Social Class and Representation in American Cities

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Abstract

Despite advances in descriptive representation, the wealth gap between U.S. elected officials and their constituents continues to grow. I investigate whether and how the overrepresentation of the affluent shapes public policy in American cities. Questions about social class and inequality seem especially pressing at the local level for two key reasons. First, the public depends on municipal government for essential services that affect their health and safety. Second, poor and working-class residents likely have fewer resources to "vote with their feet" by leaving cities with subpar services or regressive taxes, fees, and fines. Drawing on an original dataset that includes gender, race, occupational background, and political experience for 3,257 mayoral candidates from 259 cities over 60 years, I provide a comprehensive account of who runs for office and who serves in city government. Overall, mayors tend to be overwhelmingly white and male with white-collar careers and prior political experience. Across cities and over time, only about 4% of mayoral candidates in my sample come from the working class. Combining candidate profiles with municipal public finance data, I use a regression discontinuity design (RDD) to investigate the effect of the underrepresentation of the working class on local fiscal policy and find that narrowly electing an affluent mayor has little, if any, impact on local fiscal policy.

When Alderman Virgil Kalchthaler ran for mayor of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, in 1947, he introduced himself as an attorney, but he also emphasized his past experience as a worker and union member. One advertisement claimed that "his direct contact and lifelong association with the working class of people gives him a thorough understanding of their needs for good working conditions."[1] Despite his appeals highlighting his past as a worker, his current white-collar career, and his political experience, Candidate Kalchthaler lost two elections in a row to the incumbent, a local physician. Kalchthaler stands out among thousands of candidates not for his political record but for his experience as a worker in Sheboygan's factories and shipyards. Even 70 years ago, it was uncommon to see mayoral candidates with experience as workers—and especially rare to find working-class candidates—even at the local level.

Despite advances in the descriptive representation of women and racial and ethnic minorities, the wealth gap between American elected officials and their constituents continues to grow. Against the backdrop of rising economic inequality in the U.S., these disparities are especially concerning in light of studies which suggest that legislators may be more responsive to the preferences of the wealthy (Bartels 2008; Gilens 2012, but see also Branham, Soroka and Wlezien 2017; Lax, Phillips and Zelizer 2019) and others which find that unlike average citizens, economic elites and business interests have significant influence over public policy (Gilens and Page 2014).

Another channel through which wealth may confer political influence is the overrepresentation of the affluent. Notably, Carnes's (2013) detailed account of descriptive representation in American legislatures not only documents the underrepresentation of the working class but finds that more conservative policies are a consequence. In recent years renewed attention to economic inequality and representation has focused to a large degree on national politics, though there are important exceptions (e.g., Schaffner, Rhodes and La Raja forthcoming). Given the considerable evidence supporting a link between descriptive and substantive representation, questions about social class and inequality seem especially pressing at the local level for two key reasons. First, the public depends on municipal government for essential services that affect their health and safety. Second,

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[1]This political advertisement appeared in *The Sheboygan Press,* March 28, 1947 (p. 5).

poor and working-class residents likely have fewer resources to "vote with their feet" by leaving cities with subpar services or regressive taxes, fees, and fines.

Questions and debates about elite power have long been at the center of urban politics scholarship. Based on their research in Muncie, Indiana, during the 1920s, Lynd and Lynd (1929) describe a largely working-class city governed by a wealthy and conservative business class. Hunter's (1953) *Community Power Structure* outlines an elite theory in which local government was dominated by the affluent and business interests. Though the wealthy and business elites are at the center of Dahl's (1961) account of New Haven politics, he offers an alternative pluralist view of dispersed inequalities which, coupled with elections, ensure that no one group can dominate local politics. Dahl's argument, however, stands in contrast to many canonical theories of urban politics that emphasize the influence of the affluent and especially business interests. Essentially a hybrid of elite and pluralist arguments, Stone's (1989) regime theory portrays wealthy business leaders as senior partners in a durable governing coalition which affords them significant but not unchecked influence over local politics and the policymaking agenda. In the formulation of the city as a "growth machine," wealthy business interests are the preeminent force in local politics and pursue a set of mostly conservative policies designed to promote economic growth (Logan and Molotch 1987). Historically, economic and business elites were also prominent supporters and beneficiaries of political machines (Shefter 1976; Erie 1988), although they are perhaps better recognized as proponents of the municipal reform movement. Affluent elites and business leaders advocated for reforms, such as nonpartisan and at-large elections held off-cycle, that they believed would amplify their influence, and in some cities they emerged post-reform as dominant political actors (Welch and Bledsoe 1988; Bridges 1997).

Despite compelling arguments about the distribution of power and influence in local politics, limited data has hampered empirical efforts to comprehensively assess representation in U.S. cities. In this paper, I examine the social class backgrounds of American mayors and explore the implications of disparities in descriptive representation for local public policy. I draw on an original dataset of detailed candidate profiles which is, to the best of my knowledge, the most compre-

hensive source to date of information about American mayoral candidates. In particular, I rely on information about candidates' occupational backgrounds to capture their social class. I group candidates into occupational categories and types to provide a clearer picture of descriptive representation in American cities. My findings show that like politicians at higher levels of government, mayors are not very representative of their constituents. They tend to be overwhelmingly white and male with white-collar careers and prior political experience. Across cities and over time, only about 4% of mayoral candidates in my sample come from the working class.

To investigate the consequences of this deficit of representation, I classify candidates by occupation type and broader occupational categories[2] Mayoral candidates are most commonly employed in profit-oriented professions, many related to business. These professions include some of the most lucrative careers, such as business owner or executive, that can provide a high degree of financial security. Politicians with backgrounds in profit-oriented professions also may be more conservative than their counterparts with other types of occupations (Carnes 2012; 2013; 2018). Using a regression discontinuity design (RDD), I assess whether electing a profit-oriented candidate leads to more conservative policy outcomes in terms of taxation and redistributive spending. I find little evidence to indicate that profit-oriented candidates shift policy in a conservative direction.

These inconclusive results differ significantly from recent studies that have found that the underrepresentation of the working class does lead to more conservative economic policies (Carnes 2012; 2013). A practical concern is that there is so little variation in measures of social class, which complicates efforts to analyze the effect of electing affluent candidates. Yet, the results presented here also stand in sharp contrast to related work that examines the overrepresentation of business owners and executives in U.S. cities and finds that electing a business owner or executive mayor leads to changes in fiscal policy, in particular an increase in spending on infrastructure offset by a decrease in spending on some redistributive programs (Kirkland 2019). It may be that policymakers' social class backgrounds are less consequential at the local level, but a few alternative

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[2]I follow Carnes (2012; 2013) and group candidates into 10 occupational categories which fall into three broader occupation types. See Table 3 for details

explanations seem equally plausible. If local political institutions are already dominated by economic elites, electing an affluent mayor may not have an independent effect on policy outcomes. Indeed, prior efforts to evaluate the influence of mayors have produced decidedly mixed results(cf. Ferreira and Gyourko 2009; Gerber and Hopkins 2011; de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw 2016; Hopkins and McCabe 2012; Ferreira and Gyourko 2014). Or, it may be that businesspeople are, as some theories of urban politics suggest, the most potent actors in local policymaking.

Implications of Descriptive Representation

Questions about whether and how political leaders influence outcomes are fundamental to the study of politics, and scholars have amassed considerable empirical evidence that descriptive representation can have meaningful policy consequences. In American politics, party affiliation tends to be an exceptional predictor of the political behavior of both voters and elites (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). Republicans and Democrats in Congress exhibit ideologically distinct behavior (Poole and Rosenthal 1997), and differences in party control are associated with contrasting policies, particularly on issues concerning taxing and spending (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal 2006; Bartels 2008). Lee, Moretti and Butler (2004, p. 810) go so far as to argue that rather than influencing politicians, "voters *elect* policies through choosing a legislator [emphasis in the original]," showing that even winners of highly competitive Congressional races fail to pursue moderate policies once in office.

Despite the primacy of partisanship, other attributes of leaders can affect behavior and outcomes as well—particularly when politicians' characteristics are linked to distinct policy preferences. When members of underrepresented groups gain policymaking influence they can have measurable effects on policy. Advances in the descriptive representation of African Americans in state legislatures, for example, have been associated with policy changes that shift outcomes toward the preferences and priorities of black legislators and their constituents (Owens 2005). Additional evidence of a link between legislators' minority group membership and their political behavior

comes from research that examines roll call voting in Congress and finds that African American members are more likely to support legislation that advances group interests (e.g., Canon 1999; Whitby 1997). Similarly, Besley and Case (2003) find that as the share of women in state legislatures increases, states spend more on family assistance and strengthen child-support laws. In the context of Indian politics, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) exploit a policy intervention that randomly assigned villages to reserve council positions for women to identify a causal effect of women's representation on public policy. The authors find that descriptive representation leads to changes in public goods provision that reflect the policy preferences of women. Focusing on social class, Carnes (2012; 2013) argues that the underrepresentation of the working class in legislatures at all levels of American government leads to more conservative economic policy choices.

