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Responsiveness in American Local Governments

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Abstract

Does the disposition of public opinion affect the progressivism of public policy? While scholars devote a significant amount of attention to opinion–policy linkages at the national, state, and even county levels in such a manner, a similarly defined relationship in local domains remains untested. In this research note, the author offers an alternative for understanding local representation through an investigation of the relationship between the public's ideology and government spending patterns in twenty-six urban areas across multiple policy areas. The results indicate that the ideological preferences of citizens are reflected in the spending decisions of governments.

Keywords

representation, local government, responsiveness

Does the disposition of public opinion affect the progressivism of public policy? A wealth of literature addresses the question of representation in local governments from a variety of angles. The classic works of Eulau and Prewitt (1973; Prewitt and Eulau 1969), Hansen (1975), Verba and Nie (1972) and Berry, Portney, and Thomas (1993) as well as more recent works (Hill and Matsubayashi 2005; also see Oliver 2001) conceptualize and measure representation via elite opinions, albeit in varying ways, and often as tied to political participation. Specifically, Eulau and Prewitt (via interviews with council members) observed three types of representation in San Francisco Bay area communities, explained by factors such as social pluralism, recruitment procedures, and elections. Verba and Nie (1972) and Hansen (1975) moved the inquiry further to a focus on "concurrence" by adding measures of citizen opinion to compare to the observations of elites. Verba and Nie observed heightened participation in light of greater concurrence, while Hansen's (1975) results affirmed the importance of political structures and institutions to political participation and responsiveness.

Later work has shifted more to citizen opinions and/or the policy process. For example, Marcal and Svorny (2000) focused on Los Angeles voters' opinions on the detachment of the San Fernando Valley, D. Sullivan (2007) examined citizens' opinions toward gentrification in Portland, and Wassmer and Lascher (2006) explained individual preferences for county growth and regional coordination. DeLeon (1992) offered a notable example of a "process" orientation through his rich case study of San Francisco. He identified three distinct ideologies in the city (liberalism, environmentalism, and populism) and traced how

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they were able to mobilize and ultimately establish a progressive urban regime.

Other work focused more on specific policy areas, including land use (Donovan and Neiman 1992; Fleischmann and Pierannunzi 1990), recycling programs (Feiock and West 1993), economic development (Fleischmann, Green, and Kwong 1992; Goetz 1994; Goetz and Sidney 1997; Pagano and Bowman 1995), and welfare (Sharp and Maynard-Moody 1991) as well as the electoral dimensions of representation (Kirlin 1975; Kaufman 2004). Finally, attention has also been given to inequality and public policy. For example, Lineberry (1977) broadly focused on the provision of urban services. Schumaker and Getter's (1977, 249–50) specific focus was on the notion of "responsiveness bias," and their central conclusion was that communities with greater numbers of white, privileged citizens are more likely to exhibit policy responsiveness than more disadvantaged communities with greater numbers of black citizens. Hajnal and Trounstine (2005) found that there are negative consequences for blacks and Hispanics as a result of low turnout in local elections.

All of these works offer valuable contributions to understanding the processes and mechanisms of representation at the local level. Yet remaining unexplored is the question of representation from the perspective of ideological concurrence between the preferences of citizens and the progressivism of policies. While scholars devote a significant amount of attention to opinion–policy linkages at the national (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002), state (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Cohen 2006), and even county (Percival, Johnson, and Neiman 2009) levels, a similarly defined relationship in local domains remains untested. This research note addresses this oversight. I offer an alternative for understanding local representation through an investigation of the relationship between the public's ideology and government spending patterns in twenty-six urban areas across multiple policy areas. The results indicate that the ideological preferences of citizens are reflected in the spending decisions of governments.

Theory

The concept of ideological representation is a remarkably elegant one, requiring three basic elements. First, citizens must either convey a political voice or be within a system where other actors and/or institutions are willing to speak in their silence. Second, elected officials must have some perception of what citizens generally want from their government. Finally, elected officials must have a basic incentive to adhere to citizen preferences. These requirements for ideological representation can raise concerns when applied to the local level, and thus some of the literature in urban politics presents an alternative expectation regarding the possibility of ideological representation. In particular, the works of Peterson (1981) and Schneider (1989), building on the argument of Tiebout (1956), are particularly relevant.

First, Peterson (1981, 4, 20) argues that local politics is unlike politics on the national and state levels. "City politics is limited politics," and therefore cities have the resources to focus on one primary objective—improving the economic well-being of the municipality. Specifically, Peterson talks about three different types of public policies: redistributive, allocational, and developmental. He contends that while national and state governments can actively pursue a redistributive policy agenda, local entities focus on developmental policies—policies that will strengthen their relative "economic position, social prestige, or political power." Rather than engaging citizen opinion in the policy-making process, cities direct their efforts toward increasing the availability of land, labor, and capital to increase the probability of achieving their primary goals.

