Race and Class Inequality in Local Politics

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Zoltan L. Hajnal, *University of California, San Diego*
Jessica L. Trounstine, *University of California, San Diego*

This chapter assesses the effect of race and class divisions on the urban political arena in the United States. It presents an array of data from our previous research outlining the roles that race and class play in shaping both individual political choice and overall political representation in urban politics. We found that both factors significantly shape political behavior and outcomes but that race is the primary driver of urban politics across most contexts. The centrality of race and, to a lesser extent, class in shaping the vote has widespread consequences for representation at the local level. Across an array of different indicators, racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups are poorly represented in the local arena. Minorities are more apt than whites to end up on the losing side of the vote, they are grossly underrepresented in elected offices, and—ultimately—they are less satisfied with city government than whites. Local democracy, by almost all accounts, is more likely to represent the interests of whites and the wealthy than those of minorities and the poor.

There are, however, potential solutions. Turnout is a linchpin for several forms of minority achievement. Expanded turnout is associated with more minorities in office and more minority-friendly policies—which, in turn, are linked with greater minority satisfaction with local government. In addition to turnout, this chapter highlights a range of other documented solutions, including local policy change and institutional reform.

The discussion first provides evidence of unevenness in participation and explores racial divides in vote choice. This is followed by an assessment of representation in local politics, determining which voters elect their favored candidates, which candidates win election to office, and which residents are most satisfied with the governance of those local officials. Finally, potential solutions to underrepresentation are examined and emerging questions for the future of our diverse communities are discussed.

PATTERNS IN THE VOTE

Voting may be the bedrock on which democracy rests but, at the local level, one of the most consistent findings is that relatively few people vote. Whereas about half of all adults participate in national contests, data from the most recent nationwide survey of city clerks—local officials who record and report participation rates—indicate that, nationally, only about 27% of voting-age adults participate in city-council elections.[1] Data from recent California elections suggest that turnout for mayoral elections is no better.[2] Moreover, these data likely represent the high end of the spectrum. Anecdotal evidence from other types of local elections—from school boards to county supervisors—suggests that voter apathy is much greater in other types of local contests.[3] At the local level, where policies are most likely to be implemented and where a majority of the nation's civic leaders are elected, important public-policy decisions are being made without input from most of the affected residents.

Problematically and not coincidentally, there is a severe skew to those who turn out in local contests. Figure 1, the self-reported local voting rates for voting-age adults, reveals dramatic differences in participation across race and class.[4] In terms of race, whites report voting almost twice as regularly as Latinos and Asian Americans: fully 63% of whites report voting in local elections, compared to only 39% for Latinos and 36% for Asian Americans. African Americans are in the middle of the range, with a reported voting rate 8 percentage points less than whites.

The class skew also is severe. The relatively upper-status groups—the well educated, those with higher incomes, and the employed—report voting in local elections at rates that are as much as three times higher than members of lower-status groups. The largest gap in turnout is a significant 39 percentage points between full-time workers and the unemployed. These patterns are mirrored in our own analysis of the General Social Survey and in data from a wide range of exit polls.[5] Those who turn out to vote are quite different from those who do not.

The patterns shown in figure 1 also are mirrored in the national electorate (Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Yet, the local skew in turnout appears to be even more severe than that for national contests. For example, a comparison of exit polls for local and national contests found that whites are 40% better represented among local voters than the local population but only 7% better represented among national voters. Similarly, residents with a college degree were 2.6 times better represented at the local level but only 1.9 times better represented among national voters.

In summary, by every measure, there is a severe skew to the local electorate. However, turnout differentials are unlikely to have meaningful political consequences if demographic groups share preferences for political outcomes. That is, if whites and nonwhites, wealthy and poor, old and young, and more- and less-educated individuals tend to support the same candidates and policies, then the skew in participation may not matter. By analyzing local voting patterns, the next section discusses whether this is the case. We found deep divides across demographic groups—with race as the most prominent division.

Divides in the Vote

To some observers, local politics appears largely apolitical, with bureaucratic needs and economic constraints driving decision making, thereby making differences in local political participation an unimportant problem (Oliver et al. 2012; Peterson 1981). Others argue that the urban electorate, in fact, is divided. Which dimensions matter most? Is local politics largely a struggle among racial groups to control local decision making, as a number of studies suggest (Barreto 2007; Collet 2005; Hajnal 2007; Kaufman 2004; Liu and Vanderleeuw 2007)? Or is it principally a class-based conflict between haves and have-nots (Bridges 1997; Trounstine 2008). Alternatively, does local electoral politics mirror national-level politics, in which ideological battles between liberals and conservatives and partisan contests between Democrats and Republicans dominate (Abrajano and Alvarez 2005)? Or are the contenders

Figure 1: Skew in the Local Electorate
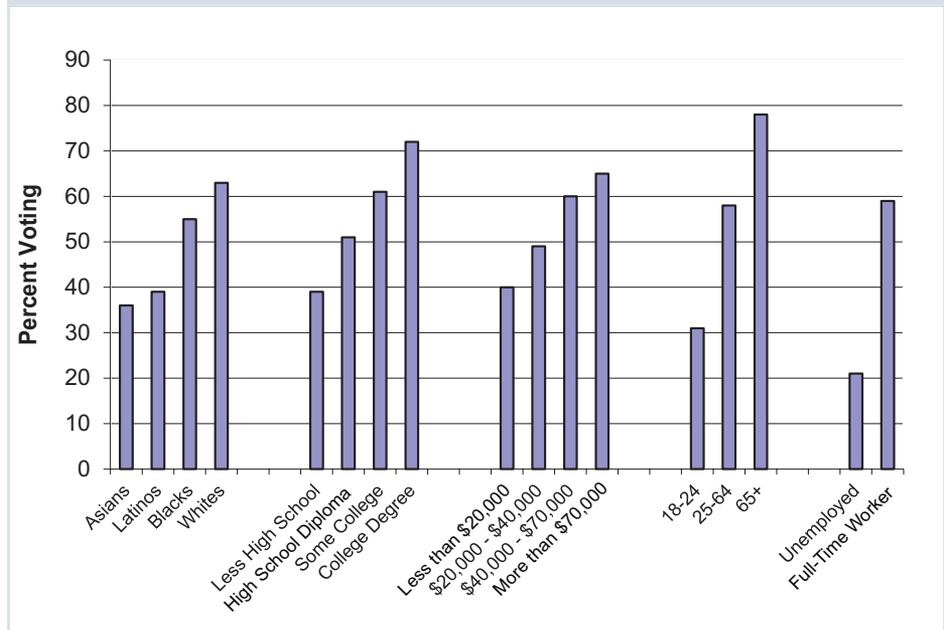
defined more by religion and morality, gender, and age (Bailey 1999; DeLeon and Naff 2004; Sharp 2002)?

To answer these questions, we assessed voting patterns across a wide range of local elections.[6] For each election in the dataset, we measured the divide in support for the winning candidate across each of the major demographic and political factors that previous research suggested represents important dividing lines in local politics. Table 1 presents average divides across all of the contests.[7]

Perhaps the most striking feature of table 1 is the degree to which the racial divide overshadows other demographic divides. Across all of the elections in this exit-poll dataset, the average maximum racial divide was a massive 38.3 percentage points. The following example more clearly illustrates that number. A 38.3-percentage-point gap between racial groups translates to overwhelming support for one candidate by one racial group (e.g., 75% support) and clear opposition to that candidate by a second racial group (e.g., only 36.7% support). In other words, a 38.3-percentage-point gap means that the typical urban election pits two racial groups against one another.

