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Abstract

What is urban politics really about? Despite decades of research, there is still considerable disagreement about the relative roles of race, class, ideology, partisanship, and other factors in shaping the urban vote. In this article, we assemble a wide range of data on a diverse set of urban elections and offer a more explicit empirical test of what shapes urban politics. Our results suggest that local elections are partly an ideological battle, partly a partisan contest, and at least marginally linked to class, religion, and morality. Race, however, is the dominant factor in the local electoral arena. Local elections are in no small part a competition between blacks, whites, Latinos, and Asian-Americans over the leadership of their cities. We also assess how and why these divides vary across cities and electoral contexts finding that a theory of realistic group conflict best predicts patterns in the vote.

Keywords

race, class, partisanship, ideology, voting

One of the core questions behind the study of urban politics is as follows: What is urban politics really about? Is it largely a competition across cities each with limited local control, limited issues, and limited local politics as

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Peterson (1981) and others argued (J. E. Oliver 2012; Tiebout 1956)? Or is it more likely to be a ubiquitous struggle between racial groups to control local decision making as any number of studies have suggested (Barreto 2007; Collet 2005; Hajnal 2006; Kaufmann 2004; Liu and Vanderleeuw 2007)? Perhaps local politics is principally a class-based conflict between haves and have-nots (Bridges 1997; Trounstine 2008). Alternatively, does local electoral politics mirror national-level politics where ideological battles between liberals and conservatives and partisan contests between Democrats and Republicans dominate (Abrajano and Alvarez 2005)? Or are the contenders defined more by religion and morality, gender, and age (Bailey 1999; DeLeon and Naff 2004; Sharp 2002)? These questions have dominated scholarly attention on urban politics for decades. The results of these efforts have been illuminating and somewhat contradictory. We know that all of these different accounts of urban politics apply in some cities and contexts but we know less about the relative roles of each factor across a wide range of cases.

In this article, we focus on one core aspect of the debate. In the typical electoral contest, how do these potentially interacting and potentially overlapping divisions play out? Ultimately, when we consider a number of different potential factors, what tends to drive urban politics today? We attempt to answer these questions and to adjudicate between these different views of what shapes urban politics with two innovations. First, unlike most existing studies, we explicitly compare divisions across the different dimensions of race, class, ideology, partisanship, and other demographic characteristics in electoral contests. Given that race, class, partisanship, ideology, and other factors purported to drive urban politics are often highly correlated with each other, we cannot know which factors truly matter until we have a test that considers all of the alternatives in a single empirical model of vote choice.

Second, we include a wide range of elections in which to assess the question of what drives urban politics. One real concern is that many of the existing studies are limited to an analysis of a single election in one city or at most to a number of respondents in handful of cities. They offer keen insight into a particular locale but it is difficult to offer meaningful generalizations about urban politics based on analyses that do not incorporate patterns from more than a few cities or elections. To address this concern, we generate two different data sets—one that includes data on all elections in all available exit polls in 5 of the nation's largest cities and one that includes every available mayoral primary and general election over the past 20 years in the nation's largest 25 cities.

A larger number and a more diverse array of cases serve two purposes. With a broader array and an at least somewhat more representative set of cases, we increase our confidence in the generalizability of the results. The

other purpose of a larger, more diverse sample is that we can begin to assess and understand patterns in where and when race matters. Although we seek to provide the big picture, we are also well aware that patterns in the vote are likely to vary substantially from place to place and election to election. There is no single story that describes all urban elections.

An important element of this article will be to put forward and test a theory of racial politics that begins to help us understand the factors that make race more or less central features of the urban political arena. Our theory highlights the role that realistic group conflict can play in explaining patterns in the vote. To a significant extent, whether individual members of different racial and ethnic groups stand with or against each other depends on the size and perceived threat posed by the other group.

In what follows, we review the existing research on the urban vote and note its limitations. We then outline an empirical strategy for advancing our knowledge of the urban vote. The following section details our analysis of the vote not only highlighting the relatively large role played by race in the urban electoral arena but also illustrating how a range of other political and demographic features impact the vote. We end the analysis by examining and seeking to understand variation in the urban vote across different contexts. The article concludes with the implications of our findings for how we perceive local politics.

Existing Evidence

A wide range of research has illustrated the divergent preferences of black and white voters in local contests (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; DeLorenzo 1997; McCrary 1990; Pinderhughes 1987; Sonenshein 1993; L. Stein and Kohfeld 1991). And there is not only evidence that black–white divisions persist but also that the racial divide extends to other groups (Bobo and Johnson 2000; Joyce 2003; Kim 2000; Meier et al. 2004; Rocha 2007). In particular, there is clear evidence of significant racial solidarity among Latino (Barreto 2007) and Asian-American voters (Collet 2005) when coethnics are on the ballot.

But recent research is far from unanimous in its findings on the centrality of race in the local political arena. A number of other studies have found wide variation in the significance of race across different electoral contests (DeLeon and Naff 2004; Hajnal 2006; Kaufmann 2004; Liu 2003; Logan and Mollenkopf 2003; R. M. Stein, Ulbig, and Post 2005). Moreover, much of the most prominent research on local politics either does not include race in models of voter behavior or finds it insignificant (e.g., Berry and Howell 2007; Clingermyer and Feiock 2001; Krebs 1998; J. E. Oliver and Ha 2007; Wald, Button, and Rienzo 1996).

Even more importantly, there is evidence that many urban politics contests are shaped by dimensions other than race. Among others, Krebs (1998), J. E. Oliver and Ha (2007), and Ramakrishnan and Wong (2010) found that partisanship can dramatically shape local politics. A different set of scholars suggest that ideology can trump other factors in local democracy (Abrajano and Alvarez 2005; DeLeon 1991). Still others point to class as a primary dividing line in local governance (Bridges 1997; DeLeon and Naff 2004; Trounstein 2008). Sexuality, religion, age, and gender have also, at times, been linked to outcomes in the local arena (Bailey 1999; Sharp 2002; Wald, Button, and Rienzo 1996).

Concerns

Five issues inform the conclusions we can draw from these studies. First, given that different divisions appear to dominate in different sets of studies, it is difficult, if not impossible, to come up with an overall assessment of the importance of America's urban racial divides. Second, and perhaps most importantly, few studies explicitly incorporate and compare the effects of race with each of the other demographic or political dimensions (for two important exceptions, see Abrajano and Alvarez 2005 and Lieske and Hillard 1984). It is hard to judge if racial divisions are large unless they are compared with divisions across other demographic groups and it is harder still to know if race is the primary factor behind the vote, if we do not simultaneously control for other key demographic characteristics. Especially given strong correlations between race, class, ideology, and partisanship—the four factors most regularly cited as the main driving force in local politics—any model that does not simultaneously test all of these different factors is incomplete.

Also, most of the research is limited in breadth. Much of the research is focused on a single election in one city or at best on a series of elections in a couple of cities. Logan and Mollenkopf (2003); Liu and Vanderleeuw (2007); R. M. Stein, Ulbig, and Post (2005); Sonenshein (1993); and Hero (1989) provided excellent in-depth assessments of racial voting patterns but they all did so in only one city.¹ Other studies only improve matters slightly by looking at one or two cities (Kaufmann 2004). Large-*N* comparisons across multiple cities are rare (see J. E. Oliver 2012).

Another issue specific to the studies that examine racial divides is that they focus almost exclusively on biracial elections. Almost all of this research aims to assess the vote when there is one white candidate and one minority candidate (e.g., Hajnal 2006). This is crucial for establishing the willingness of members of each racial group to vote for candidates of another racial group but it may lead us to significantly overstate the role of race in the urban arena.

If we want to see how much race matters in the urban arena, we need to look at the entire range of elections.