Of course, opinion may be implicitly included in these goals. However, Peterson does not acknowledge that and does not have the requisite data to perform a direct test of its influence. Rather, his take on urban politics focuses on cities as motivated by competition and, in particular, by Tiebout's (1956) "sorting effects." Citizens decide where to live based on services provided, and when they value the service more than the costs to provide it, they

"will place a higher value on remaining in the community" (Peterson 1981, 42). Therefore, what cities want to do is maximize the developmental policies they provide to encourage people to settle there. Because an appealing match of services and taxes can make a locality a more attractive place to settle, "cities . . . like private firms, compete with one another so as to maximize their economic position" (Peterson 1981, 29). The core of Peterson's argument is the benefit–cost ratio, or, in other words, the relationship between the benefits citizens receive for a service as compared to the taxes they pay to support it. Because developmental policies improve the benefit–cost ratio, they deter outward migration of residents (Schneider 1989, 18–19). Thus, implicit in this argument is that the threat of Tiebout's sorting effects driving local officials toward developmental policies and away from considerations of public opinion.

Schneider (1989, 20–21), following in the tradition of Peterson and Tiebout, argues that tax base maximization is the core pursuit and primary objective of local government players. A stronger tax base not only leads to a better benefit–cost ratio but also permits elected officials to credit claim for providing more services at a lower tax rate. Schneider notes the consequences of deviating from this path of governance:

> The risk to communities that do not undertake such investments are potentially severe: fiscally productive resources will leave and the community will fail to attract new ones. The resulting stagnation or decline in local property wealth can force remaining residents and firms to pay even higher taxes, further increasing local costs in relation to local benefits. This will make a community even less attractive. (Schneider 1989, 21)

The pursuit of a developmental policy agenda again dominates local activities.

These theoretical frameworks, however, may be less viable considering the nature of local politics today. For example, in the area of urban development, politics, history, vision, and leadership are emphasized as determining the fate of cities—not just purely market forces (Pagano and Bowman 1995). Lewis and Neiman (2009, 4–6), in a very recent book, pointed to city government behaving as a trustee of citizens in the area of residential growth and development rather than "captured" by economic interests and motivations. They contend that cities maneuver between "constituency demands, fiscal challenges, and constraints on their capacity to affect economic and demographic trends." Their perspective, in other words, is "government-centered." "Local officials, when government circumstances allow, are prepared to act as custodians or stewards of the community, entrusted by the public with the long-term viability of the local society and economy."

In addition, in recent years local governments have jumped to the forefront of ideological debates that used to be purely national in scope. They now find themselves engaged in "culture wars" (Sharp 1999) and address controversial and clearly ideological topics such as gay marriage, affordable housing, and the environment on a regular basis (Sharp 2002). Craw (2004, 2006) also notes the increased role of local governments in the domain of redistributive policy making and specifically explores whether vertical or horizontal relationships within the federal system best explain the varied levels of welfare spending in local domains. If the federal government continues to devolve more and more authority to state and local domains as has been recently discussed (Kelleher and Yackee 2004), we should expect continued attention by local governments to ideological issues.

Local governments operate with similar mechanisms as the national and state governments, although obviously to different extremes and in varying capacities. As DeLeon (1992, 31) writes, "Political ideology is the closest thing to a blueprint in giving leaders an overall perspective on how to proceed." And despite variation in electoral practices and systems, there is one important consistency across local governments—they all utilize direct elections to select at least part of their government, and therefore officials and citizens alike should be connected by bids for election and reelection.

Therefore, despite the alternative motivation of competition offered by Tiebout, Peterson, and Schneider, I argue that ideological representation, or a correlation between public ideology and urban policy, is a viable expectation for local governments. Democratic theory, knowledge of the public's collective political intelligence, the recent emergence of local governments as powerful players in "national politics" (Sharp 1999), and the definitive nuances of ideology at the local level (DeLeon 1992) tell us that in the presence of genuine electoral calculations and consequences, representation as it occurs in the national and state governments should also occur in the most decentralized arenas in our political system. These expectations compose the foundation for this article's central claim: *Local governments respond to public opinion. When citizens are liberal, local governments form more liberal, or expansive, policies; conversely, when public opinion is conservative, more conservative, or less expansive, policies result.*

Specific internal institutional configurations may serve as a sort of mechanism for this linkage. The problem with the body of work investigating reformed versus nonreformed structures is that it offers multiple contradictory conclusions. For example, Lineberry and Fowler (1967) investigated the effect of nonreformed versus reformed structures on policy outputs and concluded that nonpartisan elections and at-large constituencies (reformed governments) lead to less responsive government. Hawley (1974) observed selective benefits for certain citizens from partisan (as opposed to nonpartisan) electoral systems. Morgan and Pelissero (1980) found that city government structure had no effect on city fiscal behavior, and Pelissero and Krebs (1997), examining the effect of city council legislative committees on policy making, found a similar null relationship. Dutton and Northrop (1978) observed a positive association between reformed institutions and the influence of business and elite groups in government. At the state level, Lax and Phillips (2009) found little to no influence for institutional variation on the responsiveness of governments to gay rights policies.

In a review of the literature, Svara (1990) concluded that reformed cities generally were less responsive to public preferences than nonreformed localities. In the economic development policy arena, however, political structures were observed to influence policy outputs (Sharp 1991; Fleischmann, Green, and Kwong 1992). In the domain of electoral politics, a large body of work contends that reformed institutions severely depress voter turnout (Alford and Lee 1968; Karnig and Walter 1983; Wood 2002). In addition, Welch and Bledsoe (1988, 52–53) examined similar issues related to symbolic representation and electoral systems and concluded that "when nonpartisan and at-large structures are combined, both lower income and educational groups and Democrats are strongly disadvantaged." I now turn to my analyses, which test whether ideology, competition, or institutional structures influence the policy outputs in local domains.

