



LEAP

Center for Local Elections in American Politics



MAYOR

Who Runs for Mayor in America?

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 **Knight Foundation**



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About the Center for Local Elections in American Politics

The Center for Local Elections in American Politics (LEAP) is developing pathbreaking solutions to the problem of collecting, digitizing, and disseminating data on local elections. More information is available at <http://www.leap-elections.org/>.

The United States is viewed as an archetype of democracy, yet fundamental questions about the nature of our government and its electoral processes and outcomes are often difficult to answer because of a simple problem: a lack of data. Because elections are decentralized in this country, basic information about local contests is difficult to access. To date, there has been no comprehensive source of data on U.S. local elections. The situation has vexed political scientists, journalists and other researchers for decades. As a result, much of what we think we know about local government, particularly trends over time, is based on anecdotes and generalizations — not empirical evidence.

We're helping to change that. With a grant from the National Science Foundation in 2010, principal investigators Melissa Marshall and Paru Shah launched the Local Elections in America Project (LEAP). Since then, LEAP has developed the most comprehensive database of local election results in existence. In 2015, the Knight Foundation provided funding to turn LEAP into the Center for Local Elections in American Politics within Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

LEAP developed a suite of software application tools to systematically collect, digitize and disseminate data on elections across the U.S. LEAP's innovation was in creating a digital archive of past election results, as well as automating data collection for current and future elections.

At present, the database contains results from 22 states that, in some cases, date as far back as the 1980s. The database contains the names of local candidates, their party affiliations, the number of votes they received, how those votes were cast (e.g., in person, by absentee ballot or by early voting) and whether they ran at-large or by district (and the district name or number). Other fields include government level (county, municipal, school district or special district), office type (executive, legislative, judicial/law enforcement, other) and election type (primary, general, runoff, special or initiative/referendum). In addition, each candidate record is geocoded, making connectivity to other data seamless. We have records of hundreds of thousands of candidates who've run for office in the U.S.

The database is dynamic and continues to be updated as new elections come online, which is a truly pathbreaking feature. And, while we continue to add new election results, we also are expanding data collection to other states and developing new technology that will not only make it possible to expedite the collection of data that's ordinarily difficult to access, but will allow us to enhance our data by adding new fields that measure other candidate, election and campaign features.

Finally, we are working with the Kinder Institute and a large network of stakeholders to make the database and LEAP

sustainable so that it can continue to provide data, research and information to scholars, practitioners and policymakers long into the future.

By creating a database that updates automatically — and constantly — we are able to ensure we have the most current information available to help researchers, journalists and others effectively study government. While the presidential politics continue to generate headlines, the heart of democracy is at the local level. We believe LEAP's database will allow us to better understand the process and outcomes of these elections.



Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research is a “think and do” tank that advances understanding of the challenges facing Houston and other urban centers through research, policy analysis and public outreach. By collaborating with civic and political leaders, the Kinder Institute aims to help Houston and other cities. For more, visit www.kinder.rice.edu.



The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote informed and engaged communities and lead to transformational change. The Knight Foundation Community Initiative focuses on 26 communities. Resident program directors oversee grant-making in eight communities: Akron, Ohio; Charlotte, N.C.; Detroit; Macon, Ga.; Miami; Philadelphia; San Jose, Calif.; and St. Paul, Minn. In the remaining 18 communities, the Knight Foundation partners with other community foundations. The foundation has invested more than \$841 million in community initiatives since its creation in 1950. The Knight Foundation wants its national network of learning to inspire the actions of residents in each of its communities and help build a better democracy and a successful future. For more, visit www.knightfoundation.org.

Future Reports

The “Who Runs for Mayor in America?” study is a culmination of several reports on municipal elections in 2015–2016 by the Kinder Institute for Urban Research's Center for Local Elections in American Politics. Reports on California, Kentucky, and Indiana have already been published and are available at www.kinder.rice.edu/reports. Forthcoming reports examine trends in municipal contests in Minnesota and Louisiana.

Marschall, Melissa, John Lappie and R. Lucas Williams. 2016. “Who Runs for Mayor in America?” Center for Local Elections in American Politics. Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Rice University, Houston, Texas.

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1. Executive Summary

Political observers' assumptions about local election trends are often based on anecdotes, incomplete observation or simply conventional wisdom. However, the Kinder Institute for Urban Research and its Center for Local Elections in American Politics offer a first-of-its-kind way to analyze elections. In this report we examine data on municipal elections in six states — California, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota and Virginia — to investigate who runs for mayor and the characteristics of those contests. We focus on these states in part because they are states for which we have comprehensive data on mayoral elections over time, but also because they provide a good representation of the regional, demographic and institutional variation of cities in the United states.

Several characteristics vary by state across the six states in our analysis: candidate competition, incumbency, and the prevalence of women and minority candidates among mayoral office seekers differ depending on state. Additionally, we find differences in degree of competition, gender, and race across city size and city type. These results provide an in-depth look at the details of mayoral elections across these states and provide the best insight to date about who runs for mayor in America.

Background

This study focuses on elections of mayors in municipalities in California, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota and Virginia, which include roughly 10 percent of the country's municipalities. Mayoral elections occur in presidential, congressional midterm and off-cycle elections. These elections occur across 17 years, six states, 1,899 municipalities and 8,452 unique elections. Apart from our analysis of African-American candidates, which relies exclusively on data from Louisiana, our analysis is based on elections between 2000–2016. We use this time period because it maximizes observations from all six states and does not unnecessarily weight observations from states for which we have mayoral election data extending further back in time (e.g., Louisiana and California).

