

Elections and Representation in American Municipal Administration

Evidence from Elite Surveys in Five New England States

April 11, 2024

Abstract

How does the way that public officials are selected affect how they represent their constituents? Do elections facilitate representation relative to indirect appointment? Municipal clerks in the New England states provide an ideal setting to explore these questions, as they 1) are essential government actors, 2) serve in full-service local governments with few overlapping jurisdictions, and 3) vary in the methods through which they are selected. To understand clerks' attitudes *vis-à-vis* their constituents, we conduct an original online and mail survey of municipal clerks in five New England states. Our findings suggest that elected clerks are more public service-oriented and are more attentive to constituent concerns, but that there is little difference in substantive ideological, partisan, or policy representation between selection methods. Our analysis provides some of the clearest evidence to date on the relationship between the extensive margin of elections and representation, and provides a model for future exploration of additional offices and dimensions of representation.

Local governments must balance two competing expectations. First, because they are at the lowest level of governance and are closest to the citizens they serve, they play a crucial representative function. Tocqueville regarded local government and participation as one of the main drivers of a young America’s democratic spirit, noting that “Without the institutions of a township a nation can give itself a free government, but it does not have the spirit of freedom” (de Tocqueville 2000, 58). Belief in the importance of local control over certain policy areas, the accessibility of local government for citizen input, and its centrality in representing citizen interests remain. These representational expectations, however, conflict with a second expectation of local government. Because many of the policy areas delegated to local government are not politicized like national- or state-level policymaking, many believe that local governments should emphasize competence and professionalism over politics. Commentators frequently argue, for example, that there is no partisan way to “fill a pothole” (de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016, 722) or “pave a street...[or] lay a sewer” (Adrian 1952, 766). This spirit is reflected in Progressive-era institutions such as appointed municipal managers (e.g., Sahn 2023) and non-partisan elections (e.g., Adrian 1952, 1959). Local policymakers are expected to fulfill both a political, representational role and a professional, administrative one.

Local government institutions that select officials reflect these competing expectations. Elections are a natural way to select officials who are expected to represent and be accountable to the public they serve. Appointment, alternatively, may better select capable individuals while insulating them from political pressures. As a result, there is substantial variation in the methods used to fill many offices in local government. Such within-office variation in selection methods is unusual in American politics, with most evidence on elections’ consequences coming from variation in the *competitiveness*, rather than the *existence*, of elections. For example, studies of American legislative politics explore the consequences of the level of electoral threat to which legislators are subjected (e.g., Burden 2004; Jones 2013; Fourinaies and Hall 2022; Titiunik 2016). While these studies provide valuable evidence about elections’ consequences, none can

provide leverage on the most relevant counterfactual scenario: what if these elected officials were not elected at all? Local governments provide a unique opportunity to answer that question.

In this paper, we leverage the substantial variation in selection methods of municipal clerks in five New England states to explore the consequences of elections. Whether clerks should be elected is a live political question being debated in New England and beyond.¹ Municipal clerks, therefore, provide a unique opportunity to understand how elections influence responsiveness to constituents. They also represent an essential office in local government. The clerk is crucial for a town to operate because they both do much of the work of municipal government and facilitate the ability of other officials and citizens to access its services (Munro 1934). Their tasks include administering hundreds of laws, managing elections, issuing permits, conducting the town census, granting licenses, managing public records, and more. In a case that illustrates the importance of the office, the town of Passadumkeag, Maine was effectively shut down when the town clerk resigned after she was denied vacation time.² Our study offers new evidence on this important local office.

To explore how selection methods shape the responsiveness of elected officials to their constituents, we conducted an original survey of municipal clerks in New England, which we fielded in the spring of 2023 both online and through the mail. We solicited responses from all town and city clerks in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. We focus on New England for several reasons: municipal government is both uniquely relevant and consistent across the region; counties play a limited role in local governance, resulting in fewer overlapping jurisdictions than in other states; and, most importantly, the region offers substantial within-state variation in the clerk selection method.

We begin by presenting descriptive results comparing elected and appointed clerks. We

¹See, for example, Galvin, William F. "Selectmen Debate Elected Vs. Appointed Town Clerk." *The Cape Code Chronicle* (Chatham, MA). November 30, 2022.

²Bartov, Shira Li. "Town Forced to Shut Down After Sole Clerk Resigns Over Vacation Denial." *Newsweek*. May 18, 2022.

show that elected clerks are generally less credentialed and work in lower-capacity offices but are generally more experienced and feel more self-directed in their work than appointed clerks. We then explore our main hypothesis around clerk responsiveness. We do so in two ways. First, we use several questions that examine clerks' feelings of accountability to their constituents and other actors and their attitudes toward public service. We find that elected clerks report being more responsive to their constituents. We then examine whether the relationship between constituent political preferences and clerks' political beliefs and attitudes differs between elected and appointed clerks. We find little evidence of this; in fact, we find that on a key issue facing clerks, voting rights, elected clerks are *less* responsive than appointed clerks. Taken together, our results demonstrate key similarities and differences among clerks chosen with different selection methods.

Selection Method and Local Officials

While traditional studies of American local politics emphasized the policymaking constraints faced by local governments ([Peterson 1981](#)), a number of recent studies demonstrate a connection between citizen preferences and policy outcomes (e.g., [de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016](#); [Gerber and Hopkins 2011](#); [Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014](#); [Einstein and Kogan 2016](#); [Palus 2010](#)). Local government institutions – such as election timing ([de Benedictis-Kessner 2018](#); [Anzia 2011](#)), party competition ([Bucchianeri 2020](#); [Tausanovitch and Warshaw 2014](#)), and the use of a municipal manager ([Sahn 2023](#); [Carr 2015](#))– condition the relationship between constituents and local government officials. Possibly complicating this relationship is the increasingly nationalized lens through which voters view local politics ([Hopkins 2018](#)). Such nationalization may induce politicians to implement policies consistent with the positions of national political parties at the cost of what is best for a community ([Farris and Holman 2023, 2017](#)).

Our focus is on an important electoral institution: how local officials are chosen to serve. Town clerks are, depending on the charter or code of a given municipality, either elected directly or appointed by a town executive. We expect the choice of the selection method to have substantial consequences across several dimensions of clerk characteristics, attitudes, and behavior. Previous work has explored, directly or indirectly, the effects of election versus appointment for a number of offices and a number of possible outcomes. A substantial literature documents the consequences of city managers – appointed municipal executives – as “arguably... the most important innovation in American local government over the last century” (Carr 2015, 673). Use of a municipal manager is associated with lower levels of taxing and spending (Lineberry and Fowler 1967), higher municipal bond ratings (Dove 2017), and different development approaches (Feiock, Steinacker and Park 2009; Hawkins 2010). Other work finds that appointed treasurers are associated with lower borrowing costs than elected (Whalley 2013), that appointed assessors are fairer than elected (Sances 2019; Bowman and Mikesell 1989), but that school superintendent selection method has little effect on student performance (Hoover 2008; Partridge and Sass 2011). Existing studies explore, with contrasting findings, whether appointed clerks increase or decrease local turnout (Burden et al. 2013; Ferrer N.D.b). With some exceptions (Burden et al. 2013; Ferrer N.D.a), this previous scholarship focuses on performance- and competence-based outcomes; we turn our attention instead to responsiveness to constituent preferences.

Our theoretical expectations build on prior scholarship on electoral accountability to establish a connection between selection method and clerks’ responsiveness to constituent preferences. Prior scholarship emphasizes that electoral threat induces public officials to exert effort (Alt, Bueno de Mesquita and Rose 2011; Fourniaies and Hall 2022) and heed constituent preferences, through either selection of politicians (Canes-Wrone and De Marchi 2002; Hall 2015) or politicians adapting their behavior (Huber and Gordon 2004; Gordon and Huber 2007). If a municipality appoints rather than elects their clerk, this may result in selecting a more-qualified, less community-connected individual with access to more professional resources. Aside from

selection issues, clerks may adapt their behavior to respond to the incentives presented by different selection methods. If clerks are elected, the public will have an opportunity to pass direct judgment on them, and clerks should be cognizant of this as they act. If a clerk is appointed, their immediate accountability will be to a different public official. While this official may be accountable to voters, it is unlikely that the performance of the clerk will weigh heavily on the minds of voters. This, in turn, may give voters less incentive to monitor clerks in the first place. Our theoretical expectations mirror the argument that while the broader electorate is less capable of selecting high-quality officials and monitoring their behavior than a more-informed appointer, elected officials will nevertheless be more responsive to voter preferences ([Gailmard and Jenkins 2009](#)).

New England Municipalities and Their Clerks

Across the United States, thousands of county, city, and town clerks administer municipal government, implement and interpret local, state, and federal law, and act as the first point of contact for citizens and their government. The decisions of these officials can dramatically affect citizens' lives. [Munro \(1934, 95\)](#), one of the first textbooks on municipal politics, described the office, noting that:

No other office in the municipal service has so many contacts. It serves the mayor, the city council, the city manager (when there is one), and all the administrative departments without exception. All of them call upon it, almost daily, for some service or information. Its work is not spectacular but it demands versatility, alertness, accuracy, and no end of patience. The public does not realize how many loose ends of city administration this office pulls together.

This century-old description holds true today and is quoted on many municipal clerk websites. The “loose ends” that clerks address include administering hundreds of laws, managing elec-

tions, issuing permits, conducting the town census, granting licenses, and managing public records. Thus, the role of the clerk is both administrative and representative.

Local government in New England is distinctive in its focus on the municipality as the relevant unit of government and not counties. Municipalities in the region are primarily classified as towns, which overwhelmingly use the town meeting as their form of local government. This form of government takes a variety of shapes that range from the traditional whole-town political meeting to those more closely approximating the mayor-council or council-manager systems that predominate in other parts of the country.³ Other, primarily larger municipalities have the designation of city, which grants them additional home-rule powers. Because municipalities are the relevant unit of local government, services that might be provided in special districts in other states – such as education in school districts – are disproportionately also town-based in New England.

A valuable feature of local government in New England for our purposes is that municipalities are a *comprehensive* and *exclusive* unit of local government. They are comprehensive because nearly every geographic area, and therefore nearly every person in the region, is part of a municipal government. For example, there is no unincorporated land in Connecticut, Massachusetts, or Rhode Island ([Betlock 2014](#)); there are “very few exceptions” to the general rule that “All lands in Vermont are located within towns”;⁴ New Hampshire has twenty-five unincorporated places to join its thirteen cities and 221 towns.^{5,6} As a result, nearly the entire population of the five states we examine live in the municipalities that constitute our sample.⁷

Municipal governments in New England are “exclusive” because of the near-absence of

³“Cities 101 – Forms of Local Government.” National League of Cities. Accessed August 2023.

⁴“Land Use in Vermont.” Two Rivers - Ottauquechee Regional Commission. Accessed August 2023.

⁵“NH Cities and Towns.” NH.gov. Accessed August 2023.

⁶These unincorporated places are disproportionately small in population. See [Howe \(n.d.\)](#).

⁷In the final New England state, Maine, on the other hand, “somewhat more than half of the total land area of the state is designated ‘unorganized territory’” ([Howe n.d.](#)). While these areas are sparsely populated, this nevertheless consists of more than four hundred unincorporated townships, making it distinct from the states we include.

meaningful county-level government: “Unlike the rest of the nation, New England states generally don’t follow a county government system.”⁸ Connecticut and Rhode Island have no county government,⁹ a number of Massachusetts county governments have been abolished,¹⁰ and New Hampshire and Vermont have county governments, but they are relatively limited in their powers.¹¹ While in most other states counties serve as the “comprehensive” unit of local government, ensuring that all residents lie in the service area of at least one local government, municipalities fill this role in New England, thus largely obviating county government.

These various features of New England local government – town-based governance, paucity of unincorporated areas, and absence of meaningful county government – make New England an ideal setting to conduct our survey and test our theoretical expectations. The importance of the municipality allows us to focus on that level of government, thus retaining a focus on an office with important roles – that many states would assign to the county level – but allowing us to have an increased sample size and variation in our key quantity of interest, clerk selection method. It also ensures that key variables of interest are available at the municipality level. The infrequency of unincorporated areas and the absence of county government allow us to avoid complications that arise from overlapping and ambiguous jurisdictions. In other regions, counties and municipalities may provide the same services but for different areas, and special districts may be used to provide particular goods and services to areas that do not hew neatly to existing jurisdictional boundaries. These features of local government in other parts of the country may complicate citizen understanding of public service provision (Sances 2017), shaping levels of observational data aggregation and affecting public servants’ behavior (Berry 2008).