Finally, in light of how immigration is transforming the racial landscape of America's cities, there are also a series of important, largely unanswered questions about how racial diversity impacts local democracy. Perhaps the most obvious question is where voters from the two relatively new groups fit into the racial mosaic? Do Latino or Asian-American voters even form cohesive voting blocs? Given a wide range of divergent national origin experiences, an array of different immigrant experiences, and often divergent socioeconomic outcomes, it is far from certain that individual members of these two pan-ethnic groups will feel strong attachment to their coethnics or sufficient motivation for voting as a collective (de la Garza 1992; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004). If, however, Latinos and Asian-Americans are able to overcome these differences, against whom will they be competing and with whom will they form coalitions? And how stark are those patterns of competition and cooperation? Furthermore, how has this increasingly complex racial picture affected the gap between white and black voters? Thus, a significant final concern is that existing studies are rarely able to examine the voting preferences of all four racial and ethnic groups (see DeLeon 1991; Logan and Mollenkopf 2003). This is understandable given that few cities have sizable populations of Latinos, Asian-Americans, African-Americans, and whites. Nevertheless, it means that it is extremely difficult to offer conclusions about the relative size of the divides across different groups. It also makes it difficult to establish evidence about which groups are most likely to form voting alliances. In short, we fail to get the entire, complex picture of intergroup dynamics.

The end result is a mix of important and illuminating studies that nevertheless fail to lead to an overarching set of conclusions about the nature of racial divisions in the urban political arena. We know a lot about particular groups in particular cities in particular types of biracial elections but we have not yet been able to come up with an assessment of the larger patterns of competition and cooperation that undergird local democracy. By examining racial differences across a larger sample of cases and elections and by explicitly comparing each of the different racial divisions with other potentially relevant demographic and political factors, we hope to offer firmer conclusions about the underlying dimensions of urban politics.

Where and When Does Race Matter?

Providing an understanding of variation in voting patterns across cities and contexts is, in many ways, just as important as offering an overall picture of

the urban vote. Thus, in the latter stages of this article, we begin to assess changes in patterns of the urban vote across different cases.

We do not claim to offer a full-fledged theory of urban politics that can explain any and all of the variation in the vote. We do, however, believe that a realistic group conflict account of race relations can help to predict when and where racial considerations are more pronounced. Drawing on the work of Bobo (1983), Bobo and Johnson (2000), Key (1984), Blalock (1967), and others, we believe that members of different racial and ethnic groups often feel a strong sense of competition with other groups over a range of political, economic, and social resources. That sense of competition or conflict is not constant but rather is likely to vary as the perceived threat posed by another group increases. In particular, two key factors are likely to structure the degree of threat and conflict. First, as any number of previous studies have demonstrated, larger out-groups can represent a greater threat that spurs greater action (Baybeck 2006; Key 1984; Taylor 1998). This relationship is pronounced for black–white interactions.² Whether group context or group size governs relations between other racial and ethnic groups is a more open question (Gay 2006; Ha and Oliver 2010; Hopkins 2010; Taylor 1998). Second, minority efforts at political empowerment have been shown to trigger threat and motivate action (Hajnal 2006; Olzak 1992). In this sense, it is not surprising that studies find that the presence of minority candidates on the ballot can be influential (Barreto 2007, 2011; Collet 2005).³ If racial threat and group conflict do govern intergroup relations in the local political arena, these two factors should help to predict racial divisions in the vote.

In addition, there are a number of other factors that previous research has identified as structuring local politics that we need to incorporate into our analysis. Specifically, the literature highlights at least three other nonracial sets of factors that could shape the racial vote in urban contests: (1) local institutional structure, (2) economic conditions, and (3) local political leaning.

A well-worn finding in the urban politics literature is that local institutions can play a major role in limiting or facilitating minority representation (Bullock and MacManus 1990; Karnig and Welch 1980; Kaufmann 2004). As such, we might also expect certain local structures to impact patterns in the vote as well. Specifically, logic suggests that parties would be less important in nonpartisan contests and as a result, we might see heightened racial divides in nonpartisan contests (Bridges 1997; Karnig and Welch 1980).⁴ It is also well known that local economic conditions can exacerbate group tensions (Branton and Jones 2005). Given these findings, we might predict heightened racial divides under conditions of economic stress. One other feature of the local population—the attitudes and political leanings of residents—may also influence the vote. Given that minorities often align with liberal

whites in national and local politics, cities with more liberal populations might be expected to generate more limited racial gaps in the vote (Sonenshein 1993).⁵

Data

The key to providing a realistic assessment of the dimensions underlying the urban vote is incorporating each of the potentially relevant demographic and political divisions in a single model. This is really only possible if we have detailed data on large numbers of individual voters—a condition that at the local level requires raw exit poll data. To ensure that we have as broad a sample as possible, we assembled data from every available exit poll in large American cities. That effort led to a data set that includes the vote choice for 56,000 respondents across 63 elections for different local offices in five cities (New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Detroit) between 1985 and 2005—hereafter called the “Exit Poll Data Set.” The Exit Poll Data Set includes not only mayoral vote choice (23 elections) but also candidate choices in city council (26 contests), city comptroller (2), city attorney (2), city clerk (1), and public advocate elections (2) and preferences on six ballot propositions (see Table A1 in the appendix).

This is obviously a small number of cities and by some dimensions an unrepresentative sample of cities. These cities are relatively representative of large American cities in terms of most economic characteristics and the five cities do represent different regions, different racial mixes, and different socioeconomic circumstances. But the five cities are generally larger and less white than the national urban population. Thus, our results cannot confidently be generalized to the entire urban arena.

Given concerns about generalizability, we endeavored to assess divisions across a much larger set of elections. Specifically, we collected the vote by race for mayor in all available primary and general elections in the nation’s 25 largest cities over the past 20 years.⁶ This process led to a data set with the aggregate vote by race for 254 candidates in 96 elections that represent a fairly wide range of cities and electoral contexts—hereafter called the “Mayoral Elections Data Set” (see Table A2). The cities are Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, El Paso, Houston, Indianapolis, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, Memphis, Milwaukee, Nashville, New York, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose, Seattle, and Washington. The online appendix presents a list of the 96 elections and includes a few core features of each contest.

The data in this larger data set are also far from perfect. For one, these 25 cities are also not fully representative of the urban population. As Tables A1 and A2 in the appendix show, they are larger and less white than the average

American city. However, two factors suggest that they can tell us a lot about basic patterns in the urban vote. First, they account for roughly 30% of the nation's urban population. Thus, they offer a fairly broad window into the urban electorate. Second, these cities are fairly representative in terms of education outcomes and economic characteristics like employment rates and housing values.

A second issue is that the Mayoral Elections Data Set only includes the vote by race so we can determine whether our original findings on race are paralleled in a broader set of cities and elections but we cannot compare racial divisions with other divisions using this larger data set. Another concern is that the data set is incomplete. Data on racial voting patterns are not available for many elections in these cities so the elections included in the data set (96) account for about half of the elections in these cities over this time period. This means that the divisions we see in these elections may not be fully representative of these cities. To try to address this issue, we created a smaller but complete data set. This smaller data set contains the vote by race for the one mayoral election closest to the year 2000 in the nation's 10 largest cities. When we rerun the analysis with this smaller but complete set of elections, the patterns evident in this smaller data set are nearly identical to the patterns we see across the larger set of elections.

A third concern with the larger data set is that the estimates of the vote by race come from different sources. To assemble the data, we had to use a variety of methods for estimating the vote by race. For the vast majority of elections (78%), we relied on exit polls or on public opinion surveys—generally viewed as offering the most accurate assessments of the vote.⁷ In 20% of the elections, we used estimates based on ward- or precinct-level analysis (either simple regressions using ward totals and ward demographics or homogeneous precinct analysis). And finally, in a handful of cases, we relied on ecological inference.

Although we recognize that this is an ad hoc mixture of data and methods, we are confident that our results provide a reasonably accurate picture of the vote. First and foremost, the vast majority of our estimates (78%) come from exit polls and surveys. In these cases, we do not need to be concerned about the potential biases involved with using aggregate data (Ferree 2004; Cho and Gaines 2004). Second, several tests indicate that our results are consistent across different sources of racial voting estimates. In particular, the basic pattern of results does not change when we focus only on data from one kind of estimate. If, for example, we look only at results from exit poll estimates, the main conclusions are the same. As well, for a small number of elections, we have two different kinds of estimates for the vote by race. These different estimates of the vote by race in the same election proved to be strikingly

similar to each other. None of these estimates is error free but the method used does not appear to be skewing the data.

