

**The Vote Matters:**  
**Race, Turnout, and Representation in City Politics**

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## Introduction

The vote is the bedrock upon which democracy rests. Through the vote citizens convey information about their needs and preferences. Through the vote citizens make important decisions about who to elect and who not to elect to office. Democracy is unworkable and unthinkable without the vote.

Despite the centrality of the vote for democratic theory and democratic practice, large numbers of citizens stay away from the polls. In America, voter participation at every level of government is low and appears to be getting worse. In fact, the majority of citizens often do not vote when given the opportunity. At best, slightly over half of all eligible voters vote in national contests. In midterm Congressional elections the figure usually falls to under half of all eligible voters. 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 just as rapidly as it is in national elections (Verba et al. 1995, Karnig and Walter 1993).<sup>1</sup>

This nonvoting by such a large portion of the electorate has led to widespread unease about the functioning and fairness of American democracy. The main reason for the concern is that those who do turn out to vote look very different from those who do not. Study after study

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<sup>1</sup> 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).

of American elections 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).<sup>2</sup> Educational differences are even starker. Those with advanced degrees are especially apt to vote (77 percent). On the opposite end of the spectrum, 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 of a more privileged status.

The skewed nature of the vote raises real concerns about how well the interests of different groups are served in democracy (Verba et al., 1995; Guinier, 1994; Casel, 1986). 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 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). The fear, simply put, 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). Voters and those who look racially, ethnically, and economically like voters will win, while non-voters and those who look like non-voters will lose. Policies will be biased, outcomes unfair, and in the end American democracy

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

will represent the interests of the privileged few over the broader concerns of the masses (Mills 1956; Schattschneider 1970). And all of this will get worse as turnout declines.<sup>3</sup>

But are these fears founded? Conventional wisdom suggests that they are. Candidates, the media, and parties all act as if turnout matters. Before most elections, candidates invest precious campaign resources to get out the vote and in speeches regularly implore their supporters to turnout. 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). And Gubernatorial winner, John G. Rowland of Connecticut, tried to rally the troops on the eve of his contest by stating “its all about turnout” (Hacket 2002).

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.<sup>4</sup> “Win May Hinge on Turnout” was the sentiment expressed by pollsters in the last Los Angeles mayoral race Finnegan (2005). And after any close contest, commentators are likely to conclude that “turnout emerged as a decisive factor in [the] elections” (Bumiller and Nagourney 2002).<sup>5</sup> This was certainly the case in the last two presidential contests but it is common for elections of any size.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> It is not, however, clear if declining participation has led to a less representative electorate. Leighley and Nagler (1992) find that the electorate has become more skewed in favor of certain racial groups over time but others find little change in the demographic makeup of the electorate (Gant and Lyons 1993, Shields and Goidel 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Headline from a story in the Midland Reporter-Telegram on November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> 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).

<sup>6</sup> “GOP’s Ground Game Wins It” is just one of the examples from the last presidential election (Hull 2004).

There is also little doubt about who usually wins when turnout expands. 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 effort by the Democratic Party to make the vote more accessible and has equally motivated Republicans to oppose most such changes. 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 lose out significantly less often than they do now. Because of these beliefs, millions of dollars and thousands of hours of campaign resources are expended on 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 get out the vote on election day (Nichols 2004). The existence of groups like the South West Voter Registration and Education Project is premised in large part on the notion that turnout matters. In short, just about everyone involved in American politics acts like turnout matters.<sup>7</sup>

However universal this view may be among political practitioners and other political observers, it is one that is seldom supported within empirical political science.<sup>8</sup> At least in the American case, the preponderance of evidence suggests that fears of a skewed electorate leading to biased outcomes are largely unfounded. This conclusion rests largely on two different tests.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> One famous and oft-cited example of the power of the vote 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).

<sup>8</sup> There are some important exceptions to this general conclusion that I will detail below. For example see Hill and Leighley (1992), Griffin and Newman (n.d.), Fellowes and Rowe (2004).

<sup>9</sup> A third, smaller set of studies that 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 also suggest that voter turnout does not enhance the influence of different groups on incumbent behavior (Bartels 2005).

First, when the political preferences of nonvoters are compared to the preferences of voters, the gap in views is generally small and/or insignificant (e.g. Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Bennett and Resnick 1990, Gant and Lyons 1993, Norrander 1989, Erickson 1995, Highton 2004). Even those who lament the distortion created by the unrepresentativeness of non-voting forms of political participation, nevertheless conclude that “Voters are relatively representative of the public” (Verba et al, 1995:512). The range of empirical studies on this question are so uniform in their findings that Elcessor 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). In other words, voters and non voters may look very different but they do not think all that differently.

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 find that expanded turnout would make little systematic difference. Put another way, 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 whether marginal benefits from expanded turnout would accrue to Democrats or Republicans (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 in their assessment of American democracy, the path is clear. We should support the status quo. Since the electorate seems to speak for the masses, we need not be all that troubled by America's low turnout and its skewed electorate. Reform is unnecessary and even potentially detrimental. American democracy is functioning reasonably well.

But what if these studies are wrong and America's democracy is, in fact, skewed by uneven turnout? If these existing studies are somehow missing important aspects of America's electoral process, the implications for American democracy are equally wide ranging. If, despite these seemingly strong findings, racial minorities, the poor, and other disadvantaged groups are losing out because they do not vote as regularly as more advantaged interests, then America's democracy is flawed and we should be very concerned about the welfare of America's least advantaged communities. In this case, the path is very different. We should not support the status quo but should instead try to actively reform America's democracy. We should do all we can to try to raise the turnout of less active groups and somehow even the playing field. Thus, it is vitally important that we get it right – that we know whether or not turnout matters.

### **Turnout does matter**

In this book, we challenge the basic conclusion of the existing literature. We offer an alternative account that not only explains why existing studies have failed to find turnout effects but also tells us where we should be looking for the effects of turnout. We then look at a large set of elections where theory tells us we should expect turnout effects. Using these cases we demonstrate that turnout does matter in the American context.



Our argument is straightforward. We maintain that the non-impact of a skewed electorate stems in large part from the narrow focus of the existing empirical research. Put another way, existing studies have, been looking in the wrong place. Nearly every study that looks at the effect of voter turnout on electoral outcomes focuses on the national electorate in presidential and Congressional elections. We contend that national elections are the last place that we are likely to find bias. There are two reasons why we think that national elections are more representative and thus why we think 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, skew 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 one ignores substantial variation in group size across geographic boundaries and almost necessarily diminishes the role that small minority groups can play. In national contests, only a few very large groups can have a significant affect on the outcome of the vote. Asian Americans, for example, are the third largest racial and ethnic minority group but they make up well under 4 percent of the total national population. Whether or not they vote is almost immaterial to the outcomes 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 many states, districts, or cities. This is especially true for race and ethnicity but segregation by income, education, and other measures of well-being also occurs. 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, Atlanta, and Washington 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. Although nationwide the population is only 12 percent Latino, 12 percent African American, and 4 percent Asian American, data from a recent nationwide survey (the American Citizen Participation Study) indicate that 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. Where minorities actually live, they make up a substantial proportion of the electorate. Thus, at least at the local level, whether or not they vote could have a real say in determining who wins and who loses.

Ultimately, if we are concerned about the effects of a skew 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 begin to weigh in. 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.

Unfortunately, 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 elections but there appears to be no research that looks systematically across cities at the *consequences* of a skewed electorate at the local level (Leighley 2001, and Verba et al 1995).

Thus the question of whether or not turnout matters remains largely unanswered.

In the following chapters we seek to provide an answer that question. Our analysis of a wide variety of outcomes at the local level demonstrates that turnout does matter in American politics. A simulation of outcomes in recent big city mayoral elections with even turnout by race and ethnicity, an investigation of the link between aggregate voter turnout and the racial and ethnic composition of city councils nationwide, and an assessment of the link between aggregate voter turnout and city government spending patterns all suggest that in the nation's cities who wins depends critically on who votes. Low and uneven turnout, a factor at play in most American cities, leads to a range of less than optimal outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities. In particular, we find that low turnout results in important losses in mayoral elections, less equitable racial and ethnic representation on city councils, and less favorable spending policies. If we could expand voter turnout, a task we turn to in the second to last chapter, there is every reason to believe that we could improve outcomes for America's minority population.

All of this is more than an addendum to national level studies. Although presidential and Congressional elections get much of our attention, urban politics represents a critical component of American democracy. The vast majority of elected officials emerge from local contests and more votes are cast in the multitude of local elections than in national contests. Even more importantly, policy decisions at the local level affect citizens in profound and immediate ways (Pellissero 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. It is, therefore, not too much of stretch to argue that "the functions of government that have most

impact on citizen's daily lives" are within the purview of local governments (Oliver 2001:15). 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 being made and executed at the local level. In short, it matters who wins and who loses in a political arena that touches more and more regularly on the lives of residents.<sup>10</sup> The fact that low and uneven voter turnout at the local level means that some racial and ethnic communities lose out while others gain raises serious concerns about American democracy.<sup>11</sup>

What's more, it is very possible that inequities that are present in today's local political arenas are harbingers of what is yet to come in national political contests. As immigration continues and America becomes more and more diverse, racial and ethnic minorities will be large enough to have a say in national contests. But if they continue to vote less regularly than whites, that impact could very well be diminished and blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans could be losing out in both the local and national arenas.

Fortunately, there may be solutions. Later in the book, I begin to consider different avenues through which we might expand voter turnout. Although a range of different reforms have been put forward, the analysis presented here focuses on changes in local electoral structures. Since these institutions are easier to alter than either individual socioeconomic status or individual attitudes, the two other main factors driving turnout, they represent the most viable and potentially the most effective target for reforms. Our analysis suggests that small changes to the local electoral structure - like moving the timing of local elections to coincide with statewide

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Another concern with local elections is that because of the limited attention paid to these contests, there may be more room for more severe electoral discrimination against minorities. Certainly, the range of Voting Rights Act

or national elections - 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. As such, they represent an important step that could help to increase the fairness of American democracy.

### **A Book about Race**

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. In short, are minorities losing out because they vote less often than whites?

Most past studies concerned with the implications of uneven turnout have focused on differences in turnout affect partisan outcomes (eg Citrin et al 2003, DeNardo 1980, Tucker and Vedlitz 1986). 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

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cases against different localities suggests that can be major problems in the way elections are run and in the policy

white population (Smelser et al 2001). Even the Asian American population, who as a whole often fares well on many of these basic measures, contains several national origins 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 at least in part from government inaction. 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. One could argue that 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 these efforts have often been half-hearted and it is far from clear whether these efforts have done much to elevate the status of minority communities (Blank 2001, Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1995). In short, government policy in America does not seem to be overly focused on aiding the most disadvantaged groups or on eliminating racial disparities.<sup>12</sup>

While none of this comes close to proving 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

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making process at the local level (Davidson and Grofman 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Moreover, as later chapters will show, these kinds of spending patterns are not in line with minority preferences. Although there is considerable variation within the minority community, public opinion polls indicate that racial

ethnic minorities in American democracy. Given the possibility that racial and ethnic minorities are somehow losing out in American democracy, an investigation of the ability of minorities to get their interests represented through the political process and an examination of the role that turnout places in that process is clearly warranted.

Aside from these normative reasons for being concerned about racial and ethnic minorities, there are also strong theoretical reasons to focus on race rather than party. Since turnout is skewed much more by race than by party, we should expect turnout to matter more for racial and ethnic groups than for political parties. 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 (Elcessor 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 we will see, 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, we might expect turnout to be critical for racial and ethnic minorities even when it appears to have minimal effects for Democrats or Republicans.<sup>13</sup>

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

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and ethnic minorities are, on average, more apt than the white community to support greater government spending and greater government activism.

<sup>13</sup> Yet another reason to expect turnout to matter for racial and ethnic minorities is the deep racial division that sometimes occurs in American politics. Although evidence at the local level is sparse, it is, nevertheless apparent that race represents one of the most fundamental divisions in local electoral politics. There is a real potential for minorities who vote less regularly to lose out to whites who have larger numbers and vote more regularly. The more

hold nonpartisan elections (Hajnal and Lewis 2003). Even if we 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, we seek to understand how turnout can hurt or benefit 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, our primary goal will be to assess the link between turnout and representation. However, our examination will also shed light on another set of critical questions related to race and ethnicity. Specifically, through an examination of the vote by race in a series of mayoral elections, we hope to understand more about the dynamics of race in the voting booth and the nature of America's racial divisions. 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? Which of America's four main racial and ethnic groups are likely to form coalitions with each other? And which are likely to be especially divided in their political goals?

In a nation that is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, these are increasingly important and increasingly complex questions. 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 the political arena and as whites, at times, becoming the minority group, questions about the nature of inter-group relations take on a more and more prominent role. This increasing diversity raises both hopes and fears. On one hand, diversity raise hope for a powerful inter-racial political coalition. With no dominant group, all racial and ethnic communities may be forced to work together to get policies passed. On the other hand, diversity raises the specter of increased

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that African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and whites disagree over candidates and policies, the greater the



tension and conflict. New communities can 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 glimpse of what the reality is in America's cities today.<sup>14</sup>

What the vote ultimately tells us is that racial divisions in America's cities are quite 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 to be substantially shaped by which racial or ethnic community we come from.

### **A Book about Urban Politics**

In order to assess how turnout does or does not affect electoral winners and policy outcomes at the local level, we need to develop a model of how local government works. This is a much more difficult task than it may at first appear. Scholars of urban politics have had a difficult time figuring out exactly what forces are or are not at play in influencing the actions of local government. From C. Wright Mills' seminal work "The Power Elite," to Robert Dahl's well known "Who Governs?" and more recently to Paul Peterson's influential book "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.

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potential for uneven voter turnout to affect outcomes.