⁸“County Government.” Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Citizen Information Service. Accessed August 2023.

⁹“Quick Facts: Connecticut Municipal Governments.” CT State Library LibGuides. Access August 2023.

¹⁰“County Government.” Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Citizen Information Service. Accessed August 2023.

¹¹“State Profiles.” National Association of Counties. Accessed August 2023.

By focusing on a region where one level of local government provides the same set of public services to all residents, we avoid these potential complications.

The town clerk has traditionally been an elected office. Massachusetts and Connecticut, for instance, have clerk elections as the “default” method of selection, but allow individual towns the leeway to change the selection method at their discretion.¹² Some towns, however, have sought to shift to an appointed clerk as the position has grown in responsibility and complexity.^{13,14} The result of gradual changes is a substantial blend throughout the region in the nature of clerk selection. In Figure 1, we map the selection method used by the municipalities in the five states we examine. While the choice of clerk selection method is non-random, there is considerable geographic and demographic diversity among communities using different methods, and we control for a variety of potential confounders in our analyses.

Original Survey of New England Municipal Clerks

To test our theory about the relationship between clerk selection methods and representation, we conducted an original survey of municipal clerks in five New England states. Our survey, conducted via both email and physical mail, yielded a relatively high response rate of 25 percent that was balanced across clerk selection method.

In our survey, we asked clerks about their attitudes toward public service, ideological and policy preferences, job performance and qualifications, and perceptions of their local government and community (Baldassare and Hoene 2004; Einstein, Glick and Lusk 2014; PRRI 2021; Barboza-Wilkes, Le and Resh 2023). These questions took a variety of forms. Most were structured as five-point Likert scales, while others were multiple choice. We also invited

¹²See MA Gen L ch 41 § 1 and § 1b (2022), CT Gen Stat § 9-189. (2022), and CT Gen Stat § 7-16a. (2022).

¹³Dunn, Tim. “Dartmouth Looks to Appointed Town Clerk as Job Becomes More Complex.” *The Standard Times* (New Bedford, MA). November 9, 2020.

¹⁴In New Hampshire, the ability to appoint a clerk is specifically tied to having a “city” form of government.

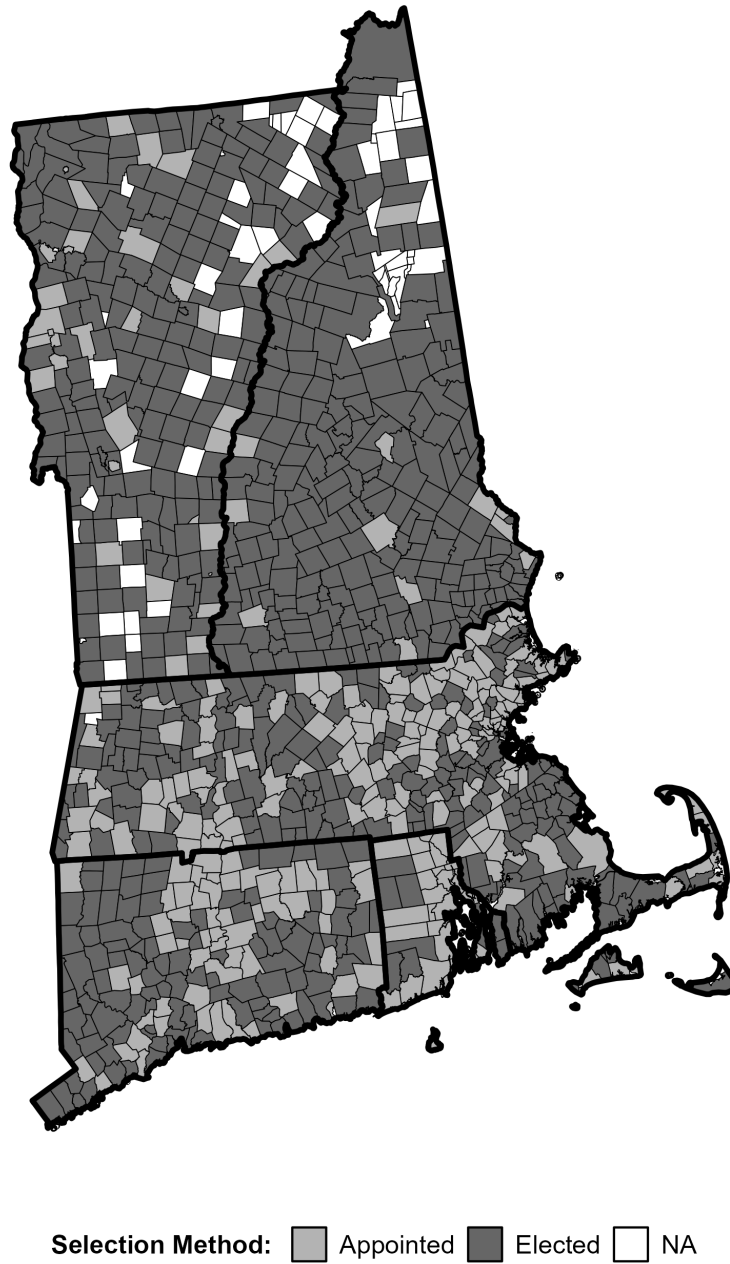


Figure 1: Selection Method for New England Municipal Clerks

Note: Map units are municipal boundaries. Areas in white are those for which we could not determine clerk selection method.

open responses at various points throughout the survey. Finally, we collected demographic and background information on the clerks.¹⁵

We administered the survey both online and via postal mail. We began by creating a list of email addresses for municipal clerks. The survey was then emailed to these addresses through Qualtrics with an invitation to respond on April 4, 2023.¹⁶ A follow-up email was sent one week later, on April 11th, 2023. We subsequently collected the mailing addresses of our list of clerks, and approximately three weeks later, a paper copy of the survey was mailed with a pre-paid response envelope to all clerks who had not yet responded online.

Our overall response rate was 25 percent. Our response rate was substantially higher for the paper surveys delivered via postal mail. Ten percent of our responses came from online respondents, while 16 percent came from those who were mailed the survey (which, recall, was sent only to those not responding to the online survey).¹⁷ This gap is particularly pronounced for appointed clerks, who were nearly twice as likely to respond to the paper survey. In the aggregate, we achieved similar and high response rates across appointed and elected clerks, with both groups exceeding 20 percent response rates. We summarize our recruitment in Table A.1 in the Supplementary Materials, which divides response numbers and rates by both survey delivery mode and clerk selection method. Our sample was also geographically diverse. In Figure A.1 in the Supplementary Materials we re-create our map from Figure 1 highlighting only the municipalities whose clerks responded to our survey.

Table 1 presents the characteristics of our sample. In this table, we compare the municipality-level characteristics of our sample to non-respondent municipalities in our sampling frame. Our sample is broadly representative: we find no significant differences for median age, population

¹⁵See Supplementary Materials, Section C, for the full text of the survey.

¹⁶Several email addresses bounced back our recruitment email; we attempted to contact these via email a second time.

¹⁷Some clerks emailed us to question the legitimacy of our online survey or to express that they were not allowed to click on emailed links.

size, the share of town residents with a bachelor’s degree, the share of town residents who are non-white, median home value, Biden two-party vote share in 2020, or the share of communities using a town or city manager. We only find a significant difference for median household income, with municipalities in our sample having a household income on average approximately \$5,500 higher than municipalities from which we did not get a response. Collectively, Table 1 suggests that the municipalities in our sample are slightly richer, less white, more liberal, and more educated than non-respondent municipalities, but the differences are small. Our high response rate and our sample’s geographic, demographic, economic, and institutional representativeness provide confidence that our results generalize beyond our survey sample.

Table 1: Representativeness of Sample, ACS Variables

| | Non-Respondents | Respondents | P-Value |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------|
| Median Age | 46 | 45 | 0.14 |
| Population | 13, 113 | 13, 406 | 0.87 |
| Percentage w/ Bachelors | 30 | 31 | 0.12 |
| Percentage Non-White | 10 | 11 | 0.08 |
| Median Household Income | 88, 858 | 94, 381 | 0.01 |
| Median Home Value | 330, 459 | 347, 270 | 0.18 |
| Biden Vote Percentage | 59 | 60 | 0.35 |
| Percentage with Manager | 10 | 10 | 0.99 |

Note: Table presents means for respondent and non-respondent municipalities, and p-values for a difference-of-means test.

Descriptive Comparison of Elected and Appointed Clerks

We begin by exploring descriptive characteristics of our sample. These comparisons provide a baseline for understanding who serves as a municipal clerk in New England, what resources they have at their disposal, and how they feel about their jobs. The analysis in this section is descriptive: here, we focus on understanding how elected and appointed clerks compare as a baseline. In short, we find that elected clerks are, on average, older, less educated, and work in

offices with lower institutional capacity than appointed clerks. They are also longer-tenured and more independent and self-reliant in their work. These results also show how selection method may be bundled with other differences across municipalities.

Clerk Personal Characteristics We first consider clerks' personal and demographic characteristics. Figure 2 plots means for a variety of characteristics. In the top-left panel, we plot respondents' birth years. In general, elected clerks are older than appointed clerks and about twenty percentage points more likely to 65 years of age or older. Elected clerks also have less formal education on average, being more likely to have high school as their highest level of educational attainment, while nearly three times as many appointed clerks as elected have post-graduate degrees. On gender and race, we find few differences between elected and appointed clerks but do note the homogeneity of our sample: unlike many other political offices (e.g., [Thomsen and King 2020](#)), our sample of clerks is overwhelmingly comprised of women. Additionally, New England municipal clerks are disproportionately non-Hispanic whites.

Institutional Capacity Next, we consider whether systematic descriptive differences exist between the institutional capacity of elected and appointed clerks. Specifically, we consider whether the position of clerk is full or part-time, the size of the clerk's staff, and how long-tenured clerks are, which contributes to their capacity through personal experience. We find meaningful differences in clerks' institutional capacity across selection methods. Appointed clerks are more likely to be full-time employees, although a sizable majority of all clerks in our sample are full-timers. Elected clerks also have smaller staffs, on average, than appointed clerks. Elected clerks may compensate for lower institutional capacity with greater personal capacity, as they are disproportionately likely to have served for more than ten years.

Satisfaction, Efficacy, and Sources of Guidance Finally, we explore differences in appointed and elected clerks' attitudes toward and efficacy in their work. We do so in two ways. First,