For our examination of variation in racial divisions across cities, we incorporate five different sets of variables that we think could be linked to local racial politics. First, to measure the dynamics related to group size, we include interpolated Census figures for the proportion of blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and whites. Second, to assess the influence of the race of the candidates, we incorporate dummy variables for biracial elections.⁸ Third, to gauge the role of institutional structure in shaping the vote, our main model includes a single measure of whether local elections are nonpartisan. In alternate tests, we evaluate other factors like the mayor-council versus city manager form of government, term limits, staggered council elections, and election timing. All institutional measures are from the International City/County Manager's Association annual surveys. Fourth, we not only add one measure of economic stress—percentage poor—to our main model but also test the impact of various other measures of income, crime, inequality, and unemployment in alternate tests. All economic measures are interpolated from the Census. Fifth, our core model includes one measure of ideology or political leaning—the presidential vote.⁹ Finally, as controls, our model incorporates the number of candidates in the election, whether it is a primary or runoff, and the year of the election.

Basic Divides

In Table 1, we get our first glance at the size of the underlying divisions in the urban vote across 63 elections in the data set.¹⁰ The table presents data on electoral divisions across each of the major demographic and political factors that previous research has suggested represent important dividing lines in local politics. For each election, we proceed with the following steps. First, we get the proportion of respondents from a given group (e.g., blacks) that supports the winning candidate. We then subtract the proportion of respondents from a second group (e.g., white respondents) that supported the same winning candidate. We then pool all of the elections and take the mean of the absolute value of the group difference (e.g., black support minus white support).

To allow comparability across different demographic and political factors, for each election, we recorded the biggest gap between any two categories within that particular demographic or political characteristic. For example, with religion, rather than always record the gap between one particular religious denomination (e.g., Catholics) and one other denomination (e.g., Protestants), we recorded the size of the largest gap between any of the six

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

	Average Divide in Vote for Winning Candidate (SD)
Race	38.3 (22.1)
Class	
Income	19.6 (12.8)
Education	18.2 (10.4)
Employment status	8.3 (3.7)
Other demographics	
Age	21.4 (11.8)
Gender	5.8 (5.0)
Religion	29.9 (16.0)
Sexuality	14.9 (7.3)
Marital status	6.4 (6.9)
Union membership	7.1 (3.1)
Children	5.1 (3.6)
Political orientation	
Liberal–conservative ideology	27.4 (13.8)
Party identification	33.0 (18.7)

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

religious categories in each election. Likewise, for race, we record the biggest racial gap in the vote for the winner between any of the four racial and ethnic groups.¹¹ This ensures that the key division within each demographic or political characteristic in each election is recorded in Table 1 and allows us to determine which characteristics tend to produce the largest divisions.¹²

Perhaps the most striking feature of Table 1 is the degree to which the racial divide overshadows other demographic divides. Across all of the elections in this Exit Poll Data Set, the average maximum racial divide is a massive 38.3 percentage points. To illustrate that number more clearly, we provide the following example. A 38.3 point gap between racial groups could translate to overwhelming support for one candidate by one racial group (e.g., 75% support) and clear opposition to that candidate by a second racial group (e.g., only 36.7% support). In other words, a 38.3 point gap means that the typical urban election pits two racial groups against each other.¹³

Although some maintain that class is still the main driving force in politics, in these elections, class divides are typically much smaller than racial divides (Evans 2000). The average income gap in the vote is 19.6 percentage points—sizable but only about half of the typical racial divide. In these contest, *t*-tests

indicate that class divides are significantly smaller than racial divides. Educational divides are also generally half as small as racial divides in these contests.¹⁴ And aside from class, few major demographic divides emerge.¹⁵ Differences across gender, employment status, marital status, union membership, and parental status are all dwarfed by racial divides. Interestingly, some of the largest demographic divides aside from race are between different religious affiliations, across different age groups, and between gay and straight voters. The largest religious divide in these contests averages 29.9 percentage points making religion the second most important demographic variable.¹⁶ Age also factored into these contests in a significant way. The average maximum age gap that was generally between the oldest and youngest voters was 21.4 percentage points. Finally, in the few exit polls that asked about sexuality, there was a reasonably large 14.9 point divide between gay and straight voters.

Importantly, Table 1 also indicates that racial divisions significantly surpass partisan and ideological divides.¹⁷ The 38 point racial gap in urban elections exceeds the average 27.4 point gap between liberal and conservative voters and the average 33 point gap between Democratic and Republic voters. Moreover, in less than a third of the elections is the partisan or ideological divide greater than the racial divide.¹⁸ This is perhaps the starkest evidence yet that race is still a central driving force in urban politics. Party and ideology do shape the mayoral vote but race is the more dominant factor.

Another way to get at the importance of race is to focus on contests that involved two candidates of the same race. In doing so, we can see if race is only important when candidates from two different racial groups square off against each other. When we split the sample into two and focus only on non-biracial contests, average racial divides were substantially smaller but still large—on average 26.7 point gap.¹⁹ Furthermore, we find that even in non biracial contests, the racial divide dwarfed most other demographic divides and was roughly on par with the liberal–conservative and the Democrat–Republican divides (23.6 and 27.1 point gaps, respectively, in single-race contests). Racial divisions are not isolated to a few biracial contests but are rather a much more pervasive aspect of the urban political arena.

A Closer Look at Racial/Ethnic Divisions

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

Table 2. Racial Divisions in Urban Politics.

	Average Divide in Vote (SD)
Black–white	31.6 (25.0)
Black–Latino	24.1 (18.3)
Black–Asian-American	20.8 (14.8)
White–Latino	22.5 (17.8)
White–Asian-American	15.0 (10.4)
Latino–Asian-American	19.6 (15.2)

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

As evidenced by Table 2, there is considerable variation in the size of racial and ethnic divisions across different pairs of groups.²⁰ The black–white gap, as past research might lead us to expect, is the largest. In the typical case, the percentage of blacks who supported the winning candidate differed by 31.6 points from the percentage of white voters supporting that same candidate. In one election, that gap grew to 84 points and in only a quarter of the cases did it fall below 10 points. In short, it was unusual when black and white voters favored the same candidates at the local level.

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

Combined, all of these patterns highlight the distinctiveness of the black community. The black vote differs sharply not just from the white vote but

also from the Latino and Asian-American votes. In many contests, the black community is competing against the white community and challenging the Latino and Asian-American communities.²¹

There are few signs of a close, enduring coalition in Table 2 but of all the groups, whites and Asian-Americans appear to have the closest preferences in the urban electoral arena. The average divide between white and Asian-American voters is a relatively small 15 points and exceeds 20 points in under half of the cases.

Assessing Relative Contributions

Although these bivariate results are compelling, they ignore the fact that race, political orientation, and other demographic characteristics are all likely to be correlated. It is difficult to determine the individual contribution of one of the demographic or racial characteristic without controlling for other potentially relevant characteristics. So in Table 3, we present results from a series of regressions that do exactly that. Specifically, for each election in the data set, we run a single logistic regression with all of the individual voters in the exit poll as cases predicting support for the winning candidate. Then for each election, we use Clarify to calculate the marginal effect of shifting from one category (e.g., black respondent) to the comparison category (e.g., white respondent) for each independent variable in each election. We then calculate the average predicted effect of each independent variable across the different elections in the Exit Poll Data Set.²² Table 3 displays the means and standard deviations for the predicted effects for each independent variable across the elections. The last column of the table indicates how often each coefficient is significant across the elections.

