Representation and Accountability in Cities

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Abstract

Local governments in the United States provide essential services and allocate an enormous share of the country's public goods. Knowing how benefits are distributed and who wins and who loses in American politics requires understanding the functioning of local representative democracy. Pitkin (1967) delineates three components to democratic representation—authorization, responsiveness, and accountability. Elections play a fundamental role in each of these processes, from selecting government officials, to influencing the policies governments choose, to holding representatives accountable for outcomes. Scholars of local politics have tended toward two themes in analyzing the link between elections and representation: exploring the role of race and ethnicity, and understanding how institutions shape both practices and outcomes. Racial and ethnic divisions are prominent in local politics and shape both voting decisions and policy outcomes. Institutions implemented by municipal reformers tend to decrease the visibility of politics and in some situations advantage white, middle/upper-class residents. This review presents the research on both themes, discussing each of Pitkin's components of representation in turn, with the goal of summarizing what we know and what we still need to learn.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 90,000 local governments in the United States, represented by more than 340,000 elected officials, employ approximately 13 million workers, levy a quarter of the nation's revenues, provide services that America could not function without, and allocate an enormous share of the country's public goods. Knowing how benefits are distributed and who wins and who loses in American politics requires understanding the functioning of local representative democracy. Pitkin (1967) delineates three components to democratic representation—authorization, responsiveness, and accountability.

As Hirschman (1970) notes, exit is an important mechanism for achieving representative outcomes. Applied to the local setting, this argument, popularized by Tiebout (1956), suggests that individuals who are dissatisfied with the responsiveness of their government will move to or found a new jurisdiction that offers the bundle of taxes and services that best meets the individuals' needs. A substantial literature investigates the degree to which mobility is possible and the degree to which competing and overlapping jurisdictions produce responsive government (see Berry 2009). The importance of exit to the representative outcomes in local politics is indisputable but is not the focus of this article.

Instead I concentrate on the relationship between elections and representation. Elections play a fundamental role in each of Pitkin's processes, from selecting government officials, to influencing the policies governments choose, to holding representatives accountable for outcomes. Scholars of local politics have tended toward two themes in analyzing the link between elections and representation: exploring the role of race and ethnicity, and understanding the ways in which institutions shape both practices and outcomes. Scholars have found that racial and ethnic divisions are prominent in local politics and shape both voting decisions and policy outcomes. Institutions implemented in the first half of the twentieth century by municipal reformers tend to decrease the visibility of politics and in some situations advantage white, middle/upper-class residents. I begin by reviewing the historical development of important local institutions; then I present the research on both themes noted above (race and institutions), discussing each of Pitkin's components of representation in turn, with the goal of summarizing what we know and what we still need to learn.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One of the benefits of studying local democracy is the high degree of variation across cities with regard to political institutions, preferences, and policies. This diversity offers scholars the opportunity to make general inferences about the determinants of political outcomes. Understanding the variation in modern municipal institutions requires a short discussion of their historical development because the basic institutional framework that defines cities today resulted from political battles that occurred at several key moments during the past two centuries. At the turn of the twentieth century, city institutions looked much like institutions at other levels of government. Most cities had a mayor who formally led the executive branch and a city council that handled legislative functions. Typically cities were divided into districts with one councilor representing each geographic area. As was true of the state and federal governments of the time, the number of functions city governments handled (and therefore the size and structure of their bureaucracies) was fairly limited (Erie 1988). As cities rapidly expanded with the forces of industrialization and immigration, the weak institutional setting created an opportunity for alternative institutions to coordinate the operation of city life. Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, political machines came to govern local politics through party organizations. White, working-class, immigrant communities became the core supporters of machine electoral coalitions. Although we now

know that strong, citywide machines dominated only about 30% of the nation's cities, the practice of trading divisible benefits such as patronage jobs or city contracts for electoral support was widespread (Trounstine 2008).

Many observers of municipal affairs, particularly those who were not key members of machine coalitions, became deeply worried about the possibility of successfully managing the modern American city (Murphy 2002). Because formal institutions in this environment were a façade (the locus of power was the party hierarchy headed by the infamous boss), the solution for many was the reinvention of city government through municipal reform. The clearest expression of reform ideals was offered by the National Municipal League, founded in 1894. Throughout the early 1900s, the League produced a series of model city charters intended to generate incorruptible city governments run by experts and supported by knowledgeable, decisive electorates (National Municipal League 1916). Reformers argued that these were the necessary preconditions to allow elected officials the freedom to pursue growth and development. They believed that their goals could be achieved through the revision of city charters and state constitutions (Bridges 1997).