Sample, Measures, and Method

I combine multiple sources of data from cities at two points in time (1999 and 2002) to explore whether citizen preferences are related to local policies. This sample was used because a research-based initiative by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation made available consistent public opinion data across multiple cities to construct the core variable of interest—*ideology*. The Knight Community Indicators Project focused on twenty-six communities (see Table 1) in which Knight Ridder newspapers are located.[1]

This sample of cities is this study's greatest strength as well as an important weakness that I directly acknowledge. It is particularly valuable as it deviates from much of the urban politics literature that examines, almost exclusively, big cities (Danielson and Lewis 1996) or only one or two cases. A weakness, of course, is that it is a nonrandom sample of only twenty-six cities. Clearly, while a study with greater variation would be the desired ideal, the absence of reliable and consistent public opinion data across multiple cities at the local level makes this impossible. That being

Table 1. Liberal Spending in the General and Special Funds, 1999 and 2002

City	1999 liberal spending	1999 rank[a]	2002 liberal spending	2002 rank[a]
Aberdeen, SD	30.16	6	36.84	3
Akron, OH	10.75	21	9.93	21
Biloxi, MS	7.47	25	8.11	24
Boca Raton, FL	21.76	7	21.59	6
Boulder, CO	34.17	4	35.4	4
Bradenton, FL	9.71	23	11.96	18
Charlotte, NC	12.37	19	10.33	20
Columbia, SC	7.28	26	7.22	25
Columbus, GA	17.52	12	20.12	7
Detroit, MI	21.24	8	19.62	9
Duluth, MN	15.31	15	11.1	19
Fort Wayne, IN	10.16	22	8.47	22
Gary, IN	11.29	20	17.04	12
Grand Forks, ND	38.75	3	12.78	17
Lexington, KY	13.74	18	14.58	16
Long Beach, CA	49.42	1	51.56	1
Macon, GA	13.79	17	16.21	14
Miami, FL	16.38	13	21.64	5
Milledgeville, GA	13.81	16	5.98	26
Myrtle Beach, SC	18.72	11	20.03	8
Philadelphia, PA	41.37	2	43.39	2
San Jose, CA	34.16	5	16.3	13
St. Paul, MN	20.06	10	18.38	10
State College, PA	20.42	9	17.19	11
Tallahassee, FL	8.47	24	8.29	23
Wichita, KS	15.44	14	15.99	15
M	19.76		18.46	

[a] 1 = highest.

acknowledged, however, the sample is still useful because it does span cities across multiple states and regions and does vary in terms of demographics, economics, and politics (John S. and James L. Knight Foundation 2001). In addition, similar and/or identical samples have been used by Rahn et al. (2003), Rahn and Rudolph (2005), and Kelleher and Lowery (2009). To address concerns tied to the small sample size, I conducted my analyses in a variety of ways, as discussed below, and the results are robust.

Geographically, the cities are from sixteen different states. Regionally, while the South and the Midwest are the best represented (with twelve and nine cities, respectively), there are two cities from the Northeast in the sample (State College, Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) and three cities from the West (San Jose, California, Long Beach, California, and Boulder, Colorado). The population of the communities ranges from a mere 18,757 individuals in Milledgeville, Georgia, to over 1.5 million residents of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (according to the 2000 U.S. census). The racial makeup of the cities varies quite significantly as well, from 12% white in Gary, Indiana, and Detroit, Michigan, to over 93% white in Grand Forks, North Dakota, and Aberdeen, South Dakota. Economically, the median family income in 1999, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, extends from $27,225 in the city of Miami to over $77,000 in Boca Raton, Florida.

Overall, the sample is somewhat poorer and more nonwhite than the national average. It also includes fewer reform cities and more consolidated governments than nationally. Yet, in sum, the sample varies considerably on many

key variables. Although the Knight Foundation collected these data and selected the cities based on the locations of their newspapers, it is unlikely that the presence of a Knight newspaper in these places significantly alters or taints our results or conclusions. Nearly all American cities have a newspaper of some sort targeting them, and there is no reason to expect that the effect of such will be any different in Knight communities than in other American cities or towns. In addition, journalists abide by collective professional norms (or "pack" journalism), and thus the types (and styles) of coverage in different places are actually quite similar. Whether Knight papers (or communities in which they are located) are systematically different from other papers or communities is a question much larger than this article.

Dependent Variable

Information on the budgeted expenditures operationalized the dependent variables in all analyses. To gather this information, I contacted each community to obtain copies of the annual budgets in FY 1999 and FY 2002. Expenditures are important for a variety of reasons: they are often at the center of electoral debates and, more generally, are key to defining discussions between liberals and conservatives (Jacoby 1994); they are often controversial policy issues that can both constrain and promote a government's activities (Kingdon 1995); finally, sufficient funding is a prerequisite and critical driving force behind the formation and implementation of meaningful policy (Garand and Hendrick 1991).

