shown to correlate with mayoral election turnout. In studies of national and statewide elections, turnout increases as education increases (Miller and Shanks 1996), and a number of studies show this relationship at the local level. Education and its positive correlation with local political participation was first articulated by Alford and Lee (1968), with later studies upholding the positive direction (Johnson 2008; Kelleher and Lowery 2004). Similar to education, a number of scholars have also shown that per capita income correlates with turnout (Kelleher and Lowery 2003; Johnson 2008),

although a divergence of opinions from larger offices to ones at the local level is evident in the literature. Whereas in congressional and national elections, income positively correlates with voter turnout, a portion of the mayoral election literature shows that income may not matter significantly at the local level (Wood 2002; Jurjevich et al. 2015). Some studies even show a negative relationship between income and turnout in these micro-political environments (Johnson 2008). Being a member of a more elevated socioeconomic class is usually referred to as an aggregate measure of higher education and being more affluent, and given these schools of thought it follows that:

Hypothesis 5- Cities with a higher percentage of citizens from upper socioeconomic classes will garner higher turnout in mayoral elections.

Ever since Alford and Lee (1968) showed that cities that have a population significantly divided among demographic cleavages tended to garner higher turnout, subsequent studies show a similar correlation (Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014; Hajnal and Trounstine 2005; Hajnal and Lewis 2003). Demographics have provided some of the most robust relationships to turnout in large cities, and greatly echo what scholars of federal and state elections have found (Lijphart 1997; Nagel and McNulty 1996). Most importantly, particular racial groups have been shown to turn out less than others. African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and Asian Americans, for example, turn out far less when compared to White Americans at the local level. However, the effect of explicit demographic indicators on voter turnout, some scholars argue, may be minimal in the local arena. A number of studies, most notably Bullock (1990) and Caren (2007), have shown a relatively small explanatory value of race as an explicit determinant factor of turnout in municipal elections. Given the scholarship on racial factors and their influence on turnout, it follows that:

Hypothesis 6- Cities with a higher percentage of non-white populations will have lower voter turnout in mayoral elections.

Data and Operationalization

The significant dearth of research on mayoral contests is directly related to and a product of the shortage of reliable comprehensive data sources. Barry and Howell (2007) estimate that less than one percent of scholarship on voting behaviors in premier political science journals between 1980 and 2008 focused specifically on local voting. Whereas in a number of European countries there are central databases for all sub-national elections, the US does not popularly utilize these practices on a national scale.

This paper analyzes voter turnout in a total of 356 mayoral elections in cities from 50,000 to 250,000 in population according to the 2010 Census. The data universe is constrained to cities located in the Midwest, South, or Northeast. Using these three specific Census tracts adds a healthy amount of diversity among cities along many matrices such as political culture, racial composition, institutions, and economic variability. The West is not included in this analysis because of data gathering considerations. This exclusion of the West might have effects on my analysis because of their rich history popular referendums and corresponding political culture. The following states are included in the dataset with the following number indicating the count of cities in that particular state which fell within the data universe: Alabama (5), Arkansas (6), Connecticut (12), Delaware (1), Florida (39), Georgia (13), Illinois (28), Indiana (15), Iowa (9), Kansas (5), Kentucky (2), Louisiana (1), Maine (1), Maryland (4), Massachusetts (19), Michigan (27), Minnesota (14), Mississippi (2), Missouri (10), Nebraska (1), New Hampshire (2), New Jersey (11), New York (12), North Carolina (13), North Dakota (3), Ohio (11), Oklahoma (4), Pennsylvania (6), Rhode

Island (4), South Carolina (4), South Dakota (2), Tennessee (8), Texas (43), Virginia (9), and Wisconsin (10).

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is calculated by taking the number of votes cast for mayoral candidates divided by the number of estimated voting age population (VAP) in the city according to Census data.[6] VAP methodology for measuring voter turnout is in contrast to the eligible voter population method (VEP), which is argued for most notably by McDonald and Popkin (2001) and Holbrook and Heidbreder (2010).[7] Because population data taken from the 2010 Census is used in this analysis, only elections that took place since 2010 are included. Data was collected from a myriad of county and state level databases. While in a number of Europe countries there is a database for all subnational elections, the United States does not posses such data tool. From the 356 midsized elections, the average turnout is 19.22 percent[8] with a standard deviation of 12.83. A significant range manifests in the data from 1.32 percent turnout in Richardson, Texas to an impressive 72.63 percent in Lakeville, Minnesota. Please see Appendices I and II for a distribution table of voter turnout and a full breakdown of voter turnout by midsized city.