The reform agenda supported a range of institutional changes intended to increase the efficiency and efficacy of government by limiting the effects of political forces such as parties, voters, and elected officials on city government. Arguing that the "right to good government" should take precedence over the "right to self-government," reformers focused on hiring professional administrators to run municipal affairs and eliminating "politics" from city government. The result was a push for council-manager systems (where the chief executive officer of the city, the manager, was a bureaucrat appointed by the city council), decreased pay for elected officials, and civil-service systems for hiring city workers—in other words, the elimination of institutions thought to be beneficial to political machines.

Additionally, reform organizations supported the enactment of nonpartisan local elections, arguing that parties should be irrelevant to urban administration. Because reformers felt that they had identified the most appropriate approach to good government, they argued political institutions that made governance conflictual, such as parties, stymied progress. In nonpartisan elections, parties do not officially nominate candidates for office, and frequently candidates' party affiliations do not appear on the ballot. In some cases, parties are also prohibited from endorsing candidates. Reformers also promoted citywide (at-large) elections to prevent narrow interests from influencing local government. When councilors are elected by district, the city is divided into geographic areas of roughly equal population size, each of which elects a single member to the city council. An at-large system is one in which all members of the city council are selected by the entire city electorate. At-large systems shift electoral power toward a single median voter and away from geographically concentrated interests.

Finally, reformers proposed, lobbied for, and supported the passage of suffrage restrictions at the state and local levels, including literacy tests, abolition of alien suffrage, registration requirements, poll taxes, and measures that decreased the visibility or comprehensibility of politics, like nonconcurrent, off-year elections. Upper-class, middle-class, and business constituencies were the strongest supporters of reformed systems; poor residents and people of color were often underserved by these governments (Bridges 1997, Trounstine 2008).

Although there are many combinations of institutions in cities, students of city politics often focus on a few key variations. The caricature of a classic machine city is one in which the city is governed by a mayor-council form of government with districted, partisan, and perhaps concurrent elections, whereas the classic reform city has a council-manager structure, with at-large, nonpartisan, and usually nonconcurrent elections. Machine structures are believed to enhance the opportunities of low-income and minority residents while reform structures are believed to advantage

middle- and upper-class interests. In both types of cities, elections are the central vehicles for producing representation—authorization, responsiveness, and accountability; but the different institutional forms yield different outcomes on each of these dimensions.

AUTHORIZATION

Through elections, constituents authorize representatives to act on their behalf. Free, competitive elections are the foundation of this authorization process, and votes for particular candidates or parties can be understood as expressions of endorsement. On average, turnout is low in city elections, regularly falling below 25% of the voting-age population (Hajnal & Lewis 2003, Caren 2007). But there is a high degree of variation across cities. Machine and reform institutions affect this variation. Generally speaking, reform structures are associated with lower turnout levels, and Hajnal (2010) provides evidence that lower-turnout elections are less representative (with regard to race, education, age, income, and employment) of city populations. When turnout is lower the electorate is whiter, more educated, older, wealthier, and more likely to be employed than the city as a whole. Most cities in the United States have adopted nonpartisan elections, and research indicates that relative to partisan elections these systems have lower turnout and more ballot roll-off (Alford & Lee 1968, Karnig & Walter 1983, Squire & Smith 1988, Schaffner et al. 2001, Caren 2007). Schaffner et al. (2001) estimate that nonpartisan elections decrease turnout by about eight percentage points. Scholars suggest that the mechanisms producing this result are the higher cost associated with determining vote choice in these systems and the lack of a stable institutional structure for mobilization.

Similarly, the council-manager form of government (another reform institution) depresses turnout by about ten percentage points relative to mayor-council structures (Alford & Lee 1968, Karnig & Walter 1983, Wood 2002, Hajnal & Lewis 2003). The reason may be that voters perceive more to be at stake when they have the ability to directly select their executive (Oliver & Ha 2007). Research by Hajnal & Lewis (2003) supports this conclusion by showing that turnout is higher when more services (e.g., fire, police, libraries, sewerage, and garbage) are directly provided by the city rather than being contracted out to other governments or private firms. They estimate a one-point increase in turnout for each additional service handled by the municipal government. Trounstine (2008) shows that competitive elections, which are more common in machine cities, are correlated with higher turnout; all else equal, the difference in turnout between an uncontested and closely contested election is about 18 percentage points. However, Hajnal & Lewis (2003) show that the reform institution with the most pronounced effect on turnout is the timing of the election. When cities hold elections concurrently with presidential elections, turnout averages 36 percentage points higher than in off-cycle elections (those in which only local officials are elected).