Relative to state and national politics, Carnes (2013) finds somewhat greater social class diversity among politicians at the local level. At the same time, however, he notes that working-class representation may be less consequential in local politics because cities typically have limited flexibility to adopt progressive economic policies. Indeed, the limitations that cities face constitute a prominent theme in the study of American urban politics, and scholars disagree about the degree to which local politics and external forces generate the outcomes we observe. Peterson (1981), building on Tiebout's (1956) insight that citizens "vote with their feet," argues that competition for mobile taxpayers and capital necessarily underpins all urban policy choices. If cities fail to provide a near-optimal balance of services and taxes, high-income taxpayers will leave. For this reason, Peterson argues, redistributive policies are largely off the table—the only cities with the capacity to support redistribution have citizens with few demands for such policies. From this perspective, local politics are largely inconsequential because both formal and informal constraints curtail the range of viable options in local policymaking.

Despite evidence from a variety of political contexts supporting a link between leaders and public policy, efforts to assess the impact of mayors have produced conflicting findings and a lack of consensus. Several studies have sought to identify the causal effect of mayoral partisanship on local fiscal policy, and despite partially conflicting results, the overall findings suggest a much

weaker link between party and policy than we typically observe at higher levels of U.S. politics. Ferreira and Gyourko (2009) examine the effect of mayors' partisanship on local public finances and invoke Tiebout sorting to explain their null results, suggesting that the degree of preference heterogeneity within cities is generally insufficient to support partisan policy differentiation. On the other hand, Gerber and Hopkins (2011) find that the election of a Democratic mayor leads to a decline in public safety spending but has little effect on other aspects of municipal finance. The authors contend that although the effects of partisanship are muted in areas of limited or overlapping authority, mayors can influence outcomes in policy domains exclusively under local control. Most recently, however, de Benedictis-Kessner and Warshaw (2016) provide evidence that Democratic mayors *do* increase the size of municipal government, issuing more debt to support greater spending overall.

Similarly, studies examining the impact of mayors' race, ethnicity, and gender also tend to produce conflicting results. Holman (2014) argues that cities with female mayors are more likely to provide social welfare programs, although other research finds gender has no significant effect on the size of local government or the composition of spending (Ferreira and Gyourko 2014). Although Karnig and Welch (1980) find that black mayors preside over increases in social welfare spending, Pelissero, Holian and Tomaka (2000) provide empirical evidence suggesting that electing an African American or Latino mayor does not lead to significant differences in fiscal policy (see also Nelson 1978). More recently, Hopkins and McCabe (2012) assess the influence of African American mayors in large U.S. cities and find that electing a black mayor leads to reductions in police staffing and payrolls but otherwise has no significant effect on the allocation of resources. In light of these results, the authors conclude "that among issues, criminal justice alone combines the conditions necessary to allow for local politics to shape local policy" (Hopkins and McCabe 2012, p. 692).

It may be, consistent with Peterson's (1981) claims, that the constraints on local governments allow few, if any, opportunities for mayors to influence policy. However, discrepancies across

studies may reflect differences in study samples, time periods or research designs.[3] For example, early research on the influence of African American mayors had small samples of 6 to 17 cities, partly because they cover a time period where few cities elected black mayors (Richard Hatcher of Gary, Indiana, and Carl Stokes of Cleveland, Ohio, both elected in 1967 were among the earliest African American mayors of major U.S. cities). Several of these studies rely on multivariate regression analyses, but Pelissero, Holian and Tomaka (2000) use a matching design, while others (Ferreira and Gyourko 2009; 2014; Gerber and Hopkins 2011; Hopkins and McCabe 2012) rely on regression discontinuity designs (RDDs). Although an RDD can support the identification of causal effects, the resulting estimates are local average treatment effects. That is, these analyses estimate the effect of narrowly electing a certain type of leader, so we might not expect results consistent with studies that estimate average effects.

Although differences in study samples and research designs may partly explain conflicting results, we might also question which attributes of leaders are likely to be associated with differences in policies and outcomes. For example, as Ferreira and Gyourko (2014, p. 28) acknowledge, "for the gender of the mayor to have any impact first requires that men and women have different preferences for the goods and services that local governments provide." Unlike national policy concerns such as health care, national security, or immigration, core local policy domains include service provision, zoning, and land use, which are typically difficult to cast in starkly partisan terms. Based on previous studies of social class and inequality and descriptive theories of urban politics, my expectation is that more affluent candidates, particularly those with business or other profit-oriented occupational backgrounds, will have conservative preferences on economic policy. At the local level, they will prefer low taxes and limits on redistribution. As a result, I hypothesize that electing affluent mayors will affect municipal public finance in the following ways: 1) lower taxes, 2) a

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[3]For example, Pelissero, Holian and Tomaka (2000) compare outcomes in 12 cities (6 matched pairs) over the time period of 1972 to 1992, and Karnig and Welch (1980) analyze a sample of 17 cities covering the years 1968 to 1975. In their main regression discontinuity analysis, Hopkins and McCabe (2012) rely on a sample of 149 elections in 76 large cities. Holman (2014) analyzes the relationship between women's representation in 2007 and city budgets in 2008 in a sample of 214 cities with populations of at least 5,000. Ferreira and Gyourko (2014) use a regression discontinuity design to estimate the effect of narrowly electing a female mayor on a variety of outcomes in 575 cities with populations of at least 25,000.

shift toward more regressive revenue sources—for example, increasing reliance on sales tax and user fees and charges rather than property tax, and 3) cuts to spending in redistributive policy areas.

The Candidates

The differences between ordinary Americans and their representatives in Congress has been well documented, and the wealth gap, in particular, continues to grow (see e.g., Gilens 2012; Carnes 2013; Eggers and Klašnja 2019). Until recently, however, details surrounding representation in American cities have been limited by a lack of comprehensive data about who runs for office and who wins. An original dataset of 3,257 mayoral candidates reveals fresh insight on the men and women who serve in city halls across the country. Beginning with election results from Ferreira and Gyourko (2009), I collected data from contemporary news reports, obituaries, government biographies, and other sources to construct detailed candidate profiles that include race, gender, occupational background, and political experience.

This original dataset is, to the best of my knowledge, the most comprehensive source to date of detailed information about American mayoral candidates. While these data provide detailed information about thousands of candidates, some candidates' background information is missing or incomplete. The analyses here focus on a subset of the sample including the top two candidates in 1,435 elections for which I have the most incomplete information. This dataset includes 2,870 mayoral candidates from 259 U.S. cities with a population of at least 50,000 (as of the 2000 Census) in 44 states between 1950 and 2007. Although the cities in the dataset are not a random sample, the descriptive statistics reported in in Table 1 suggest the cities in the sample are quite similar to the universe of U.S. cities of similar population size.[4] Overall, there are 602 cities in the U.S. that had a population of 50,000 or greater, and my sample includes 259 of these. The population of sample cities is, on average, a bit larger, but on most measures of demographics and socioeconomic

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[4]Election data were provided by Fernando Ferreira and Joseph Gyourko, who collected the data via a survey of US cities and townships with a population of more than 25,000 people as of the year 2000. These data were used in Ferreira and Gyourko (2009) as well as Ferreira and Gyourko (2014).

characteristics, the sample appears to represent well the universe of cities of similar size. Indeed, none of the differences in the summary statistics reported in Table 1 are statistically significant.

Table 1: Sample of Cities

	Cities with $>= 50,000$ Population	Current Sample— Mayors Data	Current Sample— RDD Analysis
Number of cities	602	259	210
Population	164,638	213,319	240,245
	(410,112)	(573,236)	(632,826)
White population	68.91%	68.62%	67.94%
	(18.47)	(18.99)	(19.44)
Unemployment	6.42%	6.38%	6.43%
	(2.69)	(2.64)	(2.71)
Median household income	$43,683	$43,612	$43,692
	(13,749)	(13,567)	(13,567)
Home ownership	58.49%	58.33%	57.63%
	(12.44)	(11.56)	(11.78)
Median house value	$142,978	$141,603	$144,613
	(87,432)	(77,395)	(80,828)

Note: Descriptive statistics from the 2000 U.S. Census include mean values with standard deviations in parentheses.