[Table 1 about here]

[6] Gans (1997) suggests that VAP is a valid measure for measuring turnout, and what is most important is remaining consistent among all models. Additionally, in the study of local elections, VAP has been used by a number of scholars (such as: Kelleher and Lowery 2004; Rice and Schlueter 2004; Holbrook and Weinschenk 2014).

[7] VAP does count certain ineligible voters, such as non-citizens, felons, and eligible voters who are outside of the country at the time of election, but VEP only counts the voting eligible population. Thus, my calculations for voter turnout might be slightly lower than if using a VEP measurement methodology.

[8] Which is substantially lower than certin big city analyses such as Caren 2007 and Holdbrook and Weinschenk 2014 for instance. While Caren found an average of 27 percent, Holdbrook and Weinschenk's calculated a 25.8 percent average turnout rate.

Election Day Circumstances

To review, the day the actual election takes place drives turnout significantly (Berry Gersen 2010; Wood 2002; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). In the data set, five different electoral timelines took place and are coded as follows: off-cycle (1), Midterm but not in November (2), Presidential but not in November (3), Midterm in November (4), and Presidential in November (5). The lowest voter turnout is expected in off-cycle elections and the highest turnout in elections that took place in November of a presidential year. Of the 356 mayoral elections studied in this analysis, 243 (68.3 percent) took place in an off-cycle year, which was either in 2011, 2013, or 2015. Of the remaining elections, 34 took place in a midterm year but not in November, 23 transpired in a presidential year but not in November, 27 took place in November of a midterm election, and 29 took place in November of a presidential election year.

For the election competitiveness measure, the candidates indicator is coded by the number of candidates who appeared on the ballot for mayor on election day. This is a proxy measurement for competitiveness. While it is not a perfect measurement methodology, for instance a two-way race might be far more competitive than a five-way race, given the scant data sources for mayoral elections and the high number of elections that data was aggregated for, it is an adequate measurement for competitiveness in these midsized cities. The vote share split between candidates has also been used for competitiveness. However, because of this figure not being uniformly reported in the original database it is not used in this analysis. A high number of cities in the data only had one candidate listed on the ballot, 71 elections in all, with the most candidates appearing on the ballot on election day being eight (please see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

In regard to the coding procedure of political culture, I employ a coding scheme derived by Ira Sharkansky. Sharkansky took the work Elazar did on statewide political culture, specifically his techniques described in *American Federalism: A View from the States*, and expanded upon it to quantify the scores more accurately on a statewide scale (Sharkansky 1969). He coded each state from 1.00 to 9.00, with 1.00 being perfectly moralist and 9.00 being perfectly traditionalist. To reiterate, a moralist political culture is expected to garner the highest turnout and traditionalist the lowest. To verify the external validity of his measure, Sharkansky correlated his political culture values with measures pertaining to political participation (percent vote for Governor, percent vote for U.S. Representative, and liberality of suffrage regulations). He concluded that from all his measures of validity, "Its closest and most consistent relationships are with variables pertaining to participation" (83).

For this analysis of midsized cities, I inverted Sharkansky's measure so that 1.00 is a perfect traditionalist political culture and states that score near a 9.00 are moralist according as defined by Elazar and Sharkansky. This measurement determination was made to keep the positive correlation coefficients to correspond to the casual direction outlined in *Hypothesis 3*. Political culture is used in place of political ideology because significant majority of the mayoral elections in this election are nonpartisan. Please see Table 2 for a breakdown of the political culture measures by state.

[Table 2 about here]

Stakes in the Game

For the measures of the stakes in the game, data are utilized from both the 2010 Census and the most recent round of the American Community Survey (ACS) in 2014. The first indicator is the percentage of married families, which measures when both parents are

living in the home and there are also children present. ACS data is utilized on a city basis and is coded as a percentage variable from one to 100. The second measure is the percentage of citizens within the city who are above the age of 65; Hajnal and Lewis (2003) and Jurjevich et al. (2015) use the exact same age measurement. Lastly, Fischel's homevoter hypothesis will also be examined at a more devolved level than before. To do so, homeownership figures are taken from the 2010 Census and are expressed as percentages, counting how many residents own the home they live in as opposed to renting. As these three indicators rise, so does a voter's relative stakes in the game, and there is an expected corresponding rise in voter turnout in mayoral elections.