Research on the effect of reform institutions on vote choice is more limited than research on turnout, for the simple reason that there are few surveys of local voters. A handful of studies exist, but there is no consensus regarding the relationship between institutions and vote choice. Oliver & Ha (2007) and Holbrook (2008, 2009) find that vote choice at the local level looks similar to vote choice in other elections. Voters are more likely to select candidates who share their ideological perspective, issue positions, and party affiliations. Respondents are also more likely to vote for candidates they know and those who they perceive to be likeable (Holbrook 2009). Using a survey of residents from 13 cities, Holbrook (2008) finds no effect of nonpartisan elections on the degree to which partisan affiliation shapes vote choice. The reason for this, Holbrook argues, is that in many officially nonpartisan elections, voters receive partisan cues through media reports. On the other hand, in a study of 30 suburban elections, Oliver & Ha (2007) find that voters are more likely to select candidates who share their

partisan affiliation when elections *are* officially partisan.

Other scholars have argued that a lack of official partisan electoral cues enhances the power of other kinds of heuristics, such as race, ethnicity, or familiarity (see Wright 2008 for a review of this literature). Schaffner & Streb (2002) show that when partisan cues are missing, survey respondents with high school diplomas are about six percentage points less likely to express a vote preference than are those with college degrees. But they find education plays no significant role in expression when partisan information is provided. If lack of expression is correlated with abstention, then this could mean nonpartisan contests may produce electorates that are less representative of the community's educational distribution. Early work on nonpartisan elections assumed such a pattern to explain results showing that nonpartisan elections are biased toward Republican and upper-class candidates (Williams & Adrian 1959, Hawley 1973). Other research finds no consistent effect of nonpartisan contests for the party affiliation of councilors (Welch & Bledsoe 1988). Schaffner et al. (2007) explain that this is because nonpartisan elections lead voters to cross party lines and, as a result, advantage whichever party is in the minority among the electorate. Similar logic might lead one to predict that a lack of partisan cues could advantage incumbents who are better known than challengers. Schaffner et al. (2001) find support for this hypothesis.

Compared with the relatively thin body of work connecting institutions and vote choice, we have more research on the effect of racial cues on the casting of local ballots. The literature demonstrates that voters are likely to vote both for and against candidates because of their race. For example, Barreto (2007) estimates that in 2001, Latino precincts in Los Angeles gave between 72% and 91% of their votes to the Latino mayoral candidate, whereas 25%–65% of voters in white precincts supported him. Analyzing biracial elections in New Orleans, Liu & Vanderleeuw (2001) use ecological inference to estimate that whites voted for the white candidate about 75% of the time. In a study of elections in New York City and Los Angeles, Kaufmann (2004) finds that race is a particularly salient cue when levels of group conflict or threat are high and that in the absence of such conflict partisan cues dominate. Holbrook's (2008) research lends support to this argument with a finding that racial cues are more likely to determine vote choice among people with high levels of racial resentment. Researchers indicate a number of different possible motivations for racialized voting. There is evidence that descriptive representation offers a psychological benefit, producing positive evaluations of city government (Gilliam 1996), and that white racism can drive votes against minority candidates (Hajnal 2007, Holbrook 2008). But there is also evidence that substantive representation interacts with these psychological factors to enhance support for minority office holders (Hajnal 2001, Marschall & Ruhil 2007). When minority office holders perform well, they win the support of both white and minority voters. Stein et al. (2005) find that racial cues are more important in a minority candidate's first election to office.

More commonly, scholars have analyzed aggregate (as opposed to individual-level) factors that affect the selection of racial and ethnic minority representatives. Findings show that a large minority population is the single most important contributor to the election of minority office holders (Bullock & MacManus 1990, Trounstine & Valdini 2008). Marschall & Ruhil (2007) find that black mayors are most likely to be elected in majority-black cities, but also in cities where no racial/ethnic group has a majority. Many early theories explaining this result were heavily rooted in sociology—arguing, for instance, that as newcomers to a city become numerous enough and assimilated to the dominant culture, they accumulate the resources necessary to win political power (Dahl 1961, Banfield & Wilson 1963, Eisinger 1980). Later scholars came to focus on contextual factors (such as the size and resources of competing racial/ethnic groups) and the presence of reform institutions to explain differences across

cities in the degree to which black, Latino, and Asian Americans gain elective office. Minority groups with stronger political and organizational resources (well-developed networks, vocal leaders, more money, and higher education levels) are more likely to achieve population parity in descriptive representation (Robinson & Dye 1978, Karnig & Welch 1980, Engstrom & McDonald 1981, Vedlitz & Johnson 1982, Giles & Evans 1985, Meier & Stewart 1991). Minority candidates also tend to do better in dense urban areas relative to suburban or rural communities, perhaps because mobilization of supporters is easier in these types of places (Button et al. 1999). Indeed, Hajnal & Trounstine (2005) find that higher levels of turnout are associated with increased numbers of Latinos and Asian Americans elected to office. This may be the result of a different composition of the electorate. On average, whites outvote Latinos and Asian Americans nearly two to one (Hajnal 2010, Leighley 2001, Verba et al. 1995). If higher turnout produces a less white (and perhaps more representative) electorate, and if groups are inclined to support descriptively representative candidates, then higher turnout will result in more diverse city councils.