Methodology

LEAP software automates the collection of election results, resulting in a database containing records on municipal elections in 22 states dating as far back as the 1980s. Because the election results in our dataset having varying time series lengths, and we do not want to overweight our sample based on any one state, we restrict our analysis to the 2000–2016 period.¹

The data in this report come primarily from secretary of states' websites.² However, source data for California comes from the California Elections Data Archive (CEDA), a joint project between the Center for California Studies, the Institute for Social Research and the Office of the California Secretary of State.³

Findings

- About half of all mayoral elections feature only one candidate. Unopposed elections are particularly prevalent in small towns, where 79 percent of contests are uncontested, but they are notably rare in the biggest cities, where only 15 percent of contests see only one candidate.
- Despite variation in the percentage of uncontested mayoral contests, since 2000, unopposed elections are on the rise. By 2016, on average 60 percent of mayoral contests in the six states examined here featured only one candidate.
- Unopposed elections are less prevalent in cities and towns with larger minority populations. Indeed, as the percentage of the nonwhite population increases, the incidence of uncontested mayoral elections decreases.
- Incumbents are the norm in mayoral elections in these six states: on average, over two-thirds of mayoral contests feature an incumbent on the ballot.
- Women are significantly underrepresented when it comes to running for mayor. On average only 17 percent of all mayoral candidates in this study were female. Women are slightly more common in suburban mayoral elections (18.3 percent) compared to in rural towns (15.7 percent) or central cities (16.8 percent)
- African-American candidates are also underrepresented in mayoral elections: In the one state in which we examined race of candidates — Louisiana — African-American candidates represented 20 percent of all mayoral candidates.⁴ However, African-Americans represent 33 percent of the population, on average, in Louisiana municipalities.

¹ Of course, even with this abbreviated time series, some states (Kentucky in particular) are not represented for the entire period.

² IN (<http://www.in.gov/sos/elections/index.htm>), KY (<http://www.sos.ky.gov/elections/Pages/default.aspx>), LA (<http://www.sos.la.gov/ElectionsAndVoting/Pages/default.aspx>), MN (<http://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/>), VA (<http://www.elections.virginia.gov/resultsreports/election-results/>).

³ <http://www.csus.edu/isr/projects/ceda.html>

⁴ We can only examine candidate race in Louisiana because this information is included in candidate filing data there. As far as we know, Louisiana is the only state that records candidate race.

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3. Municipalities and Mayoral Elections in the Study States

This report is based on election data from six states: California, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota and Virginia. While the six states may not be fully representative of all 50 states, their municipalities certainly capture the regional, demographic and institutional variation of municipalities in America. We focus on these states in this report because their municipalities and mayoral elections represent the diversity of American local government, but also because our coverage of mayoral elections in these states is comprehensive across space and time. In each state we have data on mayoral elections in all municipalities for multiple time points.

Our sample includes 2,051 municipalities (incorporated cities, towns and villages), representing roughly 10 percent of all municipalities in the United States.⁵ Unlike much of the existing research on mayoral elections, which focuses on the largest U.S. cities and the highest profile mayoral campaigns and elections, this study analyzes all mayoral elections across the six states (for different time periods) and therefore provides a much more realistic and accurate view of the state of local elections and mayoral office holding in America.

In Table 1 we present information about the number and size of municipalities included in both our sample and the population of the six study states. Overall, the coverage of mayoral elections across municipalities in the six states is extremely high. While there are a few missing places in Kentucky and Virginia, coverage is essentially complete in

Louisiana and Minnesota. The discrepancy in coverage for California and Indiana is not due to missing data but instead because in both states only a portion of municipalities have or elect mayors.⁶

The data in Table 1 illustrate the variation in both the number of municipalities across states and the average size of these municipalities. In Kentucky, Louisiana and Minnesota, municipalities are relatively small, averaging roughly 5,000–7,000 residents. In contrast, the average California city is larger in size than most cities and towns in all of the other five states. This is particularly true of the California municipalities in our sample — which average more than 100,000 residents. Indiana falls somewhere in between, in part because our sample excludes towns. Finally, the average municipality in Virginia has slightly over 10,000 residents. Given the relatively small size of these municipalities, it is not surprising that the majority of places in the six states are actually located in rural areas. Overall, 58 percent of municipalities in our sample are rural, whereas 38 percent are classified as suburban. The smallest share of municipalities — about 4 percent — is designated as central cities.

Because the availability of local election data across the six states varies, we do not have uniform longitudinal coverage of mayoral races. The data reported in Table 2 refer to all elections in the LEAP database for each of the six states. This report focuses only on mayoral elections from 2000–2016, with the exception of our analyses of African-American candidates. Since we only have candidate race data for Louisiana, we utilize the entire time series (1986–2016).

Table 1: Number and Size of Municipalities in Study States: Sample vs. Population

State	Number of Municipalities		Mean Population	
	Sample	Actual (2002)	Sample Municipalities	All Municipalities (2006)
California	170	474*	107,368	62,667
Indiana	121	567*	28,253	7,174
Kentucky	402	424	5,845	5,731
Louisiana	303	302	7,191	6,581
Minnesota	853	854	5,052	4,885
Virginia	196	229	12,792	12,509
Total	2,051	2,850	16,145	9,561

*Includes all cities and towns, the majority of which do not have or elect mayors

⁵ Based on the 2002 Census of Governments, there were 19,429 municipalities (U.S. Census Bureau 2002).

⁶ For example, in Indiana only cities directly elect mayors. The more than 400 towns in Indiana only elect common councils and do not have mayors at all. In California the majority of municipalities have mayors, however, only about 35 percent are directly elected and represent true executive offices. In the remaining 65 percent, the mayor is an elected city council member who is either selected by her peers or rotates among council members. Taking these institutional features into account, our coverage in Indiana and California is also nearly universal.