Some scholars maintain that class continues to be the main driving force in politics; however, in these elections, class divides typically are much smaller than racial divides. The average income gap in the vote is 19.6 percentage points—sizeable but only about half of the typical racial divide. T-tests indicate that class divides are significantly smaller than racial divides in these contests; educational divides also are generally half as small as racial divides.[8]

Table 1: Racial, Demographic, and Political Divisions in Urban Elections

	AVERAGE DIVIDE IN VOTE FOR WINNING CANDIDATE (STANDARD DEVIATION IN PARENTHESES)
RACE	38.3 (22.1)
CLASS	
Income	19.6 (12.8)
Education	18.2 (10.4)
Employment Status	8.3 (3.7)
OTHER DEMOGRAPHICS	
Age	21.4 (11.8)
Gender	5.8 (5.0)
Religion	29.9 (16.0)
Sexuality	14.9 (7.3)
Marital Status	6.4 (6.9)
Union Membership	7.1 (3.1)
Children	5.1 (3.6)
POLITICAL ORIENTATION	
Liberal–Conservative Ideology	27.4 (13.8)
Party Identification	33.0 (18.7)

Source: Elections for mayor, council, advocate, comptroller, clerk, city attorney, and ballot propositions in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Detroit.

Moreover, other than class, few major demographic divides emerge.[9] Differences in gender, employment status, marital status, union membership, and parental status are all dwarfed by racial divides. It is interesting that some of the largest demographic divides other than race are between different religious affiliations, across different age groups, and between gay and straight voters. The largest religious divide in these contests averages 29.9 percentage points, making religion the second-most important demographic variable.[10] Age also significantly factored into these contests: the average maximum age gap that was generally between the oldest and youngest voters was 21.4 percentage points. Finally, in the few exit polls that asked about sexuality, there was a reasonably significant 14.9-percentage-point divide between gay and straight voters.

Importantly, table 1 also indicates that racial divisions significantly surpass partisan and ideological divides.[11] The 38-percentage-point racial gap in urban elections exceeds the average 27.4-percentage-point gap between liberal and conservative voters and the average 33-percentage-point gap between Democratic and Republic voters. Moreover, the partisan or ideological divide is greater than the racial divide in less than a third of the elections.[12] This is perhaps the starkest evidence yet that race

continues to be a central driving force in urban politics. Party and ideology shape the mayoral vote, but race is the more dominant factor.[13]

Approximately the same pattern emerged when we shifted to a multivariate model in which the independent effect of each variable was assessed after controlling for the range of other factors.[14] Race remained the most robust factor in the urban electoral arena, but political dimensions such as party and ideology also strongly shaped the vote. Importantly, conclusions about the centrality of race held when we focused exclusively on contests involving two candidates with the same racial identity. Even in contests in which voters cannot choose on the basis of a candidate's race, its average effect remains far more important than other demographic characteristics and is on a par with party and ideology.

Given the prominence of racial divisions in the urban vote, we further explored the data to determine exactly which racial and ethnic groups differed most in their preferences from one another and which most often favored the same candidates. Table 2 presents figures for the average divide between each racial and ethnic group across the entire set of local elections. Specifically, the table shows the average absolute difference in the percentage of each group favoring the winning candidate.

As shown in table 2, there is considerable variation in the size of racial and ethnic divisions across different pairs of groups. As previous research might lead us to expect, the black–white gap is the largest. In a typical case, the percentage of black voters who supported the winning candidate differed by 31.6 percentage points from that of white voters who supported the same candidate. In one election, the gap increased to 84 percentage points, and in only 25% of the cases was it less than 10 percentage points. In summary, it was unusual when black and white voters

Table 2: Racial Divisions in Urban Politics

	AVERAGE DIVIDE IN VOTE (STANDARD DEVIATION)
Black–White	31.6 (25.0)
Black–Latino	24.1 (18.3)
Black–Asian American	20.8 (14.8)
White–Latino	22.5 (17.8)
White–Asian American	15.0 (10.4)
Latino–Asian American	19.6 (15.2)

Source: Elections for mayor, council, advocate, comptroller, clerk, city attorney, and ballot propositions in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Detroit.

favored the same candidates at the local level.

Another interesting set of patterns that emerged is related to the major divides between racial and ethnic minorities. The growth of the minority community has not paved the way, as some had hoped, for an interminority coalition that is challenging white control. Instead, blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans appear to be regularly competing for the often-meager political and economic rewards available in the local political arena. Blacks and Latinos—the two groups that often are perceived as having common economic and racial interests and as potential coalition partners—seldom support the same candidates. The black–Latino divide, in fact, is the largest divide within the minority population. In a typical case, the percentage of blacks who supported the winning candidate differed by 24.1 percentage points from that of Latino voters who supported the same candidate. From these results, it is apparent that Latinos and African Americans may perceive themselves as competitors more often than as partners. This lends credence to accounts that highlight conflict between these two groups (Meier and Stewart 1991; Oliver and Johnson 1984; Vaca 2004). Other intraminority divisions also were stark. In particular, black voters differed sharply from Asian American voters; the average divide was 20.8 percentage points. In this set of cities, these three groups have not worked together consistently to elect candidates.

Combined, all of these patterns highlight the distinctiveness of the African American community. The black vote differs sharply not only from the white vote but also from the Latino and the Asian American votes. In many contests, the black community is competing against the white community and also challenging the Latino and Asian American communities.

There are few indications of a close, enduring coalition in table 2 but, of all the groups, whites and Asian Americans appear to have the closest preferences in the urban electoral arena. The average divide between white and Asian American voters is 15 percentage points and it exceeds 20 percentage points in less than half of the cases.

CONSEQUENCES: UNEVEN REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL POLITICS

Uneven voter participation and sharp racial divisions raise serious concerns about the fate of minorities and other

> Overall, only 47% of black voters ultimately support the winning candidate. Latino and Asian American voters are in the middle of the range.

disadvantaged groups in local democracy. In a democracy defined by majority rule and dominated numerically by a white majority, the concern is that policies will be biased, outcomes will be unfair, the local democracy ultimately will represent the interests of whites and the privileged few, and minorities and other less-advantaged groups will lose. This section assesses several different forms of representation (i.e., from winning the vote to gaining office and overall satisfaction with government) to determine which groups are relatively well represented in the local arena and which groups are more likely to be ignored.

Winning and Losing the Vote

One of the most straightforward ways to assess winners and losers in the local electoral arena is to simply count how many voters from each demographic group vote for a candidate who wins and, conversely, how many support a candidate who loses. We calculated that count using an array of mayoral-election exit polls across the largest 25 cities between 1982 and 2002 (table 3).[15]

This simple count of winners and losers reveals that concerns about a dominant white majority always winning at the expense of the minority are unfounded. No group—black or otherwise—is totally barred from local elections. Nevertheless, there are real gaps. Across the range of contests, white residents are relatively successful, winning 60% of the time that they vote. By contrast, African American voters lose most of the time. Overall, only 47% of black voters ultimately support the winning candidate. Latino and Asian American voters are in the middle of the range.

These results largely mirror patterns found at the national level. In recent decades and across a range of national contests, there is no group of voters that always loses. However, black voters lose more than they win—and

Table 3: Who Wins the Local Vote	
	PERCENTAGE WINNING
African Americans	47
Latinos	51
Asian Americans	56
Whites	60
Source: Mayoral exit polls in largest 25 cities, 1982–2002.	

the rate at which they lose surpasses that of any other group defined by income, education, age, gender, religion, and sexual orientation (Hajnal 2009).

Which Candidates Win Office

Winning the vote is an important measure of incorporation into local politics, but it is far from the only one. More typically, when scholars attempt to measure minority representation, they focus on descriptive representation: How many minorities do or do not win office? Do elected officials look like the constituents of the cities over which they preside?