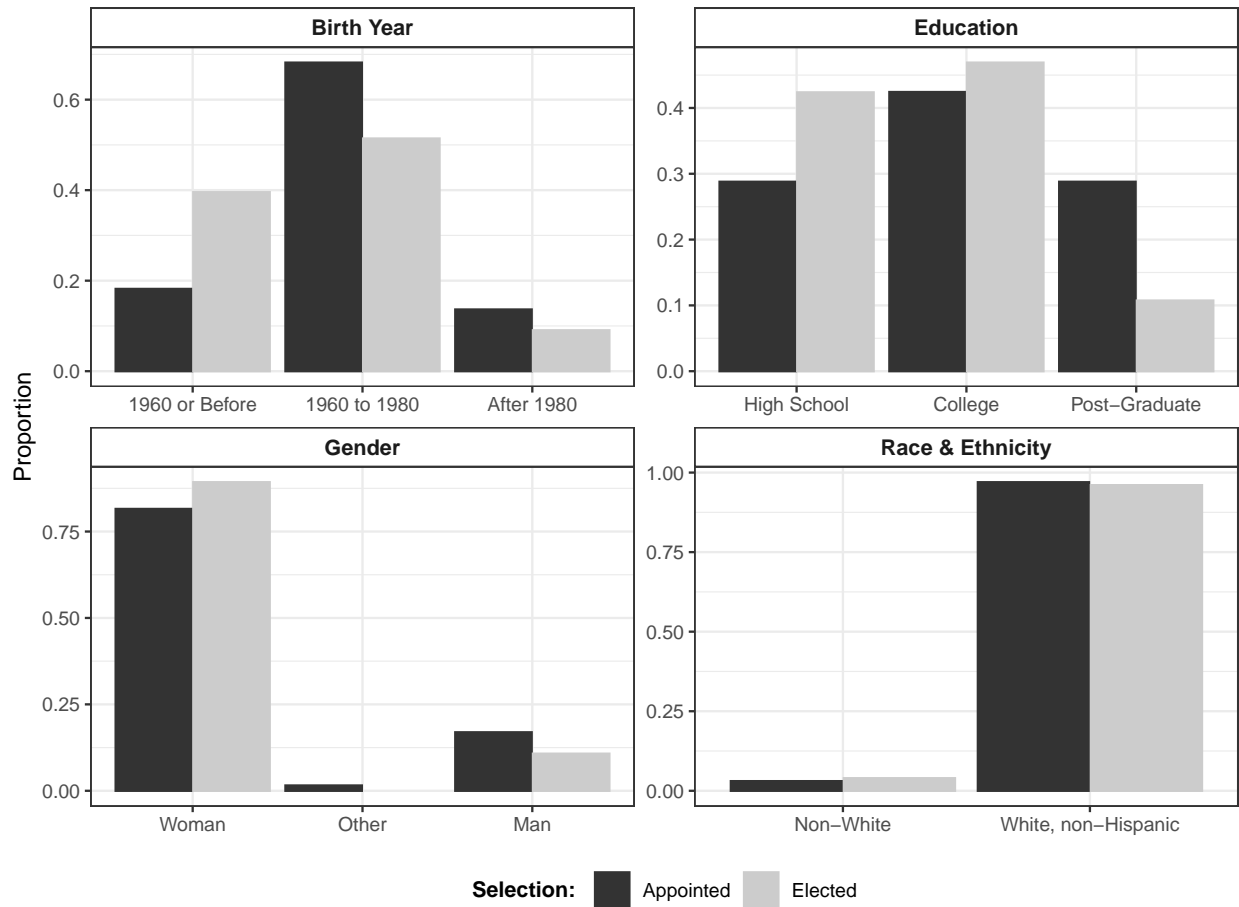


Figure 2: Clerk Personal and Demographic Characteristics

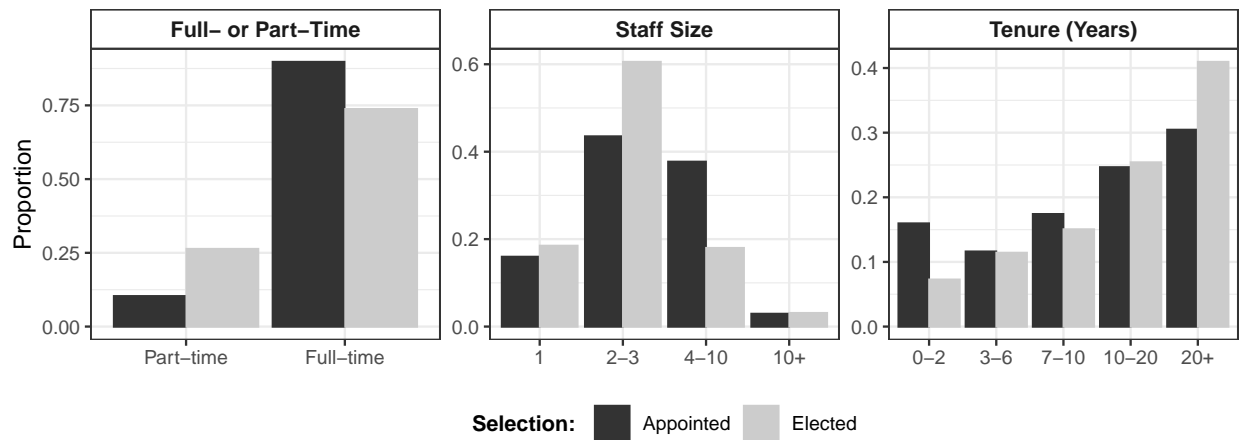


Figure 3: Clerk Office Institutional Capacity

in Figure 4, we plot the responses for a battery of questions intended to examine job attitudes and personal efficacy. These questions build on studies in public administration exploring job satisfaction for local government bureaucrats (e.g. [Petrovsky, Xin and Yu 2023](#)). Our results indicate that elected and appointed clerks feel similarly satisfied and efficacious in their roles. Clerks from both selection methods gave the least agreement to the notion that they were sufficiently compensated, and both were most in agreement with the idea that they were confident in their abilities. We find small differences for some questions: most notably, elected clerks report greater independence in their jobs and, perhaps surprisingly, are more likely to report feeling sufficiently trained.

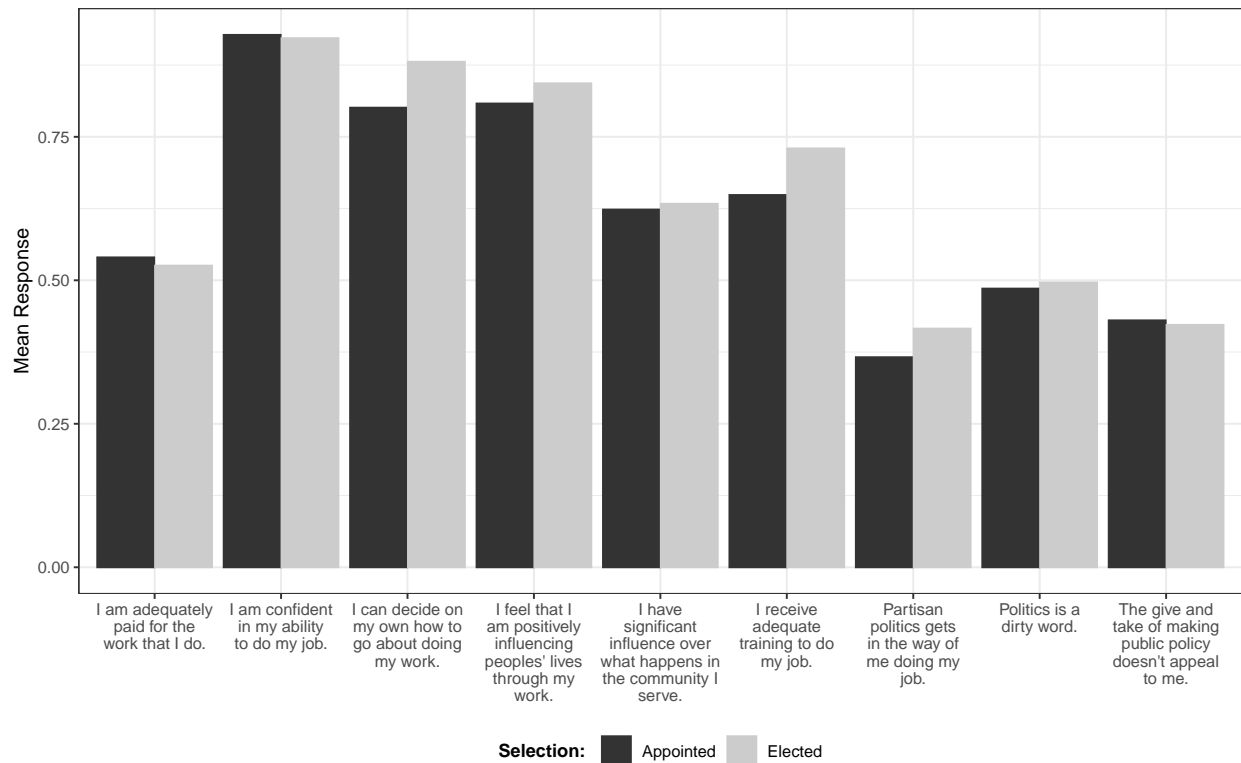


Figure 4: Clerk Job Attitudes

Note: Clerks were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the given statement. Outcome options were a five-level Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree,” and have been re-scaled between 0 and 1.

As another approach to understanding how appointed and elected clerks differ in their approaches and attitudes toward their work, we asked them how often they turn to a variety of potential sources of guidance. The results are presented in Figure 5. We find broad similarities across elected and appointed clerks, albeit with a few substantial differences. In particular, while neither elected nor appointed clerks are especially prone to turn to their personal political or religious beliefs, elected clerks are nearly twice as likely to do so; they are also more likely to rely on their formal education. The pattern in Figure 5 is consistent with elected clerks being more willing to turn to personal sources for guidance than appointed clerks.

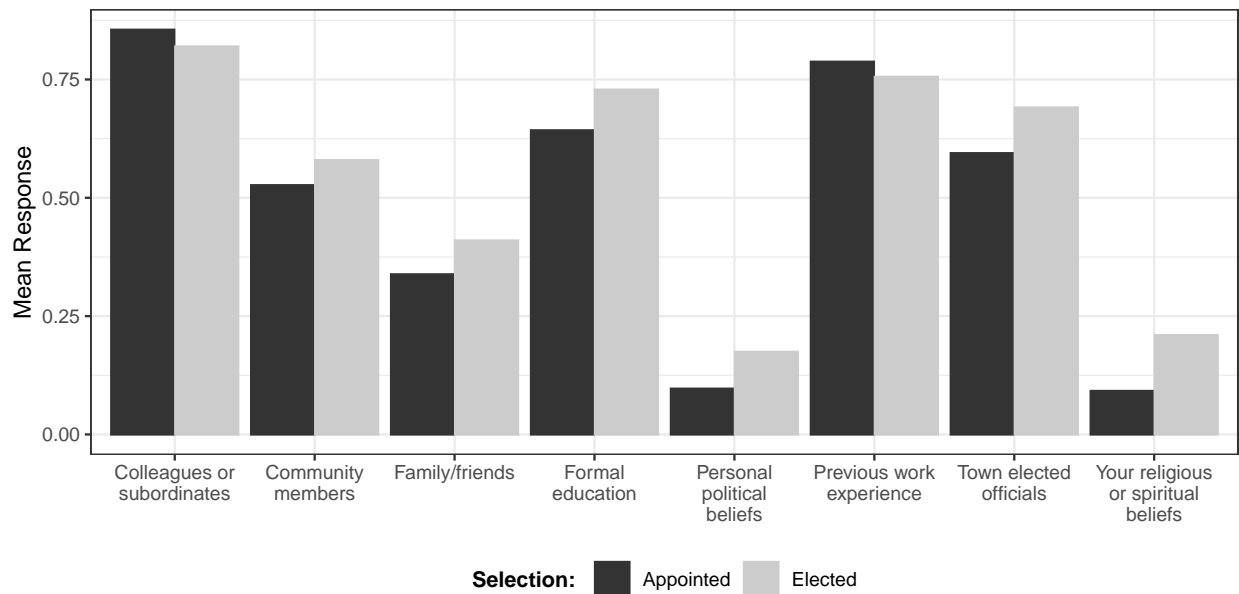


Figure 5: Clerk Sources of Advice

Note: Responses to the prompt, “Thinking about your responsibilities as a clerk, how often do you rely on the following for guidance?” Outcome options were a four-level Likert responses ranging from “Never” to “Often,” and have been re-scaled between 0 and 1.

Responsiveness and Selection Method

We now turn to formally testing our theoretical expectation.¹⁸ To reiterate, we expect that elected clerks will be more responsive to their constituents' preferences than appointed clerks. To test this, we conduct two broad sets of analyses. First, we asked clerks questions to directly measure their feelings of accountability and service toward the constituents they serve. Our results show that elected clerks are more attentive to their constituents and feel a stronger call to public service than appointed clerks, who are more concerned with the opinions of other local government officials. We then explore ideological and policy responsiveness by comparing local political preferences to clerks' self-reported ideology, partisanship, and preferences on a specific policy question. Here, we find relatively few differences between elected and appointed clerks, and even some evidence that, on voting rights questions, elected clerks may, under some circumstances, be less responsive to voter preferences than appointed clerks.

Elected Clerks Have Constituents in Mind

We begin our exploration of our hypotheses by examining how selection method affects clerks' feelings of accountability toward the public they serve. To do so, we rely on a straightforward regression specification that allows us to control for a variety of potential confounders as we attempt to isolate the relationship between clerk selection method and responsiveness. Our base model is as follows:

$$Y_{ijs} = \beta Elected_j + \Psi \mathbf{X}_i + \Phi \mathbf{Z}_j + \alpha_s + \epsilon_{ijs} \quad (1)$$

¹⁸We pre-registered our hypotheses and analyses at AsPredicted (#127549). An anonymized version is available at https://aspredicted.org/NFR_1XZ.

where i indexes individual clerks, j indexes municipalities, and s indexes states.¹⁹ This model contains both an indicator for whether a community selects clerks through elections, a vector of clerk-level control variables \mathbf{X} ,²⁰ a vector of municipality-level variables \mathbf{Z} ,²¹ and state indicators α . Of particular theoretical importance among the control variables is an indicator variable reflecting whether the municipal government uses an appointed manager or administrator to run the day-to-day operations of local government. Because this reflects a certain appetite for appointing local officials and is reasonably associated with appointing a clerk,²² it is particularly important to rule this out as a potential confounder.²³ We estimate heterogeneity robust standard errors for all models.