Overall, the mayoral candidates data yield a fairly detailed account of representation in U.S. cities and show that mayors, like politicians at higher levels of government, are not very representative of their constituents. While occupation serves as the primary indicator of candidates' social class, I also include descriptive details about other candidate characteristics in Table 2, which summarizes candidates' demographics and political experience. First, mayors are overwhelmingly white and male. About 91% of mayors are white, while another 5% are Black. Only about 3% of candidates are Latino, and less than 1% are Asian. Women make up just about 11% of the sample of mayors. Most candidates also had political experience prior to entering a mayoral race. Indeed, over 48% of winning mayoral candidates have served as mayor before, and more than half have served on the city council. A few have served as county (2.5%) or state (8.5%) legislators, while a very small share—about 1%—served in Congress before running for mayor. Though mayors who have served in elected office at higher levels of government are uncommon, there are a few exceptions. Occasionally, politicians may serve in more than one elected office. A few big city mayors,

such as John Lindsay and Ed Koch in New York or Norris Poulson and Sam Yorty in Los Angeles, also had prior experience as members of Congress. Only about 20% of winning candidates were political novices.

Table 2: Experience & Attributes

	Mayors		Runners-up	
	Count	Share	Count	Share
Race & Ethnicity				
White	1314	91.6%	1306	91%
Black	74	5.2%	76	5.3%
Latinx	37	2.6%	43	3%
Asian	10	0.7%	10	0.7%
Gender				
Men	1280	89.2%	1267	88.3%
Women	155	10.8%	168	11.7%
Political Experience				
Mayor	692	48.2%	353	24.6%
Incumbent	658	45.9%	273	19%
Council	775	54%	665	46.3%
State	122	8.5%	90	6.3%
County	36	2.5%	41	2.9%
US	16	1.1%	10	0.7%
None	287	20%	525	36.6%
$n = 2{,}870$				

Note: The table provides details on the political experience and attributes of mayors and mayoral candidates. Some mayors have multiple types of prior political experience, so the sum of the share of candidates with all types of experience exceeds 100%.

Beyond demographics and political experience, occupational backgrounds provide additional information about candidates. Specifically, candidates' occupations serve as an indication of social class. To collect candidates' occupations, I researched their work backgrounds to determine their primary job or career prior to their run for mayor. For some candidates, I was able to assemble fairly detailed work histories, but given the number of candidates and limited information, I focus on their main occupation. For example, if a candidate worked as a teacher for a few years but ultimately became a lawyer and practiced law, I would count their primary occupation as attorney. At first glance, candidates seem relatively diverse in terms of occupation, but a closer look reveals that candidates overwhelmingly have white-collar career backgrounds.

Mayors are not necessarily engaged in especially lucrative professions—among the candidates are teachers, firefighters, engineers, and stay-at-home parents. However, nearly one third of candidates are business owners or executives, i.e., they are described as an owner or corporate officer of a for-profit business. Several of these candidates own large businesses, but many others own local businesses, such as real estate and development firms, retail shops and restaurants, and funeral homes. Other common occupations include attorney, manager or supervisor, educator, and sales professional. Few candidates have what might traditionally have been characterized as blue-collar jobs, though a handful of candidates were workers in oil refineries, factories, and a warehouse. While some candidates might be considered skilled workers, including a machinist, a plumber, and a carpenter, a few also have jobs as workers in service industries, including retail, personal and home care, and food service. Among the more unusual occupations are florist, baseball scout, and rocket engine technician.

A valuable feature of the mayoral candidates' data is the rich detail of the candidate profiles; however, classifying specific occupations into broader categories helps reveal commonalities and trends among mayoral candidates. I adopt a set of occupational categories outlined by Carnes (2013) to classify candidate occupations. These include nine broad occupational categories (*attorney, business owner or executive, business employee, farm owner or manager, military or law enforcement, politician or staff member, service-based professional, technical professional,* and *worker*) as well as a catch-all *other* category for vague or difficult to classify occupations. Table 3 presents these categories (in italics) along with some examples of occupations within them. The examples are by no means an exhaustive list, but they are actual occupations of mayoral candidates in the study and convey information about occupation coding.

Note in Table 3 that the occupational categories are divided into three broader types (in bold) also from Carnes (2013), *profit-oriented*, *not-for-profit*, and *working-class*. This typology groups occupations with commonalities that not only may signify social class but also could lead to shared policy preferences. Profit-oriented occupations are those that involve the provision of goods or services for the explicit purpose of generating profit. Not-for-profit occupations, on the other

Table 3: Occupation Categories

Profit-oriented		Not-for-profit		Working-class	
Business Owner or Executive	Business owner Corporate officer (e.g., President, C.E.O.) Publisher	*Attorney*		*Worker*	Manual laborer Service industry worker Union official, or organizer
Business Employee	Real estate agent Manager of a business College administrator Consultant Sales representative	*Military or Law Enforcement*	Military service member Police officer Public safety administrator Firefighter Federal law enforcement		
Farm Owner or Manager		*Politician or staff member*			
Technical Professional	Physician Pharmacist Journalist Urban planner Accountant Engineer	*Service-based Professional*	School Teacher Nurse Social Worker Nonprofit administrator Clergy Mental health professional		

Note: Occupational classifications drawn from Carnes (2013). Examples are occupations observed in the study sample.

hand, often involve public service, advocacy, or nonprofit service provision. Finally, working-class jobs include skilled and unskilled laborers as well as service industry workers. Not-for-profit professionals may enjoy a greater degree of financial security than workers, but the profit-oriented professions include many of the most lucrative occupations. Income or wealth, however, is likely not the only way in which occupations may shape (or reflect) political attitudes. Those who make their living in business, for example, may be opposed to taxes and regulations that increase the cost of doing business. At the same time, those taxes may support the services non-profit professionals provide, and workers may value regulations with implications for their health or wages. Different types of advocacy organizations also operate within different fields, and trade associations, labor unions, or charitable organizations may help shape shared preferences either through socialization or by promoting group or industry-friendly policies.

Even with the careful coding of candidates' occupations, how to classify occupations is not entirely certain. One complication is that there may be variation within occupations. For example, an anesthesiologist or other specialist physician may earn much more than a family or general practitioner, and an attorney in a private practice likely garners a considerably higher salary than a prosecutor. Indeed, consulting various lists of high-paying occupations uncovers a fair amount of variation, but they typically include business executives and managers, engineers, and physicians,

while some lists include pharmacists and lawyers.[5] Because this uncertainty seems unavoidable, I consider two alternative coding schemes for the broad occupation classifications to mitigate concerns that my results reflect these coding choices. In the first, I re-classify attorney as a profit-oriented profession, and in the second, I classify attorney as profit-oriented but recode technical professional as a not-for-profit occupation. Although these changes do alter the distribution of candidates across categories, all three coding procedures produce similar substantive results (presented in the Appendix, Section C).

Table 4 breaks down candidates by occupation, comparing winning and losing candidates. The most common occupation among the candidates is business owner or executive. Notably, more than half of the mayoral candidates in the sample have occupational backgrounds in business. While 32.6% of candidates are business owners or executives—the largest category overall, another 18% of candidates worked in other business occupations. In sharp contrast, only 4% of mayoral candidates work in occupations that are classified as working-class jobs. A relatively large share of candidates (17%) are attorneys, and 11.5% are employed in service-based professions. About 7% of candidates have occupational backgrounds as technical professionals, and the least common occupations fall into the politician or staff member (1.5%) and farm owner (0.1%) categories. Just under 4% of candidates remain in the catch-all other category.

The statistics presented in Table 4 reveal a clear skew toward white-collar occupations, especially those that can be characterized as profit-oriented professions. There is no evidence here, however, to indicate that business owners or executives, business employees, or technical professionals win at higher rates. While workers and candidates with military or law enforcement backgrounds are also more common among runners up than mayors, lawyers win at relatively high rates, but I find no clear indication that the distribution of occupations is systematically different among candidates who win compared to those who lose ($\chi^2 = 14.685$ $p = 0.107$). Yet, we must be cautious about making inferences based on these details alone primarily because these data do not account for candidates' strategic decisions to run for office.

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[5]For examples of lists of especially lucrative occupations, see, e.g., U.S. Department of Labor (2019), Smith (2015), or Glassdoor (2019).

Table 4: Candidate Occupations

| | Mayors | | Runners-up | |
	Count	Share	Count	Share
Business Owner or Executive	454	31.6%	481	33.5%
Lawyer	268	18.7%	224	15.6%
Business Employee	259	18%	259	18%
Service-based Professional	170	11.8%	159	11.1%
Technical Professional	92	6.4%	107	7.5%
Military or Law Enforcement	60	4.2%	66	4.6%
Other	56	3.9%	54	3.8%
Worker	48	3.3%	69	4.8%
Politician or Staff Member	26	1.8%	16	1.1%
Farm Owner or Manager	2	0.1%	0	0%
$n = 2,870$				

Note: The table provides details on the occupational backgrounds of mayors and mayoral candidates.