The data are clear. Racial and ethnic minorities are grossly underrepresented in the local electoral arena. African Americans represent approximately 12% of the urban population; however, nationwide, 2011 International City/County Management Association (ICMA) figures indicated that blacks hold only 5.2% of all city-council seats.[16] Latinos are even worse off; they account for 19% of the urban population but only 2.7% of city-council seats. Asian Americans fare no better in being elected: only about 1/2% of all city-council members are Asian American despite the fact that they comprise 5.4% of the urban population. The underrepresentation of racial minorities is reflected in the overrepresentation of whites, who comprise 60% of the population yet hold 90% of all city-council seats (see table 4).

The situation in mayoral representation is no different. The mayoral data are not as up to date, but the most recent figures suggest that of all of the nation's mayors, only about 2% are black, less than 1% are Latino, and a small fraction are Asian American (Asian Pacific American Legal Center 2007; Joint Center for Political Studies 2003; MacManus and Bullock 1993; National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials 2008). Political decisions at the local level continue to be made overwhelmingly by whites.[17]

Perceived Responsiveness

Ultimately, the best arbiters of whether minorities are well represented in local politics are the minorities themselves.

Table 4: City Council Representation

	POPULATION PERCENTAGE	COUNCIL REPRESENTATION
AFRICAN AMERICANS	11.9	5.2
LATINOS	19.0	2.7
ASIAN AMERICANS	5.4	0.5
WHITES	60.7	89.8

City residents do not always have complete information about local government (Lowery and Lyons 1989; Teske et al. 1993) and their views can be shaped by factors beyond city control (Arnold and Carnes 2012). However, an examination of residents' satisfaction with government is a critical component of any evaluation of representation. Ultimately, are minorities satisfied with city government and its actions, or are they much less likely than their white counterparts to be satisfied with local democracy?

To answer this question, we used a unique survey that included large samples from 26 different communities across the nation.[18] Approximately 35,000 respondents were asked to evaluate four different local services (i.e., police departments, fire departments, schools, and libraries) and to provide an overall assessment of their city or town government. Figure 2 presents basic data on differences in overall government satisfaction and perceived responsiveness across four areas of government activity. The figure displays satisfaction divides by race, class, ideology, and other demographic characteristics. For each group, we calculated the proportion of respondents who stated that the government is doing a good or excellent job to represent the group's satisfaction. We then used the difference in approval between pairs of groups to calculate the statistical significance in the difference of these proportions.

Figure 2 clearly demonstrates that satisfaction with local government is substantially divided along several dimensions. Again, racial differences clearly comprise the largest dimension. Compared to white respondents, blacks are significantly less likely to be satisfied with the performance of the police department, fire department, local schools, and local libraries and they are significantly less likely to approve of their local government overall. In each case, the difference is substantial, ranging from about 5 to more than 21 percentage points. For instance, when asked how well the police served their community, 82% of white respondents stated that they believed they were doing a good or excellent job, compared to only 60% of blacks who felt the same. This means that 40% of blacks stated that the police were doing only a poor or fair job. Latinos feel almost as underserved by local government services—the gap with whites ranges from about 2 to more than 9 percentage points. Similar to blacks, almost 30% of Latinos believed that the police were doing only a poor or fair job serving their community. Latinos, however, do not rate local government as a whole any worse than whites. Asian Americans are near the middle of the range, rating some services worse than whites but providing an overall grade for local government higher than whites.

Similar to the black–white and Latino–white divides, those on the lower end of the

socioeconomic spectrum feel underserved by local government. Respondents who are income-stressed, those who have not graduated from high school, and those who do not own their home are more likely to rate government services poorly and are less likely to approve of government compared to their more well-off counterparts. However, these gaps are generally smaller than the racial gaps.

Finally, although there are good reasons to assume that ideology will not play a role in local politics, we found substantial differences on this dimension. Liberals are generally more apt to believe that local government services are not sufficient and they are significantly less likely to approve of local government overall.

To analyze these gaps in satisfaction more rigorously and to control for the interrelationships between race, income, and other measures of status, we regressed overall government approval and service evaluations on the range of individual-level factors.[19] The results revealed patterns that are similar to those shown in figure 2. More-privileged members of society rate local government and its services well, whereas those at or near the lower socioeconomic level feel underserved. Of all of the demographic inequalities, race is by far the most severe—even after controlling for other individual characteristics. All else being equal, blacks feel substantially less well served by city government than whites. Black, Latino, and Asian American respondents also are significantly less likely than white respondents to be satisfied with city services.[20] This suggests that perceived differences in responsiveness by race cannot be explained by the lower socioeconomic status of blacks and Latinos or by the left-leaning nature of these groups. According to these respondents, the performance of city government is uneven and decidedly favors white Americans. Class effects again are smaller and less consistent than racial effects.

In summary, there is a clear perceived bias to local democracy with race—more than any other factor—shaping those perceptions. It also is important that racial differences appear to be based on realistic evaluations of what is

Figure 2: Inequities in Resident Satisfaction
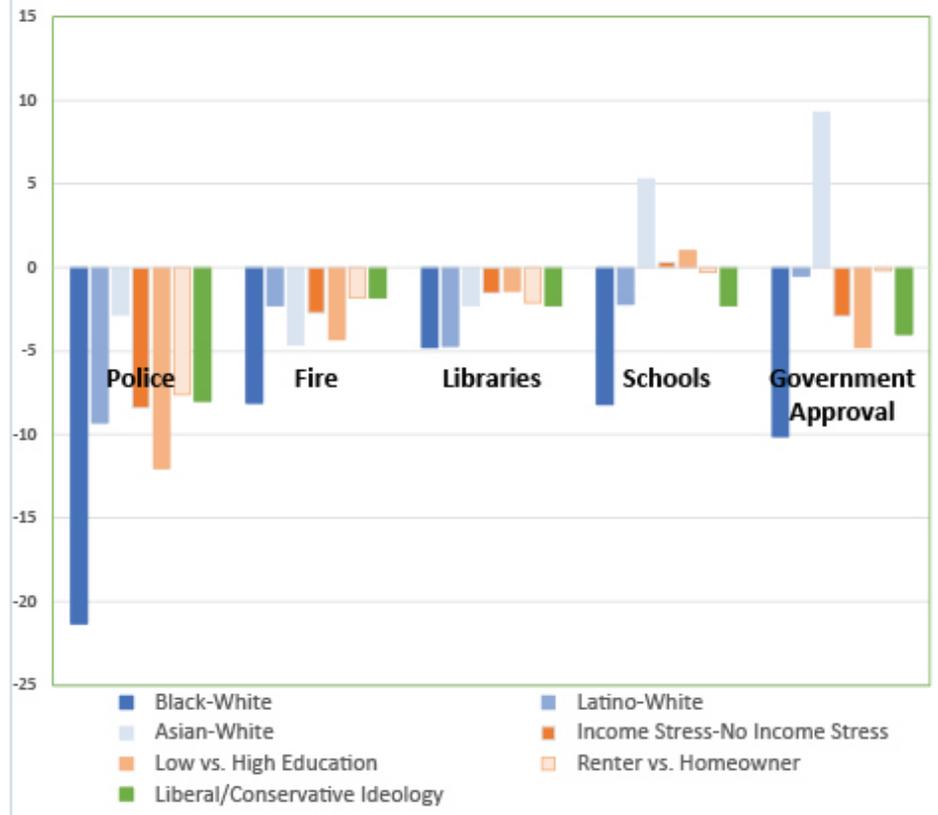
occurring in these localities. When we controlled for local conditions, both race and class differences disappeared (Hajnal and Trounstine 2013b).

SOLUTIONS

The overall picture is discouraging. Racial and ethnic minorities, relatively speaking, are not well represented in the urban political arena. Minority voters lose more regularly than whites, minority candidates win office much less often than whites, and minority residents are much less satisfied with city government than whites. This limited success can be explained easily: racial minorities tend to vote less than whites and they tend to favor different candidates than whites. Can this be addressed in any practical way? Are there solutions to the problem of minority underrepresentation?