The dependent variable, *local spending activity*, was constructed from budgetary data and measures how active and engaged local governments are in five different policy areas.[2] These areas, which offer fertile ground for government expansion and innovation, are (1) community development, housing, and conservation, (2) health and human services, (3) culture, the arts, and recreation, (4) environmental programs, and (5) transportation.[3] Debt service or management, capital, internal service, and fiduciary funds were excluded.

Table 1 highlights the values of this dependent variable for each city in 1999 and 2002 as well as their rank for each year relative to all other cities in the sample. This variable ranges from 5.98% (Milledgeville, Georgia, in 2002) to 51.6% (Long Beach, California, in 2002), with a mean of 19%.[4] The values for 1999 and 2002 are correlated at .82. Cronbach's alpha is .73, indicating that the index is a reliable indicator of an underlying dimension associated with local government spending. Higher values of this variable are meant to tap more "liberal" local policies, which are loosely defined as a more expansive role for the local government in a wider array of policy arenas. Table 2 lists the nongeneral funds included in the variable.

Independent Variables

The central theoretical variable of interest, *ideology*, is a measure of citizen public opinion in each of the twenty-six cities. This measure was constructed from surveys conducted in 1999 and 2002 by the Knight Foundation that sampled five hundred to eight hundred individuals in each of the twenty-six cities.[5] The question for the ideology measure read as follows: "In general, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal, or very liberal?" Individual-level responses were collapsed into three categories—conservative, moderate, and liberal—and then the data were aggregated to the community level.[6] Then, for each city, I computed the aggregate difference between liberal and conservative identifiers. The mean score for ideology is interpreted as the percentage point difference between liberals and conservatives in each city. In 1999, this variable ranges from –28.7 (Macon, Georgia) to 9.1 (Boulder, Colorado), with a mean of –14.55. In 2002, the most conservative city was Wichita, Kansas (–36.3) and the most liberal was again Boulder, Colorado (at 13.4). The mean ideology score for 2002 is –17.31.[7]

Other measures for public opinion used in recent works at the national and state levels (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Erikson,

Table 2. Nongeneral Funds Used in Dependent Variable

.25 Cent Tax Fund (used for Parks and Recreation)
Aberdeen Landmark Commission
Aberdeen Revolving Loan
Accommodations Tax Fund (used for Recreation and Culture)
Affordable Housing Fund
Airport
Airport Fund
Allied Arts Fund
Art Museum Board
Aurora Event Center
Aviation
Bayfront Park Management Trust
Beach and Park District
Beautification Maintenance
Bellaire Court Fund (Senior Housing)
Belmont Shore Parking Meter
Bikeway Development
Boca Raton Housing Authority
Bowden Golf Course
Bull Creek Fund
Bus Terminal Fund
Business Assistance
Business Improvement District
Campground
CEDIT—Economic Development
Center City Redevelopment Fund
Central Area General Improvement District Funds
CityFair Parking Deck
Civic Center Fund
Coliseum/Auditorium/Convention Center
Community Development
Community Housing Assistance Program
Community Redevelopment Agency
Community Resource Program (Economic Development and Community Service)
Convention and Cultural Affairs Fund
Convention and Visitors Bureau Fund
Convention Center
Cultural Facilities Grant Program
CUPA (Environmental—pollution)
Department of Off-Street Parking
Department of Transportation
Dial-A-Ride
Domestic Violence Fund
Downtown Development Authority
Downtown Infrastructure
Downtown Trolley System
Drug Law Enforcement
Duluth Transit Support Fund
Economic Development
Economic Development and Planning Services
Economic Development Enhancement Fund
Environmentally Sensitive Land
Extended School Program
Galleria Parking Garage
Genesis Convention Center
GF Housing Authority
Golf Course Fund
Golf Course Renew and Replacement
Grants Revenue—Atwater Kent (Museum)
Grants Revenue—City Planning
Grants Revenue—Fairmont Park
Grants Revenue—Free Library
Grants Revenue—Housing
Grants Revenue—Human Services
Grants Revenue—Mayor's Office of Community Services
Grants Revenue—Public Health
Grants Revenue—Recreation
Harbor
Health
Health Care Reserve Fund
Health Choices Behavioral Health
Health Facilities Authority
Home Investment Partnership Program Fund
Home Investment Program Fund
Home Program
Housing
Housing and Homeless Fund
Housing Assistance Program
Housing Assistance Trust
Housing Authority
Housing Conservation
Housing Development
Housing Information Office
Human Rights
Human Services
Ice Rink Management
Ice Skating Fund
Job Development Authority
Job Service Program
Job Training Fund
Library
License, Inspection, and Environmental Protection
Local Housing Assistance Trust Fund
Lottery Fund (used for tributary, greenways, and mountain trail establishment and maintenance)
Low and Moderate Income Housing Fund
Medical Center Fund
Miami Convention Center
Miami Sports and Exhibition Authority
Municipal Golf Course Fund
Municipal Parking
Municipal Waterfront Park
Neighborhood Development
Neighborhood Enhancement Teams
Office of the Mayor—Administer Job Training Act—Special Funds Monies