Table 2: Number of Elections by Municipal Electoral Arrangements

State	Partisan Elections	Number of Elections			
		Total	General	Primary	Runoff
California	No	1,065	1,035	--	30
Indiana	Yes	1,180	474	706	--
Kentucky	Few (< 3%)	766	723	43	--
Louisiana	Yes	2,677	282	2,290	--
Minnesota	No	4,173	4,096	77	--
Virginia	No	693	692	1	--
Total		10,554	7,302	3,117	30

Table 2 also reports the distribution of mayoral races by election type — primary, general or runoff. All municipalities in both Indiana and Louisiana hold primary elections, however, they do not function the same way. In Indiana, primaries are closed, meaning that only voters registered for the party holding the primary may vote, whereas in Louisiana they are open (voters do not need to be affiliated with a party to vote). In addition, while primary winners in Indiana advance to the general election, where they can also face independent candidates, in Louisiana, the majority of mayoral elections are decided in the primary since all that is needed to win is for one primary candidate to receive a majority of the vote. Because of this electoral rule, there are many fewer general mayoral elections in Louisiana. In Kentucky and Minnesota, primaries are relatively rare, however, if they are held, the two candidates receiving the most votes in the primary advance to the general election regardless of whether one received a majority of the primary vote or not. In California, there are no primaries per se, however, if no candidate receives a majority in the general election, the top two vote-getters face off in a runoff election. In Virginia, candidates must receive a plurality of ballots cast. Only the city of

Alexandria actually held a primary in our data set, but other Virginian cities may do so.

Another electoral feature along which our six states differ is partisanship. Again, as Table 2 reports, in two of the six states, Indiana and Louisiana, all mayoral elections are partisan, whereas in three states, California, Minnesota and Virginia, none of them are. In some Virginia localities, the parties do nominate candidates for local office (generally through a party caucus rather than a primary), but the party label still does not appear on the ballot. In Kentucky, the majority of municipalities have nonpartisan elections, however, in a handful of places they are partisan.

In this report, we will consider whether these electoral features are associated with differences in who runs for mayor. In addition, we will also consider the way in which election timing may shape the supply of mayoral candidates. As Table 3 indicates, when it comes to election timing, there is considerable variation both across and within our six states. For example, all mayoral elections in Indiana take place off cycle (in May and November of odd years for primary and general elections, respectively). In Virginia and Kentucky the vast majority of mayoral elections happen at one particular time (off cycle or during midterm

Table 3: The Timing of Mayoral Elections in LEAP Study States

	CA	IN	KY	LA	MN	VA	Total
Off-Cycle	318 (30%)	1,180 (100%)	49 (6%)	1,641 (61%)	207 (5%)	568 (82%)	3,963 (38%)
Gubernatorial	0	0	0	63 (2%)	0	0	63 (0.6%)
Midterm	421 (40%)	0	687 (90%)	848 (32%)	2,132 (51%)	60 (9%)	4,148 (39%)
Presidential	326 (31%)	0	30 (4%)	125 (5%)	1,834 (44%)	65 (9%)	2,380 (23%)

election, respectively), however there are exceptions. Finally, in California, Louisiana and Minnesota, there is considerably more variation.

4. Who Are the Candidates?

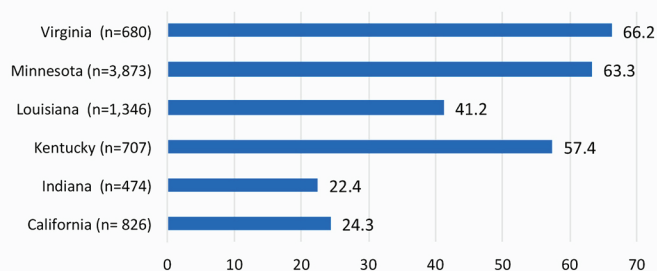
The data used for this analysis of who runs for mayor come from election returns, not surveys of the candidates themselves. Thus, we have limited information about the candidates' demographic characteristics, educational backgrounds, prior professional experiences, policy platforms or campaign activities. That said, our study answers questions that have heretofore not been systematically analyzed.

Are there lots of candidates or only a few?

We begin with perhaps the most basic question: Does anyone run for mayor at all? We ask this question because previous reports published by the Center for Local Elections in American Politics have found that uncontested mayoral elections are not unusual, and in fact, are on the rise in some states. Looking at mayoral elections across the six states from 2000–2016, we find that mayoral races are more likely to be unopposed than contested.⁷ Indeed, for our sample of nearly 8,000 mayoral races, on average 53 percent were uncontested. This means that the majority of elections held in these six states took place with only one candidate. In some cases — particularly very small municipalities in Minnesota — there were actually no declared candidates. As Figure 4.1 illustrates however, there is quite a bit of variation across our six states.

Perhaps not surprisingly, unopposed elections were least uncommon in California (24.3 percent) and Indiana

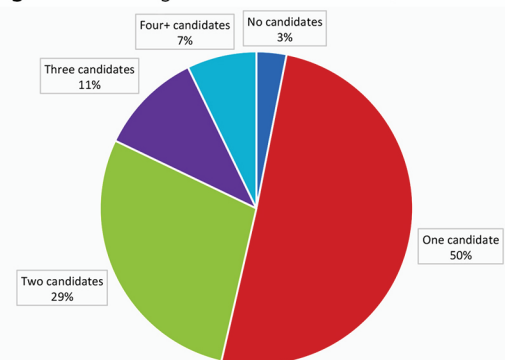
Figure 4.1: Percent Unopposed Mayoral Elections by State 2000–2016



(22.4 percent), where only cities (as opposed to towns and villages) elect mayors and where the average city size is relative larger, particularly in California. In addition, Indiana's local party organizations are likely active in candidate recruitment, which would decrease the rate of unopposed elections. The third state where the majority of mayoral races were contested is Louisiana. While there are many small towns and villages in Louisiana, perhaps the partisanship of the state's mayoral elections helps ensure that more candidates step up and run. In the remaining three states, the majority of mayoral races did go unchallenged. In fact, in Virginia the lack of contestation was quite severe — roughly two out of three mayoral races featured a single candidate running unopposed.