Socioeconomic Characteristics and Race

At the start of the analysis, socioeconomic characteristics were captured by two variables: education and income. For education, the data are aggregated from the 2010 Census. Citizens above 25 years who have attained at least a bachelor's degree are counted in this percentage variable. Education is operationalized in this manner in a number of studies on mayoral elections (Johnson 2008; Kelleher and Lowery 2004; Wood 2002; Rice and Schlueter). However, because of multicollinearity and a significant amount of intercorrelation (Pearson correlation value of .785) between income and education, per capita income was taken out of the final ordinary least squares (OLS) analysis. Nevertheless, the explanatory power of income is still being captured by the education variable. The final adjusted R^2 changed less than .002 when removing per capita income. Again, it is theorized that citizens who are more educated are expected to vote at a higher rate in mayoral elections.

Race is examined by calculating the percentage of nonwhite residents within a municipality. Census data from 2010 identifies five main ethnic groups: White, African American, American Indian, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian. For the purposes of this research, the percent of African Americans, Hispanic/Latinos, and Asian Americans are aggregated into one comprehensive non-white population measure. While it must be said that the particular voter experiences of African Americans, Hispanic/Latino Americans, and Asian Americans are quite different, this measure follows scholarship that suggests these types of potential voters are less likely to turn out when compared to White voters (Hajnal and Lewis 2003).

[Table 3 about here]

Methodology

To test the hypotheses, a stepped OLS regression is employed to examine the three main schools of thought across three different models separately and then together. By utilizing this method, a better understanding of both the casual factors of turnout and the intercorrelation among variables will be achieved (See Table 3). Variables that robustly endure across all three models are strong determinants of turnout in mayoral elections in these micropolitical environments. Model 1 includes only election day circumstances, which are the election cycle, the number of candidates that appeared on the ballot, and political culture. Model 2 includes all the variables in Model 1 with the addition of the stakes in the game indicators, percentage of the population above the age of 65, homeownership, and married families. Finally, Model 3 makes the addition of education and percentage of the city's population that is non-white.

[Table 4 about here]

Drivers of Mayoral Election Turnout

Table 4 reports the results for all three OLS regression models, which estimate the effects of election day circumstances, stakes in the game, and socioeconomic and race variables. Model 1, which only includes election day circumstances, explains 54.3 percent of the variance in voter turnout with all three independent variables being statistically significant at the .001 level. Most notably, the election cycle is the most robust indicator in the first model by a substantial margin, explaining over 45 percent of the variance by itself. Both the proxy measure for electoral competitiveness and the inverted Sharkanska's measure for political culture is in the expected positive direction. These preliminary findings shown in Model 1 lend strong support for *Hypothesis 1*, *Hypothesis 2,* and *Hypothesis 3*.

With the additional variables of age, homeownership, and married families in Model 2, the explanatory power of the model increases modestly to 58.4 percent. Both the percentage of citizens above the age of 65 and the percent of homeowners are significant at the .01 level, and the married family indicator is stronger and is significant beyond the .001 level. While age and homeownership's directions are positive, which is expected given the logic articulated in *Hypothesis 4*, the direction of the married families indicator is surprisingly negative, which could be due to the high level of intercorrelation between the married family and homeownership variable (Pearson's r of 0.680). On the aggregate level of stakes in the game indicators, *Hypothesis 4* is supported by the multivariate model. Election day circumstances remain strong in Model 2 with all three indicators staying significant beyond the .001 level. In fact, the timing of the election gains greater

explanatory value in Model 2. These findings regarding election day circumstances again lend strong support to *Hypothesis 1*, *Hypothesis 2,* and *Hypothesis 3*.

Lastly, the inclusion for the variables for education and the percentage of a city's population that is non-white in Model 3, the explanatory value on mayoral voter turnout increases to 60.6 percent, a small increase of approximately two percentage points from the previous model. Education correlates positively to turnout in this multivariate model (which is similar to the findings of Alford and Lee 1968; Johnson 2008; Kelleher and Lowery 2004). At the same time, homeownership and the age variable drop to a significance level of .05; down from a .01 level reflected in Model 2. This change can be accounted for by the amount of intercorrelation between the independent variables of homeownership, married families, education, and percentage of the city's population that is above 65 (see Table 3). The regression direction of both education and percentage nonwhite population are as expected in *Hypothesis 5* and *Hypothesis 6*, which adds support for both these hypotheses. Lastly, all three variables in the election day circumstances school of thought, yet again, remain significant at the .001 level. These findings provide additional support for *Hypothesis 1*, *Hypothesis 2,* and *Hypothesis 3*.