As independent variables, we include all of the relevant racial, demographic, and political variables that are available for that particular election.²³ To assess race, we include dummy variables for black, Latino, and Asian-American respondents with whites as the baseline comparison category. For party, the regressions include dummy variables for Democrats and Independents with Republicans as the base. Similarly, for ideology, it is liberals and moderates with conservatives as the comparison. The omitted category for religion is atheist.²⁴ Education and income are 4- or 5-point scale (depending on the exit poll). All variables are coded on a scale from 0 to 1.

The results in Table 3 indicate that even after controlling for a host of other potentially important factors, race still matters. The coefficients for each racial group vary considerably from election to election, as we would expect from Table 2, but overall race is one of the most predictive factors in Table 3. And among the racial variables, black voters once again stand out. Even after controlling for all of the other demographic and political factors, the average

Table 3. Regression-Based Estimate of Racial, Demographic, and Political Divisions in Urban Elections.

	Average Marginal Effect (SD)	% of Coefficients Significant at .05
Race		
Blacks	0.280 (0.203)	80
Latino	0.194 (0.158)	55
Asian-American	0.115 (0.106)	20
Class		
Income	0.038 (0.061)	31
Education	0.029 (0.026)	30
Employment status	0.060 (0.057)	16
Other demographics		
Age	0.032 (0.034)	31
Sexuality	0.086 (0.081)	37
Marital status	0.030 (0.026)	16
Protestant	0.086 (0.060)	35
Catholic	0.114 (0.088)	54
Jewish	0.125 (0.084)	54
Political orientation		
Democrat	0.191 (0.147)	73
Independent	0.113 (0.087)	50
Liberal	0.176 (0.098)	73
Moderate	0.106 (0.094)	46

Note: Dependent variable—Support for the winning candidate

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

predicted gap between the black vote and the white vote is 27.6 points. Perhaps more importantly, across the different election-specific regressions, the black–white divide is almost always significant. In fully 80% of the contests, the coefficient on black voters is significant indicating that the black vote differs significantly from the white vote. As we saw before with the bivariate results, there is a substantial but smaller divide between Latino and white voters and a relatively small difference between the preferences of Asian-American and white voters. Once again, it is black voters who stand out and it is whites and Asian-Americans who appear to be the most likely candidates for an interracial coalition.

The results for the rest of the demographic characteristics in Table 3 also mirror what we saw with the bivariate results. Factors like class, age, sexuality, and religion have a smaller and less consistently significant effect than

race. Income and education, in particular, are only a significant factor in about 30% of the elections and their coefficients are about one-tenth the size of the black–white divide.

The other important finding here is the central role that politics plays in the urban political arena. Despite some claims that urban politics is issueless and that traditional ideology is largely irrelevant in the typical urban contest, these results suggest that ideology matters. Indeed, in 73% of the elections, there was a significant divide between liberal and conservative voters. And the average difference between ideological groups was substantial with the average predicted gap of 18.0 points between liberals and conservatives. Moreover, the fact that most of these elections are nonpartisan does not mean that partisanship is inconsequential. Democrats vote significantly differently from Republicans in 73% of the contest and again that gap tends to be large (an average predicted gap of 19.2 points). After instituting a range of controls, race remains the most robust factor in the urban electoral arena but political dimensions like party and ideology also very strongly shape the vote.²⁵

Importantly, conclusions about the relatively central role of race hold even if we focus exclusively on contests involving two candidates of the same race. Even in contests where voters cannot choose on the basis of the race of the candidates, the average effect of race remains far more important than other demographic characteristics and continues to be on par with party and ideology.²⁶

The Mayoral Elections Data Set Results

The results to this point highlight the centrality of race in the urban political arena but the findings are admittedly based on a relatively small number of elections across a small number of cities. Given concerns about the generalizability of this first data set, we sought to evaluate the role of race in a larger and more diverse set of elections. Specifically, we present data on the vote by race for mayor in all available primary and general mayoral elections in the nation's 25 largest cities over the past 20 years. The goals here are twofold. The first is to attempt to reconfirm the important impact that race and ethnicity have in urban elections. The second is to delve deeper into racial patterns in the vote. In addition to identifying possible coalition partners and potential competitors, we can also assess more fundamental factors like the internal cohesiveness of each group. Given a wide range of divergent national origin experiences, an array of different immigrant experiences, and often divergent socioeconomic outcomes, one might reasonably wonder whether Latino or Asian-American voters typically form cohesive voting blocs. Unfortunately, by expanding the set of elections to cases without raw exit poll data, we lose

Table 4. Racial Divisions in Mayoral Politics.

	Average Divide in Mayoral Vote	
	All Elections (%)	Two-Candidate Elections (%)
Black–white	43.4	46.7
Black–Latino	32.9	34.7
Black–Asian-American	24.8	26.9
White–Latino	22.0	22.7
White–Asian-American	20.5	22.1
Latino–Asian-American	15.6	16.8

Source: Mayoral Elections Data Set—Mayoral elections in the nation's largest 25 cities over the past two decades.

the ability to incorporate data on other demographic or political characteristics.²⁷ Thus, our focus in the next section is exclusively on race.

We begin the analysis of the larger data set by reexamining racial divisions in the vote. Table 4 presents figures for the average divide between each racial and ethnic group across the entire set of 96 mayoral elections. As with Table 2, this table shows the average absolute difference in the percentage favoring the winning candidate.

The results are clear and confirm our earlier findings. Across this broader set of cities, this longer time frame, and this greater number of elections, race continues to greatly shape the urban vote. There are considerable gaps between the vote of the white, Latino, black, and Asian-American electorates. There is also, once again, considerable variation in the size of those gaps across groups. The black–white gap continues to be the largest racial gap. In the average election, the percentage of blacks who supported the winning candidate differed by 43 points from the percentage of white voters supporting that same candidate. This grows to a 47 point gap in elections with only two candidates—about half the contests. Assessed another way, across the entire set of elections, the black vote was significantly and negatively correlated with the white vote ($r = -.24, p < .05$). Black and white voters generally did not support the same candidates.

Once again, the results reveal substantial gaps between different minority voters and reinforce the notion of a uniquely isolated African-American electorate. Blacks and Latinos are, as before, the two minority groups whose voting patterns are most distant from each other. On average, the black vote differs from the Latino vote by 33 points, again reaffirming the existence of conflict between these two disadvantaged minority groups (Meier and Stewart 1991; M. L. Oliver and Johnson 1984; Vaca 2004). The mayoral vote

also separates black voters from Asian-American voters. Here, the average divide was 22.5 percentage points (21.7 points in two candidate elections). There is, in short, little evidence of a grand interminority coalition seeking to control the local political arena.

There are, however, prospects for different kinds of coalitions. Just as we saw in Table 2, differences between white and Asian-American voters are smaller than for any other pair of racial groups. White and Asian-American voters differed in their preferences by only 17.2 points on average (15.4 in two candidate contests). One might also highlight the relatively small divides between Latinos and Asian-Americans and to a slightly lesser extent the divide between white and Latino voters.²⁸ Thus, judging by the vote, whites, Latinos, and Asian-Americans appear to be the three groups most likely to form a viable rainbow coalition. This potential coalition is perhaps best illustrated by looking at correlations in the vote across elections. Across the entire set of mayoral elections, the white vote was fairly closely correlated with the Asian-American vote ($r = .73, p < .01$) and the Latino vote ($r = .64, p < .01$). Similarly, the Latino and Asian-American votes correlated at $.67 (p < .01)$. In short, these three racial and ethnic groups often seem to want the same things, or at least the same candidates.

Racial Cohesion

One, perhaps, prefatory question we might have asked about the racial vote in urban elections is whether these four populations are really groups at all? Put more succinctly, does each group vote cohesively? This is less of a question with black voters where existing research tends to show high levels of cohesiveness in the political arena. But it remains an open question for white voters who at least in national elections are often sharply divided by partisanship, ideology, and demographic factors like class (Miller and Shanks 1996). And this is especially important to establish for the Latino and Asian-American cases where differences of national origin, socioeconomic standing, and length of time in the United States could serve to divide the larger pan-ethnic vote (de la Garza 1992; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004; Tam 1995).