<sup>14</sup> Although this book will only use one measure - the vote - to assess racial conflict and cooperation and conflict, it, nevertheless represents an important first step in gauging race relations. Most existing studies of racial conflict and cooperation at the local level are either anecdotal in nature - focusing on a particular incident or city - or they rely on public opinion surveys rather than actual political behavior as their data points (Jones-Correa 2001, Jennings 1994, Kim 2000, Saito 1998, Horton 1995, Bobo and Johnson 2000, Bobo and Hutchings 1996, Cummings and Lambert 1997, Hochschild and Rogers 1999, Jackson et al 1994, Kaufmann 2000, Tedin and Murray 1994). By focusing on the vote across a range of cities we get a more concrete and more representative measure of inter-group relations.

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). 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. But 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 latter 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).<sup>15</sup>

Given the 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

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<sup>15</sup> 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

problem with existing studies is that each only generally tests for influences from one or two sides of the debate. 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 factors that directly tests for political, economic, institutional, and bureaucratic inputs this book should provide a convincing account of how local policy decisions are made.

Perhaps not surprising, 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 redistributive 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. More specifically, we find that spending patterns are not closely aligned with actual needs.

## **Outline**

The rest of the book proceeds as follows. In Chapter One I review the existing literature on voter turnout and its implications in American politics. With few exceptions, this empirical research concludes that low voter turnout has few real consequences for American politics. I challenge this finding, point to the narrow focus of the literature on national elections, and detail why turnout could matter more in local contests. Specifically, I point to two factors - relatively low turnout in local elections and high levels of racial and ethnic segregation across municipalities -

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1989, Clingermayer and Feiock 2001, Lineberry and Fowler 1967, Banfield and Wilson 1963 but see Morgan and Pelissero 1980).

that could increase the impact of turnout in local contests. I also present and explain 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. In essence, those who vote look differently than those who do not vote. It illustrates the substantial racial divides that shape local voting preferences. Put another way, groups that vote regularly choose differently from those who vote irregularly. And finally, it shows that due 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. Put simply, groups who vote less regularly are large enough to have a say in the cities where they actually live. The basic conclusion is that turnout could matter. 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 one group in particular, 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 community is eliminated. African Americans, on the other hand,

could most be helped by institutional reform. Higher turnout has little effect on black council representation. In Chapter Five, I focus on the link between voter turnout and local policy outcomes. Specifically, the chapter tests whether cities with higher turnout spend more on programs that minorities tend to favor. Yet again, the tests show that America's low turnout greatly reduces the ability of racial and ethnic minorities to translate their preferences into political outcomes. Combined, these three chapters raise serious questions about the fairness of American democracy and highlight the need to address low and uneven participation in local democracy. Chapter Six begins to try to address the problem by looking at the range of solutions that have been advanced in the hope of expanding involvement 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 does offer a viable means to greatly 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 concerns about continued growth in the Latino and Asian American populations and ongoing under-participation of both groups. In addition, I draw attention to other contexts – including state level 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, we have precious little evidence indicating that it does. In fact, a rather extensive empirical literature strongly suggests that raising or lowering turnout would do little to change the face of American democracy. With higher or more even turnout, there would be no big winners. With lower turnout, there would 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 do empirical studies of the American electorate reach this conclusion? First, when comparing the political preferences of voters to those of nonvoters, these studies generally find 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 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. The results of

these studies are clear. Even some of the biggest critics of America's low turnout are forced 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 behavior" (Wattenberg 2002:105).<sup>16</sup>

The other, perhaps more direct way of demonstrating that turnout is largely inconsequential is by calculating how outcomes would or would not change if turnout were higher or if everyone voted. These 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 over 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).<sup>17</sup>

In the end, it seems clear from this literature that the effects of turnout are neither consistent, nor large. The candidates who win elections would generally still be the winners no

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<sup>16</sup> 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).

<sup>17</sup> 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

matter how many voters came to the polls (Highton and Wolfinger 2001, Teixeira 1992, Erikson 1995, Martinez and Gill 2002). Ruy Teixeira sums up the findings well in stating that “most existing outcomes are fairly robust and unlikely to change through simply expanding the voter pool” (1992:88). 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, in particular, that the enfranchisement of African Americans through the civil rights movement led to dramatic gains for the black community. 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). In short, we know that turnout matters most of the time.

Can it really be that present day American politics is the one context in which turnout does not matter? Or is there something wrong with how researchers have assessed turnout

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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).



affects in the modern 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 is that existing studies might be understating the potential of turnout by limiting themselves to examining the small changes in turnout that occur across any given set of American elections (eg Grofman et al 1997). If one only compares higher to lower 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, turnout would have little effect on outcomes.

A second reason to believe that existing studies might be underestimating turnout effects is their reliance 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 to be at first glance. 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 characteristics 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 skewed. Piven and Cloward (1988), for example, offer compelling 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. Although these claims are compelling, 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 and Ramirez 2004, 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 a 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.<sup>18</sup> 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?**

Despite the seemingly incontrovertible results of the existing literature, we believe that there is still reason to be skeptical and to fear that voter turnout does skew outcomes in American politics. Our skepticism rests in large part from the narrowness of the existing research. All of the research we have cited so far –almost all of the research on this question – focuses on the national level. Does turnout matter in presidential elections? Does turnout shift the balance of power in the Senate or Congress? These are important questions but by no means do they cover the entire breadth of American democracy. If there are differences between national politics on one hand and state and local politics on the other hand, then the fact that we have so far ignored everything other than national level contests may be very consequential.

Moreover, a closer look at the literature does reveal some interesting variation across different levels of American democracy. A series of articles focusing not on national or state elections but instead on policy at the sub-national level has been somewhat more encouraging of

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<sup>18</sup> In addition to these three sets of critiques, there are a range of other studies that have tried to assess bias in national politics in different ways but none seems to be able to refute the notion that turnout is largely inconsequential. One line of research has looked at the connection between the behavior of elected officials and the preferences of voters and nonvoters. Griffin and Newman (n.d.), in particular, present data which suggests that voters' preferences predict Senate roll call behavior while nonvoters' preferences do not. Similarly, an earlier study by Verba and Nie (1972) demonstrated greater congruence between local leaders' views and constituent opinion when participation was higher. It is not, however, clear whether voter turnout is driving elite behavior in either case. As Griffin and Newman readily admit it is not clear whether the reason for the extra influence of voters 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.

the turnout hypothesis. Several studies have, in fact, 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, 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 one more 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 either that class bias in turnout at the state level has no effect on policy (Radcliff and Saiz 1998) or that increases in minority voter turnout actually lead to a white backlash and less spending on minority preferred outcomes (Radcliff and Saiz 1995). But the positive findings of at least a few studies at the sub-national level hint at two possibilities. First, where we look for turnout effects may be important. Second, turnout may be more important outside of national contests. All of this suggests that researchers may have been looking in the wrong place.

### **Where Turnout Should Matter: The Case of Local Politics**

In this book we begin to address this void by looking at the implications of voter turnout at the local level. We 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. Our primary motivation for focusing on the local political arena is theory. We 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.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the biggest differences 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 2004, 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 outside of national elections is important because it means that the skew in turnout can be that much worse. 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 even. If, however, only a small fraction of the population participates, the skew can be severe.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, we might be especially concerned about

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<sup>19</sup> 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, Hills 2003). 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 2003, Carmines and Stimson 1989).

<sup>20</sup> 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).

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

The second reason why 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 many cities, districts, and 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 (Brookings 2002). Whether or not their votes are added to the presidential vote tally, there is little chance that they will decide the outcome. A similar story can be told for almost any disadvantaged minority group at the national level. Looking exclusively at national elections, thus, almost necessarily 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 actually 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 to be located in cities and municipalities that have dense minority populations (Massey 2001). If we are concerned about the effects of a skew in the electorate we need to look at a series of smaller political units where the effect of different groups could begin to weigh in.

### **Evidence at the local level**

Although there are strong reasons to suspect that voter turnout plays a more critical role in the local political arena, empirical evidence at the local level is extremely sparse. At the same time that low voter turnout in national attention has garnered considerable attention and concern, much lower turnout in municipal elections has often been ignored. Leighley (2001) and Verba et al (1995) detail participation rates for different racial, ethnic, and demographic groups in local elections and Oliver (2001), Hajnal and Lewis (2003), and Wood (2002) examine the causes of low voter turnout in local elections but prior to these studies there was little research on the nature and implications of low local voter turnout. 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). More importantly, for the question at hand, there is 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 the local level.

This is not to say that urban scholars have been mute on the question. There is, in fact, a robust debate about how open the urban political arena is to different voices in the local community. A long line of pluralists starting with Dahl (1961) have claimed that the

mobilization of residents into voters has the potential to 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 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 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries suggested that the active exclusion of blacks and new immigrant groups from the political arena allowed the Irish to dominate local politics. 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 decision making is largely a function of economic considerations (Peterson 1981, Tiebout 1956, Logan and Molotch 1987, Buchanan 1971). Peterson (1981), in particular, showed that a city's policy choices are constrained by the cost of providing different services and the overall fiscal capacity of the city. 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).

Unfortunately, neither side has been able to offer anything in the way of a direct test of 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 its 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 a test of turnout.

### **Research Design**

To see if and how turnout matters in the local level, the rest of the book focuses on three aspects of the 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 who wins and who loses in mayoral elections in major cities. Here the question is: does even turnout mean we would get different winners? In the second part of the analysis I examine the link between turnout and racial and ethnic representation on city councils nationwide. Here the question is: 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. Here the question is: 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 and 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 and is often the main elected power base (Krebs and

Pelissero 2003).<sup>21</sup> Similarly, how much money local governments spend on different sets of policies is one of the most insightful measures not only of a government's priorities but also of who is winning and who is losing in the local democratic process. Unless a local government doles out sizeable economic resources to a policy, that policy is likely to have little impact and any group that favored that policy is likely to lose out. If turnout can lead to real change in these three aspects of local government, it truly matters.

The second reason to choose these three measures is that it allowed me to gauge racial and ethnic minority success along several key dimensions of representation. Without assessing a range of indicators of minority representation and in particular without assessing both descriptive and substantive representation, I would be offering an incomplete and perhaps inaccurate picture of how turnout affects minority representation (Guinier 1992, Mansbridge 1999, Thernstrom 1987, Swain, Tate, Lublin 1997).

Following this logic, I choose to focus on mayoral and city council winners because both represent the most obvious and perhaps the most important measure of minority success – the election of racial and ethnic minorities to office. 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 symbolic to more concrete. By demonstrating the openness of a democracy to the minority community, descriptive representation can be critical in instilling legitimacy and trust in a 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 to the majority white community (Hajnal 2006). More concretely and

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<sup>21</sup> 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).

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. Specifically, 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 candidate who won the contest can be seen as winners. Minority voters who supported a candidate who lost can be viewed as losers in that particular contest. This is an important alternative to descriptive representation because it makes no assumptions about which candidate is the minority candidate. Although empirical studies show that most minority voters tend to prefer minority candidates in most bi-racial elections, it is certainly not always the case (McCrary 1990, Hero 1989., Williams 1990).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, in races without minority candidates, the minority vote can be quite divided. By simply counting up 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 interests.

Finally, through an analysis of how well local government spending patterns mirror the policy priorities of minority constituents, I provide a third distinct measure of the representation of racial and ethnic minorities. Although electoral 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.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, ending up on the losing side

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<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> 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).

of an election does not always mean failure for minority voters. Leaders can be responsive to voters who voted against them.<sup>24</sup> 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 impact. Thus, the more that spending patterns are closer in line with the public opinion of most minority constituents, the more that minorities can be seen as being well represented.<sup>25</sup>

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. But combined, they should present a fairly complete picture both of how well minorities are doing in democracy and how much that success is impacted by voter 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

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<sup>24</sup> By turning out to vote in great numbers minorities and other disadvantaged groups could become a large enough threat that they motivate leaders who they vote against to be more responsive to their interests.

<sup>25</sup> 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

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 – acquired from exit polls, ecological inference, or homogeneous precinct analysis – and the racial and ethnic makeup of each city – obtained from the Census. To gauge the effects of uneven turnout, I simply compare the actual outcome with the 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, I can then 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

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difficult to intuit minority interests and thus difficult to gauge minority representation. Data on minority spending preferences is presented later in the book.

and social services, while whites and the middle class are especially concerned about 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 the following 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.<sup>26</sup> By performing essentially the same set of tests on this PPIC survey data, I 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 analytical method, time period, and geography. The analytic differences are important and worth highlighting. In particular, 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 test of how much uneven turnout matters and 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 test of how much aggregate turnout matters and is a measure of actual rather than potential turnout affects. The different time periods that are focused on in the analysis are also significant. The mayoral data and

California 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 cities 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.

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<sup>26</sup> For more details on the PPIC survey see the appendix and Hajnal et al (2002).

## **Chapter 2. 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 does lead to skewed outcomes at any level in American democracy, it is, I maintained, 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 the local level, three conditions are necessary. First, turnout must be skewed. Some groups must participate less than other groups. This, I suggested, was much 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 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 to 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**



There is no disputing the fact that local elections spawn 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.<sup>27</sup> Data from more recent California elections suggest that turnout for mayoral elections is no better.<sup>28</sup> Across the state, mayoral elections drew an average of only 28 percent of the voting age population to the polls.<sup>29</sup> Even if we focus only on 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.<sup>30</sup> What's more, all of these figures probably 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.<sup>31</sup> At the local level where most 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.

In addition, there are clear signs that local voter turnout is declining. The best data we have indicate that participation in local contests has declined steadily since the 1930s. The drop has, in fact, been precipitous. 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

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<sup>27</sup> To get this overall measure of local voter turnout, I utilize responses from the 1986 ICMA survey of city clerks – the most recent nationally representative survey with data on aggregate turnout and registration figures.

<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> The same California data indicate that city council turnout averaged a meager 28 percent in 2001.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> A study of Michigan school districts in 2000 found that registered voter turnout averaged only 7.8 percent across the 477 districts (Weimer 2001).

percent in 1986 – the last year for which we 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. 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 only getting weaker.