The Essential Ingredient of Politics is Timing

Although much attention is given to congressional and presidential elections in the United States, nowhere is the attention needed more than at the local level. This analysis critically examined a number of the primary determinants of voter turnout. From the 356 midsized mayoral elections, the average turnout was 19.22 percent with a range one percent to over seventy percent (median of 16.54). To explain this variance, election day circumstances, stakes in the game, and socioeconomic factors and race were taken into

consideration. Both the competing schools of thought and various independent variables were then tested separately and comprehensively. Using a stepped OLS regression, the election day circumstances stood out as the most robust determinant of voter turnout, explaining over 47 percent of the variance in voter turnout in each of the three models. Of all variables tested in this analysis, nothing drives turnout more than electoral timetables, electoral competitiveness, and political culture. The stakes in the game indicators, which include the percentage of citizens above the age of 65, homeownership, and married, performed strongly in both Model 2 and Model 3. All six hypotheses articulated in this study are strongly supported by the findings.

Future scholarship on mayoral elections and local politics should aim to more thoroughly examine the effects of race and ethnic cleavages in these midsized cities in the context of the legacies race has had on homeownership and marriage rates, and also the degree to which historically marginalized groups see electoral participation as an effective activity of urban life.

Moreover, while this particular study has been a macro level view of cities, a more micro level examination of citizens in particular cities should be strived for in future research. A key limitation of this study has to do with the ecological fallacy. Because midsized cities were the unit of analysis, it is problematic to generalize down to the individual voter level. Thus, more individual level data, such as survey data, should be generated and utilized in further research. It is worth noting that there are no existing data sources currently that collect individual citizen level data in regards to local governments on a city-to-city basis. Another major analytical limitation to this study, to which future scholarship should address, was the high level of intercorrelation among independent

variables. Future scholars should carefully focus on the statistical method they employ at the micropolitical level, as it might affect their findings significantly.

Both electoral institutions and the timing of mayoral elections are critical in attracting the largest and most representative pool of voters. In fact, average turnout increased from approximately 15.47 percent to over 48 percent when off-cycle elections are compared to presidential year elections in November, over tripling the turnout as a result of timing. Additionally, turnout in elections held in November of midterm years was over 34 percent. Whereas other variables in this study are quite difficult or impossible to change in any American city, such as education levels, racial composition, or the percentage of people who own their home, the timing of elections is a much easier institutional fix. Uncovering that timing is so critical in regard to voter turnout in these local contests is somewhat of a silver lining. Citizens and the extensions of citizens, i.e. politicians, decide and dictate the very rules of politics. While 243 cities in this study held their most recent mayoral election in an off-cycle year, that could be changed rather easily through local or state powers if the political will was present to do so. However, the policy makers who would be needed to change the electoral timing rules might be the exact people who benefit most from low and skewed turnout.

Berry and Gersen (2010) showed that after the timing of local elections changed, some of the jurisdictions doubled their turnout. This study shows that that projection might be correct, although the turnout could possibly triple in size, an electoral result that could possibly ripple through the many local governments across the United States. With a higher level of voter turnout comes a more representative electorate, which, as Hajnal (2010) argues, could result in much more fair and equitable pragmatic practices of local

governments. Legitimacy and local governmental capacity perhaps also might be strengthened if turnout were to rise in these micropolitical climates. In essence, it all comes down to making voting easier and more accessible to all citizens, no matter their race, socioeconomic status, or political proclivities, and the timing of elections appears to be the best institutional fix to the problem facing midsized American cities.