Another possibility is that aggregate statistics, which summarize the entire sample of candidates, may obscure differences across different kinds of cities. There is, for example, evidence that political culture varies across states and regions in ways that have implications for the character of representation representation and the degree to which policymakers are responsive to public preferences (Erikson, Wright and McIver 1993, cf. Elazar 1966). Figure 1 shows the distribution of candidate occupations by region and provides some evidence that who runs for mayor and who wins may vary across regions. Each panel summarizes a geographic region, occupational categories are listed on the vertical axis, and the black (grey) bars indicate the share of winning (runner-up) candidates in the region from each category. White-collar occupations are most common across all regions, and business owner or executive is the largest occupational category in all regions. However, we also see some notable differences across regions. For example, business owners and executives make up over 40% of candidates in the South but closer to 30% of the candidates in other regions. Lawyers more commonly serve as mayors in the Northeast while the Midwest has the largest share of mayors who are workers—though workers still account for only 5.5% of the mayors in this region. Service-based professionals, military and law enforcement personnel, and workers are more uncommon in the South, where more than three quarters of mayors have backgrounds in business or as attorneys.

Figure 1: Candidate Occupations by Region
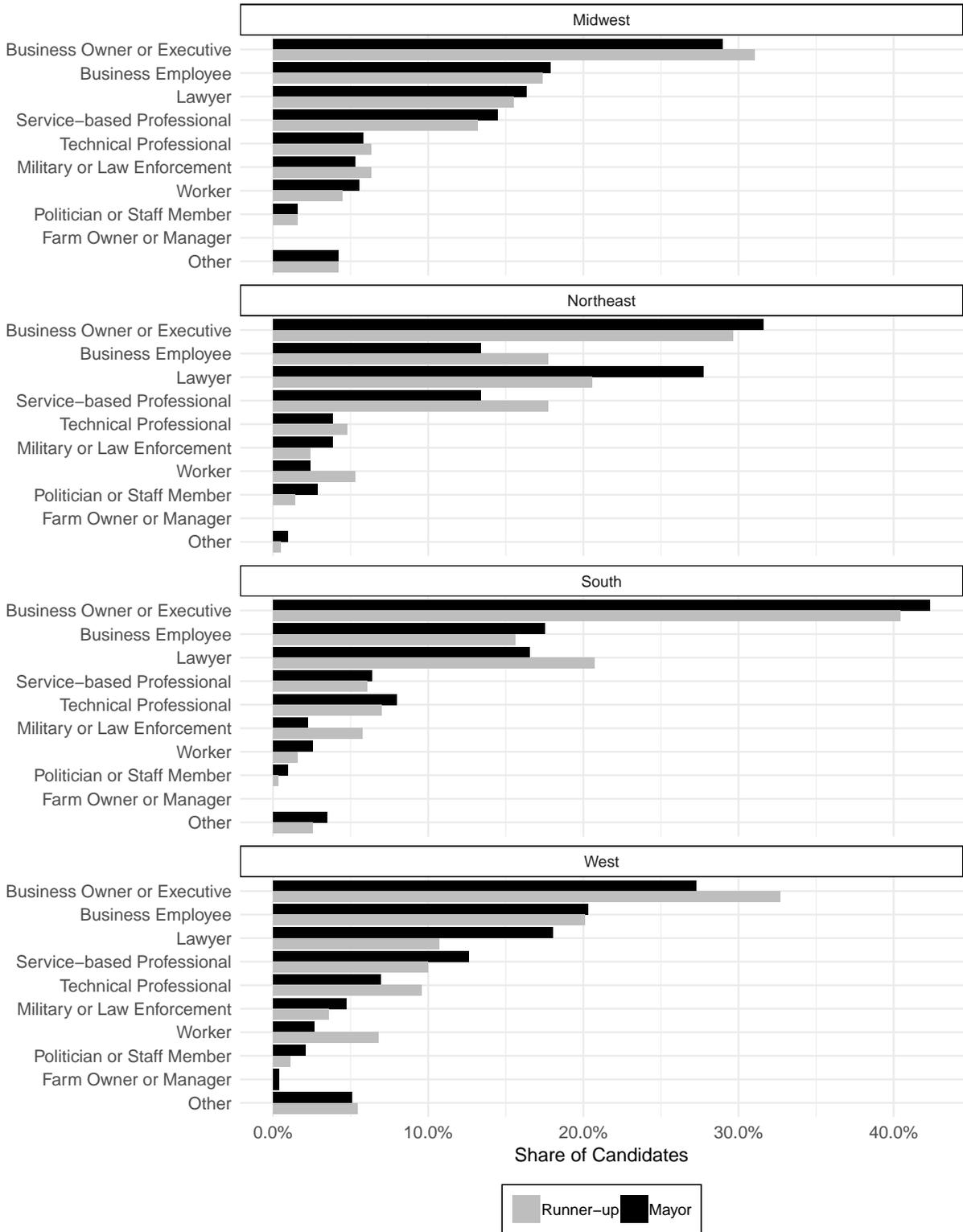
In addition to regional differences, municipal governing institutions also may either shape—or reflect—descriptive representation in American cities. Indeed, some scholars of urban politics argue that municipal reformers advocated a set of institutions (e.g., nonpartisan ballots, city managers, off-cycle elections) that would favor middle class and affluent voters while disempowering racial and ethnic minorities and the working class (Bridges 1997). There is also evidence to suggest that cites with reform institutions are more likely to elect affluent officials, especially business leaders and owners, than cities with unreformed institutions (see Welch and Bledsoe 1988 for a detailed review and analysis). Because cities typically have a bundle of reform institutions or none at all, I use municipal form of government as a proxy for reform institutions broadly. Figure 2 breaks down occupations by form of government.[6] As above, occupational categories are on the vertical axis of each panel, and the horizontal axis measures the share of candidates in each category. The top panel summarizes cities with the council-manager form of government, i.e., reform cities, while the lower panel includes mayor council cities.[7]. Figure 2 does suggest that candidates occupational backgrounds may vary with form of government. Business employees and technical professionals also run more often in council-manager cities, while lawyers and service-based professionals are more common in mayor-council cities.

These variations in the distribution of occupations by institutional context are notable for two key reasons. First, the differences do appear to be systematic.[8] Second, an interesting pattern

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[6]Data on the form and institutions of local governments come from the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). The ICMA routinely surveys municipalities to determine form of government, electoral rules, city council size, and mayors' formal powers. Data are available in electronic format for surveys conducted at five year intervals between 1981 and 2006. To cover earlier years, I accessed details about municipal government form and institutions from *The Municipal Year Book: An Authoritative Resume of Activities and Statistical Data of American Cities* for every fifth year from 1951 to 1976, with the exception of *The Municipal Year Book 1971*, which did not include the relevant information. For intervening years, I interpolated values from the most recent year in which the data were observed. Although cities do occasionally alter their governing institutions, changes are rare. Indeed, the ICMA data show evidence of changes in the form of government in only 12 cities (less than 5% of the sample) over nearly 60 years.

[7]I exclude commission cities here because only 68 candidates (2% of the sample) come from cities with this form of government. In commission cities, about half of all mayors have business backgrounds (owners, executives, and employees combined), 23.5% are attorneys, and 12% have law enforcement or military backgrounds. Another 9% work in technical professions while just under 3% are classified as workers.