There is also no disputing the fact that participation in local contests falls well below participation in national and statewide contests. All of these local turnout figures are well below turnout figures for national contests. In the last two decades, over 60 percent of the voting age population has turned out in the typical presidential contests. Figures for mid-year Congressional elections are only marginally lower – with about 40 percent turning out 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 cases local turnout is half that of national elections. And for a full 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. 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, there is clearly reason to suspect that the local electorate could be strongly skewed.

### **Voters Look Different**

Low turnout does not, however, necessarily mean that voters will look differently from nonvoters. To see 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. Equally important, it has 2517 respondents across almost 1000 different communities in the country.<sup>32</sup> This distribution across different localities makes it an ideal data set to assess the skew in local voter turnout across the nation.

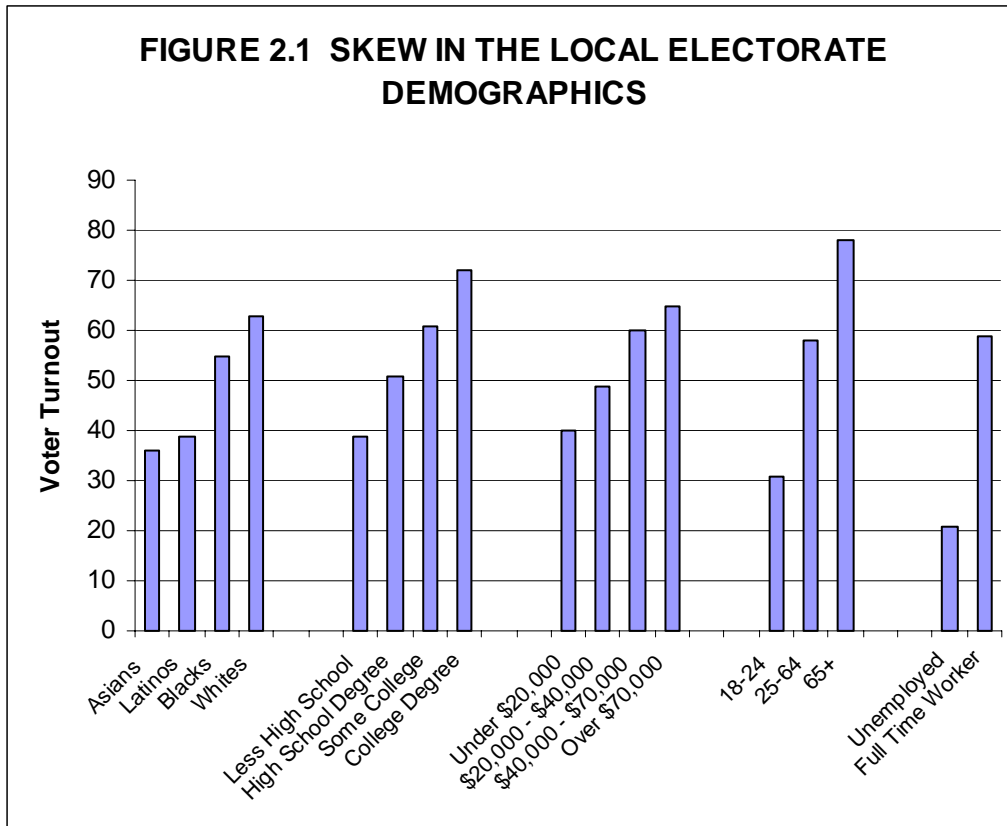
Suspensions of skewed turnout at the local level are largely borne out by the data. In Figure 2.1, I examine bias or skew in the local electorate across a wide range of demographic characteristics that have in other circumstances been shown to be related to voter turnout (Verba et al 1995, Rosenstone and Hanson 1993). The figure presents self-reported local voting rates for voting age adults.<sup>33</sup> 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).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The localities included in the sample are reasonably representative both institutionally and demographically of all of the nation's localities.

<sup>33</sup> 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).

<sup>34</sup> The Silver et al research finds 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 obvious conclusion from the figure is 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, the unemployed, English speakers) 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). Put simply, local voters do not look at all like local non-voters.

For our purposes, the gap by race and ethnicity is particularly important. It is also quite large. Specifically, 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 are going to be on the winning side of democracy and racial and ethnic minorities are going to be 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 illustrated in the GSS data closely match the patterns found here.

Since these figures are based on self-reported turnout and since we know that people overreport 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 ten 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. This comparison confirms the basic patterns we see here. More advantaged segments of the population are much more likely to participate in local contests than disadvantaged groups in the population and whites are much more likely to go to the polls than racial and ethnic minorities.<sup>35</sup> There is, in short, a severe skew to the local electorate. The bottom line of this comparison of local voters and local nonvoters is that a skewed electorate could affect who wins in local democracy.

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<sup>35</sup> The two worst off groups were once again Latinos and Asian Americans. Latinos made up almost a quarter of the adult population of these cities but only 13 percent of the voters in the exit polls. Asian Americans made up 7 percent of the adult population and only 3 percent of the voting population. By contrast, whites were greatly overrepresented among voters – 49 percent of voters compared to 40 percent of adult population.

## Different Preferences

For turnout to matter in local politics, the second requirement is that the preferences of groups that vote less regularly must differ from the preferences of groups that vote more regularly. Existing studies suggest that these differences are not that pronounced on matters of national policy. But what about on questions of local policy? And even more importantly, what happens when members of different groups actually vote in local elections? Do groups that participate less favor different candidates in local contests than groups that participate more regularly? Or more precisely for our purposes, do racial and ethnic minorities tend to choose different candidates than whites?

Unlike in national opinion polls, in surveys about local policy, racial divisions are often fairly clear.<sup>36</sup> Local 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.<sup>37</sup> But opinions on surveys are not votes in the voting booth. Survey data is helpful but it doesn't really tell us how large the divide in local electoral contests is. Choices in

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<sup>36</sup> I was also able to use the same ACPS survey to see if large racial divisions in opinion exist on questions of national policy. As others have found with data from national elections, the policy skew at the local level is not nearly as severe as the demographic skew. There is a consistent bias to the policy preferences of the active electorate. On all but one of the national policy questions I examined, respondents with conservative views were at least marginally more likely to report voting in local elections than those with more liberal views. However, the skew is much less dramatic than the pattern visible in figure 2.1. The gaps in turnout on national policy questions are much smaller – ranging from 0 to 12 percentage points – and on several of the policy questions, there is no obvious difference between voters and nonvoter. One might thus be tempted to dismiss the notion of a political skew to the local electorate. However, it is not at all clear that the relevant metric with which to assess the impact of local turnout is national policy. The key to local elections is not national policy preferences but local electoral choices.

<sup>37</sup> 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).

the local electoral arena depend critically on the candidates that are on the ballot and the kinds of campaigns they run. Those candidates seek to be clear representatives of a particular racial community and can offer starkly different visions of the future or they can be very similar in their background and agendas. Thus, without look at a range of actual elections, we cannot know how united or divided the vote really is.

Unfortunately, systematic data on local voting patterns by race is limited. There are a number of studies focusing on the black-white divide. And in most cases that research has revealed major divisions and regular conflict between these two groups (Lieske and Hillard 1984, Stein and Kohfeld 1991, McCrary 1990, Loewen 1990, Hajnal 2006). But it is not at all clear how well data from a black-white context apply to the much more complex, multi-racial environment facing most cities today. And 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).

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 have 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 still not a lot of cases.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, it is a major improvement from the case study nature of previous

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<sup>38</sup> The exact mechanisms by which each of these institutions would work is also not entirely clear. Given that political parties have traditional been one of the key mobilizers of immigrants and the working class, nonpartisan elections might limit lower class influence by reducing role of parties. Nonpartisan elections might reduce lower class influence by making voting decisions less clear and possibly confusing and turning off less educated voters.

research.<sup>39</sup> For another, the data set is incomplete. Data on racial voting patterns were simply 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.<sup>40</sup> Another concern is that the estimates of the vote by race that I use are imprecise. To assemble the data, I had to use different methods for estimating the vote by race in different elections.<sup>41</sup> 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 elections represents a potentially valuable tool that is likely to be more telling than other measures that are currently available.

What the vote tells us is that local elections are fairly sharply divided by race and ethnicity. In particular, those who do vote regularly – whites – often have different preferences from those that vote less regularly – racial and ethnic minorities. As Table 3.2 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

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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.

<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup> To try to address this issue, I 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.



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 rare when black and white voters wanted the same things at the local level.

**Table 3.2. 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

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

<sup>41</sup> For most cities, I rely on exit polls but in other cases I employ ecological inference using precinct data. In other cases, I rely on homogenous precinct analysis. And in still others, I use polls immediately prior to the election to get

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. The fact that nonwhites vote much less often than whites could be altering the outcomes of local electoral contests.

### **Minorities are large enough to have a say**

For turnout to matter at the local level one last condition is necessary. Groups that turnout less must be large enough to have some say. Nationwide we know that this is seldom the case. Since racial and ethnic minorities make up a small fraction of the national electorate, whether or not they vote in national contests is almost immaterial. Their voting or lack of voting generally will not determine the outcome of the contest. But what about at the local level? Does the uneven geographic distribution of the population make a difference? Are the groups that participate less in local politics large enough to sway electoral outcomes? And in particular are racial and ethnic minorities numerous enough to determine electoral outcomes were they to participate more regularly?

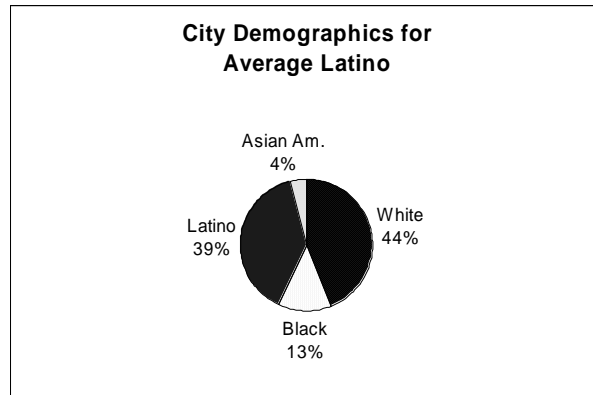
Most Americans know that neighborhood level segregation is often very pronounced in the nation's cities (Massey and Denton 1993). What fewer know is that segregation by city or municipality is also quite pronounced. The most recent data we have suggest that half of all blacks would have to move to a different city to achieve an even racial distribution across city lines (Massey 2001, Massey and Hajnal 1995). In other words, segregation by race and ethnicity may be severe enough that it could lead to a situation in which racial and ethnic minorities live in cities where they make up large portions of the electorate and as such could have a real say in determining who wins and who loses.

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the vote by race. None of these estimates is error free and the margin of error is sometimes large.

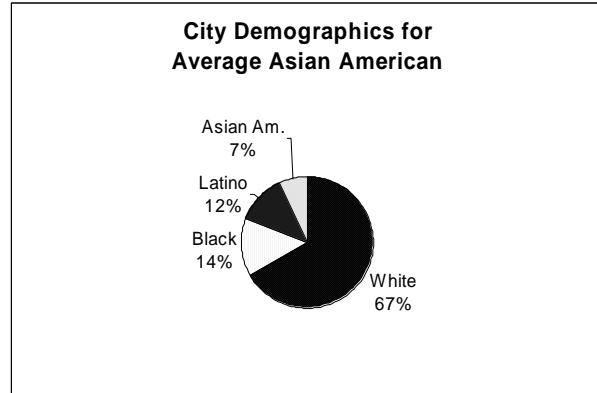
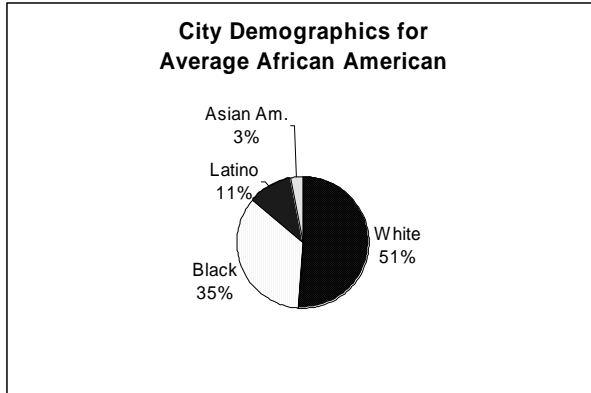
To determine if this is the case, I returned to the ACPS survey. By coupling ACPS respondents with Census data on the racial demographics of their municipalities, I can calculate the city demographics for the typical minority resident.<sup>42</sup> The results, which are displayed in Figure 2.3, indicate that the uneven geographic distribution of the population does potentially give racial and ethnic minorities a larger voice in the local political arena. As the figure 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.<sup>43</sup> So unlike at 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.

### **Minorities Live in Cities with large Minority Populations**



<sup>42</sup> With a national sample of 2517 respondents across 1000 municipalities, the ACPS is an ideal tool for this purpose.

<sup>43</sup> By comparison, the national population in 1990 was only about 12 percent African American, 12 percent Latino, and 4 percent Asian American.



The bottom line is that there are strong reasons to believe that voter turnout could matter 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 to have a say if they did vote. If we are going to look anywhere for turnout effects, we should be looking at the local political environment. 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**

When Harold Washington walked into Donnelley Hall on election night in 1983, African Americans in the city were jubilant. For black Chicagoans, Washington's mayoral victory was about more than a chance to get a new face in office, it 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 Dempsey 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. The hopes of much of the black community now rested on his shoulders. For Harold Washington and for many African Americans it truly was 'our turn.'

Victories like Harold Washington's in Chicago or Antonio Villaraigosa's more recent ascendancy to the mayoralty in Los Angeles represent a real breakthrough that could signal the fulfillment of a long held dream. 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 of their choice who would help minorities to control their own destiny. 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 reform to police practices (Headley 1985; Lewis 1987), increased efficacy and participation among minority voters (Tate 2003, Gay 2001, Bobo and Gilliam 1989), and perhaps most importantly by real shifts in white attitudes toward the minority community (Hajnal 2006).