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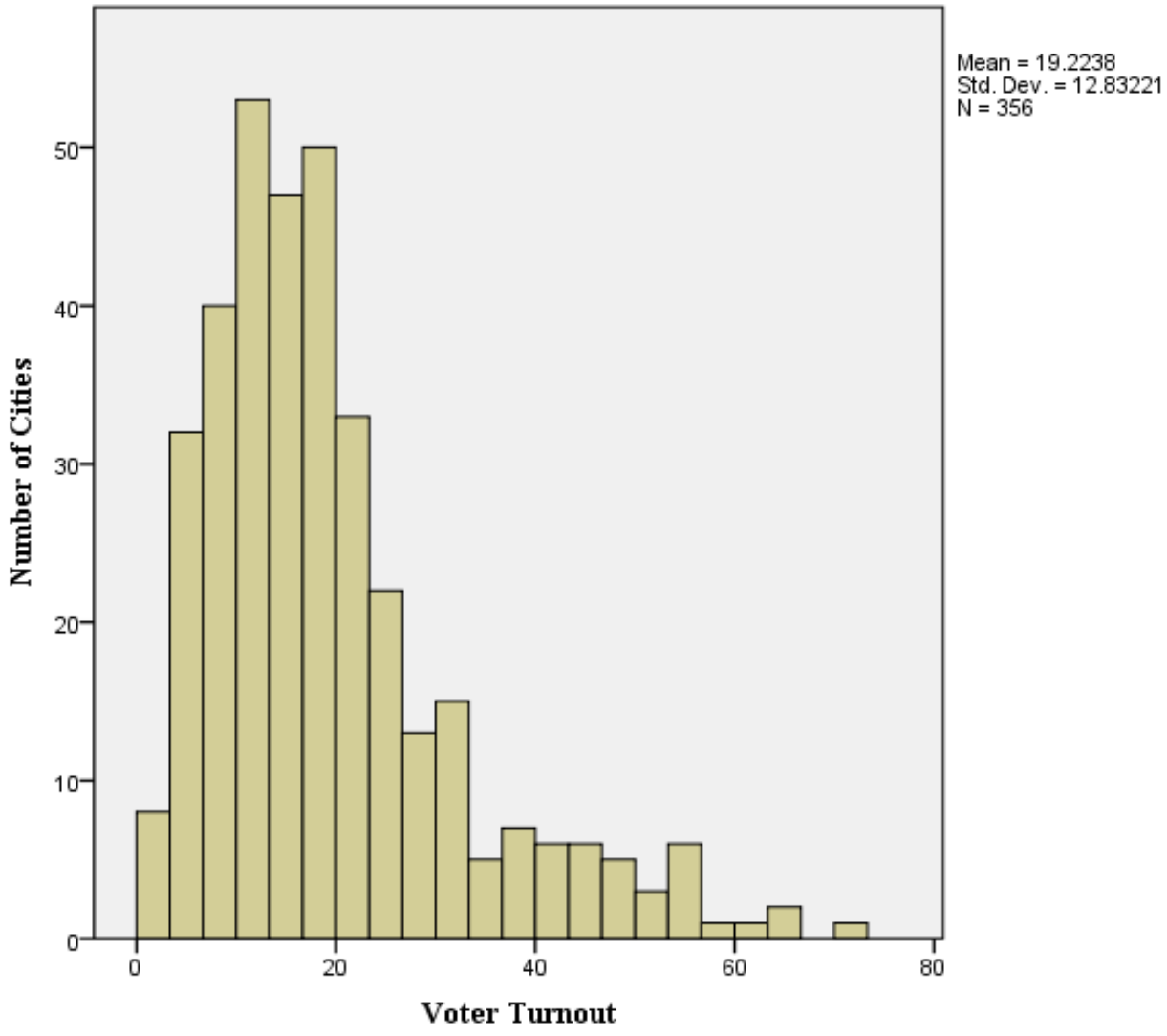
Appendix 1. Distribution of Voter Turnout



Appendix 2. Voter Turnout in Midsized American Cities

City	State	Turnout	City	State	Turnout
Aurora	IL	6.92	Norman	OK	12.24
Rockford	IL	16.89	Lawton	OK	6.41
Joliet	IL	13.46	Moore	OK	14.15
Naperville	IL	18.38	Midwest	OK	3.04
Springfield	IL	30.25	Little Rock	AR	35.43
Peoria	IL	10.01	Fort Smith	AR	26.14
Elgin	IL	7.39	Fayetteville	AR	45.42
Waukegan	IL	10.47	Springdale	AR	28.32
Cicero town	IL	17.87	North Little Rock	AR	50.56
Champaign	IL	18.15	Rogers	AR	26.99
Bloomington	IL	16.80	Lafayette	LA	32.77
Decatur	IL	18.83	Bowling Green	KY	17.53
Arlington Heights	IL	19.77	Owensboro	KY	33.16
Evanston	IL	11.32	Knoxville	TN	14.70
Schaumburg	IL	7.06	Chattanooga	TN	13.46
Bolingbrook	IL	6.25	Clarksville	TN	21.47
Palatine	IL	7.96	Murfreesboro	TN	9.38
Skokie	IL	8.70	Jackson	TN	14.54
Des Plaines	IL	18.22	Franklin	TN	5.31
Orland Park	IL	12.70	Bartlett	TN	37.52
Tinley Park	IL	17.74	Hendersonville	TN	53.17
Oak Lawn	IL	24.02	Jackson	MS	19.11
Berwyn	IL	6.20	Gulfport	MS	2.49
Mount Prospect	IL	8.38	Birmingham	AL	12.09
Wheaton	IL	13.37	Montgomery	AL	26.05
Normal	IL	10.20	Mobile	AL	39.04
Hoffman Estates	IL	10.82	Huntsville	AL	20.03
Oak Park	IL	20.60	Decatur	AL	13.20
Akron	OH	30.46	St. Petersburg	FL	26.96
Dayton	OH	15.18	Orlando	FL	12.00
Parma	OH	24.35	Hialeah	FL	10.04
Canton	OH	30.69	Tallahassee	FL	17.43
Youngstown	OH	20.79	Fort Lauderdale	FL	5.64
Lorain	OH	32.03	Port St. Lucie	FL	43.10
Hamilton	OH	11.03	Cape Coral	FL	13.30
Springfield	OH	23.37	Hollywood	FL	41.82
Kettering	OH	24.93	Gainesville	FL	11.23
Elyria	OH	31.93	Miramar	FL	8.28