This section discusses several sets of reforms that our research and that of others indicates could greatly affect minority representation at the local level. No single change will address all of the underrepresentation of the minority community and none of these reforms will be easy to

enact, but several are both feasible and impactful. There are reasonable, concrete steps that can be taken to make local democracy fairer and more equitable.

Expanded Turnout as a Solution

The discussion begins by focusing on voter turnout. Low and sharply uneven participation is clearly a problem and therefore a likely target for policy makers interested in affecting representation. Through the vote, citizens convey information about their needs and preferences, they make important decisions about whom to elect, and they hold leaders accountable for their actions by either voting or not voting to return them to office. If local voter turnout could be expanded, could we then reduce minority underrepresentation?

To determine whether turnout matters in the local context, we focused on the relationship between voter turnout and two core aspects of local democracy: (1) which candidates win, and (2) local government policy.[21] In both sets of analyses, we focused on city-council elections because they arguably are the most central election in most cities.[22]

First, to assess the ability of turnout to change who wins office, we explored whether cities with higher and presumably less skewed turnout elect more minorities, all else being equal. Data on voter turnout and minority representation are from the ICMA survey. We repeated the analysis with more recent data from a Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) survey of California cities and obtained the same pattern of results. In the regression analysis, we controlled for a range of factors that could affect minority representation, including the institutional structure of local elections; racial and ethnic demographics; and age, education, and income of the local population (Hajnal 2010). Figure 3 illustrates the predicted effects of turnout on the over/underrepresentation of each group (i.e., the percentage of a given racial or ethnic group on the council minus the percentage of that group in the city's voting-age population) for each of the four racial and ethnic groups.

It is clear from figure 3 that expanded turnout could have a major impact on minority representation. In our model, increased turnout does not bring Latinos, Asian Americans, or African Americans to equity in representation on city councils. However, for Latinos and Asian Americans, it has the potential to considerably reduce underrepresentation. For Latinos in a typical city, moving from an election in which 10% of registered voters turn out (i.e., the 10th percentile) to an election in which 69% turn out (i.e., the 90th percentile) is associated with a decrease in Latino underrepresentation on the city council by 4.2

percentage points, which eliminates approximately 25% of the 13-percentage-point average underrepresentation of Latinos. A similar increase in turnout could reduce Asian American underrepresentation in a typical city by 2.8 percentage points, which accounts for approximately one third of the 9-percentage-point average underrepresentation of Asian Americans. For whites, a similarly large increase in turnout might eliminate approximately 25% of white overrepresentation in a typical city-council election.

In some ways, the effects in figure 3 understate the importance of turnout. In alternate tests, we examined whether turnout mattered more when the racial group in question comprised a larger proportion of the local population. These interactions were positive and significant for all minority groups except African Americans, which indicates that the effects of turnout on representation increase significantly as a group's proportion of the city population increases. In other words, when minorities are numerous enough and they vote enough, they tend to win.

In another set of tests, we examined whether an even turnout across the four racial and ethnic groups would alter the outcome of mayoral elections. To obtain these results, we used exit polls to gather the vote by race in each election and then calculated the shift in the vote outcome if turnout had been even across racial groups. Several important assumptions are built into these simulations (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005). However, it is interesting to learn that between 15% and 30% of these big-city elections would have had a different winner if all racial and ethnic groups had voted at the same rate and racial preferences had remained constant. The big winners in these simulations are Latinos. If minority participation in local contests were expanded, Latinos appear to gain on two fronts. Importantly, Latino voters would have been more likely to be on the winning side of the vote and Latino candidates would have fared better under conditions of an even turnout. Almost half of the reversals resulted in a Latino candidate emerging victorious. Blacks and Asian Americans often came out ahead in the simulations, but their gains were neither as consistent nor as large as the gains made by Latinos. The clear losers were whites.

What a government does rather than who is in office is perhaps the most unambiguous measure of whether minority preferences are being represented. Thus, in a second test of how turnout affects minority representation, we examined whether the spending priorities of cities matched the expressed policy preferences of most members of the minority community more regularly in cities with higher turnout than in those with lower turnout. We focused on spending patterns because changes in how cities raise and spend money are arguably the most important way that local governments can affect policy. Unless a

Figure 3: Turnout and Minority Representation
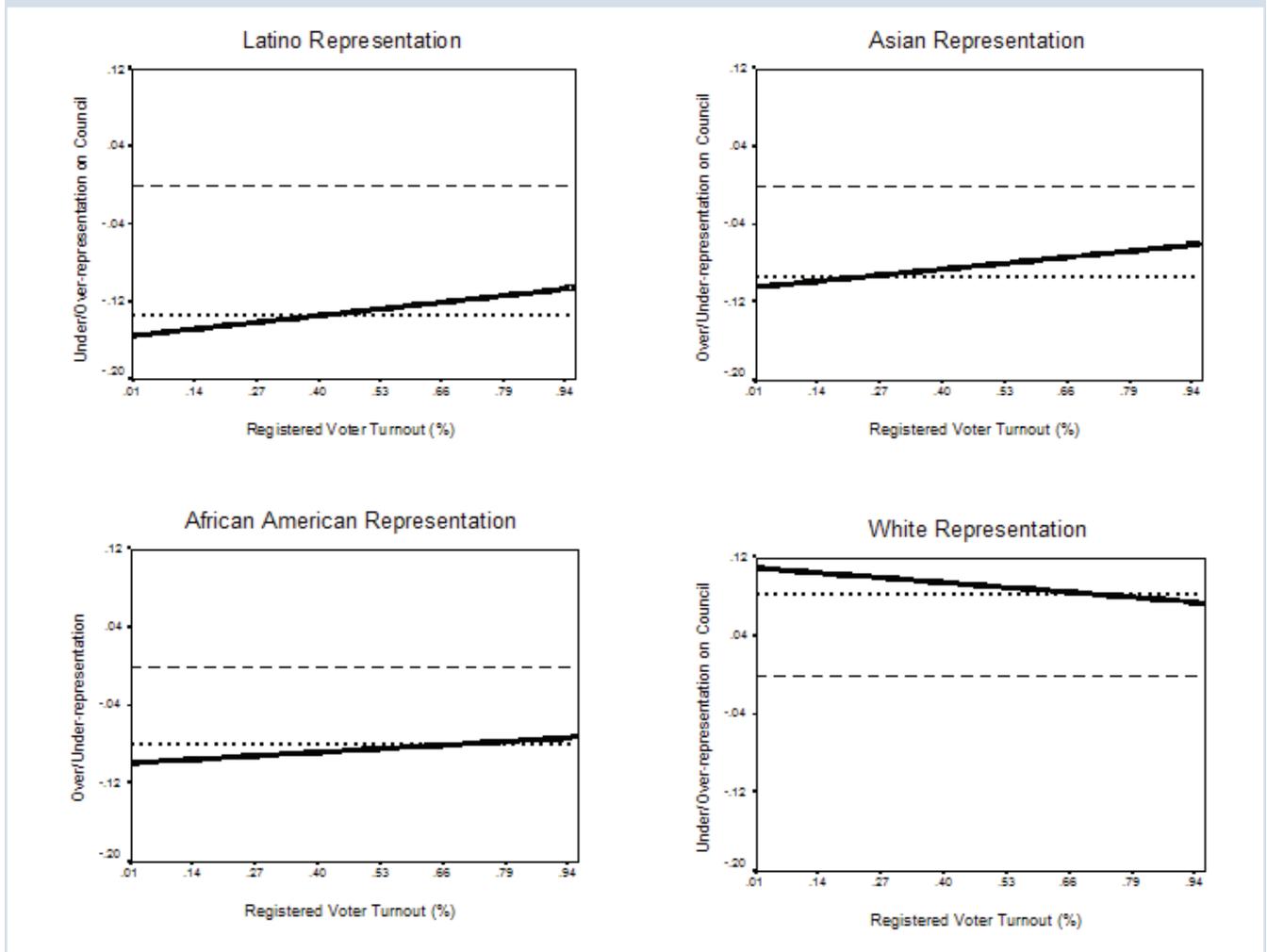
local government actually commits substantial economic resources to a policy, that policy is likely to have a marginal effect on the well-being of different respondents. Thus, the more that spending patterns follow the public opinion of minority constituents, the more often minorities can be seen as being well represented.