There is debate over the degree to which minorities are disadvantaged by reform institutions. Welch & Bledsoe (1988) show that cities with reformed institutions are less likely to be represented by racial and ethnic minorities. But Marschall & Ruhil (2007) find that cities with reformed institutions are more, not less, likely to elect minority mayors. A persistent finding in the literature is that racial and ethnic minorities are aided by district as opposed to at-large elections and by larger city councils (see, e.g., Taebel 1978, Davidson & Korbel 1981, Heilig & Mundt 1983, Bullock & MacManus 1990, Arrington & Watts 1991, Polinard et al. 1991, Alozie & Manganaro 1993a, Davidson & Grofman 1994, Leal et al. 2004). Recent research suggests that the effect of districts has weakened over time (Welch 1990). Trounstine & Valdini (2008) provide evidence that the effect of districts is conditional on the size and spatial concentration of the group in question and that districts aid black male city councilors more than any other race/gender group. District elections increase the probability of a city having black men on the council by about 17 percentage points and increase their expected proportion by about 6 points. They find that black women are not aided by district elections.

Generally speaking, institutions have proven less useful for explaining underrepresentation of women, at least in part because women are unlikely to be geographically concentrated, the proportion of women in the population is fairly constant from city to city, and women are less likely to suffer from polarized voting. Some research has concluded that institutional structures are meaningless for female councilors (Bullock & MacManus 1991, Alozie & Manganaro 1993b), while others have found that women do slightly better in at-large settings (see, e.g., Welch & Karnig 1979, Darcy et al. 1987, Trounstine & Valdini 2008). Crowder-Meyer (2009) finds that more important factors explaining women's representation are the strength and resources of local political parties and the gender biases of their leaders. She shows that women are more likely to win election to office when parties recruit broadly and have the capacity to provide substantial support for their candidates—but only when party leaders believe women can win.

One way that scholars could build upon existing research on institutions and descriptive representation would be to pay more attention to the mechanisms by which institutions produce the patterns exhibited in the data. For instance, is it the aggregation of votes that generates the outcomes or do institutional structures actually alter the behavior of organizations, candidates, and voters? Answering these types of questions would help to explain the conditions under which we expect institutions to matter for political outcomes and where we might expect political actors to simply adapt to the changed environment. Additionally, better understanding and theoretical development of the important cleavages in city politics that lead to particular vote choices are

sorely needed. Because most city elections are officially nonpartisan, there is no parsimonious way to analyze expressions of voter preferences, so we need to do a better job of systematically defining the issues in city elections and understanding how these issues affect voters' behavior. Fruitful results could come from connecting data on voters' choices, institutional variations, and election outcomes. For example, we know that in some instances race is the primary cue used by voters but in other settings partisanship dominates. One might ask how the degree of party involvement in the election affects this process, whether this differs in different electoral systems, and how these processes affect who wins and who loses elections.

RESPONSIVENESS

The second component of Pitkin's understanding of representation requires that policy makers take into account what citizens want. What factors induce responsiveness in local politics? Interestingly, a long tradition in local-politics research implies that this question is futile. Some scholars suggest that all local policy is responsive and others suggest that no local policy is responsive. The former conclusion follows from population sorting (Tiebout 1956). As people and businesses move to the community that best represents their preferred bundle of tax and expenditure policy, within-city divisions should be absent or at least minimized, leading to overwhelming agreement with regard to policy goals (White 2006 [1890]). This should be particularly true in metropolitan regions with large numbers of local governments (Ostrom et al. 1961). Ferreira & Gyourko (2009) draw on this theory to explain their finding that the partisanship of the mayor does not matter for expenditure, taxation, or crime rates. Similarly, Peterson (1981) suggests that in an effort to maximize wealth, all cities (and all city residents) have a unitary interest in offering basic services and emphasizing economic development while avoiding redistributive policy. This understanding of local politics suggests that local policy is, by definition, responsive.