City	State	Turnout	City	State	Turnout
Lakewood	OH	23.19	Coral Springs	FL	32.83
Evansville	IN	23.12	Clearwater	FL	19.60
South Bend	IN	20.29	Miami Gardens	FL	20.42
Carmel	IN	19.82	Palm Bay	FL	54.33
Fishers	IN	14.51	West Palm Beach	FL	14.45
Bloomington	IN	8.05	Pompano Beach	FL	7.71
Hammond	IN	20.56	Lakeland	FL	16.97
Gary	IN	23.61	Miami Beach	FL	13.65
Lafayette	IN	11.33	Deltona	FL	36.29
Muncie	IN	23.97	Plantation	FL	11.19
Terre Haute	IN	22.53	Sunrise	FL	12.18
Kokomo	IN	18.41	Boca Raton	FL	15.79
Noblesville	IN	16.66	Melbourne	FL	51.70
Anderson	IN	31.26	Palm Coast	FL	8.88
Greenwood	IN	17.09	Deerfield Beach	FL	8.98
Elkhart	IN	14.44	Boynton Beach	FL	7.48
Rochester	MN	42.50	Fort Myers	FL	14.89
Bloomington	MN	16.55	Daytona Beach	FL	48.66
Duluth	MN	26.55	Delray Beach	FL	13.77
Brooklyn Park	MN	37.59	Homestead	FL	4.02
Plymouth	MN	42.20	Tamarac	FL	33.33
Maple Grove	MN	44.16	North Miami	FL	15.16
Woodbury	MN	40.72	North Port	FL	37.60
St. Cloud	MN	47.63	Wellington	FL	13.94
Eagan	MN	39.97	Ocala	FL	8.29
Eden Prairie	MN	42.09	Port Orange	FL	19.88
Coon Rapids	MN	38.65	Jupiter town	FL	18.31
Burnsville	MN	63.49	Sanford	FL	30.83
Blaine	MN	54.77	Pensacola	FL	49.23
Lakeville	MN	72.63	August-Richmond	GA	18.61
Bellevue	NE	33.99	Columbus	GA	17.49
Sioux Falls	SD	27.19	Savannah	GA	21.06
Rapid	SD	19.93	Athens-Clarke	GA	14.43
Fargo	ND	17.09	Sandy Springs	GA	10.84
Bismarck	ND	11.32	Macon-Bibb	GA	31.51
Grand Forks	ND	27.62	Roswell	GA	6.83
Springfield	MO	20.18	Albany	GA	15.56
Independence	MO	12.97	Johns Creek	GA	12.10
Columbia	MO	14.57	Warner Robins	GA	13.77
Lee's Summit	MO	8.09	Marietta	GA	11.49