Because we were particularly interested in how turnout affects the interests of racial and ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups, we categorized government spending and fiscal policy in three different spending areas that are more or less popular among those groups: (1) redistributive, (2) developmental, and (3) allocational.[23] City financial data are from the year after the turnout data (Census of Governments 1987). We obtained a similar pattern of results when we analyzed more recent data from a California city survey (Hajnal 2010).

As shown in figure 4, turnout clearly matters for local-government spending. The figure shows the net effect of turnout on local-government spending priorities after controlling for a range of other factors that could impact spending, including the political leaning of the city, local economic conditions, city spending capacity, poverty needs, local demographics, local institutional structure, state spending, and state mandates (Hajnal 2010). The flat line in each case represents mean spending on each category. The sloped line shows expected spending at different levels of turnout, all else being equal.

Increasing the proportion of registered voters who turned out from 19% (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) to 59% (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) is associated with a 1.8-percentage-point increase in the proportion of city-government spending on redistributive programs. This may not appear to be a substantial shift. However, given that the average city spends only 7.8% of its budget on redistributive programs, expanded turnout could increase the amount of redistributive spending by

Figure 4: Turnout and Spending
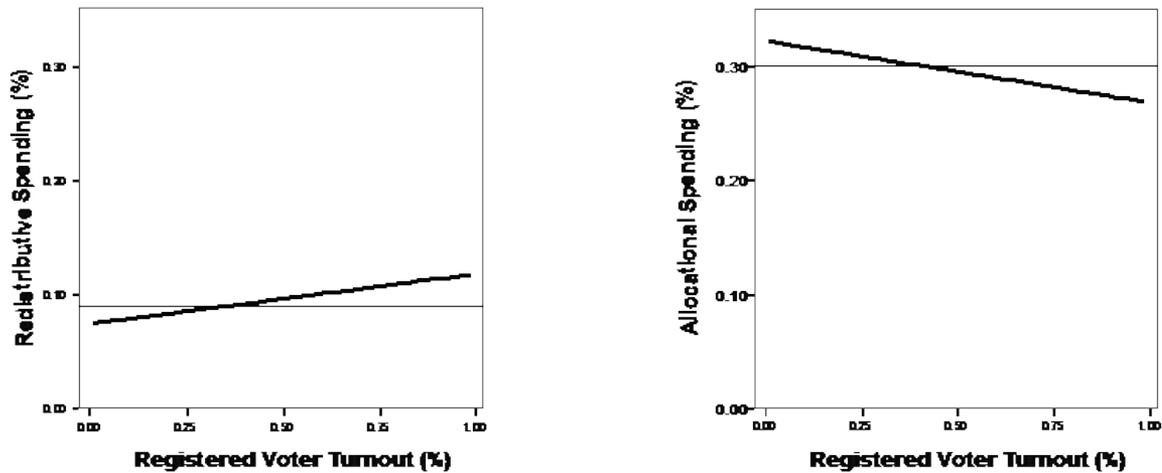
25%. As figure 4 shows, the effect of a boost in turnout on allocational spending is equally significant. There is no clear link between turnout and developmental spending.

In other words, when few voters turnout, spending is concentrated in functional areas that favor privileged interests. When more voters turnout, spending on lower-class or minority-preferred programs, such as welfare, public housing, health services, and education, expands.

Additional tests also indicated that voter turnout matters for more fundamental government policy decisions about debt and taxes. According to these models, greater turnout translates into substantially higher taxes and higher per-capita debt. 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. Higher voter turnout could dramatically reshape who wins and who loses in urban politics.

Policy and Satisfaction

What we have seen is that turnout can have consequences for whom is elected and the policies they pursue. However, does this ultimately affect the minority community in meaningful ways? Can local governments do enough to change their lives to make them believe that they are truly well represented by local democracy?

We cannot easily or directly assess the impact of politics on the well-being of racial and ethnic minorities. However, we can determine whether reasonably attainable policy changes affect the degree to which racial and ethnic minorities believe that local government serves their interests and needs. Figure 2 reveals that the gap in local-government satisfaction is largest between whites and African Americans. Therefore, we asked whether African American residents are more satisfied with local government relative to whites when policy choices more closely reflect the preferences of the black community. We focused on two regularly highlighted aspects of pro-black policy: (1) affirmative action in hiring, and (2) spending on redistributive programs.

First, we examined whether government approval increases among black respondents when local governments hire a greater share of blacks for the public work force. Then we analyzed the effect of local-government spending on government approval among black respondents. We examined whether perceived responsiveness among blacks increased with greater local spending on social services (measured as the proportion of city expenditures on welfare, health, and housing) and reductions in developmental spending (measured as highway, parking, and general-construction spending). The analyses controlled for other city-level factors that could affect black perceptions of local governments' responsiveness and that may be correlated with spending and employment patterns (e.g., local institutions, political leaning of the local population, level of political competition in the city, and local participation rates) (Hajnal and Trounstine 2013a).

The dependent variable was the respondent's approval of government. Figure 5 shows the difference in average predicted government approval for black versus white respondents for each of the independent variables (e.g.,

Figure 5: Local Policymaking and Racial Differences in Government Approval
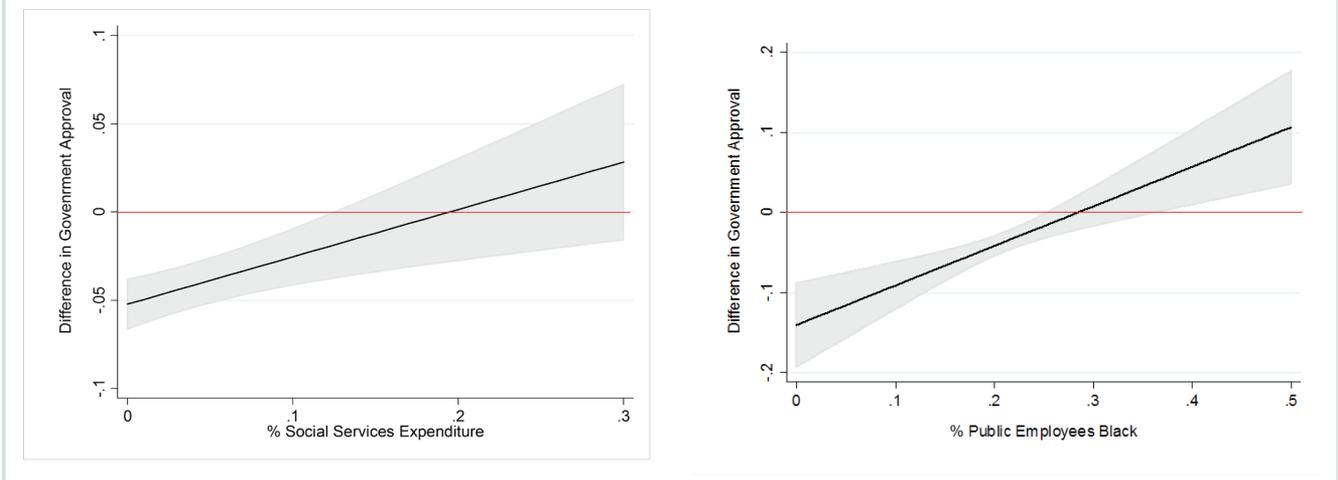
the marginal effect of respondents' race on government approval at different fixed values of each policy variable).