Thus, in Table 5, we assess intragroup dynamics by looking at voting cohesion across the set of 96 mayoral elections. The table displays the percentage of voters from each racial/ethnic group that supported the group's preferred candidate. If a group was wholly united, the measure would equal 100. A totally divided group would score 50 in a two-candidate contest and 25 in a four-person contest. As cohesion could depend greatly on the number of candidates, the table presents results for all elections as well as those with only two candidates. Also, because assessments of cohesion will be affected by the competitiveness of a given election, it is important to note that most of

Table 5. Intragroup Cohesion in Mayoral Politics.

	Average Support for Each Group's Preferred Candidate	
	All Elections (%)	Two-Candidate Elections (%)
African-Americans	76.3	76.2
Latinos	68.7	67.9
Whites	71.7	72.1
Asian-Americans	64.9	63.0

Source: Mayoral Elections Data Set—Mayoral elections in the nation's largest 25 cities over the past two decades.

these mayoral elections are far from landslides. The average winning candidate received only 56.7% of the vote. Moreover, as the candidate preferred by minority voters is not the winning candidate in many of these elections, the margin of victory is essentially unrelated to minority cohesion.²⁹

The main conclusion to emerge from this analysis is that it *is* possible to talk about racial group voting blocs.³⁰ The results of *t*-tests indicate that all four racial and ethnic groups are significantly more cohesive than a vote evenly divided among the candidates. Even among the least cohesive group, Asian-Americans, 64.9% of the group's voters support the group's favorite candidate. This is not only far from a wholly united vote but it is also far from evenly divided. Moreover, Latinos, whites, and African-Americans are all more apt to vote as a bloc. Importantly, this within-group cohesion persists when the candidates in the election are all from the same race. Cohesion drops for all four groups in single-race contests but remains high. Cohesion in these single-race elections is 69.4% for blacks, 67.5% for whites, 61.5% for Latinos, and 63.1% for Asian-Americans. Cohesion is not simply a function of choosing a candidate of your own race. Racial group cohesion is also not simply a function of partisanship. When we split the sample into partisan and nonpartisan contests and focus on contests in which political parties are not on the ballot, there is little drop in the levels of cohesion. Overall, these results suggest that race is fairly ubiquitous in the urban arena. America's four main racial and ethnic groups do represent somewhat cohesive communities. Mayoral voting is at least in part the story of four different racial and ethnic groups sorting out their preferences.

This cohesion is perhaps most surprising for Asian-Americans. The fact that only a little over third of the Asian-American electorate opposes the candidate favored by the majority of Asian-Americans means that in the arena of urban politics, the Asian-American community is often able to at least

partially overcome differences of national origin group, immigration status, and socioeconomic status. We still cannot think of Asian-Americans as a monolithic voting bloc but we should probably consider them as more of a voting bloc than many accounts suggest (Espiritu 1992; Lien, Conway, and Wong 2004).³¹

The other conclusion that is evident from Table 5 is that cohesion varies substantially across groups. On one end of the spectrum, African-American voters are highly unified. There is some difference of opinion within the black community, but at the local level, it is generally clear who the “black” candidate is and who the “black” candidate is not and the vast majority of the black community support their group’s candidate. Despite growing class divisions and by some accounts, the diminishing importance of race, electoral politics still appears to bring blacks together. Whites, perhaps somewhat surprisingly given intragroup divisions in national elections, are the next most cohesive voting bloc in urban elections. On average, roughly 72% of white voters end up supporting that same candidate. Latinos vote together about 68% of the time in these urban elections. For an ethnic group that is often viewed as being sharply divided by national origin group and immigrant status, cohesion in the voting booth is surprisingly high. The issues, candidates, and choices that are put forward in local contests enable Latino voters to overcome at least some of their internal divisions. Finally, Asian-Americans anchor the far end of the cohesiveness spectrum.

When Does Race Matter?

A closer look at the data reveals, however, that these overall assessments of the vote hide substantial variation in the vote across different cities and contexts. The multilevel mixed-effects regressions in Table 3 reveal that race while usually significant is in several cases far less relevant. Table 3 also shows similar variation in the significance of other factors like party and ideology. Moreover, the standard deviations listed in Tables 1 through 3 demonstrate quite clearly that there is considerable variation in the impact of race and all of the other factors that we have examined. Standard deviations are reasonably high for almost every factor but for race they are particularly large. In more concrete terms, it means that in the Mayoral Elections Data Set, the size of the black–white divide ranges from 2 to 93 percentage points whereas the size of the Latino–Asian-American divide ranges from 0 to 59 percentage points. Clearly, there is not one urban election but instead many different kinds of urban contests that separate different kinds of voters in different ways.

This range in outcomes inevitably raises questions about why race matters in some cases and not others. With a large number of potential explanations

Table 6. Understanding Variation in Racial Divisions in Mayoral Elections.

	Black–White Divide	Latino–White Divide	Black–Latino Divide
Realistic group conflict			
Candidate race			
Biracial election	0.14 (.04)**	0.21 (.07)**	0.24 (.10)*
Racial demographics			
Proportion black	0.88 (.45)*	-0.49 (.44)	1.13 (.43)**
Proportion Latino	0.59 (.47)	-0.28 (.45)	1.07 (.45)*
Proportion white	0.09 (.52)	-0.14 (.49)	0.42 (.50)
Local institutions			
Nonpartisan elections	-0.02 (.09)	-0.21 (.09)*	0.25 (.08)**
Local ideology			
% Democratic	-0.08 (.34)	-0.33 (.33)	0.40 (.33)
Economic conditions			
% poor	-0.78 (.75)	1.81 (.74)*	-0.43 (.69)
Controls			
Primaries (vs. runoffs)	-0.13 (.05)**	0.05 (.04)	-0.03 (.04)
Number of candidates	-0.06 (.02)*	-0.03 (.02)	-0.08 (.02)**
Year	-0.01 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)
South	-0.14 (.08)	0.03 (.07)	-0.04 (.07)
Constant	13.2 (9.8)	11.7 (8.1)	9.0 (8.8)
Number of observations	121	110	109
Number of groups	19	17	17
Wald χ^2	101**	29.6**	75.0**

Source: Mayoral Elections Data Set—Mayoral elections in the nation's largest 25 cities over the past two decades.

Note: Multilevel mixed-effects linear regression with random intercepts for city.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

and a limited number of elections and cities, rigorous testing of all of the various hypotheses is difficult. In lieu of a complete model, we run a series of regressions that include a single measure for each of the five factors that are arguably most likely to be linked to racial divisions. In alternate tests, we do, however, substitute in alternate measures for each of the five different theories. Table 6 presents three regression models that predict the black–white

divide, the Latino–white divide, and the black–Latino divide using cases from the Mayoral Elections Data Set.

The regressions in Tables 6 indicate that the impact of race does vary in predictable and understandable ways. In particular, different elements of the realistic group conflict theory of racial group relations seem to garner considerable support. Both of the different measures of realistic group conflict that we use here—candidate race and group size—strongly impact racial divisions. As predicted, biracial contests involving candidates from the two racial groups in question were fundamentally different from other elections. For example, having a black and a white candidate increased the black–white divide by just over 14 points. Likewise, the presence of a Latino and a white candidate was linked to a 23 point jump in the Latino–white divide. The comparable figure for the combination of a black and a Latino candidate was 22 points for the black–Latino voting gap. In this sense, candidates matter greatly and the presence of minority candidates can do a lot to increase intra-group cohesiveness and expand the divide between America’s different racial and ethnic voting blocs.³²

The second important aspect of the realistic group conflict theory is the size of each racial and ethnic group. Looking across the regressions, it is readily apparent that the larger a group, the more it tends to be divided from other groups. Often the effect is substantial. A two-standard-deviation jump in percentage black is, for example, associated with a 35 point increase in the black–white divide and a 47 point increase in the black–Latino divide. A larger Latino population was also tied to a larger black–Latino divide. All of these results fit neatly with a realistic group conflict view of urban politics and imply that individual members of America’s different racial and ethnic groups do feel a sense of racial competition that can be activated under predictable circumstances. However, as we do not directly measure intergroup attitudes here, the results are at best suggestive. In that light, it is important to note other studies focusing directly on individual attitudes have found that larger group size and efforts at minority empowerment often incite more negative intergroup attitudes (Baybeck 2006; Bobo and Hutchings 1996; Gay 2006; Hajnal 2006; Taylor 1998; but see Ha and Oliver 2010).