We apply this specification to two sets of survey questions that focus specifically on clerks' attentiveness to the community they serve and different members of it. First, we asked clerks about their level of agreement with six statements about their community and obligations to the public. Their responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale. In the top panel of Figure 6, we plot our regression results for these outcomes. The figure plots the coefficient on *Elected*

¹⁹In our sample there is one clerk per municipality, so i and j are used only to distinguish covariates and do not indicate a nested relationship.

²⁰Our clerk-level control variables are *Party ID* (three levels), *Ideology* (three levels), *Woman* (0-1), *Nonwhite* (0-1), *Age* (cont.), *Bachelor's Degree* (0-1), and *Ten Years of Service* (0-1). All are measured from our survey.

²¹Our municipality-level control variables are *Full time position* (0-1), *More than three employees* (0-1), *Median Age* (cont.), $\ln(\text{Population})$ (cont.), $\% \text{ Bachelor's}$ (cont.), $\% \text{ Nonwhite}$ (cont.), *Median Household Income* (cont.), *Median Home Value* (cont.), $\% \text{ Biden}$ (cont.), and *Manager/Administrator* (0-1). The full-time and office size variables are drawn from responses to our survey. Municipality-level Biden two-party vote share is collected from state-specific sources. The use of an appointed manager or administrator in municipal government was collected from various state and local government sources. The remainder are from the 2020 American Community Survey five-year estimates at the county subdivision level.

²²About 20 percent of municipalities in our sampling frame that appoint their clerk use an appointed manager or administrator, while only 6 percent of those that elect their clerk do so.

²³There is no association between clerk selection method and partisan elections. Though we did not directly collect these data in our survey, we used the 2018 Municipal Forms of Government Survey (*2018 Municipal Form of Government Survey: Summary of Survey Results* 2019). Limiting to the five states we consider, we find that 65 percent of all municipalities reported using non-partisan elections for the city council. Moreover, this usage was balanced across clerk selection methods: 62 percent of municipalities that appointed their clerks used non-partisan elections, while 67 percent of those that elected their clerks did so.

for each of three specifications: one with only state fixed effects, one with state fixed effects and respondent-level covariates, and one with state fixed effects, respondent-level covariates, and municipality-level covariates. All outcomes are re-scaled to fall between 0 and 1; higher estimates indicate that elected clerks gave higher responses than appointed, on average. While results are mixed, on balance the evidence points toward elected clerks feeling a greater obligation to and interest in their community. The results indicate that elected clerks agreed more that “An official’s obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors,” that they consider public service their civic duty, and that they find it less difficult to be interested in their community (note the negative phrasing of that statement); note, however, that not all of these are significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. For the remaining three questions, we find no meaningful difference between elected and appointed clerks, though we note that these questions also had high average levels of agreement.

Second, we asked respondents about their concern over a variety of actors’ perceptions of their job performance, recorded using a four-level Likert scale. Our models specifications are the same as those above. The means among appointed clerks indicated in the figure suggest substantial variation across the different actors. Moreover, there is a significant difference between elected and appointed clerks’ levels of concern for different audiences. Elected clerks are more concerned – to a statistically significant degree – about local business and religious leaders, and especially local residents, than appointed clerks are. Conversely, appointed clerks are notably more concerned, and elected clerks less so, about the opinions of municipal executive and legislative officials. Together, the two panels of Figure 6 paint a clear picture: elected officials are disproportionately likely to view themselves as the agent of local residents, while appointed officials are more likely to view municipal officials as their principals.

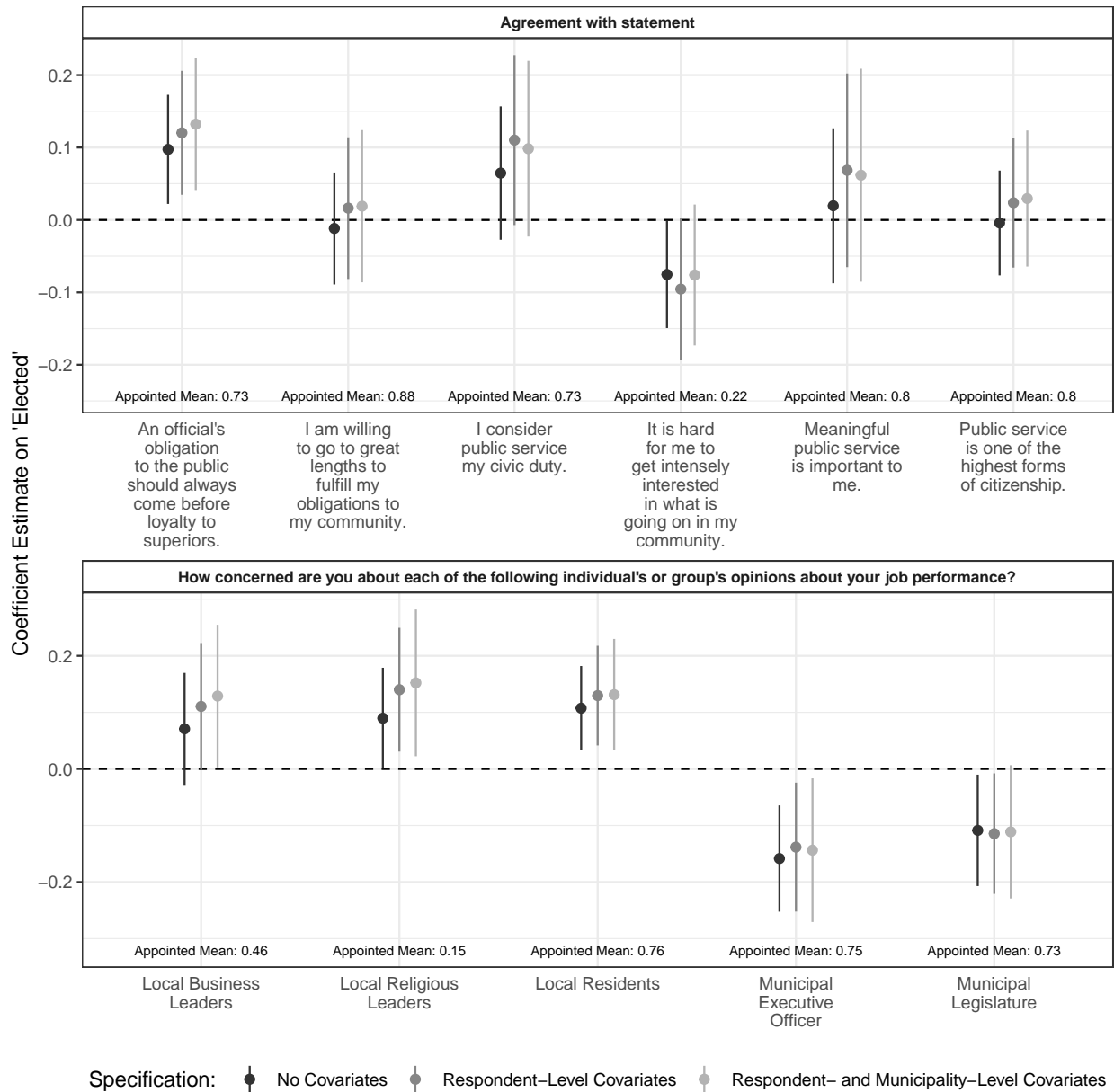


Figure 6: Effect of Electing Clerks on Perceptions of Constituency and Community

Note: Figure presents OLS regression estimates. All models include state fixed effects. 95% confidence intervals are based on robust standard errors. Outcomes in the top panel are five-level Likert scale responses, re-scaled from 0 to 1; outcomes in the lower panel are four-level Likert scale responses, re-scaled between 0 and 1. Models include between 206 and 266 observations.

Elected and Appointed Clerks Are Similarly Responsive to Constituents

In the previous section, we establish that elected clerks are more attentive to constituent preferences and feel a greater call to public service than appointed clerks, who are more concerned about the views of their bosses, other members of local government. We now turn to exploring whether selection method conditions clerks' responsiveness to constituent preferences in terms of substantive representation. In other words, we now ask whether the different sense of accountability that elected and appointed clerks feel to the people they serve manifests in their political views and attitudes.

Conceptually, our focus here is on the responsiveness of clerk attitudes to constituent preferences (Matsusaka 2015), which we measure by examining the slope of their relationship. To explore this, we use a slightly different regression specification than in our previous analysis:

$$Y_{ijs} = \beta Elected_j \times Preferences_j + \eta Elected_j + \gamma Preferences_j + \epsilon_{ijs} \quad (2)$$

This model specification adds a measure of local preferences and interacts this measure with the indicator for whether a clerk was *Elected* or not. The coefficient estimate $\hat{\gamma}$ from this model captures how responsive to constituent preferences appointed clerks are, while the coefficient estimate on the interaction, $\hat{\beta}$, captures how much more or less responsive elected clerks are than appointed clerks. We omit control variables from Model 2 because our primary theoretical interest is in the unconditional relationship between constituent and elite preferences. While we expect that municipality-level characteristics such as income, race, and others help shape municipality-level preferences, we do not necessarily want to “control away” these differences.²⁴

We use two measures to capture municipality-level constituent preferences. Our preferred measure of local preferences is municipality-level two-party vote share for President Biden in

²⁴We also estimate these models while including clerk- and municipality-level covariates; we discuss these results below.

the 2020 Presidential Election. This measure – also used in the above models as a control variable – is created from state-specific data sources that report vote totals at the municipality level. While election data does not perfectly capture local ideological preferences, [Warshaw and Rodden \(2012, 212\)](#) report that “presidential vote shares generally have a correlation with public opinion between .6 and .7. This is a rather impressive correlation, and it should be somewhat heartening for researchers who wish to continue using presidential vote shares as catchall proxies for district-level ideology.” Because we study a small geographic unit for which MRP-based estimates are likely to leave substantial missingness, we are comfortable turning to presidential vote share as our primary measure. To explore the robustness of our results and use a measure that more explicitly taps into constituent *ideological* preferences, we also use clerks’ perceptions of local ideological preferences, solicited in our survey on a seven-point Likert scale that we have re-scaled between 0 and 1. This measure correlates highly with Biden vote share ($\rho = 0.67$), but it may better reflect clerks’ subjective understanding of local preferences to which they are responsive while making policy decisions. Figure 7 presents the joint and marginal distributions of these two measures of constituent preferences. As this demonstrates, there is a strong positive relationship between the two measures, but also considerable variation in local partisanship with a given category of clerk response; for example, clerks described communities ranging from 35 percent to more than 80 percent in Biden vote share as “middle of the road.” Also of importance is that, as a function of our New England sample, most communities are solidly Democratic, with only about 26 percent of municipalities in our sample voting for Donald Trump in the two-party vote.