The larger reality is, however, that these electoral victories have been relatively sparse. Despite fairly rapid growth in the number of minority elected officials, the political leadership of America remains overwhelmingly white.<sup>44</sup> Although the national population is now roughly 13 percent African American, blacks hold only about 1.8 percent of all elected offices nationwide (JCPS 2003). Latinos are even worse off. They occupy less than one percent of the nation's elected offices, even though they account for 15 percent of the nation's population. Similarly, despite representing about 4 percent of the national population, Asian American office-holding is, relatively speaking, almost imperceptible. At the local level, the numbers are only a little 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 0.3 percent of the nation's city council seats.<sup>45</sup> The mayor's office is also a primarily white office. Of all the nation's mayors, only 2.1 percent are black, 1.8 percent are Latino, and 0.2 percent are Asian American (MacManus and Bullock 1993). The bigger story is that we still do not have nearly as many minority elected officials as we might have expected or hoped for. We continue to live in a world in which the political leadership is predominantly white.<sup>46</sup>

The simple question is why. Why forty years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, long after most of the major hurdles to minority access to the vote have been removed, are America's racial and ethnic minorities so underrepresented in the halls of power? Why are racial

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<sup>44</sup> This is not to deny that real growth in the number of minority elected officials. 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 4500 Latinos in elected office (NALEO 2005). 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).

<sup>45</sup> Figures are from the 2001 ICMA survey.

<sup>46</sup> Racial and ethnic minorities are, of course, not the only groups underrepresented in political offices. Women, for example, represent only about 15 percent of the seats in the U.S. Congress, 26 percent of statewide executive positions, 23 percent of state legislative offices, and 12 percent of the nation's mayoralities (CAWP 2005). Surveys

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

There are a number of reasons for this state of affairs but the answer that I offer and focus on is voter turnout.<sup>47</sup> Most major barriers to minority participation in American democracy may already have been removed but it is clear, as we saw in the last chapter, that racial and ethnic minorities still do not participate at nearly the same rate as the white majority. Logically speaking, this under-participation by racial and ethnic minorities could readily account for much of the under-representation of their communities in positions of power. In a democracy, voters determine electoral outcomes. Nonvoters do not. If minorities do not vote or vote less than whites, it essentially gives the white majority the ability to control the outcomes of most elections and prevent the election of more racial and ethnic minorities to office.

The connection between low voter turnout and low minority representation seems logical enough but is it true? In this chapter, I 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. I begin by focusing on the mayor's office because the mayor is, in most cases, the symbolic leader of the city – the number one elected official. 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.<sup>48</sup> 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

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of office holders also indicate that the vast majority come from privileged backgrounds – measured either by education or income (Conyers and Wallace 1976).

<sup>47</sup> The unwillingness of the white majority to support minority candidates, the limited economic and social resources of the minority community, and the limited number of minority candidates running for all office all surely contribute to the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities in public office.

other elective posts, the mayoralty is close to the people, affects their daily lives, their futures" (Levinson 1983:232).<sup>49</sup> And in cases where the mayor has the power to veto legislation and shape the budget, the importance of the post is even more apparent. In short, we should care who wins the mayor's office.

### **Simulating equal turnout**

How would we know if low minority participation affects the outcomes of mayoral elections? The easiest and one of the best ways to answer this question is simply to compare the actual outcome of a contest with the outcome if there had been even turnout across racial and ethnic groups. If more minorities had voted, would the final vote have been different? 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 makeup 25 percent of the voters. The next step is to add up the numbers for each of the racial groups in the city to see what percentage of

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<sup>48</sup> 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).

<sup>49</sup> 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).



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 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 or, 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 actually turned out. There are three 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.<sup>50</sup> Second, where we could identify the socioeconomic status of precincts in each city, we rarely see substantially different voting preferences in mayoral contests between high and low status precincts within the same racial/ethnic group. Finally, Hajnal and Baldassare (2001) found only small differences between the preferences of voters and unregistered residents of the same race on a range of policy measures in direct democracy.

Although we are fairly confident that the voting preferences of racial minorities who do not vote are fairly similar to the voting preferences of racial minorities from the same racial group who do vote, we are less confident that other changes in the local political environment would not occur 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. 1997). One would expect that potential candidates and future election campaigns would respond in important ways to a growing minority vote that would in turn affect the kinds of options available to each group.<sup>51</sup> 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 tell us exactly what would happen. 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 actually do occur across different cities and different elections. Combined, these two methods gives us estimates of both the full potential of turnout changes in the future and of the more limited reality of turnout effects today.

## **Data**

In simulating mayoral outcomes, we focus on two different sets of cities. The primary data set consists of simulations of outcomes for the most recent mayoral election in the nation's ten largest cities. 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

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<sup>50</sup> 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.

<sup>51</sup> Certainly, one possibility is that minority gains would reinforce themselves. We know, for example, that the election of minorities to office raises minority voting participation (Gay 2001, Bobo and Gilliam 1989, 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

cities. To address this concern and to offer a broader assessment of turnout effects, we also collected data on the vote 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. However, since we were only able to obtain estimates for about a half of these elections, there is some concern that the available data for this larger data set may not be representative. Ultimately, by looking at the results of both sets of elections, we hope to provide a reasonable overall account of the potential of turnout to change 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 the voting age (citizen) population of the city and 2) estimates of the voting preferences of each racial and ethnic group in the contest. Obtaining the racial and ethnic makeup of each city is not difficult. These figures are available from the 1990 and 2000 Census.<sup>52</sup> 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). 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

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community, then minority voters might get frustrated and stop voting (Hajnal 2006). In this case, increased turnout and minority victories might only be temporary.

<sup>52</sup> 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

homogeneous precinct analysis method outlined by Loewen and Grofman (1989:602-603).<sup>53</sup> Finally, for a small set of cities we were forced to use polls that occurred immediately prior to the election. While we admit 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 analysis, we calculate confidence intervals around our simulated vote tallies so that we can determine whether changes in outcomes are statistically significant or not.<sup>54</sup>

### **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

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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.

<sup>53</sup> 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.

<sup>54</sup> 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.

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**

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

Source: Estimates of voting preferences by race from: <sup>a</sup>Exit Polls <sup>b</sup>Homogenous Precinct Analysis <sup>c</sup> Ecological Inference using actual precinct returns. City demographics from 2000 Census.

\* change in vote significant at  $p < .05$  <sup>#</sup> no estimate of significance available

At the outset 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.<sup>55</sup> 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 or less urban cities. At the same time we think it is important to note that these are certainly not the only cities with larger minority populations. In fact, the last census reported that non-Hispanic whites were less than half of the population in 61 percent of all cities across the United States with populations over 100,000 (Census 2002). Thus, there are many

<sup>55</sup> African Americans make up 25 percent, Latinos 31 percent, and Asian Americans 7 percent of the population in these cities.

local arenas where blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans do form a large portion of the population 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 clear conservative in a nonpartisan contest also involving two white candidates. Thus, while the new winners were not all minorities or all liberals, each new winner would have brought a significantly different policy agenda to his city than the actual winner did. In short, equal turnout would have made a real difference in each of these three contests. More broadly, 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 in terms of 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 the losing candidate gained by almost exactly the same amount in these 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 30 percentage points had turnout been even.

At the same time, it is clear that turnout did not always have an important effect.<sup>56</sup> 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 largest twenty 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. Had turnout been even across racial groups, our simulations indicate that roughly 13 percent of the elections (6 of 45) would have had a different winner under the simulations. In most cases, the new victor offered a substantially different agenda from the old victor. In addition to the reversals 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 woman had all racial and ethnic groups turned out at the same rate in that city. Finally, the 1997 Democratic Primary would have led to

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<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, as Table 3.1 indicates, in almost all of the cases, simulating equal turnout produced statistically significant changes in the vote outcome.

a victory by fiery black candidate, Al Sharpton instead of Ruth Messinger, a quintessential white liberal.

	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 equally 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, it is once again clear that turnout did not matter in many of the contests. 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 seen as a cure to electoral outcomes in every city. As we will see later, there are specific contexts in which voter turnout plays little role. However, for a number of elections, turnout is a critical factor and across the entire set of elections, turnout seems to have a reasonably large average affect.



Moreover, these findings maybe understating the full potential of turnout to transform electoral outcomes. Up to now, 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 do the analysis the way we have proceeded so far and to leave these non-citizens out of the electoral equation. Under American law only citizens can vote in local contests for mayor and city council. There is also little reason to believe that laws about non-citizens voting will change anytime in the near future.<sup>57</sup> In addition, even if these non-citizens could vote, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that they would not vote regularly. Studies repeatedly show that when immigrants - especially those who are poor and less well educated - do become eligible, they participate infrequently in the political process (Cho 1999, DeSipio 1995, Leighley 2001, Verba et al 1995). Nevertheless, there are also strong reasons to at least consider what impact this group would 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 in that state (Pantoja and Segura 2000, Ramirez 2002). In other words, if spurred on enough by political events, large numbers of non-citizens could fairly quickly become involved in the political process and could have a say in who wins in a

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<sup>57</sup> Changes in these laws are not, however, unprecedented. Across the country, there are a number of localities that have sought to allow noncitizens to vote certain types of elections. One popular example is allowing all parents, regardless of citizenship, to vote in local school board elections.

variety of electoral contests. Given these facts, it made sense to at least consider the effects of including all voting age adults in the analysis.<sup>58</sup>

When we did re-run the electoral simulations using each group's proportion of the total adult population in each city, we found, perhaps not surprisingly, 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 – of which about half of these are – that means a 10 point change in the margin of victory. Judged by almost any standard, that is a major change in the electoral outcome. Even if that kind of change does not always immediately 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.

Moreover, in many cases, simulating even turnout of the adult population did lead directly to a new winner in our simulations. In 10 of the 45 elections – or 22 percent – simulating equal turnout led us to project 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 may 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

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<sup>58</sup> 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.

dramatic effect in these mayoral elections but judged by recent elections in the ten largest cities or by a larger array of elections in 20 cities and by simulations using voting age citizens or by simulations using voting age adults, turnout did matter regularly 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.<sup>59</sup> 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 find 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 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.<sup>60</sup>

Second, if we look more broadly at the entire set of 45 elections, we find that Latinos win again. In the vast majority of the elections, Latino voters gained from the simulations. Across

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Unfortunately, registration by race is almost never available at the local level.

<sup>59</sup> 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 tend not to vote as a bloc in these elections. The vote by race is detailed later in this chapter.

<sup>60</sup> 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.

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).<sup>61</sup> Across all of the elections, no other racial or ethnic group comes close to the gains made by Latinos.

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. 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.<sup>62</sup> But no matter how the contests are broken down, it is clear that turnout helped Latino voters more than others.

And it is not just Latino voters who would have gained. Latino candidates also fared well in the simulations. When even turnout did lead to a different projected winner, Latino candidates were the ones most likely to be chosen. Four of the ten reversals resulted in a Latino 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. Twice African American candidates went from losing an

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<sup>61</sup> 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.

electoral contest to winning that contest when we simulated even turnout across racial groups. 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 another white opponent. More importantly, a white candidate was on the losing side of the reversal in nine of the ten cases.<sup>63</sup>

Across the broader set of elections, the results diverged only slightly. The fifteen Latino candidates running in these elections would have garnered, on average, an additional 4.6 percent of the vote had turnout not been skewed by race (2.4 percentage points with the citizen only simulations). Asian American candidates, although fewer in number, would have gained even more. The three Asian American candidates that entered these contests would have increased their vote share 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. Because a limited number of Latino adults vote, 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. Since most of the elections are run as non-partisan

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<sup>62</sup> 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.

<sup>63</sup> In once 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.

contests and since categorizing the ideological leanings of each candidate is not always easy, this is not necessarily a straightforward task. However, for the ten cases where the simulations led to a new 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 Democratic than the old winner. Across the ten cases, we could detect a marked shift in the ideological leaning in seven of the ten cases. 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.<sup>64</sup> 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 been replaced by 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?**

Noting that turnout does matter and identifying who it hurts and who it helps is important but it does conceal important variation in the effects of turnout. As I 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

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<sup>64</sup> One reason for the more limited partisan implications of voter turnout in these elections is the fact that two of the ten reversals occurred in a Democratic Primary. In addition, in two of the nonpartisan contests, the two main

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 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 – if not impossible. 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 stood out. Although these three factors appeared to strongly 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 that could have at least a marginal impact in determining whether or not even turnout affected the electoral outcome.<sup>65</sup> As one might expect, the first is the race of the candidates. When minority candidates ran, turnout mattered more. The mean change in the vote for minority candidates under the voting age adult 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

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candidates were affiliated with the same party.

<sup>65</sup> One might, for example, expect turnout to matter more if the contestants were from different ethnic or racial backgrounds. Interestingly, 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

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 automatically meant dramatic turnout effects. There was an almost 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.<sup>66</sup>

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 all would shape the vote and turnout effects.<sup>67</sup> And finally, we need to test all of these factors

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candidates, whether it was a primary or a general elections, and whether or not the elections was partisan had no clear effect on how much turnout mattered.

<sup>66</sup> 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.

<sup>67</sup> 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.



against each other in a more complete model. But the preliminary results do help to 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. In this case, it is whether or not they enter as candidates, their overall numbers in the population, and their voting unity.

## **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 to expanded voter turnout. The big winners are Latinos. If we could somehow manage to expand minority participation in local contests, Latinos stand to gain on two fronts. Importantly, Latino *voters* would have more of a say in these contests. Candidates favored by Latinos would likely win more often. When our simulations led to a new winner, that new winner was always favored by a majority of Latino voters. And even when there was no reversal, Latino backed candidates increased their vote share – often by a lot. 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 we could increase turnout among Latinos, Asian 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 American democracy. 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. While 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. They give us a sense of the potential impact of turnout.

Another important concern is that these simulations assume that racial preferences would not change if turnout were more even. We cannot know if 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 all of these new voters into the contest would change the dynamics of the campaign and the election. One would certainly expect that candidates and campaigns would respond to any change in the balance of power within the electorate. This could help minorities.