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Office of the Mayor—Economic Development—Enterprise Fund Monies
OMNI Tax Increment District
Open Space Fund
Oxbow Creek Fund
Park Development
Parking
Parking and Business Area Improvements
Parks—Developmentally Disabled
Parks and Recreation
Parks Projects
Permanent Parks and Recreation Fund
Planning and Economic Development
Planning and Zoning Commission
Promotion (Economic Development and Assistance)
Public Health Dept. Special Fund Monies
Public Library
Public Parking Corporation
Public Service Dept.—Recreation Special Funds Monies
Public Transportation
Rape Crisis Center
Recreation Activity Consolidated
Recreation Activity Fund
Redevelopment
Redevelopment General Fund
RiverCentre
School Fund
Seaway Port Authority
Senior Bus
Senior Employment
Senior Nutrition
SEOPW Redevelopment Trust Fund
Special Alcohol Programs
Special Alcohol Programs
Special City Excise and Sales Taxes (used for tourism, arts, etc.)
Special City Excise and Sales Taxes (used for tourism, arts, etc.)
Special Parks and Recreation
Special Parks and Recreation
Special Sales Tax—Airport and Parking
Special Sales Tax—Airport and Parking
Special Sales Tax—Economic Development
Special Sales Tax—Economic Development
Special Sales Tax—REC
SSMID (Downtown Development)
Stadium Fund
Stadium Parking Deck
STP-RD Health
TalTran Fund
Tidelands Funds (Total)
TIF Districts (Downtown Development)
Tourism and Convention Promotion
Transit
Transit Pass General Improvement District
Transportation
Transportation Development Fund
Transportation Excise Tax Fund (New Development and Growth in Transportation)
University Hill General Improvement District
Urban Renewal and Drug Enforcement
Urban Renewal Fund
Victim's Advocate Fund
Water Pollution Control Plant
Workforce Development Fund

Wright, and McIver 1993; Cohen 2006) rely on multiple indicators over time and/or many survey responses of citizens' policy preferences for more or less government to operationalize ideological preferences. However, this survey does not ask questions about specific policy preferences, and thus constructing a similar local level measure is not possible. The previously discussed measure based on self-identification is the best possible construct.

In light of this weakness, I took a number of precautions to address validity and reliability issues of ideology. First, I compared this variable to the Erikson, Wright, McIver (1993) state ideology scores. The correlation with state ideology was quite high, at .70. In the final model, I also included a control for partisanship—the county share of the vote for Gore in 2000. The Gore vote and city ideology variables were more moderately correlated at .40.[8]

Second, an additional concern related to the use of self-identification questions is that oftentimes nonsophisticates are much more likely to self-identify as "conservative" than are sophisticates. Therefore, a measure built from individual responses to an ideology question may lack meaningful variation or be slightly biased toward those selecting to identify as "conservatives." To investigate whether this was a problem in the Knight data, I constructed two alternative mean ideology measures using different criteria for "political sophistication." The first measure defines nonsophisticates as those with less than a high school diploma and drops them from the analysis. This alternative measure is correlated with the original mean ideology measure at .96. Second, I excluded responses from those with less than the median level of education (which was some college or university work). The correlation between this measure and the original measure was .95. Because the correlations were so strong between these additional measures and the original, I used the first mean ideology score (without a consideration of political sophistication) in all analyses. In addition, because these alternative measures dramatically decrease the number of individual respondents for each city, the original measure is the most appropriate to incorporate.

A number of other variables were also included to test two categories of potential alternative explanations. The first collection of variables addresses concerns related to political and demographic context. I include population and income, similar to Peterson (1981) and others (Oliver and Ha 2007; Hill and Matsubayashi 2005; Percival, Johnson, and Neiman 2009) who include one or both of the variables in their investigations of local political participation and/or policy. These were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau.[9] To control for partisanship, I included the *Gore vote* variable, which is the proportion of the 2000 county election returns won by the Democratic candidate. To control for potential effects of the racial composition of a city on policy (Hero 1998; Stein, Post, and Rieden 2000), a measure of *city diversity* was included. This was based on one created and used by J. L. Sullivan (1973), and also Hero and Tolbert (1996), Hero (2003), and Boehmke (2004).[10] Higher values represent a greater degree of diversity or heterogeneity. To control for regional variations in the degree of fiscal centralization, I included a variable, *local proportion*, which is the total local spending for each state divided by combined state and local spending (Local ÷ (State + Local)) for 1999–2000, collected from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The second group of controls addresses concerns related to institutional structures and context. First, a number of conflicting findings exist in the literature with respect to the presence of reformed versus nonreformed institutions, as discussed above, and thus I include a variable, *reform*, ranging from 0 to 3. This is essentially an additive index constructed from three dummy variables tapping the presence of a council–manager system, at-large elections, and nonpartisan ballots. Higher values represent a greater number of reformed electoral characteristics within the city. I also include two measures tapping the regional institutional configuration (Kelleher and Lowery 2004; Kelleher 2006). The first, *competition (fragmentation)*, is measured by the number of cities within the urban county. A second measure is the level of dispersion of the

Table 3. Bivariate Analyses of Ideology and Policy in 26 American Communities

Correlations		
	Percent of Liberal Spending in the General and Special Funds	
Ideology	0.48	
Bivariate regressions using GLS-E		
	Percent of Liberal Spending in the General and Special Funds	
Ideology	0.4535** (0.1464)	
N *Overall* R^2	52 0.23	
Bivariate OLS regressions by year		
	Percent of Liberal Spending in the General and Special Funds 1999	*Percent of Liberal Spending in the General and Special Funds 2002*
Ideology	0.6390** (0.1984)	0.4271** (0.1959)
N R^2	26 0.30	26 0.17

**$p < 0.05$; one-tailed test. Standard errors are in parentheses.

population across the urban county, *concentration*, which is measured by a Herfindahl index of concentration. More specifically, the index is calculated as the sum of the squared proportions of the populations of the general purpose local governments in the urban county.