A very different approach to local politics suggests that urban policy is rarely responsive, or at least only coincidentally so. This line of thought suggests that elected city leaders have only marginal control over policy outcomes owing to a variety of constraints. To begin with, because cities are subordinate to states and the national government, their policy choices are frequently dictated by outsiders (see, e.g., Gerber & Hopkins 2009). Second, as noted above, cities have little control over the flow of people and wealth across their borders. Hunter (1953) argues that instead of producing perfect responsiveness, the mobility of capital makes elected leaders beholden to the demands of entrenched socioeconomic elites. In his view, the municipal policy agenda is structured by the economic needs of business—not voters or elected officials—and so is necessarily unresponsive to the broader public.

In order to adjudicate among these opposing arguments, we need to better define the ways in which factors such as mobility and jurisdictional competition vary across cities and get a better sense of what constituents, voters, and elites want from municipal policy. While Peterson and Tiebout assume a perfect alliance between these preferences, Hunter assumes complete disagreement—neither of which is likely to be correct. It is undoubtedly the case that preferences vary within cities as well as across them. For example, we know that racial and ethnic diversity lowers expenditures on public goods, presumably as a result of heterogeneous preferences (Alesina et al. 1999). We also have evidence that the partisan affiliation of local leaders matters for certain types of spending. Preliminary results by Gerber & Hopkins (2009) show that Democratic mayors spend less on police and fire services than their Republican counterparts do, and Choi et al. (2010) find that Democratic votes for president correlate with greater expenditure overall and a larger share spent on redistribution in county-level politics.

Thus, in order to explain how well and under what conditions city policy reflects constituent preferences, we need (*a*) some knowledge of different constituents' preferences and (*b*) the

ability to measure outcomes—neither of which is easy at the local level. Because we lack survey data on local public opinion, we lack a sense of the underlying distribution of interests at the local level and the dividing lines that are common across cities. As a result, scholars have tended to either assume constituents' preferences (such as a desire for lower spending or better services), or more commonly to use demographic information as a proxy for preferences. The reliance on demographics has led to a tendency to conceptualize responsiveness as attention to group concerns. For instance, Banfield & Wilson (1963) argued that immigrants had preferences that differed from U.S.-born white city residents and that working-class and poor voters had preferences that differed from those of the middle and upper classes. In Banfield & Wilson's account, poor, immigrant residents were "private regarding," meaning that they preferred governmental expenditures on private goods (such as patronage jobs), as opposed to the "public regarding" native white community that valued collective goods. Banfield & Wilson determined municipal policy to be responsive to immigrant preferences when machines were in power and responsive to native whites when reformers dominated.

Later work offered additional evidence of the beneficial effect of machine institutions for working-class people and minorities. Hansen (1975) studied response concurrence between elected officials and voters asked to identify the most important issue facing the community. She found that nonpartisan and city-manager systems have lower concurrence levels overall, and that these institutions affected patterns of responsiveness more significantly for poor and working-class voters. Nonpartisan systems yielded concurrence scores that were ten points higher for high-class respondents than for low-class respondents. In contrast, under partisan systems, the concurrence scores for these groups were equal. Competitiveness of elections produced similarly interesting patterns. Concurrence scores favored high-class respondents by ten points when elections were never contested but favored the same group by only one point when elections were always contested.

Many scholars argue that the reason for this relationship is that machine institutions highlight social conflict in elections and decision making and as a result produce governments more attentive to the concerns of minorities (Lineberry & Fowler 1967, Karnig 1975, Davidson & Fraga 1988). Bollens (1957) argues that fragmentation produces unrepresentative outcomes because participation is inhibited and policy making is less visible. As a result, outcomes are dominated by groups with concentrated interests in the area. Similarly, a number of scholars have argued that unreformed institutions, which encourage party involvement, may increase responsiveness by stimulating competition and participation (Lineberry & Sharkansky 1978, Alford & Lee 1968, Oliver 2001). A significant body of research provides evidence that competitive elections generate higher levels of responsiveness to the general public (Banfield & Wilson 1963, Verba & Nie 1972, Eulau & Prewitt 1973, Berry et al. 1993, Sharp 2003, Hill & Matsubayashi 2005, Trounstine 2008).

A second reason reform institutions may decrease responsiveness to poor and minority concerns is that they tend to increase attentiveness to citywide or majoritarian interests (Lineberry & Fowler 1967, Karnig 1976, Meier et al. 2000), and in many municipalities the majority is white and middle class. Depending on whether one views responsiveness as attention to neighborhood/small-group concerns or as attention to the majority, different institutional structures may be considered "most" responsive. A clear example of the tradeoffs between serving minority and majority interests is offered by Banfield & Wilson (1963) in their analysis of district size. They predict that the smaller the legislative district, the wider the dispersal of power and the more difficult united action will be; the greater the possibility for citizen access to government; the better the representation of neighborhoods; the easier it will be for minorities to secure recognition; and the worse the representation of citywide interests. Given that

machine cities tend to have larger councils and smaller districts, they are likely to induce more attentiveness to small-group concerns.