No other element of the local political arena compared in size or significance to the two measures associated with realistic group threat but the three regressions in Table 6 hint at the role that local institutional structure can play. Nonpartisan elections mattered in two of the three cases, increasing the black–Latino divide in one case and diminishing the white–Latino divide in the other. Presumably, when black and Latino voters were not united by allegiance to Democratic Party candidates, their voting preferences tended to diverge. Similarly, when Asian-American and white voters were not divided by their partisan allegiances (Latinos leaning largely Democratic and whites

leaning primarily Republican), their voting choices were more aligned. Two other institutional structures showed some signs of affecting the vote in alternate tests. The mayoral-council form of government tended to foster greater black-white and black-Latino divides than the city manager form of government. Similarly, when city council elections are not staggered, they are linked to larger divides between blacks and Latinos and blacks and whites. The substantive effects for these other institutional features were less meaningful and the results were not always significant, but the overall pattern suggests that when more is at stake in the local electoral arena, America's racial and ethnic groups may be more divided.

Perhaps surprisingly, the overall ideology of the city's residents did not appear to be related to divisions in the vote. More liberal cities were just as racially divided as less liberal cities. Furthermore, in alternate tests, when we substituted in a proxy for racial tolerance—the percentage of residents with a college degree—we found no additional link to the vote. It is certainly possible that these measures are not precise enough to show effects, but the results to this point suggest that political ideology and racial tolerance may do less to shape racial divides than group demographics and descriptive representation. Economic conditions, no matter how we measured them, also had little noticeable impact on racial divides. In the three regressions in Table 6, the proportion of the population that is poor was insignificant, and in alternate tests, various measures of income (median household income, per capita income), the unemployment rate, and inequality revealed few clear effects. Finally, among the control variables, we found that fewer candidates and primary elections sometimes meant smaller racial divides while year and region had no clear impact.

With fewer cases, we have much less confidence in our analysis of the divisions between Asian-American voters and other groups. However, it is interesting to note that realistic group conflict also appeared to play a role in shaping divisions between Asian-Americans and others. Regressions with the same basic model suggest that candidate race is also significant to the Asian-American vote. All else equal, the presence of an Asian-American candidate increases the Asian-American-white divide by an estimated 19 points and the Asian-American-Latino divide by 8 points. Likewise, the Asian-American-black divide grows significantly when a black candidate is on the ballot. The Asian-American regressions also tend to confirm the limited role played by local economic conditions, the political leaning of local voters, and the mean educational level or racial tolerance of the city. The one exception is that group demographics play less of a role in shaping the divide between Asian-American voters and other groups. If anything, there are even some limited signs that a larger Asian-American population breeds less group conflict.³³

Importantly, the basic conclusions presented here endure if we instead analyze the smaller Exit Poll Data Set. Across these 63 contests, realistic group conflict again appeared to shape the vote. Racial divisions tended to be larger in biracial contests and in cities with larger black and Latino populations.

With the Exit Poll Data Set, we can also look at variation across different types of contests (e.g., mayoral vs. council vs. proposition) and at variation in the role that partisan and ideological divides play. In terms of election type, the *Exit Poll* data show that racial divides are especially heightened in mayoral contests, much reduced in city council elections, and even lower when residents are voting on ballot propositions. The black–white divide, for example, drops from an average of 46.3% in mayoral contests to 16.3% in council elections, and finally to 14.5% on ballot propositions. Likewise, the Latino–white divide falls from 26.9 to 22.3 points, and 9.6 points across the three types of contests. Perhaps the importance of the mayoral post and the fact that it is essentially an at-large contest for control of the city is the reason why mayoral politics stirs greater racial division than city council politics. The even lower racial divisions for ballot propositions suggest that race is less important when the battle is over policy than when the fight is between candidates.³⁴ In other words, America’s different racial and ethnic groups may not disagree as strongly over concrete policy objectives as many local electoral contests suggest.

By contrast, if we shift the focus to divisions in the vote between Democrats and Republicans (or between liberals and conservatives), a very different pattern of results emerges. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to try to explain all of the factors that increased the impact of political divisions like partisanship and political ideology, it is interesting to note some of the key differences we found. First, while party is a less robust factor than race in most elections, partisan divisions tend to dominate racial divisions in direct democracy. Issues—more than candidates—may divide members of the two major political parties. Also, unlike our earlier findings, biracial elections tended to reduce the size of the partisan divide. When the contest was not about descriptive representation, party allegiances held more sway. Finally, as one would expect, party ties tended to matter more than race in the minority of local elections that are partisan contests.

Conclusion

The patterns illustrated in this article offer a telling account of race and other divisions in the local political arena. Judged by these electoral contests—albeit a limited set of elections in a sample of cities—the local political arena

is one that is in no small part defined by race and ethnicity. Growing racial and ethnic diversity does not appear to be leading to racial harmony. Instead, blacks, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and whites tend to vote as blocs and often as competing blocs. Within-group cohesion and across-group division strongly shape urban politics.

Of all the groups, African-Americans stand out—both for the unity with which the black community votes and for the distinctiveness of the black vote. When racial and ethnic groups compete in the local political arena, often it is black voters who are competing against everyone else. This obviously does not put black voters in a favorable position and is likely to lead to regular electoral defeat (Hajnal 2009).³⁵ The flip side of this black/nonblack divide is the possibility of a rainbow coalition of whites, Latinos, and Asian-Americans. These three groups regularly support the same candidates and thus appear to have the potential to form a viable, long-lasting coalition. Importantly, our results also highlight the unity within each of these groups. Even for Asian-Americans and Latinos, groups that are often seen as extremely diverse and internally divided, urban elections tend to foster a cohesive vote.

Moreover, it is clear from the analysis that racial divisions tend to overshadow other divisions. Race divides us much more than any other demographic characteristic. The urban electorate is shaped in part by class, religion, sexuality, age, gender, and a host of other demographic measures, but race seems to be more central and more decisive than all of these other factors. Perhaps even more importantly, in these elections, race often divides more than conventional politics. Most accounts of politics at the local or national level point to party identification or ideology as the main driving forces in American politics (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002; Miller and Shanks 1996). But the results presented here suggest otherwise. Party identification certainly matters. And ideology greatly helps to predict vote choice. But in local democracy, it is race more than anything else that tends to dominate voter decision making.

Importantly, hidden beneath these aggregate patterns is wide variation in the impact of race across different elections. For every two racial and ethnic groups, there are cases in which the two groups voted together as a coalition and other cases in which they were almost totally opposed to each other. Our exploratory efforts at understanding this variation reinforce at least one existing theory about the dynamics of race. Race matters more when minority candidates enter the electoral arena and when minority groups represent a larger fraction of the population suggesting that realistic group threat may be a helpful way of thinking about racial relations in the urban political arena.

More works need to be done across a wide range and number of elections, but the underlying variation in the racial vote suggests there race need not

always be the main driving force behind urban politics. Straightforward solutions are far from evident but institutional reform is at least one area where we could look for levers to bring groups together. But for now, it is important to admit that stark racial divides continue to help define the urban electorate.

Appendix

Table A1. Exit Poll Data Set.