With more minority voters, candidates and campaigns should more directly target minority interests and the minority vote. But it is not beyond the realm of the possible that the entry of more minority voters would result in a white backlash. In short, we cannot know with any certainty how the world of local politics would change if there were dramatic changes in the turnout of particular racial and ethnic groups. These results represent a reasonable estimate but they cannot tell us definitively what to expect in the future.

The other main concern with these results is that they are derived from a relatively 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 one simple solution. One need only examine actual changes in turnout across a wide variety of real world elections. If across these real world elections, higher, more even turnout is associated with more minority friendly outcomes, we will have firmer evidence of the deleterious effects of turnout on minority communities. That is the task to which we now turn.

## **Chapter Four. Turnout and representation on city councils**

The last chapter illustrated the broad potential of voter turnout to alter outcomes in American democracy. If we could get America's racial and ethnic groups to all turn out to vote at the same rate, winners in urban politics would likely look very different from what we see today. The results of the last chapter are therefore an important benchmark that helps us to understand how much low turnout is hurting America's racial and ethnic minority communities.

This chapter asks a narrower but no less critical question about the effects of turnout. The goal of this chapter is to assess how much real variation in turnout across cities and elections affect outcomes. Rather than asking what the world might look like if different racial and ethnic groups turned out at the same rate, we ask how differently the world does look in places where more voters do show up at the polls. The question here is: does higher, more equitable turnout in some cities lead to different outcomes from cities with lower turnout? It 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, in this chapter we shift our focus to city council representation to help ensure that the effects that we saw with the mayoralty are not an anomaly. The office of mayor may have a lot of symbolic importance but it is the city council that tends to do most of the real governing in the local political arena (Krebs and Pelissero 2003). Most American cities have a city council/city manager form of government where the council – rather than the mayor – is the highest elected office (Hajnal and Lewis 2003). And 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). That leaves the city council as the primary law-making body in

most cities. If turnout matters in city council elections, then we know that turnout is central to outcomes in local democracy.

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, here we examine the effects of turnout across a large, representative sample of American cities – 3524 to be exact. By looking at this broader set of cases, we can be more certain that our results present an accurate picture of the importance of turnout in the nation.

To determine how much turnout matters in these city council elections, we examine the link between aggregate voter turnout and council representation. The test is reasonably straightforward. We look to see if lower and presumably less equitable turnout leads to greater descriptive representation for racial and ethnic minorities. If turnout matters, racial and ethnic minority candidates should be elected less regularly in cities with higher aggregate turnout.

## **The Data**

To test the relationship between turnout and minority representation, we begin by utilizing data from utilizing data from the 1986 International City/County Manager's Association survey (ICMA). The 1986 ICMA survey is ideal for several reasons.<sup>68</sup> First, it is really the only data source to provide figures for local voter turnout across a large sample of America's cities.<sup>69</sup> 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 population of the

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<sup>68</sup> Although there are more recent ICMA surveys, the 1986 survey is the only ICMA survey that asks specifically about local voter turnout.

locality that responds is 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 representative of the nation as a whole (Aghion, Alesina, and Trebbi 2005).<sup>70</sup> Third, by polling city clerks directly, the survey is able to provide relatively accurate measures of voter turnout. As official record keepers, 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. A range of tests indicates that the registered voter figures reported by city clerks are, in fact, quite accurate.<sup>71</sup>

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

There is an important assumption behind this test – namely that turnout will be more skewed as turnout declines. Fortunately, there is ample evidence to indicate that turnout is, in fact, less skewed as turnout increases. Both Hill and Leighley (1992) and Jackson et al (1998)

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<sup>69</sup> 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.

<sup>70</sup> 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).

<sup>71</sup> 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 2004, Hampton and Tate

have shown that class bias in turnout across states in presidential elections declines as aggregate state turnout increases.<sup>72</sup> 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). Our own analysis 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). It is also worth noting that turnout is much less skewed for political activities that incorporate large 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). Finally, the only available data at the local level suggest that lower turnout in local contests also means a greater demographic skew. Evidence from mayoral election exit polls – albeit a small sample of ten elections across seven cities – indicates that higher turnout elections tended to be much more representative of the city population. In particular, in these contests, higher turnout was associated with greater representation of Latinos and Asian American residents in the voting population and less over-representation of white and black residents. The same pattern was evident for education – higher turnout meant greater relative participation of residents with low educations and lower relative participation of residents with a college education.<sup>73</sup>

Admittedly, aggregate turnout is likely to be only an imprecise proxy for class or racial/bias. This should, however, only make the test that much harder to pass. Given the noise

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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).

<sup>72</sup> Hill and Leighley (1992) found that aggregate turnout in presidential elections and class bias in turnout across states in presidential elections are correlated at .41 at the state level. Given that turnout rates at the local level vary across a much greater range than turnout across states, we might expect more of a correlation between aggregate turnout and class or racial/ethnic bias at the local level.

<sup>73</sup> Another test using the ACPS led to roughly similar results. Regression analysis shows that education strongly affected the likelihood that each individual survey respondents would report voting but add interaction terms with

in our measure, our results should, if anything, underestimate the magnitude of the effects of class or racial/bias on government spending patterns.<sup>74</sup> Finally, and critically, if we are wrong and there is no underlying relationship between local voter turnout and the skew of the electorate, our tests should reveal no relationship between turnout and government spending.

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.<sup>75</sup> We focus primarily on registered voter turnout rather than turnout of registered 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 voting data, there are reasons why 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 registered voter turnout. To address this concern, we repeat each of our tests with turnout of the eligible population. In the end, it does not matter which

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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).

<sup>74</sup> If this is noise is too severe, our tests should reveal no relationship between turnout and government spending.

<sup>75</sup> 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.



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 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 (Welch 1990, Grofman and Davidson 1994, Engstrom and Mc Donald 1982, Alozie 1992).<sup>76</sup> 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.

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<sup>76</sup> 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.

The ICMA survey that we use to obtain data on turnout fortunately 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 the 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 demographics on racial and ethnic minority representation 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 more well 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 city councils that are white, African American, Latino, and Asian American respectively as the dependent variables. 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)*
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<.05

The results of the analysis are clear. As can be seen in the first row of the table, 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.<sup>77</sup>

The pattern in Table Two 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 or decrease 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.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> 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). The results in Table 4.1 suggest 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 in that there are two possible interpretations of the patterns we see. The pattern could be an indication of fairly widespread Hispanic support for black and Asian American candidates and thus 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 forming regularly coalitions.

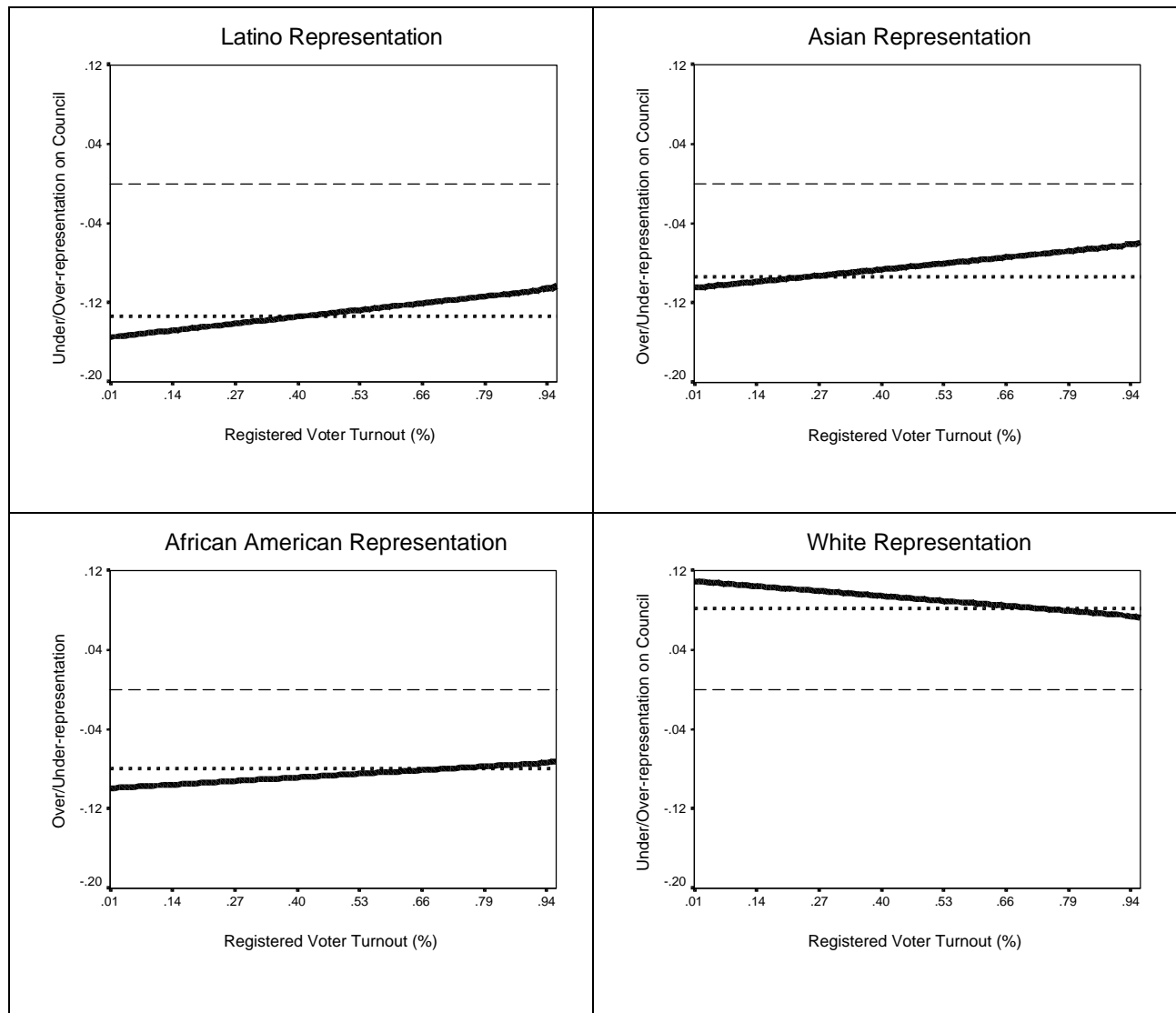
<sup>78</sup> Why do Asian Americans gain substantially here and less dramatically in our earlier analysis of mayoral elections? The main reason is likely that Asian American voters are much less divided when they have a chance to elect an Asian American candidate. Our entire data set of mayoral elections 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 proportional representation on city councils for each of the four racial/ethnic groups. To create Figure 4.1 we re-ran the analysis in Table 4.1 substituting a measure of 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) 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, for example, if Latinos were 30 percent of the city population, one might expect Latinos to hold 17 percent of the city council seats. 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 represent at least a quarter of the population, Latinos are 25 points below parity and Asian Americans are 22 points below parity.

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



The solid line represents predicted values of over/under-representation using the coefficients from Table 3. 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.

The question then becomes can increased turnout substantially reduce minority representation. 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 turnout (the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in terms of turnout) to an election

where 69 percent of registered voters turnout (the 90<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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. Likewise 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 do 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, 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 we could manipulate turnout enough to substantially impact minority underrepresentation in American democracy.

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

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<sup>79</sup> 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).

requisite political experience, citizenship requirements, and internal group divisions that also need to be considered. Turnout is only 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. 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. These alternate sets of analyses can be found in the Appendix. Both alternate dependent variables led to similar conclusions about the effect of turnout on equity in council representation. The bottom line from all of these tests is that turnout is a critical factor behind minority representation. Low voter turnout substantially reduces minority success in city council elections. The exceptionally low participation rates found in most local electoral contests may very well be creating a local political arena that serves whites and other advantaged interests more than it serves racial minorities and other disadvantaged groups.

### **The Contingent Effects of Turnout**

One of the main goals of this research has been to show that the effects of turnout are more pronounced at the local level than they are at the national level. But this, in many ways, is

only part of the story. There are also specific contexts at the local level in which we would expect turnout to matter more. In this next section, we consider two such contexts.

One of the biggest determinants of how much turnout matters for any given group is likely to be how large that group is. Put very simply, 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, 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.

**Table 4.2 Turnout Matters More When Groups Are Larger**

	<u>Whites</u>	<u>Blacks</u>	<u>Latinos</u>	<u>Asians</u>
Turnout	-.21 (.09)*	.02 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.00)*
<i>% white*turnout</i>	<b>.20 (.10)*</b>	---	---	---
<i>% black*turnout</i>	---	<b>-.04 (.07)</b>	---	---
<i>% latino*turnout</i>	---	---	<b>.29 (.07)*</b>	---
<i>% asian*turnout</i>	---	---	---	<b>.57 (.06)*</b>
Districts	.00 (.01)	.01 (.00)*	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Concurrent	.00 (.01)	.03 (.01)*	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)
Partisan	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	-.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 (.00)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.00)
Pop (log)	-.00 (.01)	.01 (.00)*	.00 (.00)	-.01 (.00)
Percent Poor	-.36 (.08)*	.39 (.12)*	.06 (.03)*	-.02 (.01)
Med. Income	.00 (.01)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.00)*
College Grads	-.12 (.05)*	.03 (.02)	.09 (.02)*	.00 (.01)
% Latino	-.71 (.06)*	.09 (.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



The results are clear. For 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. For example, with Latinos, the effects of turnout are over ten times as great when the Latino population is large then 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. By contrast, a jump in turnout from low to high turnout increases Latino representation on city councils by over 3 percentage points when Latinos make up a third of the population.<sup>80</sup> In short, expanded turnout matters much more to Asian Americans, Latinos, and whites when they are large enough to substantially affect the outcome of the vote. This should reinforce the view that turnout matters. If a group is large enough that it could have an influence in the local political arena, voter turnout will determine in large part whether or not it does.