We observed that blacks think more often than whites that local government is more responsive when they favor the black community and vice versa. Local-government hiring practices have a clear and substantial impact on government approval. The more often that local governments hired African Americans, the more responsive government was perceived to be by blacks and the less responsive by whites. Increasing the proportion of public employees who are black from the minimum to the maximum value (i.e., 0.007 to 0.466) decreased white approval of government by about 9 percentage points and increased black approval by about 14 percentage points.

Similarly, local-government spending patterns apparently influence views. Localities that spend more on redistribution and less on development were viewed more positively by blacks and more negatively by whites. The pattern in figure 5 is clear: at the lowest levels of social-service spending, whites are more supportive of government than blacks. This relationship reversed as social spending increased; in cities that spend a large share of the budget on programs such as welfare, health, and housing, blacks were more supportive of city government than whites. Blacks perceived greater responsiveness when governments began to favor blacks, and whites perceived less responsiveness when resources shifted to the black community.

These results imply that what a government does matters. When local governments spend money on the policy areas that blacks tend to favor and when they shift resources to the black community, black residents begin to feel better served. Moreover, we identified two specific policies that overcome racial disparities in perceived responsiveness: (1) redistributive spending, and (2) affirmative action. To reduce perceived racial bias, these two policies are a good place for reformers to start.

Solutions to Low Voter Turnout

We suggest that (1) more even turnout among racial groups and higher levels of turnout overall could significantly affect electoral and policy outcomes; and (2) changes in policy have the potential to alter minority perceptions of government responsiveness. Given that turnout is the linchpin for many of these changes, it is important to ask whether solutions exist for increasing turnout.

The short answer is yes. Numerous clear, documented mechanisms expand turnout. Research convincingly demonstrates that individuals are more likely to participate in politics when they are asked to do so; that is, when they are mobilized by candidates, parties, and other social groups (Green and Gerber 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). The most successful mobilization efforts are those that contain personal messages (e.g., door-to-door canvassing or personal telephone calls rather than mass e-mails or robotic calls). Recent experimental research has shown that these results are equally if not more powerful for minority voters, particularly when the personal message is conducted in the respondent's own language (Garcia-Bedolla and Michelson 2012; Ramirez and Wong 2006). Thus, we have strong evidence that participation among minority voters can be increased, perhaps dramatically, when interested parties invite them to engage in the political process.

However, minorities have been less-often mobilized than whites. Other than a few organizations, those who mobilize in American politics seek a particular political outcome and use mobilization as a means to their preferred end. As a result, some members of the population are more likely to be targeted than others. This mobilization bias has profound implications for the distribution of political participation. Figure 6 shows the share of each racial and ethnic group that was contacted by parties or candidates in the 2012 election, according to the Cooperative Congressional Election Study. Whereas 66% of white Americans reported being contacted, only 56% of African Americans, 45% of Latinos, and 34% of Asian Americans reported receiving a message from a candidate or a party. The discrepancy was even larger when we focused on personal contacts (i.e., in person or telephone calls). Figure 6 indicates that there is tremendous opportunity for increasing participation among minority voters through simple mobilization efforts.

Additionally, reforms related to institutional structures could have an even more powerful effect. By simply changing the timing of local elections, we could substantially alter who votes, who wins office, the types of policies that local governments pursue, and—ultimately—the dissatisfaction that many minorities feel with their local governments. Our research showed that moving from standalone local elections to on-cycle elections that occur on the same date as statewide and national contests has the potential to dramatically increase the number and the representativeness of the local voting population. By moving the dates of local elections to coincide with statewide primaries or general elections, it becomes almost costless for voters who participate in higher-turnout statewide elections to also vote in local elections—they need only choose candidates further down the ballot.

The data are unequivocal. Across the nation, turnout in cities with on-cycle elections is dramatically higher than those with off-cycle elections (Anzia 2014; Hajnal 2010). Combining local council elections with a presidential election leads to a 29-percentage-

point increase in registered voter turnout, all else being equal. Given that, on average, only 39% of registered voters turn out in a typical contest, that gain represents close to a doubling of turnout. Scheduling local elections with midterm elections is not as effective but still leads to a boost in turnout by about 13 percentage points. With one simple step, we could move from local elections with a small and generally unrepresentative electorate to those with broad and significantly more representative participation.

Because the majority of cities currently hold off-cycle elections, the potential to expand participation is enormous. Nationwide, only 6.7% of all municipalities held local elections that coincided with presidential contests. Even fewer cities (i.e., 3.5%) held elections concurrently with midterm congressional elections. This leaves almost 90% of all cities with the ability to greatly increase turnout by shifting election dates.

Moreover, in most cities, a simple municipal ordinance would suffice to change the timing of local elections. In fact, cities often change their electoral timing: more than 40% of city clerks responding to a 2001 California survey indicated that their city had made a change in the timing of municipal elections in recent years; the majority of those switched from standalone elections to elections concurrent with statewide contests (Hajnal 2010).

What makes timing even more appealing as a policy lever is that there are strong incentives—other than increasing participation and minority representation—to change to on-cycle elections. Indeed, the primary motivation typically is the cost savings. In most states,

Figure 6: Contact by Parties and Candidates
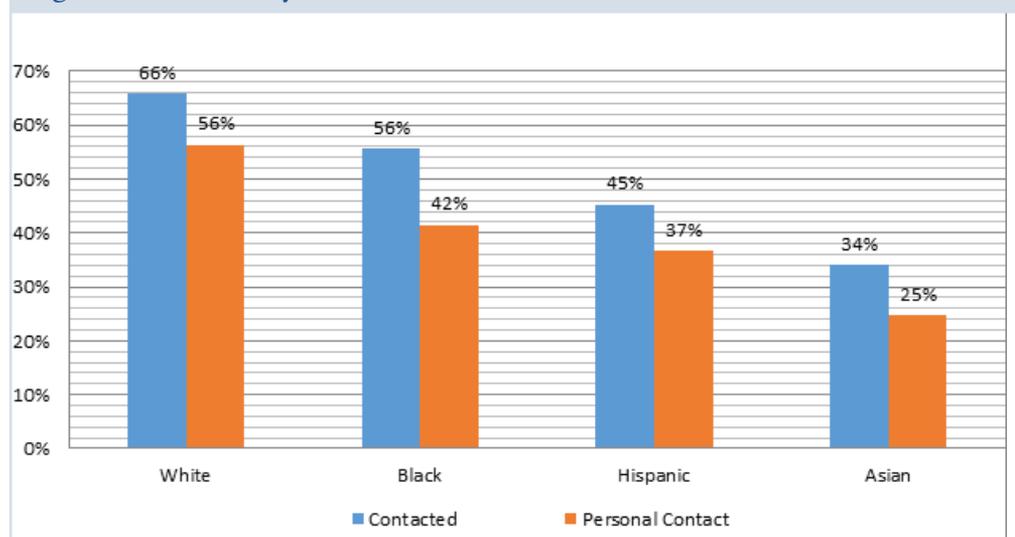
Notes: The data source is the 2012 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2013). Questions: Did a candidate or political-campaign organization contact you during the 2012 election? How did these candidates or campaigns contact you? Personal contact includes in-person and telephone contacts. Survey weights applied.

. . . the establishment of district elections and the move to on-cycle elections—could significantly expand black representation on city councils nationwide.

municipalities pay the entire administrative costs of standalone elections but only a fraction of the costs for on-cycle elections. The city of Concord, California, for example, estimated the cost of running a standalone election at $58,000—more than twice the $25,000 estimate for running an on-cycle election. Entrenched officeholders may resist this reform; however, the change is too simple and too powerful to be ignored. With a small cost-saving measure, much could be accomplished.