When we look beyond the dichotomy of contested versus uncontested races and consider the average number of candidates per race, we find that 29 percent of races were characterized by two-candidate contests, whereas nearly 20 percent of races featured three or more candidates.⁸ In fact, in some high profile elections, the number of candidates soared to 20 or more. For example, in 2006 New Orleans' election included 21 challengers to incumbent mayor Ray Nagin, whose popularity had plummeted in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Figure 4.2: Average Number of Candidates, 2000–2016



How prevalent are incumbent candidates?

The example of former mayor Ray Nagin raises the question of just how prevalent incumbents in mayoral elections are. Starting with the second election cycle in each city's time series,⁹ we coded for the presence of incumbents. Based on these years, 72 percent of contests featured an incumbent candidate. When we calculate the percentage of elections with an incumbent across all years in all states the figure is 73 percent. Looking at incumbency rates across

⁷ We examine the first stage election that is capable of producing a winner. This means we do not analyze primaries in KY, IN or MN, but do analyze primaries in LA. Again, we're examining 2000–2016 here.

⁸ To calculate the total number of unique candidates for each race, we consider primaries and general elections. For example, in the three states with nondecisive primaries, we count all Democratic and Republican candidates in the respective primaries and any independent or third-party candidates that ran in the general election.

⁹ We examine the first stage election that is capable of producing a winner. This means we do not analyze primaries in KY, IN, or MN, but do analyze primaries in LA. Again, we're examining 2000–2016 here.

our states, we find a relatively large range — from a low of 62.1 percent in Kentucky and a high of 77.9 percent in Indiana. Louisiana and California come in slightly below the overall average with roughly 70 percent of mayoral contests featuring an incumbent, while Minnesota and Virginia are slightly above average.

Figure 4.3: Percent of Elections with Incumbents by State

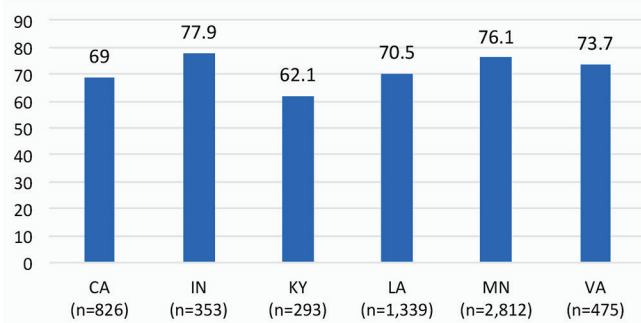
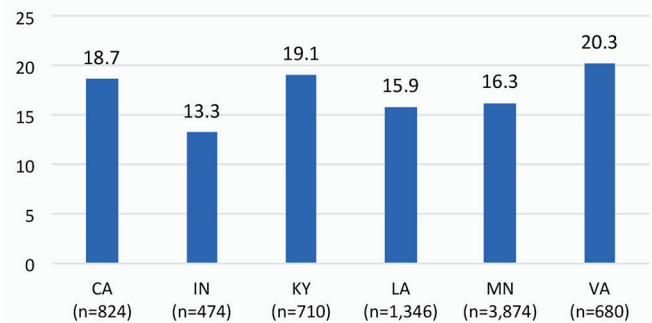


Figure 4.4: Percent of Female Candidates by State



for which we have reliable data on candidates' racial/ethnic identity.¹¹ Across all the full-time series of mayoral elections in Louisiana (1982–2016), 20 percent of candidates were African-American compared to the average African-American population across all Louisiana cites of 32.6 percent.

How common are women and minority candidates?

Overall, women and minority candidates run for office much less frequently than their white, male counterparts. Pooling mayoral candidates in all six states from 2000 to 2016, we find that only 17 percent of candidates were women. Figure 4.4 shows the differences in the frequency of elections featuring a female candidate between states. Here we see quite a bit of variation, with Indiana reporting the lowest percentages of female candidates, with 13.3 percent; Louisiana and Minnesota coming in around 16 percent; and California, Kentucky and Virginia reporting the highest percentages with roughly 19 or 20 percent female candidates.

Another way to assess the prevalence of women candidates in mayoral elections is to look at individual elections and the percentage of elections that feature at least one female. Using this indicator, we find that 27 percent of all elections from 2000–16 in our data set had at least one female candidate. When we look across states, we again find variation, though not necessarily in line with the data reported in Figure 4.4. In particular, using this indicator, California stands out above the other states, with 40 percent of its mayoral elections featuring at least one female candidate. In Indiana, females ran in about one-third of the elections. Mayoral elections in Kentucky, Louisiana and Virginia feature about the average frequency of elections with a female on the ballot, and Minnesota is the lone state below the 27 percent average.¹⁰

There is also a disparity in the race of mayoral candidates. Note that for this analysis, we only report data for one state — Louisiana — since it is the only state

5. How Does Place Shape Who Runs for Mayor?

In this section, we consider the question of who runs for mayor by looking at the characteristics of the places where candidates emerge and compete. Local politics does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, features of the local jurisdictions in which citizens live shape their political behavior. This includes the decision to seek public office. The figures that assess candidates' race in this section use the entire 1982–2016 time period for Louisiana since it is the only state in our data collecting racial characteristics of candidates. Therefore, we need not worry about overweighting our sample with any single state.