[8]Because the data are categorical, I use a chi-squared test to evaluate the relationship between form of government and occupation categories and reject the null hypothesis that occupational category is independent of form ($\chi^2 = 90.114$, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 2: Candidate Occupations by Form of Government
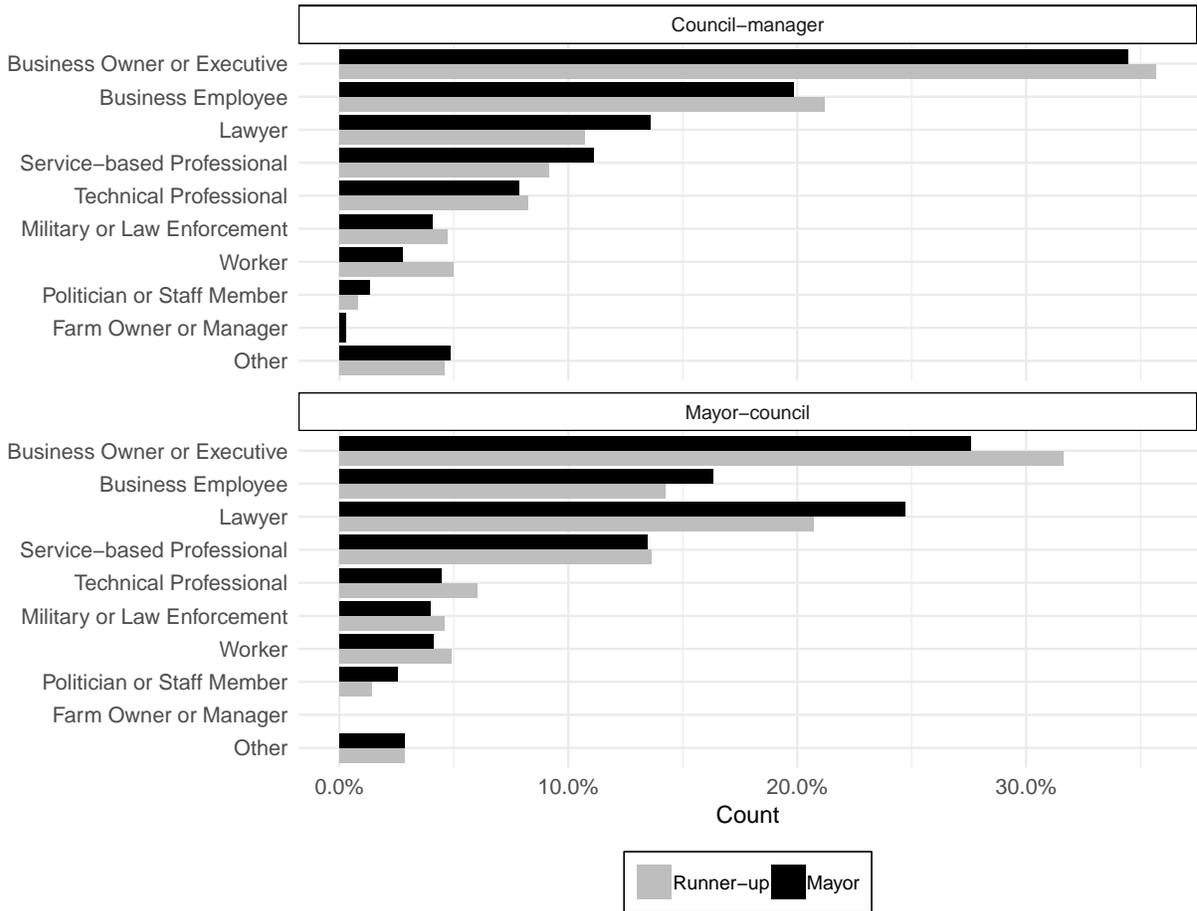
emerges. The business-related occupations that are most common in council-manager cities fall into the profit-oriented occupation type. By contrast, candidates with backgrounds as attorneys and service-based professionals—not-for profit occupations—appear more frequently in mayor-council cities than council-manager cities. Figure 3 includes occupation types on the vertical axis with share on the horizontal axis and shows that profit-oriented professions are more common among candidates in cities with reform institutions compared to cities with the mayor-council form of government. The majority of candidates in cities of both forms fit into the profit-oriented group, but two thirds of candidates (67%) in council-manager cities have profit-oriented careers compared to about 52% of candidates in mayor-council cities. Relative to reform cities, mayor-council cities have more candidates with backgrounds in not-for-profit professions (29% vs. 44%), but workers make up a very small share of candidates regardless of the institutional context—between 4% and

5% of candidates. Again, these differences are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 60.901$, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 3: Occupation Type by Form of Government
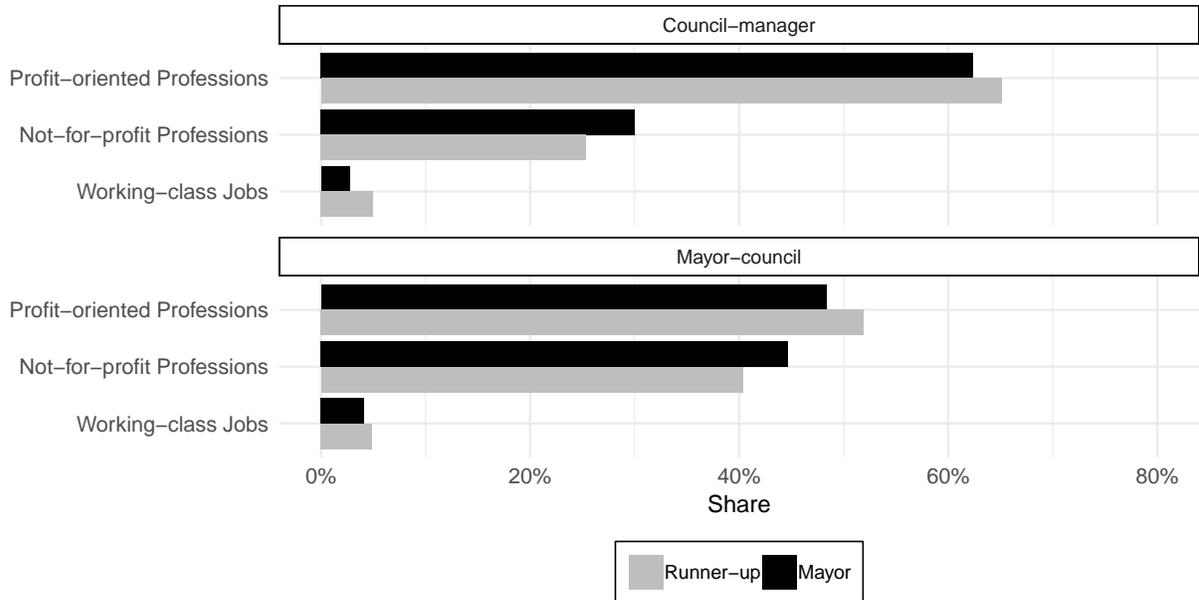
By any metric white-collar careers dominate the occupational backgrounds of mayoral candidates in cities across the United States. Although there is some variation by region and form of government, it is less clear what determines who runs and who wins. For example, region and governing institutions are not unrelated. Reform institutions are the norm in the West and fairly common in the Midwest but very unusual in the Northeast. Though there are a few exceptions, reform institutions are not prevalent among very large cities. Questions remain about the factors that determine who governs American cities, but this account of the occupational backgrounds of candidates suggests that working-class residents are surely underrepresented.

Municipal Data

To examine the effect of electing a profit oriented mayor on public finance outcomes, I augment city election results and candidates' background data with public finance data drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau. Together, the Census of Governments and the Annual Survey of Governments

provide detailed revenue and expenditure data for U.S. local governments from 1951 to 2012.[9]

In addition to variables that capture the size of local government and distinguish between revenue sources, I consider whether and how electing a profit-oriented candidate affects spending on redistributive policies.

To account for variation in population and region, all dependent variables are measured in per-capita constant (2000) dollars adjusted for differences in the cost of living across states per Berry, Fording and Hanson (2000).[10] I compiled additional municipal data included in covariate-adjusted regression models to improve the precision of treatment effect estimates (Lee and Lemieux 2010). In particular, population tends to be systematically related to cities' functional obligations and thus the size of government, and a city's lagged spending and revenues are strong predictors of outcomes in subsequent years. I present results of covariate-adjusted local linear regression models incorporating city-level characteristics that may be correlated with fiscal outcomes. Measures of population, racial composition, median household income, and median house value come from the U.S. Census. [11]

Empirical Approach

The notion that elected leaders influence policy outcomes implies a simple model—voters elect candidates with different characteristics, and elected officials shape policy. Put a different way, exposure to a certain type of leader determines policy outcomes. In this case, I want to investigate the effect of mayors' social class on municipal public finance outcomes, but a series of methodological challenges arise. In the absence of a direct measure of social class, occupation serves as a strong if imperfect proxy. As I outline above, not only does occupation convey information about candi-

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[9]The Census of Governments is conducted every five years, while the Annual Survey of Governments includes only a sample of local governments.

[10]Results are substantively similar with or without use of cross-state cost of living index.

[11]The main analyses do not include measures of municipal institutions, but both form of government and nonpartisan electoral rules (from the International City/County Management Association) are included in the RDD validity tests. I find no evidence of sorting on these institutional characteristics. These results are included in the Appendix along with a description of the data.

dates' material circumstances and financial security but also different types of occupations may be related to differences in preferences. The distribution of candidates into white-collar and working-class occupations, however, creates a problem even for a simple model because there is so little variation on this dichotomous metric. Recall that fewer than 5% of candidates have working-class occupational backgrounds. This lack of variation contributes to the decision to focus on the effects of electing candidates that fall into the profit-oriented type. Profit-oriented professions also include many of the most lucrative occupations. Prior research also finds that members of Congress with backgrounds in profit-oriented professions tend hold more conservative views—especially on economic policy issues—relative to those who worked in not-for-profit or working-class professions (Carnes 2012; 2013). Candidates in profit-oriented occupations also may have ties to business or trade associations which advance a set of policy priorities that could shape or reinforce shared policy preferences on these and other issues (Manza and Brooks 2008).

To understand the effect of electing candidates with profit-oriented occupational backgrounds, we cannot simply compare cities that have profit-oriented mayors to those that have mayors with other types of occupations. Mayors (and their occupational experience) are not randomly assigned to cities. This is especially problematic because the same factors that determine a cities' selection (or rejection) of a profit-oriented mayoral candidate could also shape the cities' public finance outcomes. For example, a city of conservative voters might elect a small business owner mayor because they perceive him to be particularly conservative (see e.g., Kirkland and Coppock 2018), and conservative voters might also demand lower taxes regardless of who serves as mayor.