To measure clerks’ attitudes, we turn to three survey questions. First, we examine clerks’ self-reported ideology and partisanship, both solicited through five-level Likert scales in our survey. While these are relatively non-specific in terms of specific policy focus, they do capture broad value systems and sets of beliefs (e.g. [Jewitt and Goren 2016](#)) that clerks might hold, and are relatively directly associated with our measures of constituent preferences. We next

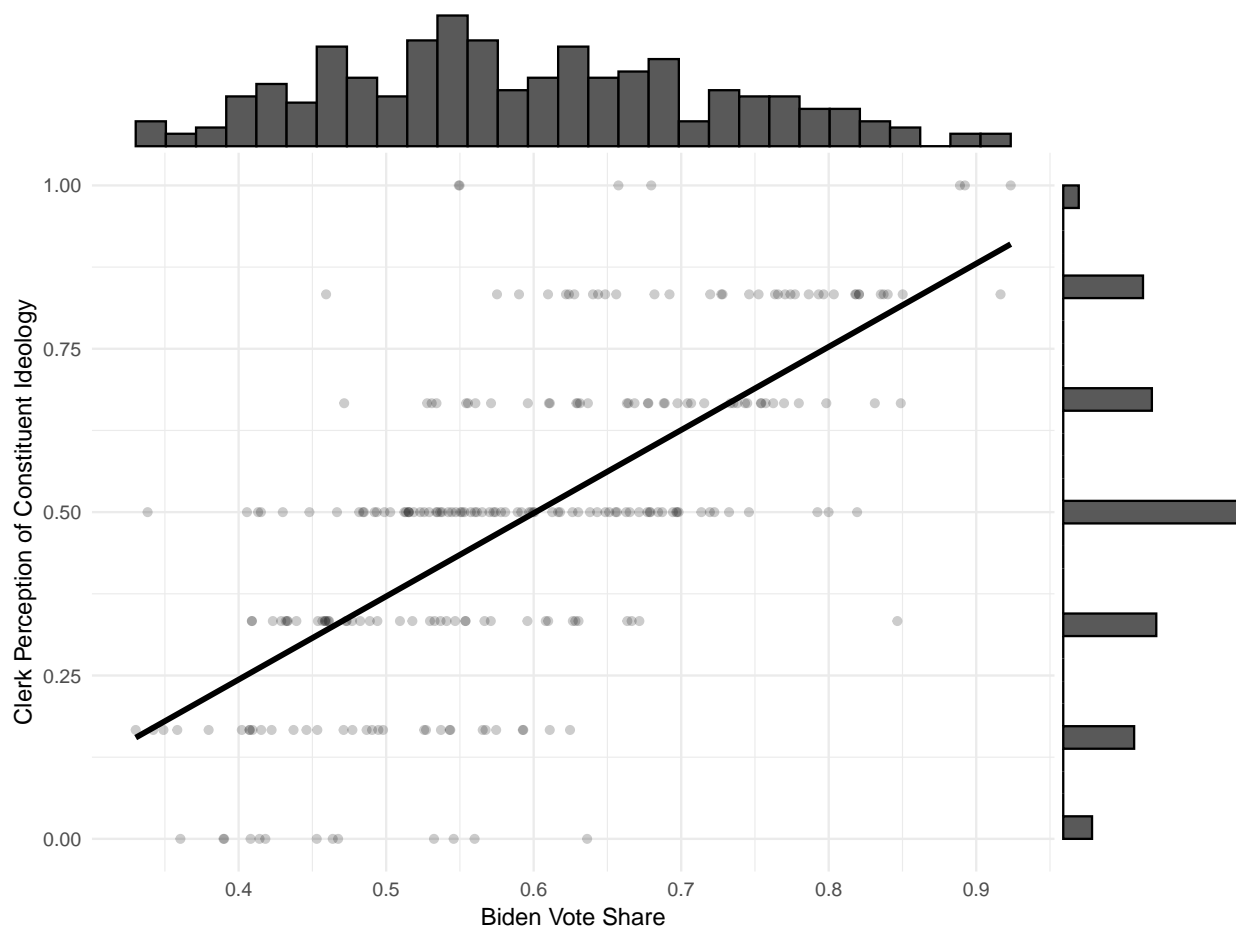


Figure 7: Biden Vote Share and Clerk Perceptions of Constituent Ideology

Note: Black line presents linear relationship between Biden vote share and clerks' perceptions of their constituents' ideologies. Marginal histograms present the distribution of the two measures.

examine clerks' responses to a specific policy prompt related to voting rights in the United States, which both 1) is related to a policy area in which clerks are actively involved and 2) should be associated with underlying ideological or partisan values. Specifically, we asked whether "The U.S. Congress should..." either "Pass legislation protecting the right to vote for all American citizens" or "Leave voting rights issues to the states." The question was forced choice between those two options, and respondents were instructed to "indicate which option comes closest to your view." We coded responses indicating that Congress should pass legislation to protect voting rights as "1," and responses indicating a preference for Congress to leave the issue to states

as a “0.” In light of the controversy around the 2020 election (Eggers, Garro and Grimmer 2021), Republican-led states’ efforts to restrict access to the ballot box (Grumbach 2022, 2023), and President Biden’s public advocacy for legislation such as the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act and the Freedom to Vote Act,²⁵ we interpret the former response to be more liberal/Democratic and the latter to be more conservative/Republican. Nevertheless, clerks’ familiarity with election administration and procedures and their own (possible) status as elected officials may give them unique insight into the question.

Our results are presented in Table 2. The top panel presents results using Biden vote share as our measure of local constituent preferences; the bottom panel presents results using clerks’ perceptions of constituent ideology. For each of our three outcomes, we present two models: one using Model 2 above and one that omits the clerk selection method and the interaction therewith; we include the latter to establish a baseline for responsiveness when aggregating all clerks together. In Table 2, the two leftmost models have clerk ideology as the outcome, the two middle models have clerk partisanship, and the two rightmost models use our binary voting rights outcome measure, with a “1” indicating a preference for greater federal involvement in protecting voting rights (i.e. the more liberal/Democratic position).

Our results are consistent with clerks being responsive to their constituents’ preferences, but provide little indication that elected clerks are moreso than appointed clerks. Focusing first on Panel A, the three models without interactions all indicate positive responsiveness to constituent partisan preferences. Places that gave Biden a greater share of the vote had more-liberal and more-Democratic clerks, on average, and those clerks were more supportive of federal involvement in protecting voting rights. We find no evidence, however, that responsiveness was greater among elected clerks. The interactions between *Biden* and *Elected* are substantively small and do not approach conventional thresholds for statistical significance for Ideology and

²⁵Corasaniti, Nick and Reid J. Epstein. “A Voting Rights Push, as States Make Voting Harder.” *The New York Times* (New York, NY). January 11, 2022.

Table 2: Constituent Preferences, Selection Methods, and Clerk Attitudes

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | Ideology | | Party | | Voting Rights | |
| Panel A: Biden Vote Share | | | | | | |
| Biden Vote Share | 0.590** (0.123) | 0.486 (0.300) | 0.482** (0.140) | 0.471 (0.299) | 0.519** (0.221) | 0.974** (0.407) |
| Elected Clerk | | -0.086 (0.209) | | -0.004 (0.218) | | 0.383 (0.335) |
| Biden × Elected | | 0.141 (0.327) | | 0.040 (0.339) | | -0.663 (0.496) |
| Constant | 0.141* (0.075) | 0.207 (0.193) | 0.226** (0.087) | 0.219 (0.195) | 0.382** (0.139) | 0.110 (0.289) |
| Observations | 239 | 239 | 240 | 240 | 250 | 250 |
| Panel B: Clerk Estimate of Constituent Ideology | | | | | | |
| Constituent Ideology | 0.171** (0.075) | 0.100 (0.130) | 0.060 (0.080) | 0.113 (0.144) | 0.122 (0.123) | 0.456** (0.210) |
| Elected Clerk | | -0.073 (0.096) | | 0.035 (0.108) | | 0.224 (0.166) |
| Ideology × Elected | | 0.088 (0.163) | | -0.083 (0.178) | | -0.525** (0.262) |
| Constant | 0.406** (0.040) | 0.465** (0.083) | 0.483** (0.044) | 0.459** (0.094) | 0.636** (0.069) | 0.484** (0.146) |
| Observations | 235 | 235 | 236 | 236 | 240 | 240 |

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.10, **p<0.05 (two-tailed test).

Partisanship, suggesting that more-Democratic areas receive more-liberal and more-Democratic clerking regardless of whether those clerks are appointed or elected.

Perhaps most interesting are the Voting Rights results: here we find that elected clerks are substantially *less* responsive to constituent preferences than appointed clerks. The coefficient on *Biden Vote Share* in the rightmost column indicates that appointed clerks are very responsive to constituent preferences; the large and negative interaction with *Elected*, though not significant,

suggests that elected clerks are markedly less so. Indeed, the marginal effect for elected clerks is approximately one-third the size of that for appointed clerks and fails to achieve statistical significance at conventional levels. To more clearly visualize the patterns at play here, in Figure 8, we plot the predicted probability of supporting Congressional action on voting rights across the support of Biden vote share in our data, separately by elected and appointed clerks. As this figure shows, elected clerks were more likely to hold the conservative view on voting rights in the most liberal places in our sample, and more likely to hold the liberal view in the most conservative places in our sample. This pattern of results is contrary to our theoretical expectations but does complement Burden et al.'s (2013) finding that elected clerks are more supportive of voter access. This suggests that these results may reflect a unique interaction between selection method and policy preferences quite apart of underlying political preferences.

The results in Panel B of Table 2 are less suggestive of clerk responsiveness. While the unmoderated models suggest responsiveness, the relationships are substantively small and fail to achieve statistical significance for the Party and Voting Rights models. As with Biden vote share, we find no significant interaction between selection method and either Ideology or Party; the pattern of results is similar for Voting Rights, however, and here we even find a statistically significant negative interaction between *Elected* and constituent ideology; the marginal effect for elected clerks in this case is actually *negative*. While we hesitate to over-interpret these results due to the potential subjectivity or relativity of clerks' perceptions of their constituents' ideology, that the results for Voting Rights substantively follows those in Panel A suggests that this unexpected pattern is not spurious.

Additional Results and Robustness Checks

As we note above, we also estimated the models reported in Table 2 while including respondent- and municipality-level covariates. These results are presented in Tables B.1 and B.2 in the Supplementary Materials. The conclusions drawn from the models using Biden vote share are

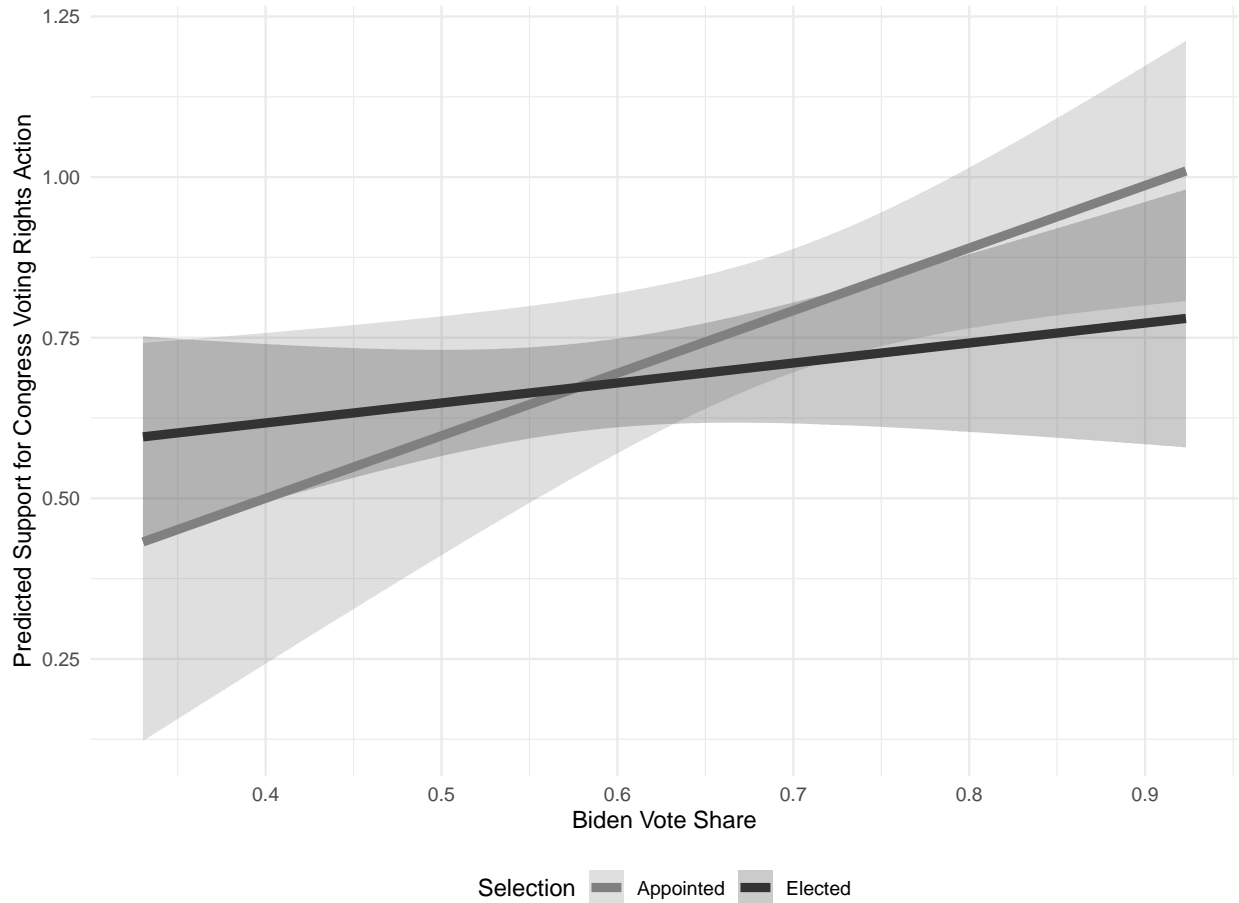


Figure 8: Predicted Relationship between Voting Rights Attitudes and Biden Vote Share

Note: Figure plots predicted values based on rightmost column in Table 2. Support of Biden vote share is drawn from sample.

generally similar to those presented in Panel A of Table 2, albeit with some loss of precision; the models using perceived constituency opinion differ somewhat more from those reported in the text, although they remain broadly null. We caution against over-interpreting these models as the inclusion of covariates may absorb important factors shaping the partisan preferences of a municipality.