However, other research has found inconsistent effects of machine and reform institutions for minority interests. Erie (1988) shows that entrenched twentieth-century political machines paid little attention to the preferences of new immigrants and minority groups. Trounstine (2008) provides evidence that reformed and unreformed governments were equally unresponsive to constituents outside of the core coalition (particularly poor and minority residents) when the government was dominated by a monopolistic coalition. This research suggests that political elites are able to adapt to their context—changing institutions to suit their needs and altering their behavior to account for less flexible institutions. The same institution may have different effects on representation depending on the goals and constraints of those in power, or, as Mullin (2008) shows, the salience and severity of the issue at hand. This conclusion supports work by Ruhil (2003) and Morgan & Pelissero (1980) showing no lasting effect of the adoption of reform institutions on city expenditure levels, likely because the choice of governmental structure is endogenous to preferences over spending.

In addition to a tradeoff between minority and majority interests, reform institutions can also produce a tradeoff between conflicting preferences. Tessin (2008) shows that reformers' direct-democracy institutions (e.g., referenda), which move taxation levels toward the median voter's preference, can have the unintended result of limiting the responsiveness of government on particular policies. Specifically, Tessin finds that communities that limit their fire district's ability to raise funds see a significant and substantively important increase in firefighter response times and an increase in the number of injuries and deaths resulting from fires. On average, taxes declined by about 43 cents. Although the median voter's interest regarding taxation was represented, Tessin argues that it is unlikely that any voter really preferred a 43-cent decrease over a better-functioning fire department. Tessin's work highlights the difficulty in defining responsiveness by arguing that voters can and do vote against their own interests.

Another approach that scholars have taken in determining the degree of responsiveness has been to analyze the degree to which minority descriptive representation yields minority substantive representation. Scholars have measured substantive representation by looking for population parity in bureaucratic positions, policy responses such as the establishment of police review boards or affirmative action policies, and expenditures in particular policy areas such as health, education, housing, and welfare. Starting with Dahl's (1961) pluralist theory, scholars have found that when groups are represented in elected and appointed positions, municipal policy is more likely to benefit the group. For instance, the election of minority mayors and councilors can mean increases in minority appointments to the bureaucracy (Eisinger 1980, Eisinger 1982, Mladenka 1989, Kerr & Mladenka 1994) and increased focus and/or spending on minority policy issues (Karnig & Welch 1980, Pelissero et al. 2000). Meier & England (1984) and Stewart et al. (1989) find black school-board members are associated with more black administrators and teachers; and that a higher proportion of black teachers is associated with a higher proportion of black students in gifted classes, and higher grades and test scores among black students. Polinard et al. 1994 and Leal et al. (2004) produce similar findings for Latinos.

Dahl's theory explains policy outcomes as the negotiated result of the many different pressures competing in the policy arena. One of Dahl's most provocative conclusions is that these coalitions are rarely dominated by the same groups of interests and that shifting membership makes local democracies broadly representative. He argued that every group in the city possesses some (although not equal) resources and so has some degree of influence over governmental policy. But following Dahl many scholars challenged the assertion that all groups could influence policy even when

they gained election to office. Foundational work in this vein by Browning et al. (1984) and Sonenshein (1993) argues that minority concerns are most likely to be represented in policy outcomes when minority elected officials form coalitions with other minority groups or liberal whites. Stone's (1989) regime theory emphasizes the degree to which political power is limited by economic power. Public actors, Stone argues, lack the resources to make and implement decisions and so are reliant on private-sector resources to carry out action. This means that even when minorities win elective office they must be attentive to the preferences and priorities of corporate elites whose cooperation they need to govern. As a result, descriptive representation will not perfectly translate into substantive representation. Furthermore, scholars have shown that not all minority groups are incorporated equally; Latino incorporation tends to lag behind black incorporation (Kerr et al. 2000). Some argue that this is because the Latino community has a more diverse set of preferences than the black community (Hero 1992), whereas others have posited the reason is competition between blacks and Latinos (Welch et al. 1983, McClain 2006).

A handful of scholars have analyzed the interactive effects of institutions and descriptive representation on substantive outcomes. Meier et al. (2005) provide evidence that electing minorities in district elections produces better substantive outcomes for minority residents compared to cities in which minorities are elected to the council in at-large elections. More specifically, they find that increasing the number of black or Latino school-board members has no effect on the hiring of black administrators in at-large systems but a powerful effect in districted systems. A one-percentage-point increase in the proportion of black (Latino) school-board members translates into an increase of 0.27 (0.28) percentage point in black (Latino) administrators in districted systems but produces no significant effect in at-large systems. These authors' explanation is that in the at-large setting, black and Latino administrators must attend to the preferences of the median (usually white) voter, and as a result are more constrained in producing benefits for minority communities. In districted systems, where logrolling frequently prevails, minority communities appear to be better served. Along these same lines, Meier & England (1984) find that appointed school-board members are more responsive to black interests than elected members because they can be less concerned with the median voter.