To address the potential for endogeneity, I implement a regression discontinuity design (RDD) to identify the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor. RDDs have become common in political science research mainly because a valid RDD can identify causal effects with observational data (e.g., Lee, Moretti and Butler 2004; Lee 2008; Ferreira and Gyourko 2009; 2014; Gerber and Hopkins 2011). The hallmark of the RDD is its reliance on a variable that determines exposure to treatment. At a known threshold value of the assignment (or forcing) variable, the probability of treatment changes discontinuously. In a two-candidate election, a candidate's vote share captures

the underlying probability that they will be elected, and there is a sharp discontinuity at 50%—i.e., if and only if the candidate's vote share exceeds this threshold, they win. Because candidates cannot precisely control their vote shares (i.e., the assignment variable), an important consequence is that near the threshold, assignment to treatment is as-if random (Lee 2008; Lee and Lemieux 2010, p. 283).

An RD analysis effectively uses the observations near the threshold in the forcing variable to estimate the change in the outcome of interest at the discontinuity. For example, if a city just barely elects a profit-oriented candidate, is there a jump (or drop) in the city's tax revenue? There are several considerations and choices involved in formulating an estimation strategy. For example, preferred local polynomial methods incorporate only the observations that lie within a specified distance—or bandwidth—on either side of the threshold of the forcing variable. This option requires the researcher to choose an appropriate bandwidth, but it is less clear what bandwidth is reasonable, i.e., how do we define "close" observations? Because specification and bandwidth choices can alter RDD results, current best practices call for the use of local linear regression combined with a data-driven approach to determining the bandwidth that minimizes the mean squared error (MSE) of the RD estimator (Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik 2014, see also Imbens and Kalyanaraman 2012).[12]

I follow this guidance and rely on local linear regression with optimal bandwidths calculated per Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik (2014) (CCT optimal bandwidths) to estimate the effects of narrowly electing a profit-oriented mayor.[13]

To implement the RDD, I focus on elections where one, and only one, candidate has a profit-oriented occupational background (640 of 1435 elections meet this criterion). The 215 cities in

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[12]Researchers have routinely used global specifications that control for higher-order polynomials of the forcing variable. However, recent work has raised some concerns about this approach. In particular, higher-order polynomial specifications may more heavily weight observations that lie far from the threshold. This method may produce misleading estimates, and as a result, most current RDD guides strongly advise use of local linear specifications (Gelman and Imbens 2014; Skovron and Titiunik 2015).

[13]Because the MSE-optimal bandwidth often seems subjectively wide—i.e., beyond what we might consider a "close" electoral margin, I also include estimates using a 5% bandwidth. In these specifications, all observations within 5% on either side of the cutpoint are used in the estimation, and observations are weighted by proximity to the cutpoint.
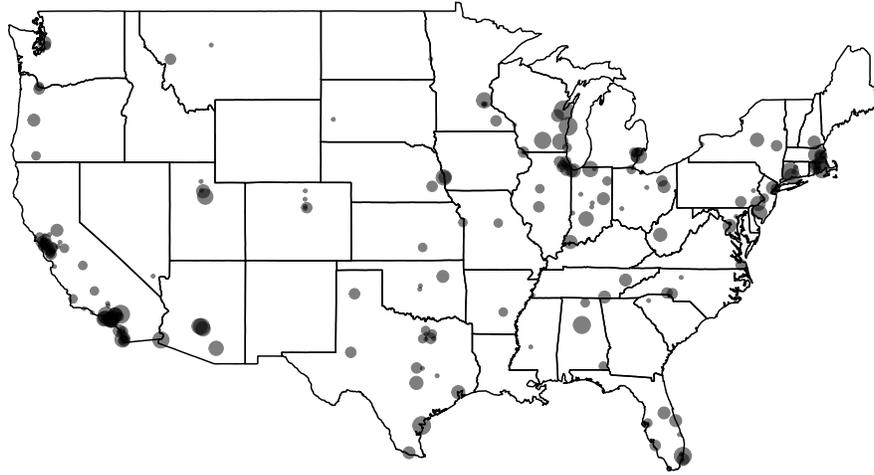
Figure 4: RD Sample Cities

Figure 4 maps the cities included in the full RD sample, i.e., cities with elections where a profit-oriented candidate faced an opponent with a different occupational background. The size of the point reflects the number of observations the city contributes to the RD sample, with larger points indicating more observations.

the RDD sample are displayed Figure 4 (Table 1 includes descriptive statistics for these cities). The point sizes vary with the number of observations a city contributes to the sample with larger points indicating more observations. Figure 4 shows that the RDD analyses include data from cities across the country, substantially mitigating potential concerns that the results may be driven by a handful of cities. In these cases, if and only if the profit-oriented candidate wins, the city experiences a profit-oriented mayor. The vote share margin serves as the forcing variable, and 0% is a sharp threshold that determines treatment assignment.[14] Throughout the analyses below, I estimate models of the following form:

$$Y_{it+2} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Profit\text{-}oriented\ Candidate\ Win_{it} + f(V_{it}) + \varepsilon_{it}, \tag{1}$$

where *Profit-oriented Candidate Win*$_{it}$ is an dichotomous variable indicating whether a profit-

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[14]Some elections include more than 2 candidates. Margin of victory is defined as the difference in the vote shares of the top two candidates.

oriented candidate won the mayoral election in city i in year t, and β_1 is the quantity of interest, the estimate of the effect of a mayor from a profit-oriented occupation. The variable Y_{it+2} is a relevant fiscal outcome measured two years after the mayoral election. I examine several public finance outcomes that capture the size of government, local taxation and revenue, and redistributive spending. Because mayoral terms of office vary across cities, I rely on outcomes measured two years after the city election to allow time for a mayor to pursue her policy goals while remaining within the two-year term maintained by some cities.[15] The term $f(V_{it})$ represents a flexible function of the forcing variable, which includes the forcing variable and the interaction of the forcing and treatment indicator variables (Lee and Lemieux 2010).[16]

Results

A crucial step in the analysis of an RDD is evaluating the validity of the design. In particular, causal identification rests on the key assumption that potential outcomes are smooth across the threshold in the forcing variable (Lee and Lemieux 2010). In some electoral contexts, the tendency of incumbents to win close elections raises concerns about potential violations of this so-called "no-sorting" assumption (Caughey and Sekhon 2011), but there is little evidence of sorting in mayoral elections (Eggers et al. 2015). Nonetheless, I assess the validity of the RDD in several ways. I use the McCrary (2008) test of the density of the forcing variable and fail to reject the null hypothesis of no sorting (log difference in heights is -0.009 with SE 0.183; $p = 0.962$). A set of placebo tests and continuity tests incorporating a variety of covariates further indicate that the RDD is sound. [17]

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[15]The results are substantively similar with outcomes measured a year earlier or later. Results using outcomes measured in multiple years are included in the Appendix, Section D.

[16]Some recent methodological work on RDDs advocates the use of a similar estimation strategy but relies on robust bias-corrected confidence intervals for inference (Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik 2014; Skovron and Titiunik 2015). In the main text, I report robust standard errors, but replicating these analyses with robust bias-corrected confidence intervals produces substantively similar results (presented in the Appendix). Clustering standard errors at the city level also produces similar results (not included).

[17]Additional details on covariate continuity tests and other validity tests are included in the Appendix along with a figure showing the distribution of the forcing variable.

Size of Government

The first set of results addresses the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor on the size of government. Beginning with the graphical results presented in Figure 5, I find little evidence to indicate that electing a profit-oriented mayor leads to a change in the size of government. Figure 5a plots total revenue (measured in per capita constant dollars) on the vertical axis and the forcing variable (profit-oriented candidate margin) on the horizontal axis. Note that positive values of the forcing variable (to the right of the vertical line at 0) indicate that the profit-oriented candidate was elected, and negative values (to the left of the cutpoint) indicate that the profit oriented candidate lost the election. The points are binned averages of the outcome variable, and the lines plot flexible (4th order) polynomials on either side of the threshold. Figure 5b is similar but plots own-source revenue against the forcing variable, and Figure 5c plots total expenditures against the forcing variable. These plots provide little, if any, evidence to suggest that narrowly electing a profit-oriented mayor leads to a decrease in the size of government. If anything, both total revenue and total expenditure appear to show a small increase with the election of a profit-oriented mayor, while there seems to be no change in own-source revenue.