In keeping with our pre-analysis plan, we also replicated our results from Figure 6 and Table 2 using a matched sample of data. While doing so limits our sample size, this procedure guards against different distributions of covariates among the appointed and elected municipalities in

our sample, and our results continue to be patterned similarly to those reported in the text. We describe our procedure and report these results in Section B.2 in the Supplementary Materials.

Finally, to further interrogate the relationship between clerks' selection method and their policy attitudes, we also asked several questions about additional policy areas in clerks' jurisdiction. Because these policy areas are less obviously associated with overall political attitudes, they are less directly connected to our theoretical expectations, but they nevertheless offer insight into the differences between elected and appointed clerks. In Figure B.4 in the Supplementary Materials, we present estimates of the relationship between selection method and two sets of questions. Because our interest with these questions is not in responsiveness to constituent ideology but rather in whether there are aggregate differences in policy professionalism by selection method, we return to our uninteracted specification (Model 1). Across a variety of additional questions about election administration, licensing and registrations, permits, public records requests, and record-keeping, we find no meaningful differences between elected and appointed clerks.

Discussion and Conclusion

New England's municipal clerks are at the front lines of democracy in two ways. On the ground, in their communities, they serve an essential administrative function, ensuring that local government and the licenses and permits it issues, the vital records it keeps, and the elections that it administers are properly executed. Clerks also sit at the front lines of democracy conceptually: in having a combination of political and administrative roles, clerks occupy an office that should neither *obviously* be elected – such as a legislator – nor *obviously* be appointed – such as a public health official. They lie at the border of the political and the administrative, the democratic and the bureaucratic, and the mix of methods used to fill this role reflects that clerks have one foot each in these different worlds.

We theorized that elections should alter the types of clerks who are selected and how clerks behave in office. Overall, we expect that these mechanisms would result in elected clerks demonstrating higher responsiveness to their constituents than appointed clerks. We designed a survey to capture these ideas in the context of New England municipal clerks, a population that offered meaningful variation in selection methods while holding a variety of factors constant. Our survey, which we administered online and via physical mail, achieved an irelatively high response rate of 25 percent.

Our findings point to important similarities and differences in elected and appointed clerks. First, we show clearly that selection method alters who clerks perceive to be their “principal.” Elected clerks are more concerned with the opinions of residents and other community members, while appointed clerks are more attentive to their bosses, other municipal officials. In this sense, elections clearly work. Our subsequent findings, however, cast doubt on how much these different orientations matter. We find little evidence that elections facilitate responsiveness to constituent partisan or ideological preferences, and on a hot-button, clerk-specific policy area. While the question we asked was about a state-level policy, other scholarship demonstrates that clerks have the ability to affect policy outcomes in election administration ([Ferrer N.D.b](#)). These findings on partisan, ideological, and policy responsiveness serve as a complement to existing work focused on performance or competence-based outcomes by offering a more well-rounded picture of the ways that election and appointment privilege particular dimensions of public service.

Our results suggest a number of directions for future research. First, future analyses should look beyond New England and consider how selection methods affect descriptive representation. While we had pre-registered analyses to examine this, the racial and ethnic homogeneity of our sample precludes a formal analysis. Our results for substantive representation, particularly our analysis of voting rights attitudes, suggest that further analysis on other policy areas – both politicized and non-politicized, and in and out of clerks’ jurisdiction – would provide

valuable clarity on how and when clerks represent the ideological and partisan interests of their constituents. Finally, while clerks provide an ideal opportunity to study the effects of elections, they are not the only local office that varies in selection method. Future work should be expanded beyond clerks to other state and local offices. Our results clearly suggest that elections matter. Future work on different dimensions of representation and in different offices can help to further refine exactly how and why.

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Supplementary Materials

Elections and Representation in American Municipal Administration

Contents

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A Survey Sample

Table A.1: Survey Responses by Selection Method and Survey Mode

| | Mail | Online | Total | Sampling Frame | Mail % | Online % | Total % |
|-----------|------|--------|-------|----------------|--------|----------|---------|
| Appointed | 46 | 23 | 69 | 315 | 15 | 7 | 22 |
| Elected | 113 | 84 | 197 | 752 | 15 | 11 | 26 |
| Both | 159 | 107 | 266 | 1,067 | 15 | 10 | 25 |

Note: Table presents number of responses and response rates by clerk selection method and survey mode. Mail surveys were sent to those who did not respond to the online survey.

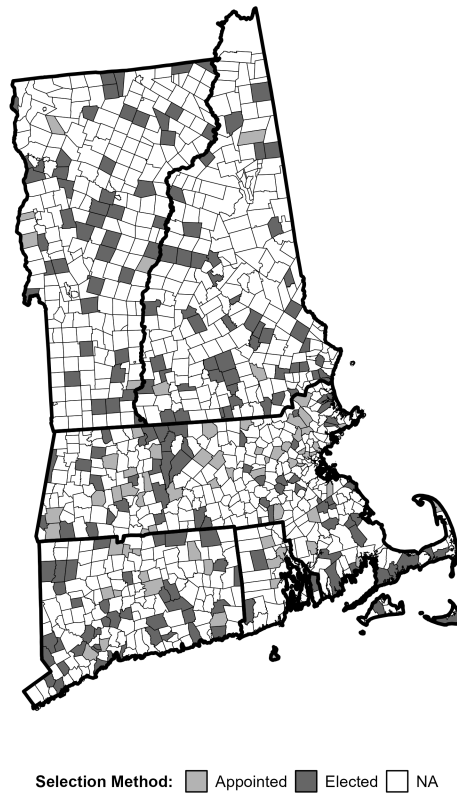


Figure A.1: Selection Method for Clerk Respondents

Note: Map units are municipal boundaries. Areas in white are those for which we either could not determine selection method or did not receive a response to our survey.

B Additional Results and Robustness Checks

B.1 Responsiveness Models with Covariates

Table B.1: Biden Vote Share, Selection Methods, and Clerk Attitudes: Models with Covariates

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | Ideology | | Party | | Voting Rights | |
| Biden Vote Share | 0.669** (0.287) | 0.563 (0.469) | 0.434 (0.338) | 0.349 (0.487) | 0.515 (0.506) | 1.189* (0.663) |
| Elected Clerk | | -0.085 (0.247) | | -0.045 (0.253) | | 0.507 (0.359) |
| Biden \times Elected | | 0.118 (0.392) | | 0.109 (0.390) | | -0.798 (0.542) |
| Full Time | -0.058 (0.046) | -0.056 (0.048) | -0.010 (0.053) | -0.007 (0.054) | -0.077 (0.100) | -0.091 (0.102) |
| Office Size > 3 | -0.028 (0.042) | -0.029 (0.044) | -0.009 (0.055) | -0.006 (0.056) | -0.018 (0.085) | -0.024 (0.085) |
| Median Age | 0.0005 (0.004) | 0.001 (0.004) | -0.003 (0.005) | -0.004 (0.005) | -0.0002 (0.006) | 0.0004 (0.006) |
| ln(Population) | 0.002 (0.023) | 0.00004 (0.024) | -0.031 (0.026) | -0.032 (0.027) | -0.030 (0.042) | -0.020 (0.043) |
| % Bachelors | -0.197 (0.320) | -0.188 (0.324) | -0.066 (0.369) | -0.036 (0.375) | 0.214 (0.554) | 0.105 (0.552) |
| % Nonwhite | 0.087 (0.280) | 0.103 (0.284) | 0.352 (0.328) | 0.348 (0.325) | 0.206 (0.483) | 0.135 (0.492) |
| Median Income | 0.001 (0.001) | 0.001 (0.001) | -0.0001 (0.001) | -0.0002 (0.001) | 0.001 (0.002) | 0.002 (0.002) |
| Median Home Value | 0.0001 (0.0001) | 0.0001 (0.0001) | 0.0002 (0.0001) | 0.0002 (0.0002) | -0.001 (0.0003) | -0.001* (0.0003) |
| City Manager | 0.024 (0.053) | 0.024 (0.053) | 0.042 (0.085) | 0.041 (0.085) | -0.052 (0.112) | -0.051 (0.112) |
| Constant | 0.031 (0.372) | 0.114 (0.449) | 0.620 (0.406) | 0.689 (0.471) | 0.696 (0.621) | 0.178 (0.713) |
| Observations | 236 | 236 | 237 | 237 | 246 | 246 |

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. All models include state fixed effects. Median Household Income and Median Home Value are in 1,000s of dollars. *p<0.10, **p<0.05 (two-tailed test).

Table B.2: Perceived Constituent Preferences, Selection Methods, and Clerk Attitudes: Models with Covariates

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | Ideology | | Party | | Voting Rights | |
| Constituent Ideology | 0.036 (0.100) | −0.050 (0.144) | −0.113 (0.105) | −0.081 (0.168) | −0.018 (0.169) | 0.398 (0.245) |
| Elected Clerk | | −0.088 (0.106) | | 0.037 (0.121) | | 0.331* (0.179) |
| Ideology × Elected | | 0.124 (0.175) | | −0.043 (0.191) | | −0.627** (0.282) |
| Full Time | −0.066 (0.047) | −0.066 (0.048) | −0.018 (0.052) | −0.017 (0.053) | −0.078 (0.101) | −0.087 (0.102) |
| Office Size > 3 | −0.034 (0.044) | −0.039 (0.045) | −0.007 (0.059) | −0.005 (0.060) | −0.021 (0.090) | −0.014 (0.089) |
| Median Age | −0.0003 (0.004) | −0.0002 (0.004) | −0.004 (0.005) | −0.004 (0.005) | −0.001 (0.006) | 0.0004 (0.006) |
| ln(Population) | −0.004 (0.024) | −0.006 (0.024) | −0.033 (0.026) | −0.032 (0.026) | −0.036 (0.043) | −0.024 (0.044) |
| % Bachelors | 0.351 (0.234) | 0.320 (0.238) | 0.467* (0.254) | 0.479* (0.261) | 0.653 (0.411) | 0.688* (0.404) |
| % Nonwhite | 0.337 (0.257) | 0.361 (0.255) | 0.527* (0.300) | 0.515* (0.300) | 0.349 (0.451) | 0.256 (0.450) |
| Median Income | −0.001 (0.001) | −0.001 (0.001) | −0.002 (0.001) | −0.002 (0.001) | −0.001 (0.002) | −0.0005 (0.002) |
| Median Home Value | 0.0002 (0.0001) | 0.0002 (0.0001) | 0.0002 (0.0002) | 0.0002 (0.0002) | −0.0004 (0.0004) | −0.0005 (0.0003) |
| City Manager | 0.027 (0.054) | 0.027 (0.054) | 0.041 (0.083) | 0.040 (0.083) | −0.018 (0.115) | −0.013 (0.114) |
| Constant | 0.384 (0.353) | 0.465 (0.360) | 0.901** (0.377) | 0.874** (0.383) | 1.086** (0.541) | 0.699 (0.570) |
| Observations | 232 | 232 | 233 | 233 | 237 | 237 |

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. All models include state fixed effects. Median Household Income and Median Home Value are in 1,000s of dollars. *p<0.10, **p<0.05 (two-tailed test).

B.2 Matching Robustness Tests

In keeping with our pre-analysis plan we also include results of models estimated on a matched dataset (Ho et al. 2007). We replicate the models presented in Figure 6 and Table 2 in the text, matching a single elected clerk to each appointed clerk using Optimal Pair Matching, implemented using the MatchIt package in R. For each analysis, we match only on those covariates used in that analysis. Figure B.1 presents the balance results for matching on our set of individual and individual+municipal covariate. Matched samples based on these two matching procedures are then used for analyses in Figure B.2; while we still control for the relevant covariates directly in the model, we also use the appropriate matched sample.