City Size

One prominent feature is city size. Dating back to the time of Plato, philosophers have debated about how the size of the local polity influences local politics. For example, residents of smaller cities may have a greater sense of political efficacy, in part because their participation in local politics is more likely to have an impact on electoral outcomes and government policy (Oliver, 2001; Frandsen, 2002). Perhaps this greater sense of political efficacy spills over to running for office. Indeed, getting elected may appear easier in smaller towns compared to larger ones, and given the reduced complexity of governing a small town, potential candidates for mayor may also perceive

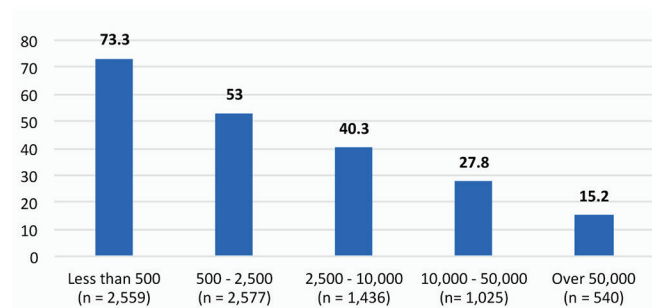
¹⁰Minnesota has a disproportionate impact on the sample because of the large number of small cities. We analyze the effect of small cities on mayoral candidacy in Section 5.

the job to be more manageable and less prone to conflict. Beyond this, the lower cost of campaigning in smaller cities may also increase the likelihood that residents in smaller cities run for mayor.

Of course there are also reasons to believe that it is larger cities that are more likely to attract candidates. For example, municipal governments in larger cities tend to possess greater powers, have higher levels of political conflict and have a system of more professionalized politics than smaller cities (Dahl, 1967). The more professionalized politics are, the richer the rewards for holding office, and more organizations that may be dedicated to candidate recruitment.

Our first empirical examination of how city size is related to mayoral candidates investigates whether mayoral elections are contested. Indeed, as we saw in Section 4, a majority of electoral contests feature only one mayoral candidate — or in some cases, no candidates at all. In Figure 5.1, we report the percentage of unopposed mayoral races across five city size categories¹¹.

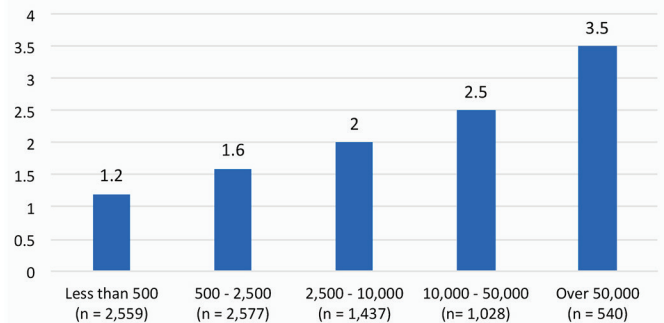
Figure 5.1: Percent of Unopposed Elections by City Size



The data resoundingly indicate a negative relationship between unopposed elections and city size. Unopposed elections are extremely common in the smallest cities (under 500 residents), where roughly 73 percent of races feature a single candidate. On the other hand, in the largest cities (over 50,000 residents), contested mayoral elections are the norm. Here on average only 15 percent of mayoral races are unopposed. As Figure 5.1 illustrates, the decline in unopposed elections as city size increases is relatively linear.

We see the same pattern when we look at candidate supply. The greater the population, the more candidates compete for the mayor's office. The largest cities have nearly three times as many candidates running for mayor as the smallest cities. This is not necessarily because residents of the largest cities have more civic engagement. The average resident of a small city may have a much greater likelihood of running for mayor than the average resident of a large city. Large cities simply have larger pools of potential candidates.

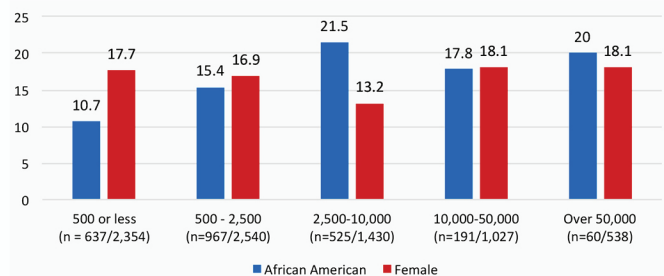
Figure 5.2: Average Number of Candidates by City Size



We also found little evidence that city size matters for incumbency. Across all but the largest city size category, incumbents ran on average around 73 percent of the time. In cities with populations greater than 50,000, incumbents were only slightly less likely to run (71 percent) for mayor. We also did not find a clear pattern in the relationship between city size and the percentage of female or African-American mayoral candidates. With regard to women and minority candidates, we actually know very little since most studies of minority and gender representation have focused only on large U.S. cities. Thus, while conventional wisdom suggests that women and minority candidates might be more prevalent in smaller cities, where elections are less competitive and the mayor's job is less complex and prestigious, up until now, we have simply not had the data to assess this hunch.