I employed a generalized least squares error components (GLS-E) modeling strategy (Maddala 1971; Nerlove 1971) to account for the pooled nature of these time series data (1999 and 2002) and possible issues with unit effects. A GLS-E strategy is most appropriate when the structure of the data is such that the number of units (*N*) is significantly larger than the number of time (*T*) points (Nerlove 1971) and when the reason the units are different can be attributed to history.[11] Both of these requirements are clearly met with the sample used in these analyses.

Results

The analyses presented below provide support for the presence of ideological representation in local governments—a finding consistent with conclusions at the national and state levels. First, as presented in Table 3, bivariate correlations and regression analyses between the core theoretical variable (ideology) and the dependent variable (local spending activity) illustrate positive, significant relationships between the opinion of citizens and the policies of government. Spending is positively correlated with ideology at .48, and in bivariate regressions using GLS-E, ideology is both significant and in the expected positive direction. When public opinion is more liberal, we see a corresponding more expansive orientation for government in these twenty-six cities. In addition, notable is the overall R^2 value of .23. To further consider the nuances of the bivariate relationship between ideology and liberal spending, I also performed a series of ordinary least squares regression analyses by year, also reported in Table 1. A positive and highly significant ($p < .05$) relationship exists in both models between ideology and liberal spending in these cities for both 1999 and 2002.

Table 4. A Multivariate Analysis of Ideology, Liberal Spending, and Control Variables

	Coeff.	*SE*
Ideology	0.3349**	(0.1607)
Political and demographic controls		
Population/100,000	0.2152	(0.8212)
Median family income/10,000	0.5323	(1.5666)
Gore vote	14.3187	(22.4556)
City diversity	–5.7984	(13.6422)
Local proportion	–24.6413	(34.5885)
Institutional structures and context		
Reformed institutions	1.3076	(2.0731)
Competition (fragmentation)	0.2946**	(0.01243)
Concentration	11.6877*	(7.1714)
Constant	19.7828	(19.8432)
N	52	52
R^2 (overall)	.5055	
R^2 (within)	.0793	
R^2 (between)	.5500	

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. These models are estimated using random effects generalized least squares estimation.
* $p < .10$, two-tailed.
** $p < .05$, two-tailed.

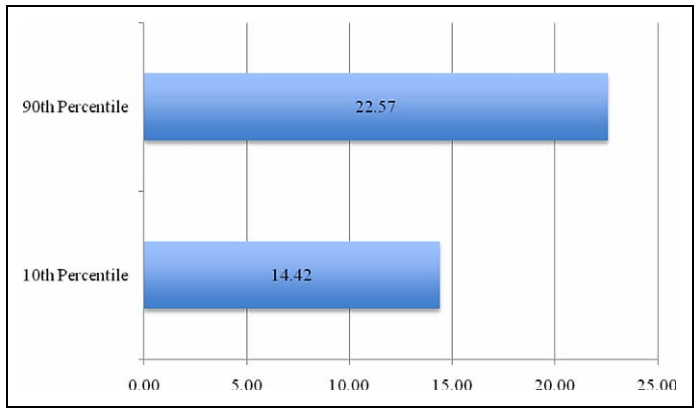

Figure 1. Predicted liberal spending, from the tenth to the ninetieth percentile

The next analysis explores a multivariate model, the results of which are presented in Table 4. The results are identical to the bivariate case—opinion is positively related to policy. Even with the inclusion of controls, the core relationship of interest between ideology and policy remains consistently and notably strong, positive, and significant. To interpret the substantive impact of the coefficient for ideology, I calculated the predicted value for spending under two scenarios for the independent variable—ideology at the tenth percentile and the ninetieth percentile. The results are graphically depicted in Figure 1. With all other variables set to their mean, the prediction for spending moves from 14.42% to 22.57%—a change of 8.15%.

With respect to the control variables, only two are statistically significant—competition and concentration. These results both are

positive and generally conform to the patterns of results from earlier work (Kelleher 2006). Central cities with more competition have more expansive and liberal policy orientations. While this affirms the importance of competition as a motivating force for cities as supposed by Tiebout and others, the fact that improved representation manifests itself via an ideological conceptualization of citizen preferences is contrary to alternative interpretations of their arguments concerning economic motivations and the importance of market pressures. The positive finding with respect to concentration indicates that greater population concentration in the central city (as opposed to the neighboring competitors) yields more liberal policies. The remaining controls, while all of the expected sign, are not statistically significant. For example, population, income, and the Gore vote are all positive—indicating that larger, more wealthy, and more democratic cities are more positively associated with expansive local government policy. In Peterson's (1981) work, income (or fiscal capacity) was among the strongest predictors of policy. The variable for reformed structures is positive yet insignificant, indicating that the presence or absence of reformed structures does not affect the nature of policy in this model.[12] The overall R^2 value for this model is .51.