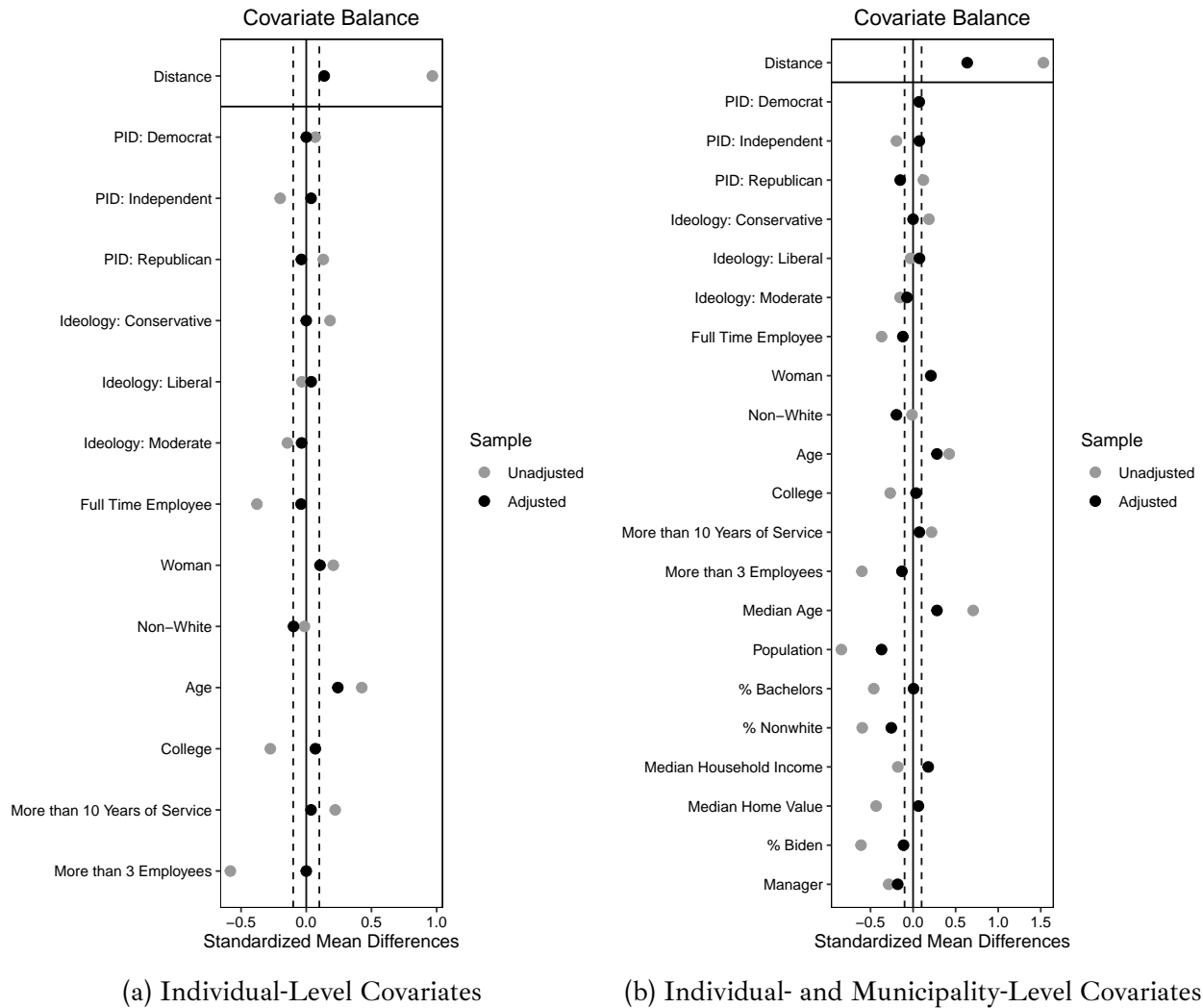


Figure B.1: Matching Balance Results for “Perceptions” Analyses

In the matched analysis, presented in Figure B.2 as in the results in the text, we find that elected clerks are more likely to consider public service their civic duty and that the obligations

to the public come before loyalty to superiors. We also still find evidence (though weaker evidence in the matched sample) that appointed clerks find it harder to be interested in what is going on in their community than elected clerks. Further, elected clerks are more likely to be concerned with business leaders', religious leaders', and local residents' opinions about their job performance. The results suggest that the matched analysis yields similar results to those in the text, although with lower precision reflecting the smaller sample size.

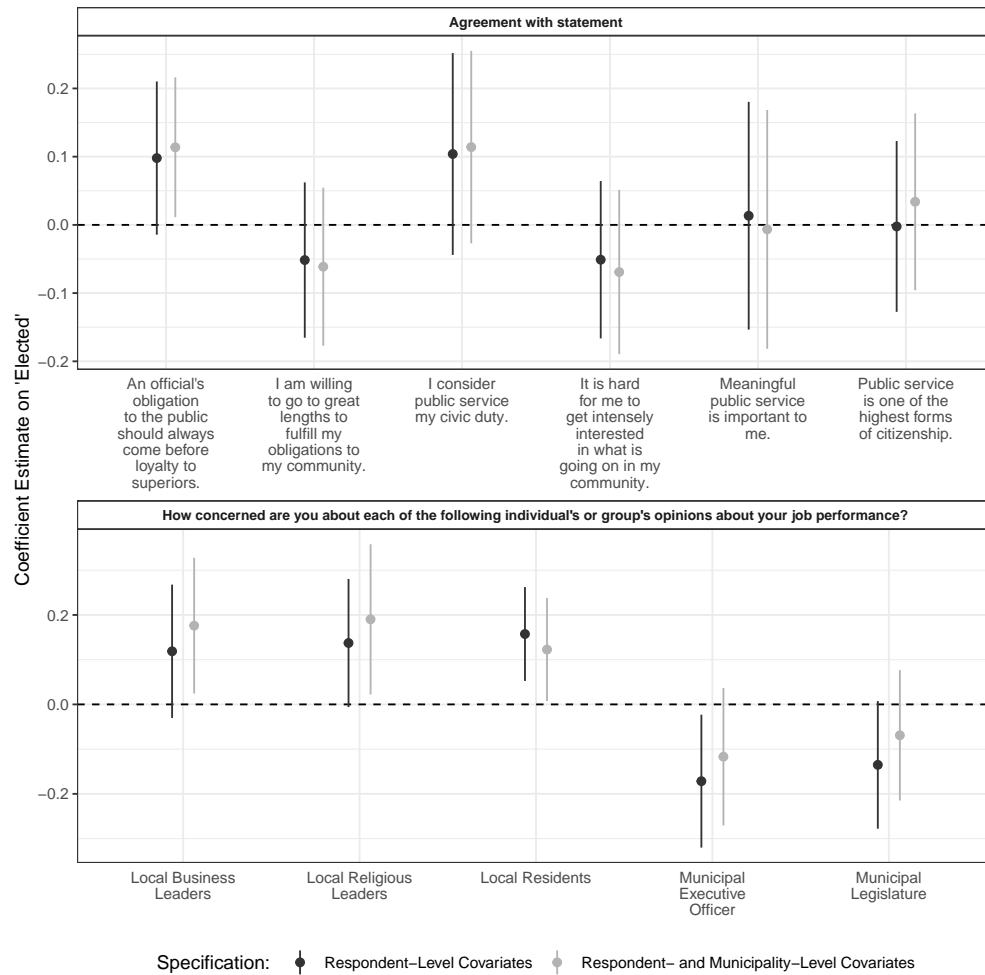


Figure B.2: Effect of Electing Clerks on Perceptions of Constituency and Community, Matched Sample

Note: Figure presents OLS regression estimates. All models include state fixed effects. Specifications are the same as those in the “Respondent-Level Covariates” and “Respondent- and Municipality-Level Covariates” models in figure 6, only on a matched dataset. Outcomes in the top panel are five-level Likert scale responses, re-scaled from 0 to 1; outcomes in the lower panel are four-level Likert scale responses, re-scaled between 0 and 1. Models include between 111 and 116 observations.

We also replicate our analysis of clerk responsiveness to constituent preferences, as presented in Table 2. Because these analyses do not use a vector of covariates, we match only on the measure of constituent preferences used in each analysis. This still has the benefit of ensuring common support among the elected and appointed clerks in the matched sample. Figure B.3 presents the balance results for these matching procedures. In Table B.3, we replicate the models from Table 2 with a sample matched on the relevant measure of constituent preferences, again using Optimal Pair Matching. These results on the matched sample are similar to those presented in the text, although the specific point estimates or statistical significance thereof may deviate from the in-text results.

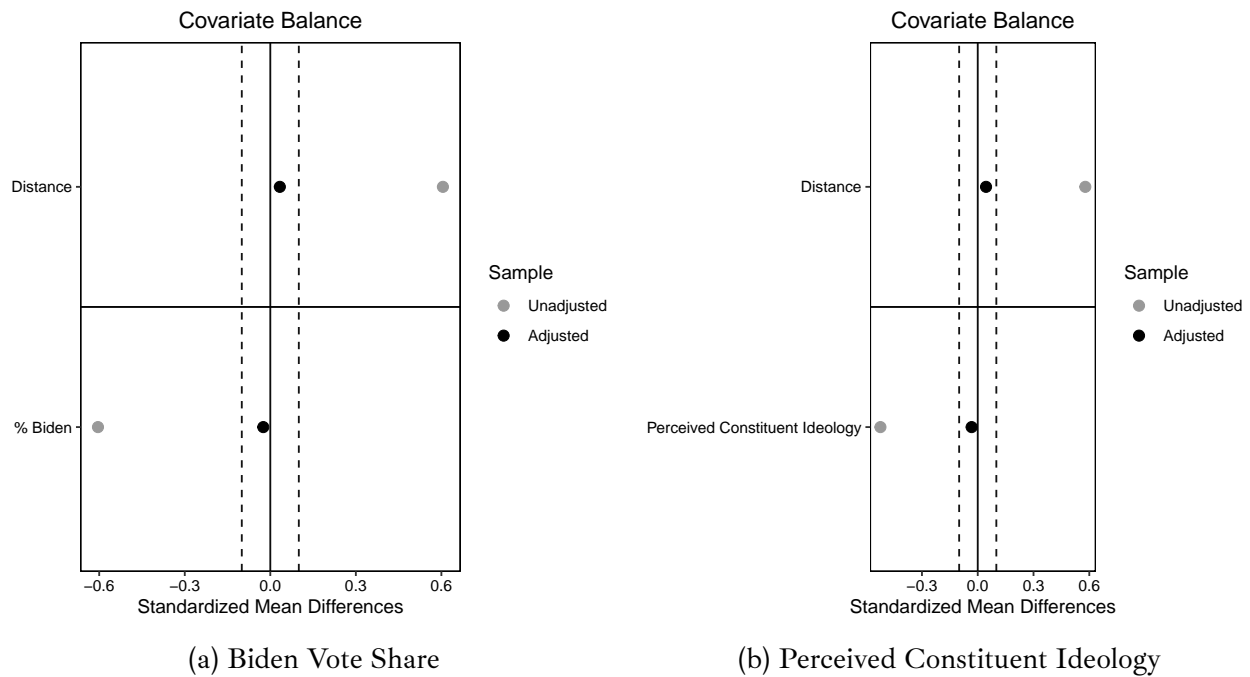


Figure B.3: Matching Balance Results for “Responsiveness” Analyses

Table B.3: Constituent Preferences, Selection Methods, and Clerk Attitudes

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| | Ideology | | Party | | Voting Rights | |
| Panel A: Biden Vote Share | | | | | | |
| Biden Vote Share | 0.488** (0.187) | 0.486 (0.300) | 0.325 (0.206) | 0.471 (0.299) | 0.564* (0.327) | 0.974** (0.407) |
| Elected Clerk | | −0.015 (0.252) | | 0.241 (0.278) | | 0.541 (0.461) |
| Biden × Elected | | 0.004 (0.379) | | −0.318 (0.418) | | −0.902 (0.684) |
| Constant | 0.199 (0.124) | 0.207 (0.193) | 0.330** (0.138) | 0.219 (0.195) | 0.356 (0.221) | 0.110 (0.289) |
| Observations | 124 | 124 | 125 | 125 | 133 | 133 |
| Panel B: Clerk Estimate of Constituent Ideology | | | | | | |
| Constituent Ideology | 0.095 (0.075) | 0.100 (0.130) | 0.075 (0.080) | 0.113 (0.144) | 0.067 (0.163) | 0.456** (0.210) |
| Elected Clerk | | 0.025 (0.096) | | 0.034 (0.108) | | 0.419** (0.166) |
| Ideology × Elected | | −0.009 (0.163) | | −0.082 (0.178) | | −0.821** (0.262) |
| Constant | 0.477** (0.040) | 0.465** (0.083) | 0.475** (0.044) | 0.459** (0.094) | 0.683** (0.104) | 0.484** (0.146) |
| Observations | 124 | 124 | 125 | 125 | 126 | 126 |

Note: Entries are linear regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. *p<0.10, **p<0.05 (two-tailed test).