A second set of contextual factors that could mediate the effects of turnout on minority representation 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, districts are drawn to create one dominant racial group in each district, then turnout should almost be irrelevant. Since a single racial/ethnic group makes up the vast majority of the population in each district, that group can turnout 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. Thus, to the extent that we see this kind of districting in American

cities, we might expect that turnout will have less of an effect on racial/ethnic representation on city councils in cities with district elections than in cities with at-large elections.

To see if turnout matters more under districts 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 mediating turnout effects. The lack of any significant effects 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 effect minority representation. In their quest to expand minority representation, advocates of minority rights have, in fact, focused much less of their attention 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

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<sup>80</sup> These simulations vary the quantity of interests from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 90<sup>th</sup> 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.

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 1998, Foner 1984). Equally importantly, the civil rights movement has been able to successfully challenge many of these structures in the courts and subsequent reform of these institutions in many states has often led to dramatic gains in minority representation (Parker 1990).

Among the institutions cited as being detrimental to minority or lower-class interests, at-large elections get the most attention (Grofman and Davidson 1994, Welch 1990, Bullock and MacManus 1990, Parker 1984, Davidson 1984). The logic is fairly straightforward. In an at-large system, if the white population can coordinate and vote for the same set of candidates, then they can control every council seat in every locality where they make up a majority of the active electorate. In these cities, minorities will essentially have no say in the outcome of the contest. Racial and ethnic minorities could control just under half of the votes and yet lose all of the seats. 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. Although the effectiveness of at-large elections depends on the nature of the white vote and the extent of the racial divide, it is certainly possible that the large number of at-large 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) the council-manager governing structure.<sup>81</sup> 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). The logic here is also straightforward. 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. It is not clear how many council seats is too few but given that over half of all cities have six or fewer council members it is clear that most cities could choose to expand the number of seats on their councils.

Nonpartisan elections – elections in which party labels are not included on the official ballot and parties do not have control over nominating procedures – were purportedly instituted by Progressives in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century to combat the graft and corruption that was viewed as an out-growth of the entrenched two-party system. But recent scholars have wondered whether nonpartisans elections serve merely to open the political arena to the middle class business interests by making politics less coherent 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, the move from concurrent elections – elections that coincide with statewide or national contests – to nonconcurrent elections was supposedly done to ensure that local contests would be decided by the most interested and knowledgeable voters. Critics have, however, countered that

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<sup>81</sup> 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

nonconcurrent elections reduce lower-class and minority influence by making voting in local elections more difficult and by weeding out only 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 ‘professionalize’ government and put power in hands of technocrats who have the knowledge to efficiently run city governments. But again more recent scholarship has argued that this restructuring of the city government power structure merely enabled middle and upper class white citizens to hand pick key government official 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 worrisome is the fact that most cities around the country have them in place today. 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.<sup>82</sup> If these structures represent barriers to minority success, they are undoubtedly having a widespread effect.

It is not, however, clear that these institutions do represent an ongoing barrier to minority representation. Despite arguments highlighting the potentially negative consequences of these structures, empirical evidence that demonstrates how much these institutions continue to hinder minority representation and which minorities they impact is limited. Much of the research

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compete for (Thompson and Moncrief 1993, Copeland 1997, Donovan and Snipp 1994).

<sup>82</sup> Figures are from the 2001 ICMA survey.

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, most of the efforts of the white community to reduce minority influence have been directed at the African American population. Consequently, most of the research has focused on how these institutions have affected black 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 (Sass 2005, Alozie 1992, Alozie and Manganaro 1993). Ultimately, institutions represent a potentially important but not fully tested alternative avenue to expanding representation.<sup>83</sup>

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

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<sup>83</sup> 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 any model include all relevant institutions.

nonpartisan elections, and 6) term limits. The results can be found in Table 4.3 which presents a look back at a subset of the results from the regressions in Table 4.1.

As the table reveals, the effect of institutions varies greatly across groups. Specifically, for one group 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 in that it identifies a new and potentially fruitful avenue to expanding black representation. Previous accounts of black underrepresentation have largely 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 1984). 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.

In both cases, 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 real impact. According to the model, reform on both measures together 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 substantial reduction in black under-representation.<sup>84</sup> Since the vast majority of cities across the nation hold at-large elections and most also hold off-cycle elections, there is clearly a lot of 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.

**Table 4.3. Institutional and Demographic Determinants of City Council Representation<sup>1</sup>**

	Whites	Blacks	Latinos	Asian Americans
<b>INSTITUTIONS</b>				
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

<sup>1</sup> 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. The effects 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 – however small the effects might be.

<sup>84</sup> 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.



For Latinos and Asians Americans, the story is different. Institutional change seems to offer much less hope in addressing inequalities in electoral outcomes for these other minority groups.<sup>85</sup> The one exception is term limits which at least at first glance appear to decrease Asian American representation. 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 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).

Why do these institutions matter for black representation and not for Latino and Asian American representation? We suspect that there 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 21 percent Asian American. For African Americans, the figure is 65 percent black. The lower levels of segregation mean that it will be 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. 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

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<sup>85</sup> 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.

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 would 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 21<sup>st</sup> Century American democracy could be that much more severe. At the same time, there are other changes that could 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 the 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). And, perhaps most important of all, if true, a greater willingness on the part of white voters to ignore race and vote for racial and ethnic minority candidates would mean that minority success is no longer dependant on minority turnout (Thernstrom 1987, Hajnal 2001). In short, it is not at all clear whether turnout matters more or less in American elections today. If we are to properly assess the effects of turnout in city councils, we need to consider temporal change. We need to see if more recent elections exhibit the same kinds of turnout effects.

To that end, I obtained data on recent elections in California. Along with colleagues from the Public Policy Institute of California, in 2000 I polled city clerks in every incorporated city in the state to acquire data on voter turnout in the most recent city level election and the institutional structure in each city. I 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, I 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 very well be where America ends up 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 primary advantage of using California as a case is its size and diversity. The size of the state 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. For comparison purposes, Table A1 in the appendix details the institutional structure and demographics of California cities and the nation as a whole.

One 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 variation on several key structures. In particular, the effects of nonpartisanship and the distinction between council/manager and mayor/council cities cannot be assessed in the state.<sup>86</sup>

We devised and distributed a mail questionnaire to every California municipality in late 2000.<sup>87</sup> The survey was sent to each city clerk, since they are designated as the chief municipal elections officials and often have unique, first-hand knowledge about the political life of their communities (Schneider and Teske 1995). 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.<sup>88</sup> A random sample of questionnaire responses was validated using municipal web pages and published newspaper accounts.<sup>89</sup> A copy of the survey is included in the Appendix.

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<sup>86</sup> The effects of nonpartisanship, for example, cannot be evaluated because all cities in the state are required to hold nonpartisan elections. 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 should be viewed with extreme caution.

<sup>87</sup> 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.

<sup>88</sup> 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.

<sup>89</sup> 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,

## **Turnout and Minority Representation in California**

A brief glance at the 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 29 percent of the state’s population but held only 12 percent of council seats. Similarly, Asian Americans accounted for almost nine percent of the city population but only 4.7 percent of council seats. African Americans were the one minority group that came close to proportional representation. Across the state blacks made up 4 percent of the population and held 4.9 percent of the council seats. As one would expect, whites were grossly overrepresented. Whites made up 53 percent of the state’s population and fully 78 percent of the council seats.

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 terms of low voter turnout. Turnout in local elections in California is depressingly 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.

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representativeness of the sample, missing data, and error correction see Hajnal, Lewis, and Louch (2002) or the appendix.

We test this relationship more systematically in Table 4.4. The table shows the effect of voter turnout on council representation for each of the state's four main racial/ethnic groups.<sup>90</sup> Mirroring the earlier analysis of the national data, in this model of minority representation, we control for each racial group's share of the local population, the local institutional structure, and a range of city demographic characteristics.<sup>91</sup>

**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

<sup>90</sup> 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 works better.

<sup>91</sup> 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.

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 that we tried, turnout had no effect on Asian American representation in the state. Whether this is because there truly is no relationship or because of data 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 is unclear.

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 at best a rough estimate. Nevertheless, it seems clear that turnout still has real potential to affect electoral outcomes in American democracy.

## **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 that we employed in this chapter. We did not simulate even turnout across racial groups. Nor did we imagine 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. The answer is 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, moving to high turnout, at least by our analysis, would eliminate much of the underrepresentation 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.

There is, however, one important caveat to these findings. Demonstrating the importance of turnout in affecting the number of minorities who are elected to office is not necessarily demonstrating the importance of turnout 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 how turnout affects what governments do once they are in office. That is the task to which we now turn.



## **Chapter 5. 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 who does not vote. But what happens after the election, once candidates enter office? Winning or not 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 or does not do once in office.

Thus, in this chapter, we present one last, critical test of turnout effects in the local political arena. Specifically, we look to see how voter turnout affects perhaps the most important indicator of government priorities – where governments 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 to determine who wins and who loses this battle, then there can be little doubt that turnout does matter 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 three simple categories. According to this traditional accounting, local governments can choose to devote their resources to redistributive spending, developmental spending, or 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.<sup>92</sup>

When broken down this way, it is clear that redistribution is not the primary function of local government (Peterson 1981, Logan and Molotch 1987). Of all the money local governments spend, 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.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, of the limited funds that do go toward redistribution, fully half are directed toward education, which although generally redistributive in nature, 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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<sup>92</sup> 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.

<sup>93</sup> 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 nature of local government's fiscal response to less advantaged segments of the population raises real concerns in part because federal government spending patterns 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 (Office of Management and Budget 2006). Housing and health care assistance to the poor also accounted for small fractions of the budget (1.1 and 6.9 percent respectively). If the most disadvantaged segments of American society are in need 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 (Keister and Moller 2000).<sup>94</sup> 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 urban inequality are hard to come by, inequality may be even more severe in urban areas where members of the underclass can 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

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<sup>94</sup>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.<sup>95</sup> Less than two percent of the top 15 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 patterns contribute to this inequality – racial or otherwise. However, it is a far from radical idea to suggest that limited redistributive spending might have contributed 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 did shift a significant portion of their resources toward less advantaged communities, there is at least the possibility 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.<sup>96</sup>

Why then don't local governments do more? Why is it that those who, in many ways, need it the most get the least from government? The story, as we will show, is a complicated one. But an important explanation that we 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

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<sup>95</sup> 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).

<sup>96</sup> There is also no guarantee that more money would help. 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).

the most likely to turnout. Logically, if individual voters are voting their own interests and governments are responding to voters, then the skew in turnout should lead to a skew in policy and specifically to limited spending on minority favored policy areas.

At this point, however, the link between turnout and local government spending is only conjecture. To see if low and uneven turnout is at least in part responsible for the limited resources that local governments expend on disadvantaged communities, in the rest of this chapter, we look to see if cities with higher and presumably broader turnout do 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 and less emphasis on development and allocational policies and other areas favored by more advantaged groups?

### **Racial Group Policy Preferences**

To assess this possibility, we first need to know what different groups of voters want. We especially want to identify the priorities of groups like racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged populations who vote less regularly and to contrast this with the priorities of more advantaged interest. Fortunately, we can map onto these divergent priorities fairly closely by focusing on and distinguishing between the three standard spending areas we 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 others and it is equally clear that all groups favor some mix of different types of spending, there is ample evidence indicating that spending priorities diverge across groups in the urban context. Surveys of urban residents and evidence from national polls

both show divergent priorities between poor, minority respondents who vote less regularly and more advantaged, white respondents who vote more regularly. Employing a range of surveys of the urban population, 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 others aspects of development, reducing taxes, and improving their quality of life through better parks and recreation and easier transportation.<sup>97</sup> 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), Himmelstein and McRae (1988), 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.<sup>98</sup> As Lovrich puts it, there is “a degree of consensus among minority voters as to priorities which cluster very

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<sup>97</sup> 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).

<sup>98</sup> 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).

differently from those of Anglo voters” (1974:707).<sup>99</sup> 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 significant changes in local government spending. Specifically, 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, we need to consider and control for a range of other potential influences. In order to do this, we 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. The result of all of this effort has not, however, led to a clear understanding of how local government’s work but instead has spawned a series of 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, Rubin and Rubin 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,

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<sup>99</sup> Whether, in the end, each of these different categories serves to aid distinct populations is more difficult to ascertain.

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 generally 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.<sup>100</sup> 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 et al 1991, Swanstrom, Goetz 1994, Donovan and Neiman 1992). 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 this public pressure risks losing office, local governments should incorporate the preferences of a range of different citizens when enacting policy. Especially for important decisions that are highly contested by participants from diverse socioeconomic

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<sup>100</sup> 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.



backgrounds, governmental policy should closely mirror public preferences. If, for example, most residents in a given locality favor greater redistribution of public resources, we 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).

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 matter. Either because the constraints of the local economic marketplace are not perfectly binding or because a wider range of policies can be considered productive, there is considerable space within which city officials can move policy.<sup>101</sup> 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 we 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 Kohler and Wrightson 1987, Jones 1981). From this bureaucratic perspective, city governments

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<sup>101</sup> So and so 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 matters.

operate in a technically efficient manner and simply distribute resources and services to those who need them. If true, we might expect governments in cities with large poor populations or severely disadvantaged neighborhoods to expend substantial resources on redistributive functions.

Institutional structure is a fourth factor that according to many helps to constrain local government decisions (Sharp 2002, 1991, Pelissero and Krebs 1997, Sass 2000). Institutionalists do not deny the existence of any of the other factors that have already been mentioned. 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).<sup>102</sup> Although evidence for many of these relationships is still limited, there is a

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<sup>102</sup> The exact mechanisms by which each of these institutions would work is also 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 role of parties. Nonpartisan elections might 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).<sup>103</sup>

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 rages on (Trounstine 2004, 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 to date is that past studies have failed to offer tests that pit each of these different accounts of urban policy making against each other in a fair manner. In most cases, the different sides have largely been talking past each other and when testing their own accounts, largely ignoring other alternatives. The two most seminal studies of this question provide some of the clearest examples of this phenomenon. Peterson (1981), for example, in trying to show that

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<sup>103</sup> 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).

economic considerations predominate does not include a single measure of political inputs in his analysis of local government behavior. Similarly, 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.<sup>104</sup>

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. As such, this chapter will serve two purposes. The first and primary goal is to help answer our main question – does turnout matter. But the second goal and by some measures an even 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, we utilize data from the Census of Governments. We focus on the 1987 Census because it has data on local spending for the year after our turnout data. Since we are particularly interested in how turnout affects the interests of racial/ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups, we break down government spending

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<sup>104</sup> Goetz (1994) and Feiock and West (1993), for example, is one of a handful of studies to include both economic and political measures in its 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.