City	State	Turnout	City	State	Turnout
O'Fallon	MO	11.09	Valdosta	GA	12.68
St. Joseph	MO	21.95	Smyrna	GA	13.00
St. Charles	MO	13.77	Columbia	SC	15.12
Blue Springs	MO	9.55	Charleston	SC	25.55
St. Peters	MO	9.56	North Charleston	SC	14.58
Florissant	MO	18.15	Mount Pleasant	SC	21.20
Overland Park	KS	4.93	Winston-Salem	NC	8.87
Kansas	KS	24.69	Durham	NC	7.49
Olathe	KS	7.16	Fayetteville	NC	12.03
Topeka	KS	12.10	Cary	NC	5.50
Shawnee	KS	12.85	Wilmington	NC	6.96
Des Moines	IA	3.10	High Point	NC	34.96
Cedar Rapids	IA	20.15	Greenville	NC	14.07
Davenport	IA	13.26	Asheville	NC	18.03
Sioux	IA	16.91	Concord	NC	5.17
Waterloo	IA	17.49	Gastonia	NC	8.87
Council Bluffs	IA	12.89	Jacksonville	NC	1.50
Ames	IA	8.22	Rocky Mount	NC	12.00
Dubuque	IA	8.54	Chapel Hill	NC	19.10
West Des Moines	IA	7.37	Norfolk	VA	8.24
Madison	WI	27.25	Chesapeake	VA	10.29
Green Bay	WI	20.53	Richmond	VA	55.13
Kenosha	WI	21.47	Newport	VA	6.16
Racine	WI	18.16	Alexandria	VA	56.32
Appleton	WI	28.02	Hampton	VA	12.15
Waukesha	WI	17.68	Roanoke	VA	12.31
Oshkosh	WI	9.52	Portsmouth	VA	59.52
Eau Claire	WI	24.58	Suffolk	VA	65.58
West Allis	WI	16.33	Frederick	MD	16.70
La Crosse	WI	22.04	Rockville	MD	13.31
Grand Rapids	MI	12.26	Gaithersburg	MD	8.05
Warren	MI	21.79	Bowie	MD	15.93
Sterling Heights	MI	15.88	Wilmington	DE	47.80
Lansing	MI	16.04	Allentown	PA	10.85
Ann Arbor	MI	15.25	Erie	PA	16.67
Flint	MI	21.18	Reading	PA	10.15
Dearborn	MI	24.87	Scranton	PA	22.31
Livonia	MI	18.64	Bethlehem	PA	8.73
Westland	MI	8.87	Lancaster	PA	17.62
Troy	MI	24.04	Jersey City	NJ	19.74

City	State	Turnout	City	State	Turnout
Farmington Hills	MI	16.53	Paterson	NJ	21.92
Wyoming	MI	7.82	Elizabeth	NJ	10.57
Southfield	MI	17.74	Trenton	NJ	15.64
Rochester Hills	MI	20.06	Camden	NJ	16.42
Taylor	MI	21.20	Passaic	NJ	15.19
St. Clair Shores	MI	25.85	Bayonne	NJ	26.30
Pontiac	MI	13.45	Vineland	NJ	46.51
Dearborn Heights	MI	16.13	New Brunswick	NJ	6.83
Royal Oak	MI	20.19	Perth Amboy	NJ	19.36
Novi	MI	16.36	Hoboken	NJ	28.71
Clinton	MI	36.35	Rochester	NY	21.81
Canton	MI	43.78	Yonkers	NY	12.99
Macomb	MI	44.57	Syracuse	NY	13.39
Shelby	MI	55.43	Albany	NY	19.58
Waterford	MI	60.12	New Rochelle	NY	15.59
West Bloomfield	MI	49.77	Mount Vernon	NY	18.86
Ypsilanti	MI	55.45	Schenectady	NY	18.35
Laredo	TX	15.68	Utica	NY	17.47
Lubbock	TX	10.85	White Plains	NY	24.15
Garland	TX	4.34	Hempstead	NY	9.74
Irving	TX	4.47	Niagara Falls	NY	19.76
Amarillo	TX	10.14	Troy	NY	18.52
Grand Prairie	TX	5.44	Manchester	NH	23.51
Brownsville	TX	7.12	Nashua	NH	22.41
Pasadena	TX	4.21	Portland	ME	32.67
Mesquite	TX	5.27	Worcester	MA	13.59
McKinney	TX	3.11	Springfield	MA	13.71
McAllen	TX	4.64	New Bedford	MA	16.79
Killeen	TX	3.92	Brockton	MA	22.28
Waco	TX	3.73	Quincy	MA	28.88
Carrollton	TX	2.07	Lynn	MA	23.15
Beaumont	TX	7.36	Fall River	MA	22.88
Abilene	TX	10.07	Newton	MA	19.73
Denton	TX	5.61	Lawrence	MA	28.01
Midland	TX	16.84	Somerville	MA	7.98
Odessa	TX	26.35	Haverhill	MA	18.66
Richardson	TX	1.32	Waltham	MA	21.29
Tyler	TX	4.52	Malden	MA	12.68
Lewisville	TX	4.47	Medford	MA	29.07
College Station	TX	4.10	Taunton	MA	11.60