Moreover, on-cycle elections are part of the only institutional reform that could expand minority representation. Among the institutions cited as detrimental to minority or lower-class interests, at-large elections receive the most attention. 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 comprise a majority of the active electorate. By contrast, in district elections, if racial and ethnic minorities are at least somewhat residentially segregated—a pattern that exists in almost every American city—then racial and ethnic minorities can influence the outcome of at least one council seat well before they become a majority of the city population. The effectiveness of at-large elections depends on the nature of the white vote and the extent of the racial divide, but it is certainly possible that the numerous citywide elections that occur each year around the country could serve as an effective barrier to minority representation today.

Although at-large elections are the most obvious and frequently cited barriers, scholars have identified other potential institutional barriers to minority representation, including small council size, nonpartisan elections, and council–manager government.[24] Reducing council size or simply maintaining a small number of council seats is a practice that has been linked to minority underrepresentation. 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 effectively limits minority voters from electing minority candidates or reduces the number of seats controlled by minorities. Others perceive a change from nonpartisan to partisan elections as an important reform for minority interests. Advocates argue that moving to partisan contests would help minorities by making electoral choices clearer and easier and by allowing political parties to mobilize more voters. Finally, some scholars contend that directly elected mayors—rather than a nonelected city-council manager—can expand minority representation by making elections more meaningful and attracting a wider array of voters.

What makes this set of institutions especially worthy of consideration is the fact that most cities around the country use them. Across the nation, 64% of all cities continue to use at-large elections, slightly more than 75% hold nonpartisans elections, and slightly more than 50% have a city–manager rather than a mayor–council form of government.[25] If these formats represent barriers to minority success, they are having a widespread effect.

Nevertheless, the effect of institutions varies greatly across groups. For African Americans, institutions represent a potentially critical determinant of political representation. This analysis suggests that two reforms—the establishment of district elections and the move to on-cycle elections—could significantly expand black representation on city councils nationwide (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005). For both election timing and district type, the effect of institutional reform appears to be reasonably significant: on average, a 6-percentage-point increase in black representation when moving to on-cycle and districted elections. The exact effects of institutional changes in a city likely would depend on the racial composition of the population, the nature of the racial divide, and other local factors. For Latinos and Asians Americans, the situation is different. Institutional change apparently offers much less hope for directly addressing inequalities in electoral outcomes. However, institutional changes are significantly correlated with increased turnout, which is highly influential in increasing Latino and Asian American representation (Hajnal and Trounstine 2005). In summary, there are important opportunities for enhancing minority descriptive representation in local government through institutional changes.

Substantive Representation

Understanding mechanisms to enhance the share of minority officeholders is an important first step in addressing underrepresentation. However, the ultimate goal is to enhance substantive representation. We are concerned about who votes and who is elected but, ultimately,

it is what government does that determines how well democracy serves minority interests. Research suggests that the main factor in determining whether minorities are well represented in local policy decisions is whether they are a part of the governing coalition. In cities in which minorities are part of the dominant regime, outcomes can be closely aligned with minority preferences. This study reveals that more competitive electoral systems offer minorities the best opportunities for incorporation into the governing coalition (Trounstine 2008). Other scholars have shown that institutional structures such as district elections, on-cycle elections, and annexation laws can affect substantive outcomes in addition to descriptive representation (Bridges 1997; Burns 1994; Leal, Martinez-Ebers, and Meier 2004; Polinard et al. 1994). Their research confirms that local structures can be manipulated to reduce black influence in the local political arena (Engstrom and McDonald 1982; Welch 1990).

Studies also indicate that descriptive representation can enhance the substantive representation of minority interests. The effects are generally minor in magnitude but there is evidence that black leadership can have a significant impact on minority public employment (Kerr and Mladenka 1994; Mladenka 1989), police practices (Marschall and Shah 2007; Saltzstein 1989), education policies (Henig et al. 1999; Meier and England 1984), and social-welfare spending (Karnig and Welch 1980). However, these effects are generally not significant enough to noticeably improve the economic well-being of the African American community (Colburn and Adler 2001; Perry 1991; Sonenshein 1993; Thompson 1996). Although considerably less effort has been devoted to understanding the substantive impact of Latino leadership at the local level, early research found few signs of major shifts in policy (Hero 1990; Hero and Beatty 1989; Muñoz 1994; Polinard et al. 1994; Rosales 2000). If descriptive representation has a major impact, it may be more symbolic in nature. Minority representation has been linked to increased interracial cooperation (Hajnal 2007; Stein, Ulbig, and Post 2005), greater minority efficacy (Bobo and Gilliam 1990), and expanded minority participation (Barreto 2007).

EMERGING QUESTIONS

We now understand that racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented along many different dimensions at the local level, and we know that low turnout is a significant contributor to this state of affairs. This chapter identifies concrete changes that cities can make in terms of both policy (e.g., minority hiring) and structure (e.g., on-cycle elections), which can enhance minority representation.

However, many questions remain. As the United States becomes a minority-majority nation, inequalities in the smallest political units along racial lines will become even more significant. We need to know more about when, where, and why racial divisions are paramount or subsumed by other cleavages. The demographics of nontraditional gateway cities are transforming rapidly, with large populations of Latinos and Asian Americans emerging in The South and The Midwest. Can we expect race to have the same pivotal role in these regions? Trounstine (2015) found that white residential exclusivity drives political polarization and decreased support for public goods. Given that racial hierarchies and residential segregation persist, it seems clear that race is likely to continue to drive preferences, choices, and outcomes in city politics. However, there also may be substantial differences in the racial politics of the future. Whereas white residents continue to live in racially homogeneous neighborhoods, black, Latino, and Asian American residents live in increasingly diverse places (Enos 2011; Logan and Stults 2011). Integrated minority neighborhoods could provide the foundation for diverse political coalitions as well. However, the extensive work exploring the challenges of building minority coalitions should caution against any assumption that minority coalitions will emerge naturally or easily (Benjamin 2010).

The suburbanization of America continues largely unabated in the twenty-first century. Given that some scholars (e.g., Oliver 2012) have argued that smaller communities have fewer divisive issues and higher levels of responsiveness to residents' preferences, will the divisions outlined in this chapter quietly disappear? Our preliminary analysis cautions against this conclusion. We found no relationship between city size and minority underrepresentation. Compared to large cities, blacks, Latinos, and Asian Americans in small communities are just as unlikely to win election to office, work in municipal jobs, and serve in the police force (as Ferguson, Missouri, so alarmingly demonstrated).

Additionally, more work is needed to uncover the factors that govern the incorporation of not only African Americans but also Latinos and Asian Americans. Given the range of factors including national origin, immigrant status, and socioeconomic status that could divide these diverse panethnic groups, more research aimed at understanding divisions in these two political communities is essential. More important are studies that lead to a better understanding of intergroup relations. With whom are Latino and Asian American residents in coalition and why? Similarly, which groups oppose Latino and Asian American initiatives at the local level? Several scholars offer interesting theories concerning racial conflict and coalition-building in a multiracial world (Carmichael and

At the local level, minorities could have a major impact in the outcomes of democracy, which makes it even more troubling that their voices are heard less at the local level.

Hamilton 1967; Jennings 1994; Jones-Correa 2001). However, systematic empirical tests of these group-relations theories are still rare.[26] We know, for example, that blacks and Latinos sometimes work together in the urban arena (McClain and Karnig 1990), which sometimes results in sharp conflict (Vaca 2004), but more research is needed to rigorously explain that variation. In an increasingly complex, multiracial urban environment, answers to these questions will likely explain much about who will win and who will lose in urban democracy.