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, we measure the proportion of total government expenditures that goes to programs in that area.

In each spending area, we only include those specific spending categories that we feel fit clearly into that spending area. We drop from our analysis categories of spending (like government administration, judicial functions, or insurance) that are harder to categorize. Nevertheless, even among the specific categories that we do include, all do not fit equally well into one of the three larger spending areas. Some could argue, for example, that educational spending, is not clearly redistributive as it serves both advantaged and disadvantaged interests. To address this issue, we repeated the subsequent analysis two different ways. First, we dropped specific categories of spending like education that arguably fit less clearly into one of the three larger spending areas. Second, we 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 our primary analysis.<sup>105</sup>

In our analysis, in addition to focusing on voter turnout, we also include the range of other factors that have been linked by past research to local government spending. First, to see if

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<sup>105</sup> 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

local governments are responding to political considerations and in particular to public preferences, we include a measure of the Democratic presidential vote share at the county level (City and County Data Book 1986). Specifically, we average the 1984 and 1988 Democratic vote share.<sup>106</sup> 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, we 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 need them, we include several measures of need. Specifically, our 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 in particular have pointed to reform structures as particularly unsupportive of minority, disadvantaged interests, we 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.<sup>107</sup> The other institutional structure that could

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spending and others do not control education. By aggregating to the three larger spending areas, we average out at least some of this noise.

<sup>106</sup> 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.

<sup>107</sup> 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.

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). We 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, we 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, we 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 we included a count of the number of specific spending 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 (1987).

Finally, we 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 differs substantially by region, city type, and city size, we 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, we include a measure of the number of incorporated places in the county (Source: Census of Governments 1987).<sup>108</sup> Finally, we 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).

Once again, since data on the class or racial skew of the local electorate in different cities are simply not available, we use aggregate voter turnout in each contest. As turnout declines across cities, we 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.<sup>109</sup> Again, data on voter turnout are from the 1986 International City/County Manager's Association (ICMA) survey.

### **Turnout and Government Spending Priorities**

Does turnout affect government spending priorities? In Table 5.1 we 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 as the dependent variables.<sup>110</sup> 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, we 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. **[Table 5.1 Here]**

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<sup>108</sup> In alternate tests, we also included the number of cities in the local SMSA. The results were nearly identical

<sup>109</sup> This is akin to arguing that turnout will be more skewed as turnout declines, a relationship that is discussed in depth in Chapter 4.



The results indicate that turnout does matter.<sup>111</sup> 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.<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> 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.

Table 5.1 also indicates that the effects of turnout are meaningful. 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. At first glance, this may not seem like a substantial shift. However, given that the average city spends only 7.8

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<sup>110</sup> 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 repeated the analysis using seemingly unrelated regressions but found that it made no difference to the substantive conclusions.

<sup>111</sup> We reach the same conclusion if we measure spending as per capita spending rather than as a proportion of government spending.

<sup>112</sup> 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)

<sup>113</sup> When we re-ran the analysis using sub-categories of spending, we found that the 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 (Trounstone 2004). Spending on parks and recreation and police services, two areas that are 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. However, given that most cities do not have any fiscal responsibility for airports, this last result may be more suggestive than conclusive.

percent of its budget on these redistributive programs, this kind of increase in turnout could potentially increase the amount of redistributive spending by one quarter in some cities. 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). And 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. What also differs in these two cities is turnout. During the time of the study, in Berkeley local registered voter turnout hovering around an impressive 60 percent. By contrast, in Vallejo turnout often

fell below 25 percent of registered voters. Multiple factors likely 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, seems 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.

To help ensure that the results in Table 5.1 do measure the underlying relationship between turnout and spending, we undertook a series of additional tests. First, we re-ran the analysis using turnout of the eligible population rather than turnout of registered voters. This alternate measure led to the same basic conclusion. Second, to ensure that our results were not due to the fact that different cities have different spending mandates imposed from above, we tested a range of measures of fiscal responsibility or functional assignments (Clark and Ferguson 1983, Stein 1990). In particular, we included a count of the number of specific spending categories that the government in question spent no money on (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, we re-ran the analysis separately for each type of municipality to see if turnout mattered more in one or the other. We also included an interaction between turnout and city size in the analysis to try to get at this possibility. Since cities might have more or different sets of functional assignments across different regions, we also included a series of interactions between turnout and region to assess whether turnout mattered more or less in different regions where. In addition, we 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, we re-ran the analysis dropping education spending - a function that is sometimes one of the largest redistributive spending categories and sometimes completely outside the responsibility of cities. Over all of

these tests, we found some signs that greater functional responsibilities in a particular area leads to more spending in that area but our basic conclusion about the relationship between turnout and spending did not change.<sup>114</sup> Third, we 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 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.

### **The Fiscal Effects of Voter Turnout**

There are many ways local governments can affect local policy. They can, as we 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 and affect the well-being of different groups.

To see if voter turnout affects this broader range of government behavior, in Table 5.2, we 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, we expect that as the size of the electorate expands and the number of relatively needy or disadvantaged voters grows, local governments will choose to

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<sup>114</sup> There was also some indication that turnout matters more in the northeast but the effects were highly variable

increase the local tax rate and the size of the existing debt (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.<sup>115</sup> **[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 the 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 another sign that who votes matters.<sup>116</sup>

### **The Contingent Effects of Turnout**

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<sup>115</sup> One issue we have not raised is the direction of causality. Governments could, in fact, spend more money on certain policy areas in order to encourage certain groups to turnout in 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. Our turnout data are generally from a year or more preceding the spending data. Also, logically, it seems more likely that turnout among disadvantaged groups would lead to more spending and higher taxes than for increases in taxes to trigger greater turnout among less advantaged groups.

<sup>116</sup> 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

Turnout, however, should not always matter. 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 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, we 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.<sup>117</sup> If, as we 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.<sup>118</sup> 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. We 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

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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.

<sup>117</sup> This incumbent reelection measure comes from responses to the ICMA survey and refers to the incumbents running in the most recent council election.

defeat, incumbents increase redistributive spending to respond to the preferences of an expanded and more diverse electorate.<sup>119</sup> 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 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, we 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. We 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.<sup>120</sup>

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

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<sup>118</sup> 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.

<sup>119</sup> 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 1, we found it was not significant.

<sup>120</sup> 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.



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.<sup>121</sup> This implies that both white and non-white elected officials are recognizing and responding to changes in who turns out to vote.

### **Turnout effects in more recent elections**

One concern with the ICMA data that I noted in the last chapter was how old it is. The spending patterns that we have been looking at all date from 1986 - long enough ago to question whether or not the same patterns occur today. Given the ongoing 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 different changes in the nature of racial and ethnic relations within our cities, there is at least reason to suspect that cities may be functioning differently today than they have in the past.

To test for this possibility and more importantly to provide a test of the robustness of turnout effects, I examine spending patterns in California cities in 2001 and ask whether turnout continues to play a role in determining local government spending priorities. The spending data for California come from the 2001 Census of Governments. Details on the survey, descriptions of key questions included in the survey, and the reasons for focusing on California are detailed in the last chapter. Suffice is to say that California represents a feasible state because it contains a large enough number and wide enough variety of cities to offer a good empirical test. Similarly, California represents an important test because the state's racial makeup mirrors the projected

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<sup>121</sup> 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.

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 we use to assess turnout effects in California is the same test that we used to test turnout effects nationwide. Specifically, we 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.

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 with the rest of the nation, California's cities 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 in the state is outpaced by both allocational and developmental spending (32 and 16 percent respectively).<sup>122</sup>

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.<sup>123</sup> In

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<sup>122</sup> 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 community.

<sup>123</sup> 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

Table 5.4, we 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.<sup>124</sup> [Table 5.4 Here]

Once again, turnout is an important determinant of policy outcomes. The results from 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 spending – two areas that polls show are less important to most minorities and the poor.<sup>125</sup> 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 our 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 we investigated this relationship more fully, we did find a clear link between turnout and redistributive spending for at least a subset of California cities. We 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, we re-ran

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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.

<sup>124</sup> Since all cities in California are nonpartisan, we could not test for the effects of nonpartisanship in the state.

<sup>125</sup> 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.

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 we 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 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 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, we also looked at how turnout affected more fundamental fiscal decisions like tax and debt policy. Using the same empirical model, we found that as with the nation as a whole, increased turnout in California was associated with higher per capita taxes.<sup>126</sup> 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.

Finally, to see if turnout effects in California depended to the same extent on competitive elections as they do in the larger nation, we added a measure of competition – the percentage of incumbents losing reelection – and an interaction for turnout and turnover to the basic regression

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<sup>126</sup> By contrast, there was no clear link between participation and per capita debt. The relationship between turnout and per capita taxes was only significant for larger cities in the state.

model.<sup>127</sup> 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 where all of the council incumbents won reelection.

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

### **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 we 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. Thus, in this next section, I re-

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<sup>127</sup> 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.

display some key results from that table to see what they tell us about local government decision making.<sup>128</sup> **[Table 5.5 Here]**

Perhaps not surprisingly, by offering a broader test that incorporates each of the four main perspectives on urban politics in the empirical model, we arrive at a more complex account of government decision making. No single dimension can fully account for local government decisions and, in fact, 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 5.5 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 5.5 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.

Another interesting finding to emerge from Table 5.5 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, our analysis finds the opposite. Need is either insignificantly or significantly and negatively related to spending on

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<sup>128</sup> Interestingly, the results from an analysis of the U.S. sample of cities differ in significant ways from the results of the analysis of California cities. In general, fewer factors are significant in the analysis of California cities. We 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 much less room to maneuver in urban politics in California.

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. In alternate analysis, we also found that cities with higher crime rates spent less of their budgets on redistributive spending.<sup>129</sup> 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.<sup>130</sup>

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 cities may be too desperate to spend on what some see as inefficient redistributive programs (Peterson 1981, Rubin and Rubin 1987).<sup>131</sup>

Economic considerations do not, however, preclude the influence of politics. As table 5.5 also shows, there is plenty of room for political considerations to factor into government decision making. This 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

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<sup>129</sup> We do not include this variable in our base model because crime statistics were only available for a third of the cities.

<sup>130</sup> 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) .

<sup>131</sup> 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.

local government spending behavior. All else equal, the results suggest that more Democratic cities spend twice as high a proportion of their budget on redistributive spending than more Republican cities.<sup>132</sup> And as we 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 2004). In many cases like San Jose, 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 appear to make it that much harder to expend additional resources on the more disadvantaged segments of the population. Intergovernmental revenue also plays a role. As expected, greater

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<sup>132</sup> 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



inter-governmental revenue allowed local governments to spend more on redistributive functions and to incur less debt (Schneider 1988, 1989).<sup>133</sup> In short, local institutional structure and a city's status in the federal system both 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 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). This explanation also might account for the pattern we find 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).

Urbanists have long debated about who or what it is that controls local government decision making. The results presented here suggest that the decisions local governments make

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deviation below the mean).

<sup>133</sup> 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.

are more multifaceted than at least some previous accounts have suggested.<sup>134</sup> 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.

## **Conclusion**

There are two important stories here. 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 often means 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 lose out.

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<sup>134</sup> In addition to offering an assessment of the four main perspectives on local government decision making, Table 5.1 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.

Still on the topic of turnout, these findings should not only help us to recognize that turnout matters, they should help us to better understand where turnout matters. Turnout matters 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 debated who or what it is that controls the local political arena. The results of a richer 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 redistributive and developmental spending is also strongly influenced by economic imperatives and institutional constraints. If we want to change outcomes in the urban arena, we need to take each of these different elements into account.