Figure 5: Size of Government

(a) Total Revenue   (b) Own-source Revenue   (c) Total Expenditure
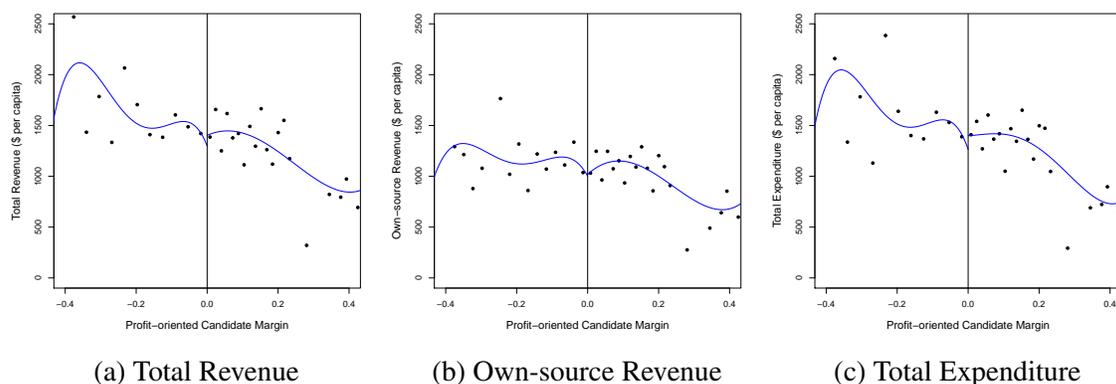
Figure 5 includes plots of size of government outcomes (total revenue, total own-source revenue, and total expenditure). The y-axes measure the dependent variables in per capita constant dollars, and profit-oriented candidate margin is on the x-axis of each plot. Points are binned averages of the outcome variable, and the lines plot flexible (4th order) polynomials on either side of the threshold.

To more rigorously test the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor on the size of government, I estimate a series of local linear regression models. Figure 6 presents the results.[18] The dependent variables are listed on the vertical axis, while the horizontal axis measures the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor in per capita dollars. Triangles indicate the point estimates from specifications that use the CCT optimal bandwidth, dots mark the estimates from specifications that use a 5% bandwidth, and solid lines show 90% confidence intervals with dashed extensions denoting 95% confidence intervals. All specifications include covariates to improve the precision of the estimates.[19] Again, I find no evidence that profit-oriented mayors shrink the size of government. At both the 5% bandwidth and the wider CCT bandwidths, the estimates of the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor on total revenue, own-source revenue, and total expenditure are positive but do not approach statistical significance.
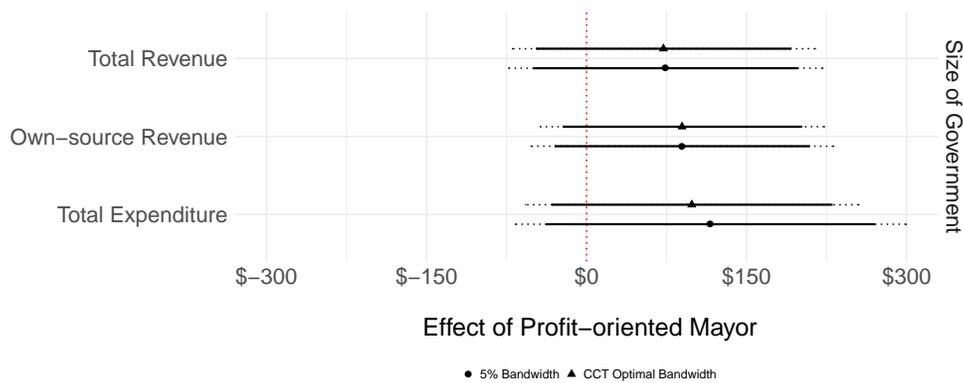
Figure 6: Results: Size of Government

Figure 6 presents the results of covariate-adjusted local linear specifications. Dependent variables are listed on the y-axis, while the x-axis measures the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor in per capita constant dollars. Triangles indicate the point estimates using CCT optimal bandwidth, dots mark the estimates using a 5% bandwidth, and solid lines show 90% confidence intervals with dashed extensions denoting 95% confidence intervals. Covariates include population(logged), median household income (constant dollars, logged), median house value (constant dollars, logged), share of population that is white, and the value of the dependent variable measured the year before the mayoral election.

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[18]The appendix includes a detailed table of all regression results presented in this section.

[19]Covariates include population(logged), median household income (constant dollars, logged), median house value (constant dollars, logged), share of population that is white, and the value of the dependent variable measured the year before the mayoral election.

Taxes, Fees, & Charges

Next, I evaluate whether electing a profit-oriented mayor leads to a decrease in taxes or charges. The plots in Figure 7 suggest that electing a profit-oriented mayor has little, if any, effect on these revenue sources. Similar to the figures above, these plot the dependent variable against the forcing variable. Figure 7a addresses total taxes, and the lines that plot the relationship between total taxes and profit-oriented candidate vote sharenearly meet at the cutpoint. In Figure 7c we actually observe the opposite of my hypothesis—there appears to be a small increase of about $50 per capita in property tax. Also contrary to expectations, Figures 7b and 7d indicate that there may be very small decreases both fees and charges and sales tax.

Figure 7: Taxes & Charges

(a) Total Taxes

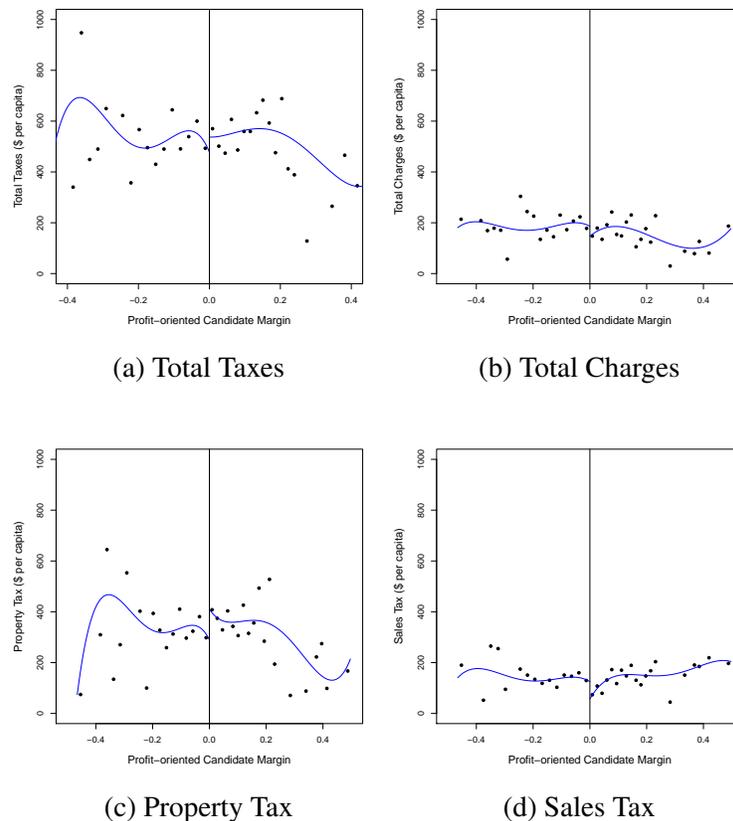(b) Total Charges

(c) Property Tax

(d) Sales Tax

Figure 7 includes plots of municipal revenue outcomes (total taxes, total charges, property taxes, and sales taxes). The y-axes measure the dependent variables in per capita constant dollars, and profit-oriented candidate margin is on the x-axis of each plot. Points are binned averages of the outcome variable, and the lines plot flexible (4th order) polynomials on either side of the threshold.

In this case, the results of local linear regression models presented in Figure 8 provide additional evidence to suggest that electing a profit-oriented mayor has no meaningful impact on municipal taxes and charges. The point estimates suggest that electing a profit-oriented mayor leads to a $7-$16 (depending on bandwidth) per capita decrease in total taxes, but this result is not statistically significant. A similar pattern emerges for sales tax. The coefficients are negative and relatively small in magnitude, and none of the estimates, regardless of bandwidth, is statistically significant. Some specifications that use alternative codings for profit-oriented occupations, however, do produce slightly larger negative estimates of the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor on sales tax which are statistically significant at the 90% level.[20] For both property tax and total charges, point estimates are positive but relatively small in magnitude and not also not statistically significant.