City	Year	Office	Type
Chicago	1983	Mayor	Democratic primary
Chicago	1987	Mayor	General
Chicago	1987	Mayor	Democratic primary
Detroit	1985	City council (1)	
Detroit	1985	City council (11)	
Detroit	1985	City council (12)	
Detroit	1985	City council (13)	
Detroit	1985	City council (16)	
Detroit	1985	City council (17)	
Detroit	1985	City council (3)	
Detroit	1985	City council (5)	
Detroit	1985	City council (7)	
Detroit	1985	Clerk	
Detroit	1985	Mayor	General
Detroit	1989	Mayor	General
Houston	1997	City council (1)	
Houston	1997	City council (1)	
Houston	1997	City council (1)	
Houston	1997	City council (4)	
Houston	1997	City council (4)	
Houston	1997	City council (4)	
Houston	1997	City council (5)	
Houston	1997	City council (5)	
Houston	1997	City council (5)	
Houston	1997	Controller	
Houston	1997	Mayor	General
Houston	1997	Mayor	Runoff
Houston	1997	Proposition—Affirmative action	
Houston	1997	Proposition—Bond	
Los Angeles	1985	Mayor	General
Los Angeles	1989	Mayor	General

(continued)

Table A1. (continued)

City	Year	Office	Type
Los Angeles	1993	Mayor	General
Los Angeles	1993	Mayor	Runoff
Los Angeles	1993	Proposition—Term limits	
Los Angeles	1993	Proposition—Tax	
Los Angeles	1997	Mayor	General
Los Angeles	2001	City attorney	General
Los Angeles	2001	City attorney	Runoff
Los Angeles	2001	Mayor	General
Los Angeles	2001	Mayor	Runoff
Los Angeles	2005	Mayor	General
Los Angeles	2005	Mayor	Runoff
New York	1985	Mayor	Democratic primary
New York	1989	Comptroller	
New York	1989	Council president	
New York	1989	Mayor	General
New York	1989	Mayor	Democratic primary
New York	1989	Mayor	Republican primary
New York	1989	Proposition—City charter	
New York	1993	Comptroller	
New York	1993	Mayor	General
New York	1993	Public advocate	
New York	2001	Mayor	Democratic primary
New York	2001	Mayor	General
New York	2001	Public advocate	

Table A2. Mayoral Elections Data Set Cases.

City	Year	Election Type	Candidates	Biracial	White Vote	Black Vote
Austin	2009	General	3	0	0.41	0.18
Baltimore	1991	Democratic primary	3	0	0.24	0.76
Baltimore	1991	General	2	1	0.35	0.92
Baltimore	1995	Democratic primary	2	1	0.15	0.85
Baltimore	1999	Democratic primary	3	1	0.9	0.3587
Boston	1993	General				0.78
Charlotte	2001	Democratic primary	3	1	0.44	0.17

(continued)

Table A2. (continued)

City	Year	Election Type	Candidates	Biracial	White Vote	Black Vote
Charlotte	2001	Democratic primary	3	1	0.42	0.82
Charlotte	2001	General	2	1	0.86	0.07
Chicago	1989	Democratic primary	2	1	0.92	0.06
Chicago	1989	General	3	1	0.882	0.036
Chicago	1991	Democratic primary	3	1	0.926	0.158
Chicago	1991	General	2	1	0.925	0.22
Chicago	1995	Democratic primary	2	1	0.9457	0.2337
Chicago	1995	General	2	1	0.893	0.152
Chicago	1999	Primary	2	1	0.9565	0.45
Chicago	2003	Primary	2	1	0.85	0.55
Cleveland	1989	General	5	0	0.8	0.3
Cleveland	2001	General	2	1	0.8	0.25
Columbus	1991	General	2	1	0.69	0.125
Columbus	1995	General	2	1	0.85	0.46
Columbus	1999	Primary	3	1		0.575
Columbus	1999	Runoff	2	1	0.4138	0.92
Dallas	2007	Runoff	2	0	0.67	0.31
Dallas	1989	Primary no runoff	2	0	0.75	0.57
Dallas	1991	Primary no runoff	3	0	0.75	0.12
Dallas	1995	Primary no runoff	3	1	0.42	0.97
Dallas	2002	General	2	0	0.64	0.29
Denver	1995	General	2	1	0.4	0.9
Denver	2003	Primary	5	1	0.5	0.16
Denver	2003	Runoff	2	1	0.72	0.55
Detroit	1993	Primary	2	0	0.77	
Detroit	2001	General	2	0	0.43	0.55
Detroit	2005	Primary	4	1	0.56	0.4
Detroit	2005	Runoff				0.55
Houston	1989	General				0.75
Houston	1991	General	2	1	0.8	0.1
Houston	1991	Primary	3	1	0.626666667	0.018518519
Houston	1997	General	2	1	0.26	0.895

(continued)

Table A2. (continued)

City	Year	Election Type	Candidates	Biracial	White Vote	Black Vote
Houston	1997	Primary	4	1	0.148	0.74
Houston	1999	Primary no runoff				0.66
Houston	2001	General	2	1	0.25	0.97
Houston	2001	Primary	3	1	0.2577	0.9604
Houston	2003	General	3	1	0.55	0.17
Houston	2003	Runoff	2	1	0.51	0.85
Indianapolis	2003	General	2	0	0.55	0.92
Jacksonville	2003	Primary	4	1	0.13	0.75
Jacksonville	2003	Runoff	2	1	0.71	0.07
Los Angeles	2001	General	2	1	0.59	0.8
Los Angeles	2001	Primary	6	1	0.2347	0.1237
Los Angeles	2005	General	2	1		0.48
Los Angeles	2005	Primary	5	1	0.27	0.15
Los Angeles	1989	Primary no runoff	2	1	0.47	0.73
Los Angeles	1993	General	2	1	0.67	0.14
Los Angeles	1993	Primary	5	1	0.4945	0.0588
Los Angeles	1997	Primary no runoff	2	0	0.732	0.2021
Memphis	1991	General	2	1	0.026	0.96
Memphis	1995	General	2	1	0.3854	0.9
Milwaukee	1996	General	2	1	0.83	0.14
Milwaukee	2004	General	2	1	0.83	0.08
Milwaukee	2004	Primary	3	1	0.11	0.04
New Orleans	1990	General	2	0	0.23	0.86
New Orleans	1994	General	2	0	0.07	0.9
New York	1989	Democratic primary	2	1	0.31	0.97
New York	1989	General	2	1	0.2755	0.9286
New York	1993	General	2	1	0.7857	0.05
New York	1997	Democratic primary	3	1		0.28
New York	1997	General	2	0	0.76	0.2
New York	2001	Democratic primary	2	1	0.84	0.29
New York	2001	General	2	0	0.602	0.2604

(continued)

Table A2. (continued)

City	Year	Election Type	Candidates	Biracial	White Vote	Black Vote
New York	2005	Democratic primary	3	1	0.25	0.4
New York	2005	General	2	1	0.68	
Philadelphia	2007	Democratic primary	2	0	0.37	0.4
Philadelphia	1991	Democratic primary	3	1	0.8197	0.1515
Philadelphia	1999	Democratic primary	2	1	0.082	0.57
Philadelphia	1999	General	2	1	0.1558	0.925
Philadelphia	2003	General	2	1	0.24	0.88
Phoenix	1999	General	3	0	0.61	
San Antonio	1991	Runoff	2	1	0.8	0.6
San Antonio	2001	General	2	1	0.521	
San Antonio	2005	Primary	3	1	0.18	0.52
San Antonio	2005	Runoff	2	1	0.78	0.34
San Diego	2004	General	3	0	0.26	0.42
San Diego	2004	Primary	4	0	0.39	0.43
San Diego	2005	Special	3	0	0.42	0.66
San Diego	2000	General	2	0	0.56	0.03
San Francisco	1991	Primary	5	0	0.2651	0.0833
San Francisco	1991	Runoff	2	0	0.4886	0.3778
San Francisco	1995	Runoff	2	1		0.88
San Francisco	1999	Runoff	2	1	0.48	0.92
San Francisco	2003	Runoff	2	1	0.45	0.53
San Jose	2002	Primary no runoff	6	1	0.5466	0.1667
San Jose	1998	General	2	1	0.46	0.75
Washington	2002	Democratic primary	2	0	0.9	0.52
Washington	1994	General	2	1	0.08	0.8
Washington	1994	Primary	2	0	0.05	
Washington	1998	Primary	4	0	0.7674	0.4179