**Table 5.1 The Effects of Turnout on Government Spending Priorities**

	Proportion of Government Expenditures to...		
	Redistributive Spending	Developmental Spending	Allocational Spending
<b>VOTER MOBILIZATION</b>			
Registered Voter Turnout	.044 (.019)**	-.003 (.012)	-.054 (.022)**
<b>MASS PREFERENCES</b>			
Democratic Vote for President	.082 (.041)**	-.066 (.025)***	-.042 (.046)
<b>SPENDING CAPACITY</b>			
Government Revenue	.381 (.131)***	-.159 (.078)**	-.353 (.146)**
Change in Revenue	.730 (.225)***	-.275 (.134)**	-.869 (.250)***
Median Household Income	-.009 (.005)*	.001 (.003)	.016 (.006)***
<b>NEEDS</b>			
Percent Poor	.017 (.088)	.087 (.052)*	.098 (.098)
Percent Black	-.089 (.039)**	-.037 (.023)	-.036 (.044)
Percent Latino	-.084 (.065)	-.028 (.039)	.086 (.073)
<b>LOCAL INSTITUTIONS</b>			
Mayor vs City Manager	-.045 (.010)***	.009 (.006)	.026 (.011)**
Mayoral Veto	.027 (.010)***	-.011 (.006)*	-.009 (.011)
Term Limits	.009 (.016)	.006 (.009)	-.009 (.018)
Nonpartisan	.062 (.011)***	-.002 (.006)	-.038 (.012)***
<b>FEDERALISM</b>			
Legal limits on debt	-.061 (.019)**	-.002 (.011)	-.011 (.022)
Balanced budget provision	-.010 (.014)	-.001 (.008)	-.011 (.016)
Total state/federal govt revenue	.319 (.036)***	-.022 (.022)	-.084 (.041)**
<b>CITY TYPE</b>			
Suburb	-.023 (.013)*	.013 (.079)	.063 (.014)***
Central City	.024 (.013)*	-.001 (.008)	-.003 (.015)
Population	-.051 (.012)***	.018 (.007)**	.048 (.013)***
Population Growth	.004 (.011)	-.002 (.006)	-.052 (.011)***
Number of places in the county	.079 (.024)***	.001 (.014)	-.071 (.026)***
<b>REGION</b>			
West	-.023 (.018)	.065 (.011)***	-.043 (.020)**
Midwest	-.013 (.015)	.044 (.009)***	-.059 (.016)***
Northeast	.124 (.018)***	.006 (.010)	-.110 (.019)***
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>			
Percent Asian	-.096 (.103)	-.076 (.062)	-.052 (.115)
Percent College Educated	-.023 (.049)	.052 (.029)	.129 (.055)**
Percent Homeowner	.044 (.041)	.043 (.024)*	-.139 (.046)***
Percent Non-Citizen	.235 (.118)**	-.026 (.071)	-.195 (.132)
Constant	-.055 (.040)	.069 (.024)***	.435 (.045)***
Adj R-squared	.39	.17	.14
N	1067	1067	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
<b>VOTER MOBILIZATION</b>		
Registered Voter Turnout	1.39 (.554)**	.055 (.034)
<b>MASS PREFERENCES</b>		
Democratic Vote for President	-3.09 (1.16)***	.178 (.072)**
<b>SPENDING CAPACITY</b>		
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)
<b>NEEDS</b>		
Percent Poor	-4.48 (2.46)*	-.089(.152)
Percent Black	.955 (1.11)	.006 (.068)
Percent Latino	-.495 (1.85)	-.267 (.114)**
<b>LOCAL INSTITUTIONS</b>		
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)***
<b>FEDERALISM</b>		
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)
<b>CITY TYPE</b>		
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)**
<b>REGION</b>		
West	.385 (.508)	.052 (.032)
Midwest	.376 (.414)	-.026 (.026)
Northeast	-.142 (.503)	.195 (.031)***
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>		
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
<b>VOTER MOBILIZATION</b>		
Registered Voter Turnout	.156 (.057)***	.051 (.021)**
<b>LOCAL COMPETITION</b>		
Percent Incumbents Winning	-.031 (.026)	---
Percent Incumbents Winning*Voter Turnout	-.126 (.063)**	---
<b>RACIAL REPRESENTATION ON COUNCIL</b>		
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)
<b>MASS PREFERENCES</b>		
Democratic Vote for President	.091 (.042)**	.084 (.041)**
<b>SPENDING CAPACITY</b>		
Government Revenue	.379 (.132)***	.392 (.132)***
Change in Revenue	.711 (.226)***	.702 (.228)***
Median Household Income	-.009 (.005)*	-.009 (.005)*
<b>NEEDS</b>		
Percent Poor	.019 (.089)	.012 (.088)
Percent Black	-.097 (.039)**	-.110 (.051)**
Percent Latino	-.064 (.067)	-.074 (.082)
<b>LOCAL INSTITUTIONS</b>		
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)***
<b>FEDERALISM</b>		
Legal limits on debt	-.062 (.019)**	-.063 (.019)**
Balanced budget provision	-.009 (.014)	-.008 (.014)
Total state/federal govt revenue	.308 (.037)***	.316 (.036)***
<b>CITY TYPE</b>		
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)***
<b>REGION</b>		
West	-.027 (.018)	-.026 (.018)
Midwest	-.013 (.015)	-.015 (.015)
Northeast	.128 (.018)***	.122 (.018)***
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>		
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
<b>VOTER MOBILIZATION</b>				
Registered Voter Turnout	-.005 (.004)	.133 (.053)**	-.088 (.031)***	-.085 (.043)*
<b>MASS PREFERENCES</b>				
Democratic Vote for President	.131 (.073)*	.181 (.087)**	-.061 (.057)	-.034 (.080)
<b>SPENDING CAPACITY</b>				
Government Revenue	-.028 (.161)	-.028 (.197)	.074 (.127)	-.017 (.018)
Median Household Income	-.007 (.005)	-.004 (.126)	.008 (.036)	.012 (.051)
<b>NEEDS</b>				
Percent Poor	.077 (.136)	.315 (.248)	.179 (.107)*	-.262 (.150)*
Percent Black	-.062 (.117)	-.181 (.125)	-.181 (.092)*	-.054 (.130)
Percent Latino	.026 (.061)	-.186 (.086)**	-.133 (.049)**	.170 (.068)**
<b>LOCAL INSTITUTIONS</b>				
Mayor vs City Manager	.051 (.034)	-.013 (.071)	-.015 (.027)	-.009 (.038)
Mayoral Veto	-.009 (.041)	.002 (.041)	-.037 (.032)	.008 (.046)
Term Limits	-.022 (.016)	-.004 (.017)	-.005 (.012)	.014 (.017)
<b>FEDERALISM</b>				
Total state/federal govt revenue	.018 (.015)	.160 (.044)***	.009 (.012)	-.055 (.016)***
<b>CITY TYPE</b>				
Suburb	.043 (.018)**	---	-.018 (.014)	-.043 (.020)**
Central City	-.005 (.022)	-.043 (.020)**	-.025 (.017)	.017 (.025)
Population	.005 (.006)	.026 (.019)	-.004 (.005)	-.012 (.007)*
Population Growth	.037 (.022)*	-.084 (.051)*	.017 (.017)	-.078 (.024)**
Number of places in the county	-.037 (.297)	.035 (.040)	.049 (.234)	-.104 (.033)**
<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>				
Percent Asian	.197 (.072)***	.118 (.080)	-.098 (.056)*	-.016 (.079)
Percent College Educated	-.027 (.066)	-.200 (.096)**	.055 (.052)	-.040 (.070)
Percent Homeowner	.033 (.067)	.198 (.117)*	.147 (.050)***	-.101 (.074)
Percent Citizen	-.036 (.145)	-.314 (.208)	-.144 (.114)	.217 (.160)
Constant	.000 (.168)	-.056 (.355)	.239 (.132)*	.517 9.186)***
Adj R-squared	.10	.26	.11	.16
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

**Table 5.5. Who or What Governs? The Determinants of Government Policy Outcomes**

	Proportion of Government Expenditures to....		
	Redistributive Spending	Developmental Spending	Allocational Spending
<b>POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS</b>			
Democratic Vote for President	.082 (.041)**	-.066 (.025)***	-.042 (.046)
Registered Voter Turnout	.044 (.019)**	-.003 (.012)	-.054 (.022)**
<b>ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS</b>			
Government Revenue	.381 (.131)***	-.159 (.078)**	-.353 (.146)**
Change in Revenue	.730 (.225)***	-.275 (.134)**	-.869 (.250)***
Median Household Income	-.009 (.005)*	.001 (.003)	.016 (.006)***
<b>BUREACRATIC FACTORS - NEED</b>			
Percent Poor	.017 (.088)	.087 (.052)*	.098 (.098)
Percent Black	-.089 (.039)**	-.037 (.023)	-.036 (.044)
Percent Latino	-.084 (.065)	-.028 (.039)	.086 (.073)
<b>INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS</b>			
Mayor vs City Manager	-.045 (.010)***	.009 (.006)	.026 (.011)**
Mayoral Veto	.027 (.010)***	-.011 (.006)*	-.009 (.011)
Term Limits	.009 (.016)	.006 (.009)	-.009 (.018)
Nonpartisan	.062 (.011)***	-.002 (.006)	-.038 (.012)***
Legal limits on debt	-.061 (.019)**	-.002 (.011)	-.011 (.022)
Balanced budget provision	-.010 (.014)	-.001 (.008)	-.011 (.016)
Total state/federal govt revenue	.319 (.036)***	-.022 (.022)	-.084 (.041)**

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







## 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
Baltimore	Democratic Primary	1995	Schmoke	60%	66%	5.69%	Schmoke	1.64%	0.53%	Partisan	Council Mayor
Baltimore	General	1991	Schmoke	72%	69%	-3.35%	Schmoke	1.03%	0.32%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
Chicago	Democratic Primary	1999	Daley	72%	73%	1.50%	Daley	22.83%	14.26%	Partisan	Council Mayor
Chicago	Democratic Primary	1995	Daley	66%	64%	-2.17%	Daley	22.83%	14.26%	Partisan	Council Mayor
Chicago	General Democratic	1995	Daley	60%	58%	-1.62%	Daley	22.83%	14.26%	Partisan	Council Mayor
Chicago	Democratic Primary	1991	Daley	63%	54%	-8.97%	Daley	19.61%	11.75%	Partisan	Council Mayor
Chicago	General	1991	Daley	71%	62%	-9.42%	Daley	19.61%	11.75%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
Columbus	General	1999	Coleman	60%	53%	-7.26%	Coleman	2.26%	2.02%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
Columbus	Primary	1999	Teater	37%	37%	0.43%	Teater	2.26%	2.02%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
Columbus	Primary	1999	Coleman	39%	38%	-0.84%	Coleman	2.26%	2.02%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
Columbus	Primary no run-off	1995	Lashutka	67%	76%	9.08%	Lashutka	2.26%	2.02%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
Columbus	Primary no run-off	1991	Lashutka	52%	56%	3.72%	Lashutka	1.07%	0.92%	Partisan Non	Council Council
Dallas	General Primary No	2002	Miller	55%	53%	-1.64%	Miller	31.19%	25.64%	Partisan Non	Manager Council
Dallas	Run-off	1995	Kirk	62%	51%	-11.50%	Kirk	31.19%	25.64%	Partisan	Manager
Detroit	General	2001	Kilpatrick	54%	53%	-0.55%	Kilpatrick	4.61%	3.20%	Non	Mayor

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

New York	General Democratic	1993	Giuliani	51%	51%	0.04%	Guiliani	24.36%	18.97%	Partisan	Council Mayor
New York	Primary	1989	Dinkins	51%	56%	5.43%	Dinkins	24.36%	18.97%	Partisan	Council Mayor
New York	General	1989	Dinkins	50%	53%	3.15%	Dinkins	24.36%	18.97%	Partisan	Council Mayor
Philadelphia	General	1999	Street	50.20%	51%	0.58%	Street	7.09%	5.66%	Partisan Non	Council Manager
Phoenix	General	1995	Rimsza	59%	61%	1.62%	Rimsza	29.04%		Partisan Non	Council Manager
San Antonio	General	2001	Garza	59%	76%	16.81%	Garza	55.03%	48.36%	Partisan Non	Council Manager
<b>San Diego</b>	<b>General</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Murphy</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>-9.74%</b>	<b>Roberts</b>	<b>21.38%</b>	<b>14.60%</b>	<b>Partisan Non</b>	<b>Council Manager</b>
San Francisco	Runoff	1999	Brown	60%	54%	-6.08%	Brown	12.76%	8.90%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
San Francisco	Runoff	1995	Brown	57%	52%	-4.56%	Brown	12.76%	8.90%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
San Francisco	Primary	1991	Agnos	28%	30%	2.13%	Agnos	13.91%	9.37%	Partisan Non	Council Mayor
<b>San Francisco</b>	<b>Primary</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>-9.01%</b>	<b>Alioto</b>	<b>13.91%</b>	<b>9.37%</b>	<b>Partisan Non</b>	<b>Council Mayor</b>
<b>San Francisco</b>	<b>Runoff</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>Jordan</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>49.94%</b>	<b>-2.06%</b>	<b>Agnos</b>	<b>13.91%</b>	<b>9.37%</b>	<b>Partisan Non</b>	<b>Council Mayor</b>
San Jose	Primary no run-off	2002	Gonzalez	56%	56%	-0.72%	Gonzalez	26.80%	19.97%	Partisan Non	Council Manager
San Jose	General	1998	Gonzalez	52%	54%	2.15%	Gonzalez	26.80%	19.97%	Partisan Non	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
<b><i>Eligible Voter Turnout</i></b>	-.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	1263	423	392	148

Source: ICMA Survey 1986, Census 1990. Figures are coefficient and their standard errors

\*p<.05



**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<.05

**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<.05

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

	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<.05 <sup>#</sup> 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<.05

**Table 4.A.6 Descriptive Statistics for the 1986 ICMA Survey and 1990 Census Data**

<i>Variable</i>	MEAN (STD DEV)	
	All Cities	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	-.49 (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)	----

Table 5.A.7 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR ACPS DATA

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean (Std Dev)</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
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 PPIC Survey**

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>
<b>Dependent variables</b>			
Turnout of registered voters	47.2	7.3	88.6
Turnout of adult residents	30.0	4.5	78.8
Percent Registered	63.1	4.6	97.6
<b>City population characteristics</b>			
City population (natural log)	10.3	5.3	15.1
Socioeconomic status (factor score)	0.01	-2.0	4.6
Percentage black	4.2	0	46.4
Percentage Hispanic	30.6	2.2	98.3
Percentage Asian	9.1	0	61.5
Percentage aged 18 to 24	9.3	2.4	33.6
Percentage aged 65 or older	11.6	3.7	45.1
Percentage lived in same house for 5 years	43.7	11.4	70.8
Percentage institutionalized	1.5	0	40.0

**Table 6.A.3 Municipal Government Structure in California vs the U.S.**

	<i>California<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>United States<sup>b</sup></i>
<i>Form of Government</i>		
Council/city manager form	97%	52%
Mayor/council form	3	32
<i>Election Timing</i>		
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	---
<i>District Type</i>		
At-large council elections	93	64
District method	5	18
Combination	2	18
<i>Term Limits</i>		
Term limits—council members	18	9
<i>Mayoral Authority<sup>c</sup></i>		
Mayor develops (or jointly develops) the budget	3	13
Mayor has veto power	6	28
<i>Nonpartisan Elections</i>	100	76

Notes: --- indicates data not available

<sup>a</sup> California data are from 2000 PPIC survey of city clerks.

<sup>b</sup> 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).

<sup>c</sup> For directly elected mayors only.



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