It is important to emphasize that the "median voter" in these analyses tends to be conceived of using group terms—white and middle class. This is different from research on congressional responsiveness, which analyzes congruence between policy outcomes or representatives' behavior and the ideological position of the median voter in the district. Very little work at the local level analyzes responsiveness from an ideological standpoint. This is largely a result of a lack of knowledge of the dimensionality of local policy preferences. The median voter is not a meaningful unit when politics cannot be described along a single dimension. We have no clear sense of what "liberal/conservative" or "Democratic/Republican" means in reference to city politics or how these labels connect to demographic groups in city-level contests. We do not have a good sense of how political-party control or competition shapes policy outcomes in cities or what issues divide the parties.

This lack of attention to partisan divisions stems at least in part from the persistent argument offered by reformers that local issues are technical, not partisan, in nature (e.g., there is no Democratic or Republican way to clean a street). Furthermore, if one believes that local officials are constrained in their decision making by the mobility of population and capital or by higher levels of government, then partisan divisions ought not to matter much for local policy outcomes. But, as Hawley argued in 1973, neither argument holds up well under "even cursory scrutiny" (p. 111). In *Nonpartisan Elections and the Case for Party Politics*, Hawley (1973) analyzes data from a 1968 survey of party leaders, mayors, and city councilors from 91 cities in the San Francisco

Bay Area. He finds that compared to Republican respondents, Democratic elected officials and party leaders were more likely to select social issues (low-income housing, improved welfare services, open housing, urban redevelopment, and improved employment) as high-priority problems in need of solution. Democratic respondents were also more willing to use governmental power to solve problems they identified as important. The differences between Democratic and Republican leaders and voters may look similar today, 50 years later, but they may not. We need new research to uncover salient cleavages in modern American cities, which will then allow us to determine the conditions under which responsiveness occurs.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Once elected officials are authorized to act, and then generate policy, are local voters able to hold them accountable for their decisions? Because the responsibilities of cities vary widely, the set of outcomes for which voters might hold incumbents accountable also varies. For instance, most cities handle public safety, road maintenance, and utilities such as sanitation, but some do not. Many fewer provide social services (such as cash welfare or housing assistance), manage ports or airports, or oversee public schools. The number of responsibilities handled by any given city is dictated in part by state law and in part by the choices of the community itself. Beyond this, local elections are embedded within a federal structure that could affect voters' attention to local issues. At the very least, a model of democratic accountability suggests that voters should evaluate mayors and councilors for outcomes over which they have authority and then vote accordingly.

Perhaps surprisingly to scholars of voter sophistication, we some have evidence that this occurs. In a survey analysis of three cities, Arceneaux (2005) finds that respondents do hold different levels of government accountable for appropriate policy areas. When respondents see mayors as responsible for traffic congestion or education and the issues are highly salient, respondents also connect these evaluations with their vote choice. Holbrook's (2009) work supports this conclusion by showing that mayoral approval matters more for mayoral vote choice than presidential approval does; nonetheless, views of the president do have an independent effect on mayoral selection, particularly in partisan elections. Howell & Perry (2004) study mayoral approval in four cities (Charlotte, Chicago, Detroit, and New Orleans) and find that respondents' evaluations of city services in eight different policy areas were significantly related to mayoral approval about half the time. Oliver & Ha (2007) find that challenger support is highest among dissatisfied voters and those interested in local politics and Stein et al. (2005) find that mayoral approval significantly predicts vote choice. These results point to retrospective analysis by the voters, but we still have little sense of what exactly it is that they are evaluating. For instance, Oliver & Ha find no relationship between respondents' evaluation of local economic performance and vote choice. Similarly, Holbrook (2008) reveals that dissatisfaction with local conditions has no relationship to vote choice in open seats.