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Notes

1. Other studies that include multiple racial groups but limit themselves to a particular city include Abrajano and Alvarez (2005) and Stowers and Vogel (1994).
2. More recent research has, however, demonstrated that the effects of black population size are not always consistent (Branton and Jones 2005; Dixon and Rosenbaum 2004; Kinder and Mendelberg 1995; Liu 2003; J. E. Oliver and Wong 2003).
3. These minority candidates could heighten racial divisions either by stimulating solidarity within their own group or by threatening the status of other groups.
4. It is less clear how institutions like term limits, staggered elections, and off-cycle elections would be linked to patterns in vote choice. We do, however, consider these other institutional features of the local political environment in alternate tests.
5. Unfortunately, by including a large number of electoral contests and contexts in our analysis, it makes it more difficult to assess the role played by more specific campaign factors like the issues that are highlighted by the candidates' campaigns (Kaufmann 2004) or the degree that minority candidates run a deracialized campaign (Hajnal 2006; Perry 1991). Similarly, in our empirical tests, we cannot incorporate the level of elite linkages within the city (Sonenshein 1993).
6. City rankings were based on the 2000 Census.
7. Estimates of the racial vote using exit polls and public opinion surveys can be skewed by poor samples or other factors like the Bradley effect (Hopkins 2009; Segura 2012). However, poor minority samples are much more of a problem in national surveys where there are often few minorities, and evidence of the Bradley effect has diminished considerable over time (Hopkins 2009). Note that in a little under half of public opinion cases, we use polls immediately prior to the election.
8. Only major candidates (with more than 5% of the vote) are used for coding biracial elections. Race of the candidates generally comes from newspaper coverage.
9. The measure is the two-party Democratic presidential vote share at the county level and is linearly interpolated to the year of the local election (Congressional Quarterly [CQ] Elections and Voting Collection 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000; <http://www.cqpress.com/product/928.html>). Although county boundaries do not always conform well to city geographic boundaries, we performed additional analysis that suggests that the county presidential vote provides a reasonable

approximation of city preferences. Specifically, we compared the city-level and county-level presidential vote for the largest 100 cities. The county and city votes were correlated at .84.

10. Some of the demographic categories (e.g., gay/lesbian) are, however, not included in every exit poll.
11. With a small number of exceptions, these exit polls include four basic options for race (black, white, Latino, and Asian-American). Typically, there are three partisan options (Democrat, Republican, and Independent/Other) and three options for ideology (liberal, moderate, and conservative). If the particular exit poll includes five or seven options for party identification or ideology, the more refined categories were merged into the 3-point scale. There is more variation in the number of categories for age, income, education, and religion. For each of these demographic characteristics, the original coding was left intact. So the largest divide was simply the largest divide between any two groups regardless of how many groups were included in the survey.
12. The alternatives are to record the difference between the “highest” and “lowest” category for each demographic characteristic or to present data on every pairwise combination. When we performed the former test, average divides declined somewhat but the basic pattern remained the same as in Table 1. Analysis of each pairwise combination does not alter the basic conclusions that emerge out of Table 1 but it does reveal more information about within-category variations (e.g., which racial groups are most divided from each other).
13. As we discuss in the next section, the largest racial division in these contests is generally between black and white voters. In just over two-thirds of these elections, the largest recorded racial gap is between black and white voters. When the largest gap was not between blacks and whites, it was most often between African-American and Latino voters.
14. It is striking to note that there is no election where the educational divide is larger than the racial divide. In only one election, the 1997 mayoral runoff in Los Angeles between two white men (Richard Riordan and Tom Hayden) is the income gap larger than the racial gap.
15. The results of *t*-tests indicate that racial divides are significantly larger than every other demographic divide.
16. The nature of the religious gap varies considerably. Across the different contests, the largest religious gap fluctuates between almost all of the different combinations of pairwise groups among the six different religious categories (Protestants, Catholics, other Christians, Jews, Muslims, and those with no religious affiliation). The average divide between Protestants and Jews is, however, marginally larger than the average gap between any other two religious groups. As we will see, the effect of religion on the vote diminishes greatly when we simultaneously take into account other factors like partisanship, ideology, and race divides. The Muslim vote, for example, is highly correlated with the black vote, while the protestant and Catholic votes are closely linked to the conservative and Republican vote.

17. The results of *t*-tests indicate that the average racial divide is significantly larger than these political divides.
18. Partisan divides tended to dominate electoral outcomes in general elections in cities with partisan contests when both candidates were white.
19. Biracial elections generated much larger racial divisions—on average, a 45.7 point racial divide.
20. The results of *t*-tests indicate that the black–white divide is significantly larger than all others. In fact, the only pairs of divisions that are not significantly different from each other are the Latino–white divide and the Asian-American–white divide. It is also important to note that *t*-tests reveal that every single racial divide is significantly larger than zero.
21. We do not know why black voters are isolated relative to whites, Latinos, and Asian-Americans but we can speculate that the sharply liberal preferences of the black community play a role. Blacks are more uniformly liberal than any other group. Alternatively, the isolation of blacks may result from other groups holding more negative racial attitudes about African-Americans (or vice versa).
22. We would like to add all of the cities together and run a hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) regression but there is no dependent variable that can be employed across all of the different cities and elections. We could focus on voting for the winner as the dependent variable but because the types of winners vary from city to city and election to election that regression would only assess which groups are disproportionately likely to win. Alternately, we could focus on who votes for the Democratic candidate but almost 80% of our cases are nonpartisan. Finally, one might examine the vote for the liberal candidate but the candidates can be difficult or impossible to place on the left–right spectrum.
23. Again, every exit poll does not include questions on every demographic characteristic but almost all include race, ideology, and party identification.
24. The results do not change substantially, if we choose different omitted baseline categories.
25. To further assess the importance of race in these contests, we conducted one other test (analysis not shown). We assessed intragroup divisions within the black, Latino, and white electorate (the Asian-American sample was generally too small to allow for intragroup analysis). Specifically, we looked to see whether there were substantial different electoral preferences across class or other demographic factors *within* each racial and ethnic group. In the majority of elections, there were no major within-group divides. Within each of the two minority groups, substantial differences of opinion were rare.
26. Our data do not tell us why race matters so much in these uniraical contests but one obvious answer is simply that members of different groups want different things from their local government. Members of each group might want more resources distributed directly to their own group or alternatively to their own neighborhoods.
27. Without raw exit poll data, it is almost impossible to obtain estimates of the vote across each of the demographic and political groups listed in Table 1. In most

- of these elections, published data in newspapers and other public outlets usually only present figures for the vote for one or two demographic or political characteristics of which race is usually one.
28. There are certainly cases where these gaps are much greater. The white–Latino divide grew as high as 68 percentage points in one case and the white–Asian-American divide ranged up to a 48 point gap.
 29. In fact, in a slim majority of elections, the candidate preferred by a majority of black and Latino voters was not the winner.
 30. The patterns of cohesiveness that emerge out of the smaller but complete set of 10 mayoral elections in the 10 largest cities almost exactly mirror the results in Table 1.
 31. This is not to say that all contests bring Asian-American voters together. There is considerable variation in the results and several of the elections do lead to a fairly divided Asian-American vote. But these atypical contests do not refute the underlying cohesiveness of Asian-Americans in the typical contest.
 32. Having candidates from their own racial group significantly increased black, Latino, and Asian-American cohesiveness when we substituted group cohesiveness as the dependent variable in these regressions.
 33. In the one significant relationship, a higher proportion of Asian-Americans is associated with a smaller Asian-American–white divide.
 34. Smaller racial differences in both cases could also be a function of a smaller, more politically aware electorate.
 35. We estimate that across the larger set of mayoral elections, 53% of all black voters end up voting for candidates who lose. Blacks are the only group in which a majority—albeit a slim one—loses. By contrast, only 40% of white voters lose in these contests. The figures for Asian-Americans and Latinos are 44% and 49%, respectively.

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