Finally, urban-race scholars should consider the impact of new fiscal strains on the representation and well-being of racial minorities in the urban arena. Does the current economic crisis and the tendency of state governments to usurp funds from their localities impinge on the ability of racial minorities to shift resources so that they more closely mirror minority preferences? Likewise, is greater global competition creating a greater incentive for cities to pursue a developmental agenda that limits minority gains? It is possible that these two trends may change; however, in the immediate future, it is important to consider how urban leaders are coping with accomplishing more with less.

Why We Should Focus on Local Politics

Many of the patterns described in this chapter are not unique to local politics. Indeed, other chapters in this task force report discuss deep political inequalities along race and class lines at the national and even the international levels. However, the consequences of bias and division are likely to be more severe at the local level for one overarching reason: the uneven geographic distribution of the population. Segregation by race and other demographic characteristics means that groups that comprise a small fraction of the national population—and therefore have a limited impact on national contests— can comprise a substantial share of the population within smaller geographic boundaries and therefore become major players in the cities, districts, or states in which they are concentrated. Despite their recent growth, Asian Americans continue to represent only 6% of the national population. Whether they turn out to vote in larger or smaller numbers is unlikely to affect the outcomes of national contests.

However, Asian Americans represent the majority of the population of Honolulu, a third of San Jose, and almost a fifth of both New York and Los Angeles. In the cities where they live, Asian Americans could have a pronounced impact. Likewise, the average Latino resident lives in a city that is 39% Hispanic and the average African American resident lives in a city that is 35% black.[27] At the local level, minorities could have a major impact in the outcomes of democracy, which makes it even more troubling that their voices are heard less at the local level. This makes it even more important that we continue to learn about inequality in local politics and the ways in which that inequality can be reduced.

NOTES

1. Data are from the 1986 International City/County Management Association survey of city clerks.

2. Across the state, mayoral elections drew an average of only 28% of the voting-age population to the polls. Data are from the 2001 Public Policy Institute of California survey. See also Holbrook and Weinschenk (2014) and Caren (2007).

3. A study of Michigan school districts in 2000 found that registered-voter turnout averaged only 7.8% across the 477 districts (Weimer 2001).

4. Data are from the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study (Verba et al 1995).

5. We also collected data from a series of 20 mayoral-election exit polls in major cities to determine whether actual turnout patterns matched reported turnout patterns. The exit-poll data confirm the basic skew that was evident in self-reported voter turnout.

6. The dataset is derived from available local exit polls and includes the vote choice of 56,000 respondents across 63 elections for different local offices in five cities (i.e., New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Detroit) between 1985 and 2005. It includes not only mayoral vote choice (23 elections) but also candidate choices in city council (26 contests), city comptroller (two elections), city attorney (two elections), city clerk (one election), and public- advocate (two elections), as well as preferences on six ballot propositions. Given concerns about generalizability, we endeavored to assess divisions across a much larger set of elections. Specifically, we collected the vote by race for mayor in all available primary and general elections in the nation's 25 largest cities in the last 20 years. This process resulted in a dataset with the aggregate vote by race for 254 candidates in 96 elections, which represents a fairly wide range of cities and electoral contexts (Hajnal 2010).

7. For each election, we proceeded as follows. We obtained the proportion of respondents from a given group (e.g., blacks) that supported the winning candidate. We then subtracted the proportion of respondents from a second group (e.g., white respondents) that supported the same winning candidate. We then pooled all of the elections and took the mean of the absolute value of the group difference (i.e., black support minus white support).

8. It is interesting that there is no election in which the educational divide is larger than the racial divide. In only one election—the 1997 mayoral runoff in Los Angeles between two white men (i.e., Richard Riordan and Tom Hayden)—was the income gap larger than the racial gap.

9. T-tests indicated that racial divides are significantly larger than all other demographic divides.

10. The nature of the religious gap varies considerably. Across the different

contests, the largest religious gap fluctuates between almost all of the different combinations of pair-wise groups among the six different religious categories (i.e., Protestants, Catholics, other Christians, Jews, Muslims, and those with no religious affiliation). The average divide between Protestants and Jews, however, was marginally larger than the average gap between any other two religious groups. The effect of religion on the vote diminished greatly when simultaneously considered other factors such as partisanship, ideology, and race.

11. T-tests indicated that the average racial divide was significantly larger than these political divides.

12. Partisan divides tended to dominate electoral outcomes in general elections in cities with partisan contests when both candidates were white.

13. Even in non-biracial contests, the racial divide dwarfed most other demographic divides and was roughly on par with both the liberal–conservative and the Democrat–Republican divides (i.e., 23.6- and 27.1-percentage-point gaps, respectively, in single-race contests). Racial divisions are not isolated to a few biracial contests but rather are a more pervasive aspect of the urban political arena.

14. Hajnal and Trounstine (2013b).

15. Hajnal (2009).

16. The share of council seats held by African Americans was only slightly higher (i.e., about 5.5%) among cities with more than 20,000 people. Among cities with more than a 5% black population, the average ratio of council share to population share was 0.64 and the median was 0.32. This indicates that although African Americans are descriptively well represented in a significant number of cities, they completely lack representation in many more.

17. Racial and ethnic minorities, of course, are not the only groups underrepresented in political offices. Women are greatly underrepresented at all levels (Center for American Women and Politics 2008). Surveys of officeholders also indicated that the majority are from privileged backgrounds, measured by either education or income (Carnes 2013).

18. The Knight Foundation surveys were conducted in 1999 and 2002. The cities are not a random sample of American cities but they are fairly representative of medium- to large-sized cities on a range of demographic measures (Hajnal and Trounstine 2013a).

19. We also controlled for trust and efficacy because research has shown that racial and ethnic minorities tend to be less trusting and to feel less efficacious politically. By controlling for these beliefs, we could isolate the effect of demographic characteristics. Because first and foremost we are concerned about differences in perceived responsiveness across demographic groups within a city, our analysis incorporated fixed effects for each city (with the national sample as the excluded category) as well as fixed effects by year.

20. Interactions between race and income stress were not statistically significant, which indicates that minorities are less approving of local government than whites, regardless of their level of wealth.

21. We expect that as turnout in city elections expands, the vote will be less skewed by class or race, and less-advantaged interests will have more voice in determining outcomes. There is ample evidence that turnout, in fact, is less skewed as turnout increases at the state level; our own analysis of local exit polls demonstrated the same relationship (Hill and Leighley 1992; Hajnal 2010).

22. Most US cities have a council—city manager form of government; even in those with a mayor, the mayor seldom has veto power or unilateral control over the budget (Hajnal and Lewis 2003). Thus, council elections are almost always central to local policy making (Krebs and Pelissero 2003).

23. Redistributive policies are those that target and benefit less-advantaged residents. They include functions such as welfare, public housing, health care, and education. Developmental policy, by contrast, is focused on programs that 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, including services such as 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. For each spending areas, we measured the proportion of total government expenditures for programs in that area.

24. According to its advocates, a more recent reform (i.e., term limits) has had the opposite effect and has helped minorities by forcing out long-term white incumbent leadership and opening up positions for which minorities can compete.

25. Figures are from the 2001 ICMA survey.

26. There are, however, several interesting studies of group relations in a particular city or policy arena (Kim 2000; Saito 1998). Almost all of the studies that provide more systematic empirical evaluations of group dynamics in the political arena have used public-opinion surveys rather than actual political behavior as their data points (Bobo et al. 2000; Kaufmann 2000). These surveys of individuals administered either in one city or nationwide generate hypotheses about the determinants of intergroup conflict and cooperation. However, it is clear that expressed attitudes and actual behavior can and often do differ.

27. These figures are derived from the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study (Verba et al 1995), a recent nationwide survey, and the 2000 US Census.

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