Implications and Limitations

The previous findings all speak to the importance of considering ideology when exploring the varied dimensions of responsiveness in local governments. These findings are in contrast to the implicit expectations offered by Paul Peterson (1981) in *City Limits* and Mark Schneider (1989) in *The Competitive City*. The results from testing this article's core hypothesis illustrate that ideological representation is a valid and viable expectation for local governments. Clearly, cities concern themselves, to varying degrees, with more than just developmental policies and their relative economic position in a particular region, and when they do so they are responding to the desires of their publics.

The research presented here is only a first step in understanding the dynamics of the opinion–policy connection using an ideological framework, and there is much work to be done to hopefully overcome some of the weaknesses of this work. First and quite obviously, the sample needs to be expanded to investigate whether the opinion–policy link observed here holds in other places and times. However, while this sample is certainly not perfect, it has provided a starting point (and hopefully a springboard) from which to examine the question of ideological representation. Perhaps the findings here will not hold when tested across a larger sample of cities with a richer set of control variables that cannot be included in a model with only twenty-six observations. However, the importance of such an inquiry is paramount, and the answer remains unknown until this work is furthered and refined. And even if the relationship does not hold up when tested in other cities, then new (and arguably more important questions) emerge, with powerful normative consequences.

A second important future step involves further development and refinement of the measurement tools available to urban researchers, especially with respect to the aggregate measures of opinion and policy across cities and over time. At the state and national levels, a number of innovative variables have been created in the last decades to tap these concepts in unique and powerful ways. Bringing these measures to the local level, however, is daunting, if not usually impossible. For example, greater specificity in the dependent variable used here would have been ideal; however, budgets and reports by cities are highly aggregated and often significantly vary across cities, and thus breaking down spending patterns across a large sample of cities is quite difficult. Future case study work on a selection of cities could certainly shed light on the intricacies of the decisions driving the formation and execution of ideological policies. Thus, to truly further this line if inquiry, much time must be spent in developing similar indicators that can be replicated across both space and time.

Conclusion

The results of the previous analyses indicate a link between the ideology of city's residents and the policies formed in city hall. In other words, at the macro level, the tenets of democratic theory are manifested in the actions of local governments. Despite common rhetoric about apathy, low turnout, and sparse knowledge about local politics, somehow the ideological preferences of citizens are being translated to elected officials. My central conclusion is that one of the most common paradigms in urban politics about the nature of local policies overlooks an important piece of the puzzle—ideological representation as a valid and viable expectation. Of course, to be fair, Peterson did not have any measure of ideology or public opinion to include in his analyses, and thus he was unable to test this explanation. Nonetheless, these findings here suggest that cities might not be quite as limited as his work contends.

These results hold numerous important implications for the study of American politics more generally. In local domains, not only do cities address ideological policies but also a definitive representational link exists between citizens and government. Perhaps, then, the actions and reactions of cities may not be as distinct from the national and state levels as many contend. Cities make critical policies and clearly delve into arenas focused on much more than purely developmental policy. These findings illustrate that the use of a quasi-market paradigm may oversimplify the roles and importance of cities. Cities not only concern themselves with building roads and maximizing their tax base but also make many other important decisions with severe political and practical implications. Local governments not only have a clear incentive to heed citizen opinion but also, in practice, that is what actually occurs. Liberal publics lead to more expansive policies and conservative publics lead to less expansive policies.

This is important because it has consequences for larger empirical and theoretical questions about the way in which we study urban politics and the connections to other work in American politics. The results in this article clearly illustrate that public opinion, as measured using an ideological lens, has value in furthering our understanding of representation and responsiveness at the local level. Of course, perhaps the results observed in these analyses are temporally driven and reflective of a more recent shift toward "culture wars" and ideological politics at the local level. In other words, perhaps the linkages between opinion and policy are only beginning to be crystallized. Regardless, however, as we embark on future research in the area of urban politics, a more detailed and direct focus on the possibility of these relationships must be addressed. We need to broaden our expectations about what cities are capable of doing. They do not operate with tunnel vision focused only on mobile residents or economic and tax base growth; instead, they broadly address many critical concerns, and as a result their scope of influence may be much larger (or is in the process of becoming much larger) than originally considered.

The findings of this article also speak to the capabilities of citizens within these localities. Even with sometimes limited participation, representation is occurring, and therefore citizens may have a much stronger role in local governance than previously considered—whether they are aware of it or not. Potentially, they could use this knowledge to demand even greater accountability and more pointed attention to their most pressing concerns by elected officials. These findings allow one to imagine what might be possible if people turned out in greater numbers and participated even more fully in local domains. While it is easy to overlook the importance of local governmental activity to our political system, research suggests that citizens who become engaged at the most decentralized levels are most likely to get involved in other spheres of government. Therefore, it is in local governments where we should focus most intently to see the idealistic tenets of representative democracy most effectively realized and expanded.