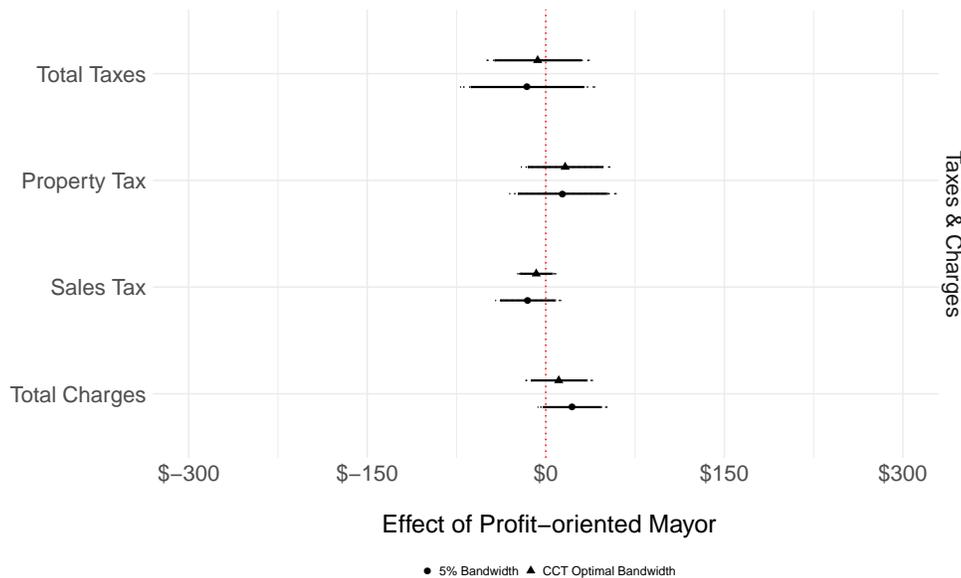Figure 8: Results: Taxes & Charges

Figure 6 presents the results of covariate-adjusted local linear specifications. Dependent variables are listed on the y-axis, while the x-axis measures the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor in per capita constant dollars. Triangles indicate the point estimates using CCT optimal bandwidth, dots mark the estimates using a 5% bandwidth, and solid lines show 90% confidence intervals with dashed extensions denoting 95% confidence intervals. Covariates include population(logged), median household income (constant dollars, logged), median house value (constant dollars, logged), share of population that is white, and the value of the dependent variable measured the year before the mayoral election.

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[20]The estimates range from -$18 to -$31 in per capita sales tax. See Appendix, Section C, for additional details on alternative coding of profit-oriented candidates and full results.

Figure 9: Redistributive Spending
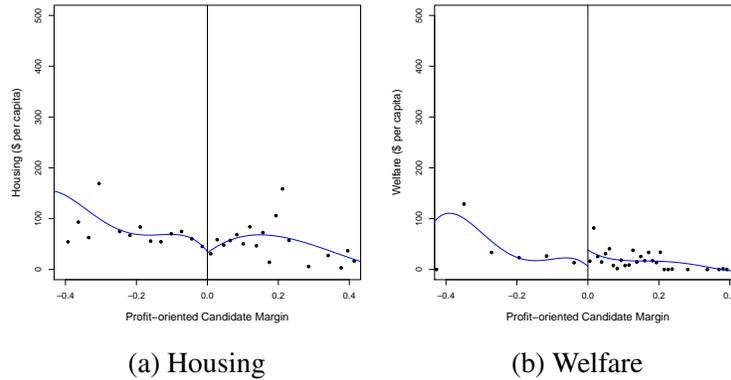

(a) Housing   (b) Welfare

Figure 9 includes plots of spending on key redistributive policies (housing and community development and welfare). The y-axes measure the dependent variables in per capita constant dollars, and profit-oriented candidate margin is on the x-axis of each plot. Points are binned averages of the outcome variable, and the lines plot flexible (4th order) polynomials on either side of the threshold.

Redistributive Spending

Finally, Figure 9 addresses the relationship between electing a profit-oriented mayor and spending in two key domains of redistributive policy, housing and community development and welfare. In Figure 9a, which plots per capita spending on housing and community development against the forcing variable, we find little indication of a shift at the threshold. Moving on to Figure 9b, there appears to be a slight increase in spending on welfare with the election of a profit-oriented mayor. A jump in spending—even a small one–would run counter to the expectation that profit-oriented mayors will work to decrease municipal spending on redistributive programs.

The results of local linear regression models using both the 5% and CCT optimal bandwidths are presented in Figure 10. Like all of the results presented here, these point estimates come from covariate-adjusted specifications. The point estimate for spending on housing and community development is negative at the 5% bandwidth, though the sign switches at the CCT optimal bandwidth. Both estimates are small in magnitude and fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The coefficient for welfare spending is close to $0 at the 5% bandwidth and a bit larger and negative at the CCT optimal bandwidth. These estimates are neither substantively nor
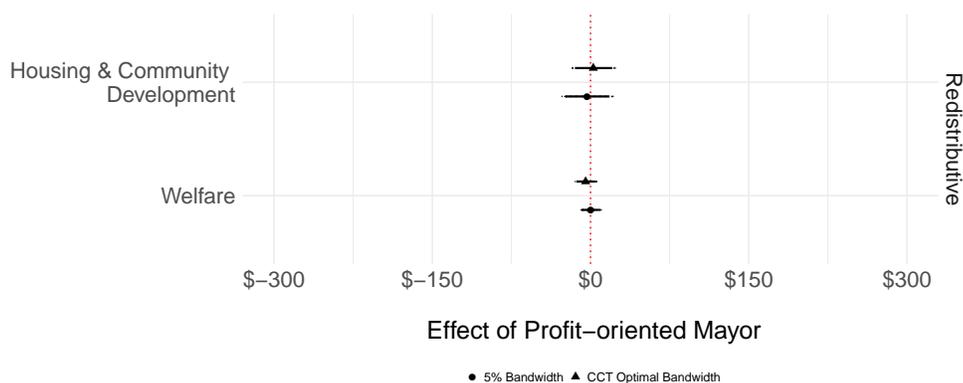
Figure 10: Results: Redistributive Spending

Figure 6 presents the results of covariate-adjusted local linear specifications. Dependent variables are listed on the y-axis, while the x-axis measures the effect of electing a profit-oriented mayor in per capita constant dollars. Triangles indicate the point estimates using CCT optimal bandwidth, dots mark the estimates using a 5% bandwidth, and solid lines show 90% confidence intervals with dashed extensions denoting 95% confidence intervals. Covariates include population(logged), median household income (constant dollars, logged), median house value (constant dollars, logged), share of population that is white, and the value of the dependent variable measured the year before the mayoral election.

statistically significant.

Discussion

Contrary to expectations, the results above provide little evidence to indicate that narrowly electing a mayor with a background in a profit-oriented profession leads to systematic changes in local tax policy or spending on redistributive spending. Overall, the analyses presented here may raise as many questions as they answer. Details about the backgrounds of mayoral candidates do provide a clear account of representation in cities across the U.S. and affirm that working-class Americans are underrepresented in city halls across the country. The vast majority of mayoral candidates in the study sample are white and male with white-collar careers and prior political experience. It appears that there are differences by region and institutional context in who runs for mayor and who serves. Less clear is what accounts for these differences and how they might affect local policy outcomes.

In some ways, the null results presented here are consistent with earlier findings of limited mayoral influence. It may be that the underrepresentation of the working class is not consequential

for the policy outcomes analyzed here. For example, cities' tax policies may be determined by state rules, or outcomes may be driven by external forces and competition for mobile taxpayers as Peterson (1981) might suggest. Closer study of policy domains that are more clearly under local control, such as law enforcement and policing may reveal the effects of electing affluent candidates. Indeed, Gerber and Hopkins (2011) suggest this logic explains their finding that mayoral partisanship is important in shaping spending on public safety but not in other areas.

Another possibility is that local-level policy makers share similar backgrounds, and this lack of variation makes it difficult to disentangle an independent effect of electing profit-oriented mayors. If so many mayors have affluent backgrounds, then perhaps what we might expect is that electing a mayor with a working-class occupation (as opposed to yet another mayor with a white-collar occupation) would produce a change in policy. However, the significant deficit of descriptive representation in cities across the U.S. creates methodological challenges. Of the 2,870 candidates analyzed here, only 117 are classified as workers. Of these, 113 ran against an opponent with either a profit-oriented or not-for-profit occupation, and only 40 of these elections have a vote-share margin within 10 percentage points, limiting the statistical power of any RDD analysis. Although Carnes (2013) notes greater class diversity in city councils, compared to state legislatures or Congress, it appears that business backgrounds are more common than working-class occupations. If white-collar occupations are also overrepresented on city councils, adding an affluent mayor may have little impact on policy.

Although the findings here suggest that electing affluent mayoral candidates has little impact on local fiscal policy outcomes, these results should be interpreted with caution. First, the RDD identifies a *local* average treatment effect—specifically, the effect of narrowly electing a mayor with a profit-oriented occupation. The null results also should not be extrapolated to other policy areas. The overrepresentation of the affluent may affect other local policy domains, such as zoning or land use policies. Given considerable evidence of a link between descriptive and substantive representation and the overrepresentation of the affluent—and of white men with white-collar backgrounds in particular—representation in American cities warrants closer attention from scholars to further

advance our understanding of who runs for office, who serves, and the implications of descriptive representation at the local level.

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