A small literature on the local incumbency advantage seeks to understand accountability by determining the factors that enhance the probability of reelection. Scholars have shown that being an incumbent increases the probability of election in a number of different cities (Prewitt 1970, Lieske 1989, Krebs 1998). To explain why, scholars have shown that candidate success is linked to a number of factors that give incumbents an advantage over challengers: campaign fundraising and spending (Lieske 1989, Lewis et al. 1995, Gierzynski et al. 1998, Krebs 1998, Fuchs et al. 2000, Krebs 2001), name recognition (Lieske 1989), prior office holding (Merritt 1977, Krebs 1998), and endorsements from local media, political organizations, and parties (Stein & Fleischman 1987, Davidson & Fraga 1988, Krebs 1998). Trounstine (2010) provides evidence that incumbents are aided when local elections are characterized by limited information and limited attention to issues. Lascher (2005) finds

that California incumbents are more likely to win in large counties, a result he ascribes to low challenger visibility.

One recent paper explicitly investigates the connection between the local incumbency advantage and performance. In an analysis of school-board elections, Berry & Howell (2007) find that incumbents benefit from inattentive publics. Incumbents' decisions to run for reelection, challengers' decisions to contest elections, and incumbents' vote shares were not affected by changes in student test scores where student achievement had not been the focus of media attention. Similar studies that analyze city elections and new individual-level research analyzing the factors (e.g., education level and interest) that lead some voters to vote retrospectively while others do not would be useful additions to the literature.

We also need additional work analyzing the relationship between governmental performance and candidate success in city elections. This is no easy task in a setting where a lack of party labels can mean that scholars (and voters) have limited ability to connect candidates to a particular regime. We might even expect that in these low-information settings, where racial and ethnic cues can dominate, vote choice would be determined by considerations unrelated to accountability. However, scholars have shown that performance becomes a key criterion for evaluation of minority office holders once they have won their initial election, thereby limiting the effects of racially motivated vote choice over time (Hajnal 2001, Howell & McLean 2001, Howell & Perry 2004, Stein et al. 2005, Marschall & Ruhil 2007). Scholars have also made progress connecting performance and vote choice using case-study analysis, where knowledge of individual coalitions and candidates is deeper. Erie (1988) provides evidence that political machines were brought down in a number of cities by coalitions of discontented residents who sought different patterns of municipal policy and expenditure. Trounstine (2008), however, argues that discontent alone was insufficient for the collapse of machines. Accountability, at least for some groups in the electorate, was unattainable when monopolies dominated. Only after factions divided the governing coalition, or institutional change was forced on the city by outsiders, did machines cede power and government become more responsive.

At this point, our understanding of the degree to which elections operate to hold officials accountable at the local level is limited. The vast majority of the research on accountability focuses on federal-level and to some extent state-level elections. Berry & Howell (2007) report that of the 212 articles published between 1980 and 2000 in five top political science journals, only 1% examined local elections and none focused on retrospective voting. What we know is that voters have some ability to evaluate local elected officials for local outcomes, and that the incumbency advantage varies from city to city, but we lack a body of work connecting these results.

CONCLUSION

Despite many hurdles, city-politics scholars have developed a substantial body of work investigating the factors that affect representative democracy at the local level. We can say with some certainty that reform institutions tend to depress turnout and may increase the importance of race, occupation, or incumbency in vote choice. However, reform institutions have inconsistent effects on the election of minority officials and women. Scholars have shown that reform institutions have the potential to move policy outcomes toward majority interests and away from narrower (e.g., minority) interests, but the effects are inconsistent and depend on the nature of the coalition in power and the issue under consideration. We know that racial and ethnic divisions in local elections are extremely important and that frequently groups vote for descriptively representative candidates who then produce substantively beneficial policies for the group. But we also know that the ability of minority officials to produce outcomes that are beneficial to minority residents is limited by the institutional setting and the degree

to which the business community, white officials, and white residents are supportive of the minority's agenda. We know that incumbents are likely to win reelection, but we do not know the degree to which reelection signals accountability.

We do not yet have a firm sense of how well local democracy functions, the conditions under which it functions well, or what "well" means. Much of the evidence that we have is limited to a handful of cities that may or may not be representative of cities more generally, and in some areas we have only assumptions and hypotheses. Additionally, there remains an enormous opportunity for scholars to use the local level to answer nagging questions from other fields. For instance, one could use local-level data to determine whether appointed or elected officials do better at representing public opinion and/or producing well-functioning governments; or determine the degree to which incumbents are aided by politicizing the bureaucracy. Such studies could allow us to better understand the tradeoffs between pandering and performance. One could explore the degree to which voters use racial or gender cues as opposed to or in addition to partisan cues in casting ballots, and whether they use the same partisan cues at all levels of government. Then we would know more about how partisan identities develop and how they change. One might analyze whether constituents benefit from more responsive governments when parties organize the policy-making process versus when they do not; determine what kinds of policy-making coalitions get built when parties are not a useful organizing structure; or study how constituents' propensity to turn out or learn about their city government changes with variations in party strength. In sum, the study of local representative democracy embodies great untapped potential.

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