It is within these most decentralized units of American government where the mere

proximity of individuals to government may be a mediating force for political participation and policy responsiveness. Thus, it is vital that we continue to push and prod the mechanisms of representation in such settings. ''Municipalities are where most citizens are both learning and exercising the arts of self-governance'' (Oliver 2001, 15). Perhaps, then, citizens who become engaged at the most decentralized levels become more likely to get involved in other spheres of government. As demonstrated by Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, 283–84), knowledge of local politics is highly correlated with knowledge of state and national politics. Therefore, local governments are the arenas in which the idealistic tenets of representative democracy might be most effectively realized and expanded. ''Local politics may be the door through which citizens of all economic and social backgrounds are brought into the political arena more generally.''

In recent years, scholars have lamented the state of urban politics scholarship (Judd 2005) and its isolation from the general lines of inquiry in the field of American politics (Sapotichne, Jones and Wolfe 2007). For example, Sapotichne, Jones, and Wolfe (2007, 98), ''The study of urban politics is collapsing into the academic equivalent of a black hole: The light it generates within cannot escape; furthermore, no light from outside can penetrate the event horizon.'' Through an application of well-established theories and findings about the nature of representation in American politics work (Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993; Cohen 2006) to the urban landscape, this article addresses this critique. The primary contribution is a multicity, macro-level analysis investigating the possibility of a broad ideological link between the public's opinions and the actual policies of government.

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Notes

1. For more information about the Knight Foundation and the Community Indicators Project, see http://www.knightfoundation.org/research_publications/community_indicators/community_indicators.dot
2. In *Statehouse Democracy*, Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) created an Index of Policy Liberalism based on eight preexisting indicators. Gray et al. (2004) used an identical method to create an index of state policy circa 2000. At the local level, however, most existing measures of policy examine only one policy area; no measures of policy comparable to Erikson, Wright, and McIver's exist for the universe of local governments.
3. Some slight issues arose with respect to availability of some of the budgetary data. The fiscal years for each city are somewhat varied; some begin in July or October while others run according to the calendar year. However, with very few exceptions the data collected from the fiscal years account for one of the following ranges: July 1, 1998/2001 to June 30, 1999/2002; October 1, 1998/2001 to September 30, 1999/2002; and January 1, 1999/2002 to December 31, 1999/2002. Exceptions follow. For the city of Gary, Indiana, the budget for FY 2002 was unavailable. As a result, I utilized data from the 2003 budget to avoid losing a data point. In addition, for the city of Long Beach, California, the budgeted expenditures for FY 1999 were unavailable, and therefore I used data on the actual expenditures in FY 2000 (October 1, 1999 to September 30, 2000). For Columbus, Georgia, I relied on actual (rather than budgeted) expenditures because of availability issues. For the total budget amounts for Boca

Raton (2002) and San Jose (1999), I also used actual expenditures. Careful comparisons of budgeted and actual expenditures in other cities reveal very small and insignificant differences between budgeted and actual.

4. Examples of expenditures not classified as "ideological" include general government, public safety, and public works.
5. In twenty-four of the twenty-six cases, the "community" sample corresponds to residents within the home county of the central city. The surveyors made this decision because the home county was very similar to the central city. For example, the sample for Fort Wayne, Indiana, was from residents of Allen County, including residents of both the central city and suburbs. Two cities (Long Beach, California, and Gary, Indiana) are strikingly different from their home counties, and therefore the sample for these places was from only the central city. The surveys were all completed using telephone interviews of adults ages eighteen or older within each individual community.
6. Responses of "don't know" and "refused" were excluded.
7. Between 1999 and 2002, ideology clearly does vary over time. The largest shifts occurred in the following cities: San Jose, California (–15.73), Columbus, Georgia (–13.35), Wichita, Kansas (–10.78), and St. Paul, Minnesota (8.41).
8. Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) have similar findings and values when they correlate their measures of ideology and partisanship. Because of collinearity issues, I do not include the state ideology measure in subsequent models.
9. Population and city diversity are operationalized using 2000 data. Median family income is for 1999.
10. It is operationalized using the following formula to tap the racial diversity of the city: Diversity = 1 – (Proportion White Population^2 + Proportion African American Population^2 + Proportion Asian Population^2 + Proportion Hispanic Population^2 + Proportion Native American Population^2).
11. Despite limited degrees of freedom because of the small *N*, I estimated a number of models using fixed effects for the cities in the sample. The results were nearly identical for all models subsequently reported, with the core relationship between opinion and ideology preserved. Including twenty-five dummy variables, however, did introduce significant collinearity, which caused a number of variables to drop from the analyses. Therefore, to appropriately estimate the parameters for all relevant variables, generalized least squares error component is the best and correct analysis strategy, and thus I use this method for all analyses. However, because of the importance of acknowledging city-specific variation and effects, I felt it important and necessary to explore the fixed effects. And it is critical to note that even with such a small sample size, the inclusion of city dummy variables does not negate the link between opinion and policy.
12. The results are identical when I included separate measures for each of the three reform characteristics. Only the variable tapping the presence of at-large elections is marginally significant ($p = .104$).

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