Figure 5.3 reports the percentage of women and African-American candidates for mayoral elections by city size. As the data show, women represent roughly 17-18 percent of all mayoral candidates in cities of every size but one: those between 2,500 and 10,000 residents. In these medium-sized cities, women make up only 13 percent of mayoral candidates. The pattern looks slightly different for African-Americans (recall that here we report data only for Louisiana since this is the only state for which information

Figure 5.3: Percent of African-American/Female Candidates by City Size



¹¹Note that our analysis of unopposed elections excludes cases where zero candidates filed to run (that is, all candidates were write ins). We exclude these because we do not know how many candidates ran write-in campaigns; no doubt in many cases there was only one serious write-in candidate.

on candidates' race and ethnicity is available). In this case, the percentage of all mayoral candidates who are African-American tends to increase as the population of the city increases. Interestingly, the category with the greatest average proportion of black candidates is cities with between 2,500 and 10,000 residents (21.5 percent), though this is statistically indistinguishable from the proportion in the largest category (20 percent in cities over 50,000 people). The most striking difference in women versus African-American candidates for mayor is in the smallest cities, where women are significantly better represented (17.7 percent of all candidates) than African-Americans (10.7 percent of all candidates).

City Type

Another contextual factor that may influence candidacy in mayoral elections is the “type” of city — namely, whether it is a central city, a suburb or a rural town.¹² This is not the same thing as city size. Specifically, while central cities are almost always populous, there are many suburban and rural cities of comparable sizes. The primary difference is one of geography and to a certain degree function, rather than size. Rural cities, by virtue of their relative geographic isolation, are more central to the lives of their residents than suburban communities are to their residents.¹³ Conversely, suburbanites often work, socialize, shop, etc. in cities other than their own. For instance, their local news media would almost certainly be based in the nearby central city, and pay far more attention to the central city's politics than the politics of the outlying suburbs. Taken together, this may mean that rural residents have a stronger sense of community than suburbanites, leading to more candidates seeking public office.

mayoral elections. Similarly, suburbs tend to have more candidates seeking the mayoralty than rural cities. In either case, competition in mayoral elections is disturbingly low, but the problem is more acute in rural cities. The pattern is similar when we consider the average number of candidates in mayoral elections. Suburbs tend to have more candidates seeking the mayoralty than rural towns (1.9 versus 1.6 candidates), and central cities have on average, more than twice as many candidates (4.1) as suburbs or rural towns.

When it comes to the relationship between city type and incumbents seeking re-election, we find that while the percentage of incumbents seeking re-election is high across all city types, incumbents run about 10 percentage points less in central cities as opposed to suburbs and rural towns. Incumbents often refuse to seek re-election when they believe the odds of defeat are high; perhaps the relatively low intensity of politics in rural and suburban cities makes incumbents feel safer seeking re-election. Or, perhaps it is the fact that challengers are significantly less likely to emerge in suburbs and rural towns than in central cities. It is also possible that incumbents in central cities are more politically ambitious, and create open seats when they win higher office. Finally, central cities may be more apt to adopt term limits, which would lead to more open seat elections.

When it comes to the incidence of female candidates, there is not much difference across city types. Across all mayoral contests, women represent slightly more than 18 percent of all mayoral candidates in suburbs, about 17 percent in central cities and about 16 percent in rural towns. In contrast, African-Americans represent a significantly smaller share of all mayoral candidates in suburbs (12 percent) and a rather significantly higher percentage in central cities (24.9 percent).

Figure 5.4: Percent of Unopposed Elections by City Type

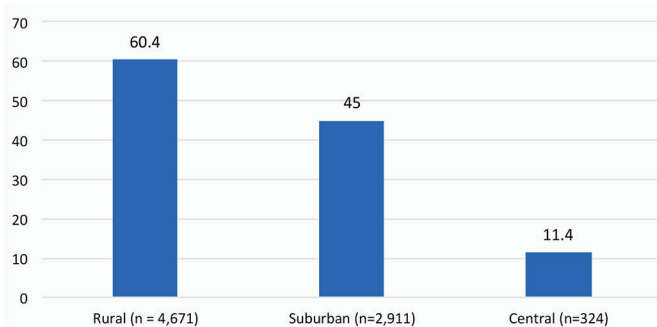
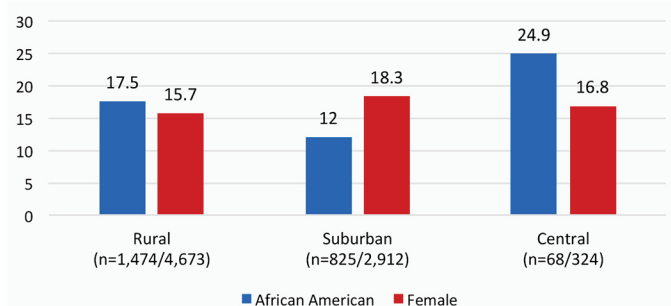


Figure 5.5: Percent of African-American/Female Candidates by City Type



This hypothesis is not borne out by the data. About three-fifths of all mayoral elections in rural cities are unopposed, compared to slightly under half of all suburban

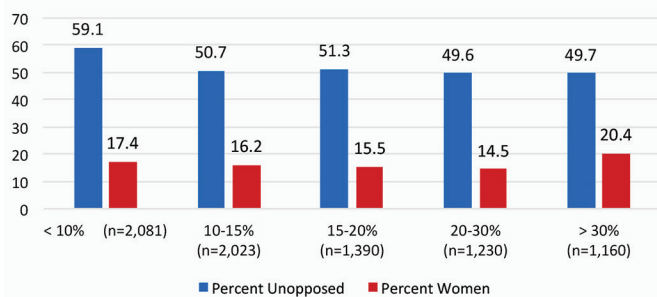
¹²Central cities are defined by the U.S. Census (we use the Metropolitan Area Central City Indicator for 2000). We coded suburbs as noncentral city municipalities located within metropolitan areas and rural towns as municipalities located outside of metropolitan areas.