City	State	Turnout	City	State	Turnout
San Angelo	TX	10.35	Chicopee	MA	27.36
Pearland	TX	5.09	Weymouth	MA	31.34
Allen	TX	4.59	Revere	MA	25.02
League	TX	23.45	Peabody	MA	14.72
Longview	TX	6.03	Bridgeport	CT	19.16
Sugar Land	TX	6.40	New Haven	CT	12.10
Edinburg	TX	3.65	Hartford	CT	10.07
Mission	TX	9.10	Stamford	CT	22.07
Bryan	TX	8.61	Waterbury	CT	14.02
Pharr	TX	14.64	Norwalk	CT	19.87
Missouri	TX	10.52	Danbury	CT	10.43
Temple	TX	4.88	New Britain	CT	15.19
Harlingen	TX	9.54	Meriden	CT	20.12
North Richland Hills	TX	5.06	Bristol	CT	25.35
Victoria	TX	11.33	West Haven	CT	10.62
New Braunfels	TX	6.45	Milford	CT	30.23
Conroe	TX	5.43	Providence	RI	28.17
Rowlett	TX	2.40	Warwick	RI	44.39
Port Arthur	TX	10.79	Cranston	RI	18.56
Euless	TX	5.77	Pawtucket	RI	37.09

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Variables*

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Turnout	19.22	12.83	1.32	72.63
Election Cycle	1.78	1.32	1.00	5.00
Candidates	2.39	1.26	1.00	8.00
Political Culture	4.51	2.49	1.00	9.00
% > 65 pop.	12.12	3.57	4.70	27.50
% Homeowners	58.52	13.24	23.10	90.00
% Married Families	43.06	10.79	19.10	73.70
Education	30.72	14.20	7.50	76.20
% Non-White pop.	38.17	22.53	2.60	98.90

Table 2. *Political Culture Coding Procedure*

State	Code	State	Code	State	Code	State	Code
Alabama	1.43	Kansas	6.34	Missouri	2.34	Pennsylvania	5.72
Arkansas	1.00	Kentucky	2.60	Nebraska	6.34	Rhode Island	7.00
Connecticut	7.00	Louisiana	2.00	New Hampshire	7.67	South Carolina	1.25
Delaware	3.00	Maine	7.67	New Jersey	6.00	South Dakota	7.00
Florida	2.20	Maryland	3.00	New York	6.38	Tennessee	1.50
Georgia	1.20	Massachusetts	6.34	North Carolina	1.50	Texas	2.89
Illinois	5.28	Michigan	8.00	North Dakota	8.00	Virginia	2.14
Indiana	3.67	Minnesota	9.00	Ohio	4.84	Wisconsin	8.00
Iowa	8.00	Mississippi	1.00	Oklahoma	1.75		

Table 3. *Correlation Matrix of Variables*

Variable	Turnout	Election Cycle	Candidates	Political Culture	% > 65 pop.	% Homeownership	% Married Families	Education	% Non-White pop.
Turnout	1.000								
Election Cycle	0.692**	1.000							
Candidates	-0.002	-0.107*	1.000						
Political Culture	0.227**	-0.012	-0.174**	1.000					
% > 65 pop.	0.171**	-0.002	-0.125*	0.039	1.000				
% Homeowners	0.148**	0.167**	-0.266**	0.065	0.233**	1.000			
% Married Families	0.009	0.153**	-0.266**	0.028	-0.081	0.680**	1.000		
Education	-0.012	-0.042	-0.211**	0.045	-0.178**	0.215**	0.383**	1.000	
% Non-White pop.	-0.228**	-0.076	0.432**	-0.300**	-0.286 **	-0.401**	-0.307**	-0.325**	1.000

*- Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**- Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. *OLS Regression of Models on Voter Turnout (N=356)*

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Election Cycle	0.707*** (0.351)	0.710*** (0.339)	0.718*** (0.332)
Candidates	0.118*** (0.373)	0.126*** (0.372)	0.180*** (0.383)
Political Culture	0.256*** (0.188)	0.247*** (.179)	0.213*** (0.182)
% > 65 pop.	--	0.122** (0.141)	0.103* (0.144)
% Homeowners	--	0.173** (0.060)	0.155* (0.060)
% Married Families	--	-0.198*** (0.073)	-0.246*** (0.074)
Education	--	--	0.078* (0.035)
% Non-White pop.	--	--	-.0147*** (0.025)
Adjusted R^2	.543	.584	.606

Sig. Level: *≤0.05, **≤0.01, ***≤0.001 – Beta value depicted above and standard errors in parentheses.