B.3 Additional Outcome Measures

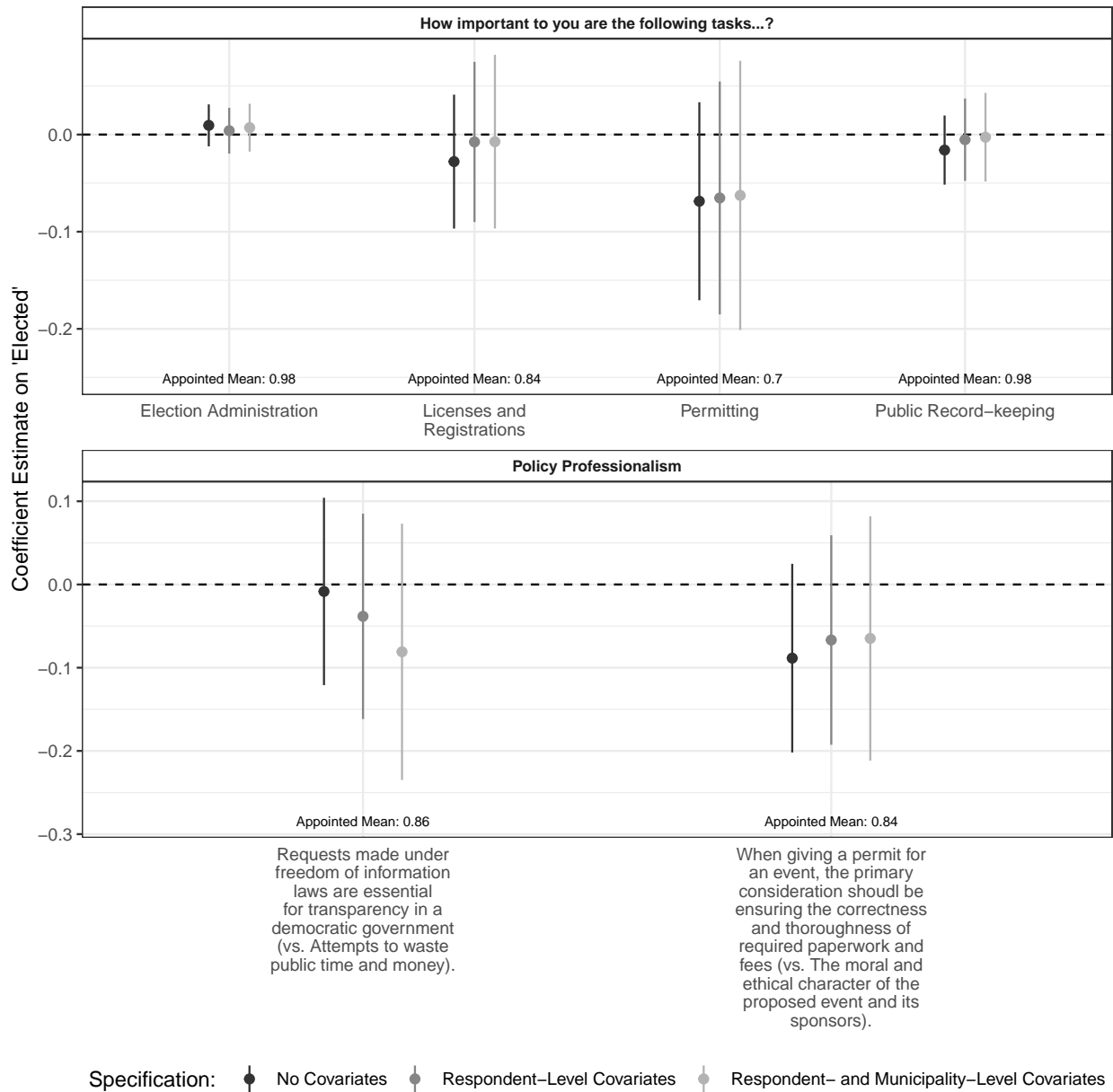


Figure B.4: Qualifications and Job Performance: Policy Professionalism

Note: Figure presents OLS regression estimates. All models include state fixed effects. 95% confidence intervals are based on robust standard errors. Outcomes in the top panel are four-level Likert scale responses, re-scaled from 0 to 1; outcomes in the lower panel are indicator variables. Models include between 201 and 266 observations.

C Survey Instrument

We sent via email and physical postal mail the survey for municipal clerks to complete. We included the following message as an introduction to the full survey (full text below):

Hello,

We are a team of academic researchers at [redacted] interested in learning more about the vital work of municipal clerks. We invite you to take a short survey about your job. If you agree to participate, you will be asked several questions about your position and responsibilities. This survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

To take the survey and have your response recorded, please fill out the enclosed survey form, place it in the provided postage-paid return envelope, and place it in the mail.

In return for taking the survey, we will provide you with a report of the results of this study. If you have any questions, please contact [redacted] at [redacted].

Best,

[redacted]

Academic Survey of Municipal Clerks in New England

Consent to Participate in Research

We invite you to participate in a research study being conducted by investigators from [REDACTED]. You have been asked to take this survey because you are a municipal clerk. We recognize the importance of the work that you do, and we are interested in learning more about how you think about the municipality that you serve, your job, and policies over which you have discretion. The following survey is brief, and your answers will never be shared publicly. We thank you, sincerely, for taking the time to take our survey.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked a number of questions about your position and responsibilities. This survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

There are no known risks. There will be no costs for participating. In return for taking the survey, we will provide you with a report of the results of this study. Your participation will help researchers, teachers, and students to gain a better understanding of the nature of your job. Findings from this study will be reported in scholarly journals, at academic seminars, and at other research meetings. The data will be stored securely on researchers' computers through encrypted cloud backup and retained indefinitely. The data will NOT be posted publicly.

If you have any questions about the research study itself please contact [REDACTED]. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Human Research Protection Office at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]. Thank you very much for your consideration of this research study.

Please make a copy of this document for your records.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Which of the following best describes you, the person taking this survey?

- ☐ Clerk
- ☐ Assistant Clerk
- ☐ Staffer (please specify): _____
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Our primary interest is in learning about the attitudes and beliefs of your community's highest-ranking clerk. We understand, however, that someone other than the clerk may be filling this out on their behalf.

If you are not the clerk, as you complete the remainder of this survey, please put yourself in the shoes of your town or city's highest-ranking clerk and answer the questions as you believe they would.

How much do you agree with the following statements about your work as a local official?

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| I am confident in my ability to do my job. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I can decide on my own how to go about doing my work. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I have significant influence over what happens in the community I serve. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am adequately paid for the work that I do. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I feel that I am positively influencing peoples' lives through my work. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I receive adequate training to do my job. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Partisan politics gets in the way of me doing my job. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Which of the following statements best describes why you became a local official?

- ☐ It's an opportunity to serve my community.
- ☐ I enjoy being involved in my local community.
- ☐ I want to ensure that local government runs as it should.
- ☐ I get paid to do a good thing.
- ☐ It's my responsibility as a citizen.

Thinking about your responsibilities as a clerk, how often do you rely on the following for guidance?

| | Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Family/friends | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Colleagues or subordinates | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Town elected officials | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Formal education | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Previous work experience | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Your religious or spiritual beliefs | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Community members | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Personal political beliefs | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Which of the following most frequently provides you with guidance in your responsibilities as a clerk?

- ☐ Family/friends
- ☐ Colleagues or subordinates
- ☐ Town elected officials
- ☐ Formal education
- ☐ Previous work experience
- ☐ Your religious or spiritual beliefs
- ☐ Community members
- ☐ Personal political beliefs

Thinking about the nature of your job and the duties of your office, do you think municipal clerks should be elected or appointed? Why?

How concerned are you about each of the following individual's or group's opinions about your job performance?

| | Not at all concerned | Slightly concerned | Moderately concerned | Very concerned |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Local residents | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Municipal executive officer (mayor, town/city manager, etc.) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Municipal legislature (town/city council or meeting) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Local business leaders | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Local religious leaders | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Of the following individuals or groups, whose opinion of your job performance are you *most* concerned about?

- ☐ Local residents
- ☐ Municipal executive officer (mayor, town/city manager, etc.)
- ☐ Municipal legislature (town/city council or meeting)
- ☐ Local business leaders
- ☐ Local religious leaders
- ☐ Someone else (please specify): _____

How would you describe the political leanings of most of the people in the community you serve?

- ☐ Very Conservative
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Somewhat Conservative
- ☐ Middle-of the-road
- ☐ Somewhat Liberal
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Very Liberal

What policy area or political issue do you think has the biggest impact on citizens' approval of your performance?

Please read each statement below, carefully. For each statement, please select the degree to which you agree with the statement.

Meaningful public service is very important to me.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

The give and take of making public policy doesn't appeal to me.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

I am willing to go to great lengths to fulfill my obligations to my community.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

It is hard for me to get intensely interested in what is going on in my community.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

An official's obligation to the public should always come before loyalty to superiors.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

I consider public service my civic duty.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Politics is a dirty word.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Public service is one of the highest forms of citizenship.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

For each of the following pairs, please indicate which option comes closest to your view.

Requests made under *freedom of information* laws are:

- ☐ Attempts to waste public time and money
- ☐ Essential for transparency in a democratic government

The U.S. Congress should:

- ☐ Pass legislation protecting the right to vote for all American citizens
- ☐ Leave voting rights issues to the states

When giving a permit for an event, the primary consideration should be:

- ☐ The moral and ethical character of the proposed event and its sponsors
- ☐ Ensuring the correctness and thoroughness of required paperwork and fees

How important to you are the following tasks that clerks may be asked to perform?

| | Not at all important | Slightly important | Moderately important | Very important |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Permitting | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Licenses and Registrations | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Public Record-keeping | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Election Administration | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Which of those tasks is the **most** important to you?

- ☐ Permitting
- ☐ Licenses and Registrations
- ☐ Public Record-keeping
- ☐ Election Administration
- ☐ Something else (please specify): _____

What are other important tasks that are a part of your job?

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?

- ☐ Strong Republican
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Independent, but lean Republican
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Independent, but lean Democrat
- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Strong Democrat
- ☐ Other party (please indicate): _____
- ☐ Not sure

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as more conservative, more liberal, or middle-of-the-road?

- ☐ Very conservative
- ☐ Conservative
- ☐ Middle-of-the-road, but lean conservative
- ☐ Middle-of-the-road
- ☐ Middle-of-the-road, but lean liberal
- ☐ Liberal
- ☐ Very liberal
- ☐ Something else (please indicate): _____
- ☐ Not sure

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your political or policy views?

Before we let you go, we'd like to ask you some questions about your personal background and characteristics.

What is your gender?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Which of the following best describes you? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ White, non-Hispanic
- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ Black/African-American
- ☐ Native American/American Indian
- ☐ Asian American
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

In what year were you born? _____

What is the highest level of education that you completed?

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school or equivalent
- ☐ Some college/vocational training
- ☐ College graduate
- ☐ Some post-graduate training
- ☐ Post-graduate degree

If you graduated from college, what was the major or area of study for the highest degree you completed?

Which of the following best describes your employment before becoming a municipal official?

- ☐ For-profit company or organization
- ☐ Education (including higher education)
- ☐ Non-profit organization (including tax-exempt or charitable organizations, excluding educational institutions)
- ☐ State government (excluding educational institutions)
- ☐ Active-duty U.S. armed forces or Commissioned Corps
- ☐ Federal government civilian employee
- ☐ Owner of a non-incorporated business, professional practice, or firm
- ☐ Owner of an incorporated business, professional practice, or firm
- ☐ Worked without pay in a for-profit family business or firm
- ☐ Always worked for local government (excluding educational institutions)
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

How long have you worked in public service?

- ☐ 0-2 years
- ☐ 3-6 years
- ☐ 7-10 years
- ☐ 10-20 years
- ☐ More than 20 years

Is your position as a clerk full or part-time?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time

How many people does the clerk's office employ, including yourself?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2-3
- ☐ 4-10
- ☐ More than 10

You have completed the survey. Thank you so much for taking the time to complete our survey.