¹³Verba and Nie, 1972.

Average Educational Attainment of City Residents

At the individual level, educational attainment is strongly related to political behavior. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to be more informed and more politically engaged than their less educated counterparts (Hillygus, 2005; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). It would logically follow that cities where residents have higher levels of educational attainment would have a larger pool of politically engaged residents, and thus more residents stepping forward to run for office. We investigate this relationship by first considering contestation. In Figure 5.6, we report both the percentage of uncontested races and the percentage candidates who are women by average educational attainment, measured as the percentage of the population over age 25 with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Figure 5.6: City Mean Educational Attainment and Who Runs for mayor



Though about three-fifths of mayoral elections are unopposed in cities with the least educated populations, the rate in all other categories is more or less the same: about half of mayoral elections are unopposed. It seems that education does lead to higher levels of contestation in mayoral elections, but the effect is not additive. Once a city has reached a certain threshold (10 percent or more with a bachelor's degree or more), there is no additional benefit (in terms of contestation) to having more college-educated residents. We find a similar pattern in when it comes to candidate supply. The average number of candidates is about 1.5 in cities with the smallest share of college-educated residents and about two in cities with the largest share of college-educated residents. Conversely, there is no evidence that educational attainment is related to incumbency; about three-quarters of elections feature an incumbent regardless of mean educational attainment.

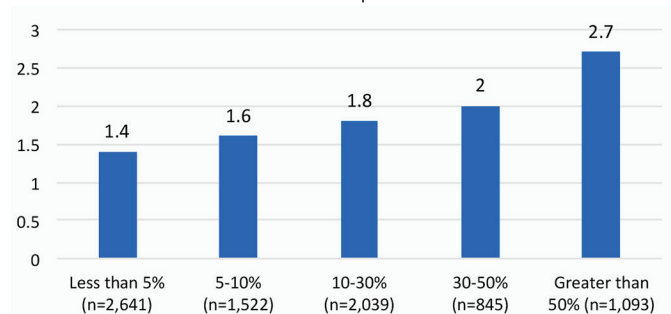
Since education is also associated with a stronger commitment to racial and gender equality (Sniderman, 1984), we might also expect cities with more educated residents to have more women and minorities seeking the office of mayor. The results, however, are rather mixed. As Figure 5.6 also reports, on average women make up a larger percentage of mayoral candidates in cities with the largest share of college-educated residents (20.4 percent). However, the more general pattern is negative — the percentage of women candidates declines as the average

educational attainment of city residents increases. This pattern is also evident when it comes to the percentage of African-American candidates in Louisiana (not shown). In this case however, given the correlation between race and socioeconomic status, this bivariate relationship might be misleading. In other words, it is important to also consider the racial makeup of cities since it is possible that the Louisiana cities with most educated residents may have relatively small African-American populations.

Racial and Ethnic Minority Population

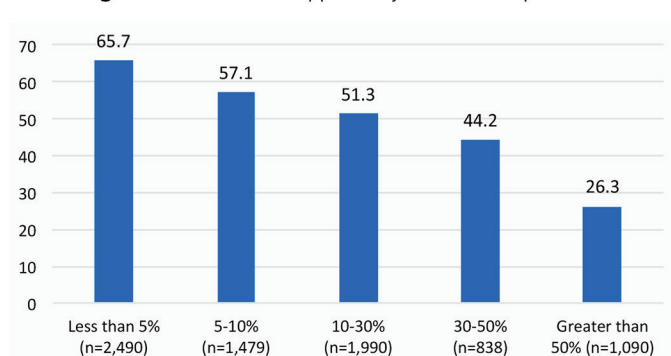
The final demographic factor we examine is the percentage of the city's nonwhite population. First, do we find fewer candidates running in cities with larger nonwhite populations? As Figure 5.7 indicates, the answer is a resounding no. Instead, we see a striking increase in the

Figure 5.7: Average Number of Candidates, by Percent Nonwhite Population



average number of candidates running for mayor as the size of the city's minority population increases. In cities where more than half of residents are nonwhite, mayoral elections feature an average of 2.7 candidates. This compares to around 1.5 candidates in cities where the nonwhite population is less than 10 percent.

Figure 5.8: Percent Unopposed by Nonwhite Population

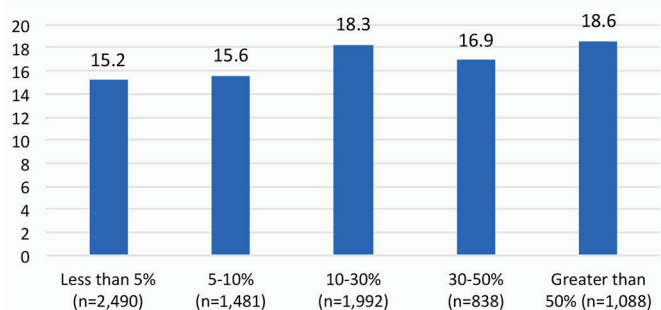


We also find a similar pattern when we consider the percentage of unopposed races. In Figure 5.8, we see that cities with the largest nonwhite populations have the

lowest incidence of unopposed elections (26.3 percent). In contrast, nearly two-thirds of mayoral elections are unopposed when less than 5 percent of the population is nonwhite. It is possible that increasing racial diversity leads to higher levels of political conflict in these cities, causing more candidates to seek public office. However, this increased competition does not seem to discourage incumbents from seeking re-election. A little over 70 percent of incumbents seek re-election regardless of the racial diversity of the city.

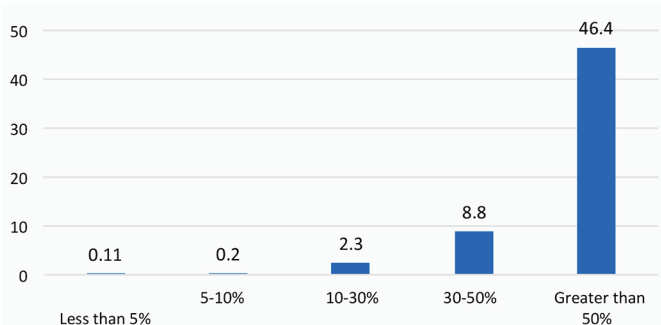
When it comes to the percentage of female candidates, we do find that cities with larger minority populations have higher percentages of women running for mayor, however the relationship is not strictly linear. In cities with the largest nonwhite populations, women make up about 19 percent of mayoral candidates, almost four points higher than in cities with the smallest non-Hispanic white populations (See Figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9: Percent of Female Candidates by Nonwhite Population



While the size of the minority population is related to African-American candidacy, as Figure 5.10 shows, African-American candidates are uniformly underrepresented compared to the size of non-Hispanic white population. Even when the minority population is between 30–50 percent, on average, African-Americans still make up less than 10 percent of all candidates for mayor. Plainly, living in heavily nonwhite communities (almost always African-American in Louisiana) has not completely discouraged whites from seeking the mayoralty. This is true even in cities where whites make up a minority of the population.

Figure 5.10: Percent of African-American Candidates by Nonwhite Population



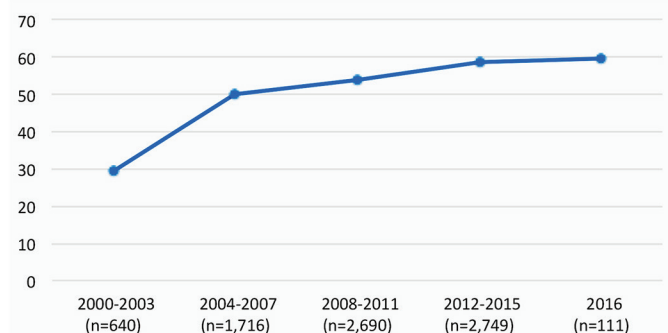
In fact, even in these cities, white candidates are the majority and African-Americans represent on average, only 46.4 percent of all mayoral candidates.

6. Does Who Runs for Mayor Change over Time?

The analyses presented in the preceding sections were based on data pooled from elections that occurred over 17 years and several election cycles. While these analyses provide an overall picture of who runs for mayor, this approach may mask changes over time. In this final section we therefore re-examine several of our indicators, this time focusing on trends over time.

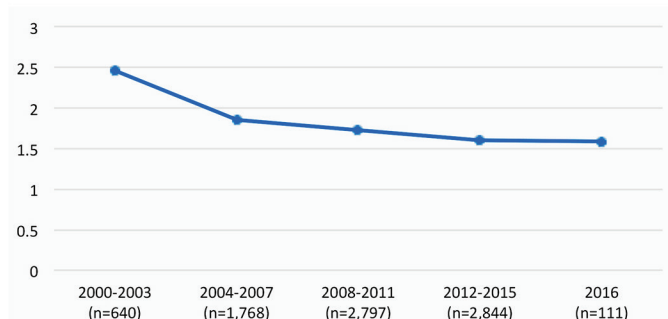
Returning to the question of uncontested elections, Figure 6.1 shows there has been a steady increase in the percentage of mayoral elections without challengers. From a low of 30 percent in 2000–2003, by the midpoint of the time series, more than half of all mayoral elections in the six states were uncontested. While it appears that the rate of uncontested races has stabilized at around 60 percent, there are relatively few data points for 2016, so it is likely too soon to tell.

Figure 6.1: Percent of Unopposed Elections Over Time



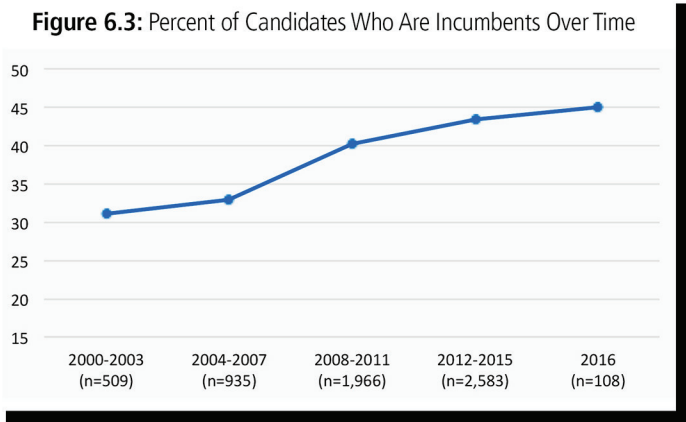
In Figure 6.2, we report the average number of mayoral candidates over time. Here we see a steady decline over time. Complementing the data reporting in Figure 6.1,

Figure 6.2: Average Number of Candidates Over Time



overall, it appears that fewer candidates are running for mayor in the cities and towns in our six state sample. From an average of roughly 2.5 candidates per election in 2000-2003, by the end of the time series, the average had dropped to 1.5 candidates per election.

The final indicator we consider in this section is incumbency: To what extent has the percentage of candidates who are incumbents changed over time? As Figure 6.3 shows, the answer is, quite a bit. Over the entire time series, the percentage of mayoral candidates who are incumbents increased 15 percentage points — from roughly 30 to 45 percent. The presence of incumbents typically reduces the competitiveness of elections and discourages challengers from emerging. Thus, the increased prevalence of incumbents in mayoral elections may not bode well for local democracy.



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